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Power, Partnership, and Youth as Norm Entrepreneurs: Getting to UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security

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Advocates have long worked within and outside the United Nations (UN) to institutionalize recognition of youth as positive participants in peace and security. However, despite the disproportionate impact of conflict on youth, attention to constructive role of youth in peacebuilding has been largely neglected. In 2015, a convergence of efforts and events saw the UN Security Council pass a groundbreaking thematic resolution, Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (SCR2250), which recognizes for the first time youth's positive role in responding to peace and security challenges. This article draws on analysis of civil society and UN documents, and interviews with key members of the coalition of UN and civil society actors who advocated for this resolution. It demonstrates that partnership with youth in the case of Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) advocacy offers an opportunity to extend understandings of agenda setting in new ways. It examines the issue framing as well as the actors, access, and allies that enabled the success of a coalition of diverse actors working toward normative change. Efforts toward SCR2250 were unique because of the key role of youth-led advocacy, making youth themselves central not only as beneficiaries but also as creators of a new principle for the norm of youth participation in peace and security.

Hace mucho que existen defensores trabajando dentro y fuera de la ONU para institucionalizar el reconocimiento de los jóvenes como participantes positivos en los procesos de paz y seguridad. Sin embargo, a pesar del impacto desproporcionado de los conflictos en los jóvenes, se ha descuidado en gran medida el papel constructivo de la juventud en el marco de la construcción de la paz. En 2015, una convergencia de esfuerzos y acontecimientos hizo que el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU aprobara una resolución con un tema innovador, la Resolución 2250 sobre Juventud, Paz y Seguridad (Resolución 2250 del Consejo de Seguridad), que reconoce por primera vez el papel positivo de los jóvenes en respuesta a los desafíos planteados por la paz y la seguridad. Este artículo se basa en el análisis de documentos de la sociedad civil y de la ONU, así como en entrevistas con miembros clave de la coalición de la ONU y actores de la sociedad civil que abogaron por esta resolución. Este artículo demuestra que la colaboración con los jóvenes, en lo referente a la defensa de la agenda relativa a la juventud, la paz y la seguridad (JPS), ofrece la oportunidad de ampliar la forma de comprender el proceso de establecimiento de la agenda. Además, también examina el marco de la cuestión, así como los actores, el acceso y los aliados que permitieron el éxito de una coalición de diversos actores que trabajan por el cambio normativo. Los esfuerzos en pro de la Resolución 2250 del Consejo de Seguridad fueron únicos debido al papel clave de la defensa liderada por los jóvenes, haciendo que los propios jóvenes fueran el centro no solo como beneficiarios, sino como creadores de un nuevo principio para la normalización de la participación de los jóvenes en los procesos de paz y seguridad.

Des militant-es ont longtemps œuvré, au sein et en dehors des Nations Unies, pour la reconnaissance officielle de la jeunesse comme composante active et positive des questions de paix et de sécurité. Toutefois, en dépit de l'impact disproportionné des conflits sur les jeunes générations, l'apport constructif de la jeunesse dans la consolidation de la paix n'a suscité que peu d'intérêt. En 2015, toutefois, une série d'initiatives et d'événements a débouché sur une résolution thématique inédite du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies, la résolution 2250 sur la jeunesse, la paix et la sécurité (SCR 2250), qui reconnaît pour la première fois le rôle positif de la jeunesse dans la résolution des problèmes de paix et de sécurité. Cet article s'appuie sur une analyse de la société civile et de documents des Nations Unies, ainsi que sur des entretiens avec des membres clés de la coalition entre les Nations Unies et des acteur-ices de la société civile ayant plaidé pour cette résolution. Il démontre que, dans le cadre d'une défense de la paix et de la sécurité tenant compte des jeunes générations, un partenariat avec des représentant-es de la jeunesse permet de jeter un éclairage nouveau sur les modalités d'élaboration d'un programme de travail. Cet article examine la définition des enjeux, ainsi que les personnes, les canaux et les alliés ayant contribué au succès d'une coalition rassemblant divers acteur-ices engagé-es en faveur d'un changement normatif. De par leur rôle clé, les jeunes mouvements militants ont généré des efforts uniques, ayant permis à la résolution SCR 2250 de voir le jour. Ils démontrent ainsi que la jeunesse occupe une place centrale non seulement en tant que bénéficiaire des programmes, mais également en tant que créatrice d'une nouvelle norme, instituant sa participation aux questions de paix et de sécurité.

Introduction

On December 9, 2015, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (SCR2250). The unanimous adoption of the resolution marked the culmination of a successful campaign by a coalition of actors including adult-led and youth-led civil society organizations and parts of the United Nations (UN) to meaningfully include youth in responding to conflict and building peace.

SCR2250 itself recognizes the “important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security” (UNSC 2015b). Such an articulation is groundbreaking because it is the first time that youth have been officially recognized and legitimized by the UNSC as positive contributors to peacebuilding and conflict resolution—as part of the solution, not the problem (Simpson 2018)—and to formalize a requirement for governments and other stakeholders to support young peacebuilders' work. It calls on Member States to create mechanisms for young people's participation in

peace and security practices. The resolution identifies five key pillars for action: participation; protection; prevention; partnerships; and disengagement and reintegration. It justifies its call for youth inclusion by noting that youth are a “a unique demographic dividend that can contribute to lasting peace and prosperity” if inclusive policies are implemented (UNSC 2015b).

The resolution is also a product of its time. Its passing in 2015 in the context of global attention on the risks posed by the terrorist group Islamic State (ISIS), particularly of youth recruitment, means the resolution also focuses on the threat posed by violent extremism and foregrounds Member States’ obligations to work with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), communities, and youth to counter violent extremism. As a result, SCR2250 is a document that both enshrines an approach that recognizes youth as positive peacebuilders, while simultaneously being constituted of the same tensions around understandings of youth as potentially dangerous that often reinforce limited and damaging framings.

The creation of SCR2250 seemed unlikely, and is largely due to persistent youth-led advocacy, working as part of a coalition that also included adult-run NGOs, and various bodies of the UN to build consensus and shift norms around youth involvement in peacebuilding and security practices. The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY), a network of at the time approximately forty youth-led peacebuilding organizations from around the world, was one of the central drivers of efforts to get a UNSC resolution, pushing via advocacy missions to New York, resource creation, and awareness raising. UNOY capitalized on the existing expertise of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding (referred to as the Working Group [renamed the Global Coalition on YPS in 2018]),¹ which had formed in 2012 to bring together more than forty stakeholders at the time, working within and outside the UN on issues to do with young people and peace and security. This included a wide range of UN bodies, international NGOs, civil society, and donors. This collective of actors invested in building support for and recognition of youth participation in peacebuilding can be understood as a coalition (Khagram, Rikker, and Sikkink 2002, 7) as they undertook coordinated tactics to promote the issue. When youth advocates for a UNSC resolution spoke to people at the UN in the years leading up to 2015, they were told that the UNSC was “tired” of thematic resolutions, and it was “never going to fly.”² The, perhaps unlikely, victory of YPS advocates in establishing a UNSC resolution in the face of dismissal and skepticism demonstrates the importance of a clear agenda-setting vision, the value of coalition building inside and outside the institution of the UN, and the clever issue framing by advocates, and illustrates the capacity of young people to operate as norm entrepreneurs.

Normative change does not happen “out of thin air” (Nadelmann 1990, 496), but rather norms are forwarded by “norm entrepreneurs” who seek to change the behavior

of states and other actors in international politics. Scholarship since the 1990s has recognized the crucial role norm entrepreneurs play in norm emergence. Finnemore and Sikkink note norm entrepreneurs “call attention to issues or even ‘create’ issues” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 897), and such actors work to reframe policy problems in often highly contested normative spaces. While the literature has identified a wide range of NGOs and non-state networks as norm entrepreneurs (Florini 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998; Carpenter et al. 2014; Davies and True 2017; Somerville and Aroussi 2019), young people have not been seen as political actors at all (see McEvoy-Levy 2001; Berents and McEvoy-Levy 2015; Beier 2018), let alone as capable of changing normative discourses around peace and security. In addressing this absence, this article looks beyond the usual “elite” actors that are the focus of much attention in this space.³

This article extends the existing discussions of who can occupy the role of a norm entrepreneur, arguing that young people themselves are norm entrepreneurs toward a new norm of their own capacity to contribute productively to peace and security. The exclusion of youth from consideration as political actors is predicated on dominant understandings that see youth through a deficit or danger lens. Youth, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, have long been characterized as lacking the capacity to contribute by virtue of their age as proxy for inexperience. More than this, youth are frequently seen inherently as potential spoilers to peacebuilding, vulnerable to recruitment, and willing to participate in violence. Such framings have been extensively challenged and disproven (see, e.g., Hendrixson 2004; McEvoy-Levy 2006; Sommers 2011; Pruitt 2020) yet endure in informing policy and decision-making.

Advocacy toward a UNSC resolution refutes such characterizations. It was unique because it was led by a coalition that included leadership by a network of youth-led peacebuilders, working with civil society and UN partners, making young people themselves central not only as recipients of the benefits of a resolution but also as creators of a new principle for the norm of youth participation. This article examines the features of the agenda-setting efforts of the coalition of advocates for a new norm on youth participation in peace and security.

In this article, I draw on a critical analysis of relevant public documents on the YPS agenda including UN resolutions, reports and statements, key reports and guidance notes on YPS, and reports and outputs of adult- and youth-led civil society organizations, and twelve in-depth interviews conducted in 2019 and three further in-depth interviews conducted in 2022 with key stakeholders in the process of advocacy in getting to a UNSC resolution.⁴ Interview participants include past and present Co-Chairs of the Working Group/Global Coalition, representatives from the UNOY Secretariat and Regional Coordinators of UNOY, members

¹The Working Group was established under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Network on Youth and Development, which was created in 2010. From its establishment in 2012, the Working Group expanded its efforts to position itself beyond the UN as a global space for strengthening the role of youth in peacebuilding. Since 2018, the Working Group has reframed itself as the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security (Global Coalition) and expanded its membership. The Working Group/Global Coalition has been co-chaired by a representative from the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, international NGO Search for Common Ground, and, since 2013, the youth-led peacebuilders network UNOY. Because of the time period of relevance to this article, it is largely referred to here as the Working Group, its name at the time.

²Interview, Matilda Flemming, former Co-Coordinator of UNOY Peacebuilders, April 2019.

³Youth have traditionally not been seen in academic literature or policymakers and politicians as part of the “elite” in terms of powerbrokers, networkers, advocates, and decision makers at the international level. However, positioning youth as distinct from the “elites” in this context is not to overlook or diminish recognition of the fact that those youth who are participating in “elite” contexts are themselves positioned as “elite” in relation to the much larger population of youth peacebuilders and advocates who work around the world without access to these high-level contexts. Power is relational and negotiated in multiple directions and contexts, and this article’s focus on the Working Group/Global Coalition and UN context does not preclude the need for careful attention to other contexts. For further reflection, see footnote 27 and section “Cautions, Considerations, and Future Directions.”

⁴This research has received ethics approval from the Queensland University of Technology, approval numbers 1900000047 and 2000000226.

of the Working Group's advisory panel, UN stakeholders, and others involved in formal elements of the YPS agenda's architecture. Interviewees were both youth and non-youth. Interviews were conducted in person or via Skype or Zoom, and participants had the option to review transcripts and chose whether particular comments were attributable or anonymous. The analysis in this article is further supported with an understanding of the YPS agenda developed via an ongoing research project (since 2019 and continuing still in 2022), which includes additional interviews not quoted directly in this article, and over 120 hours of participant observation undertaken at virtual meetings, public and invitation-only events, and high-level conferences held by the Working Group/Global Coalition and other actors working on YPS from 2020 to 2022.

Through this work, I have gained a sense of the Working Group/Global Coalition and its activities and the role of youth in the coalition from a range of stakeholders who were key in the agenda-setting efforts toward SCR2250 and have remained key in the development of the YPS agenda since 2015. While the YPS agenda has evolved and gained traction since 2015, institutionalizing the agenda in new ways,⁵ this article focuses its scope on the lead up to the first UNSC resolution, as it is interested in the agenda-setting efforts toward the emergence of a new norm of youth participation and young people's role in this process.

This article first examines the "problem": the existing dominant normative context in which youth are framed as threats to be managed, and discusses efforts to reframe the issue toward a new norm of positive youth participation. It then explores why a UNSC resolution was seen as a key path to embed this framing, examining why advocates saw a UNSC resolution as a way to "solve" the problem by institutionalizing legitimacy and accountability toward youth in decision-making structures that often exclude youth. Having established how advocates framed the problem and rationalized the need for a UNSC resolution, the article turns to explore the politicization of the issue through the elements of agenda setting that influenced the success of advocacy efforts, examining the *actors*, *access*, and *allies* that featured in the agenda-setting process. The final section before the conclusion offers some thoughts on future directions for this work, and reflections on the contributions and analytical limits of this article. Through this analysis, this article brings explicit attention to the capacity and political agency of youth. It offers a new empirically grounded theorization of partnerships in agenda-setting and norm entrepreneurship in demonstrating the key role of young people themselves as norm entrepreneurs toward establishing a new normative agenda on youth participation in peace and security.

Reframing Youth from Threats to Agents for Peace

The existing normative context in which youth are engaged in peace and security reflects deeply embedded and problematic assumptions about young people that are con-

structed external to youth. To shift this understanding toward a norm of positive youth participation, the framing processes of youth advocates challenged the underpinning logics of frames of youth deficit, and proposed alternative constructions of youth to build support for more inclusive peace practices. Here, I briefly outline the deficit/danger framing of youth before discussing how advocates worked to challenge this and offer a different framing of youth.

Definitions of youth vary in different social contexts and have been codified in varying ways by international bodies.⁶ Regardless of definitional variances, the current generation of youth globally is disproportionately impacted by peace and security challenges, with one in four affected by armed conflict, violence, or displacement (Hagerty 2017). Youth are particularly vulnerable in conflict but not only are they at risk, they are also perceived as a risk. Youth are often understood as potential disruptors to peace and security. This has often manifested as fear of contexts that are described as having a "youth bulge"—a theory that argues that the presence of large populations of youth, particularly young men, makes violence more likely, particularly if economic opportunities are not present (for critique, see Altiok et al. 2020; Pruitt 2020). However, this simple narrative ignores the fact that a substantial majority of countries with populations indicating a youth "bulge" have not recently been sites of civil conflict (Sommers 2011, 296). The widespread reliance on these ideas in foreign policymaking has had pernicious effects on the framing of youth (Hendrixson 2004; Pruitt, Berents, and Munro 2018; Altiok 2021) and has impacted how they have been engaged in peace and security policy and practice.

In the context of the early years of the 2010s, this "policy panic" (Simpson 2018) about the potential danger of youth was exacerbated by the rise of ISIS and the radicalization and recruitment of youth from around the world. The disproportionate attention to a relatively small number of youth joining ISIS impacted public and policy discourse in many countries globally. Just like the "youth bulge" theory, the focus on youth themselves as dangerous results in a view that these behaviors are inherent features of youthhood (for critique of "youth bulge," see Pruitt 2020). These narratives erase the multitude of intersecting, complex factors that research has shown influence the likelihood of violence or conflict emerging including lack of economic opportunities, lack of access to education, inequality, resource scarcity, and poor governance (Hendrixson 2004; Sommers 2012). These factors can make youth vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and terrorist organizations. Often, young people participate in violence not because they are inherently predisposed to violence, but rather because no good alternatives are available to them due to a range of social, economic, and political factors of their environment.

Crucially, this disproportionate focus on youth vulnerability to violence elides the reality that an overwhelming majority of young people do not participate in violence, and in fact many of them contribute to finding ways of building more peaceful and secure societies (IANYD Working Group 2016; Simpson 2018). In 2016, the youth-run organization UNOY and adult-run NGO Search for Common Ground (SFCG) conducted a global survey of

⁵Although beyond the focus of this article, the passage of SCR2250 has formalized an agenda for Youth, Peace, and Security, which in the short years since 2015 has in the formal sphere included two subsequent UNSC resolutions, SCR2419 (2018) on youth participation in peace processes and SCR2535 (2020) that reinforces and operationalizes the political commitment to the agenda; adoption of resolutions and statements on youth, peace, and security by regional bodies including the European Union and African Union; creation of National Action Plans on YPS by states, reports, and guidelines on implementation of YPS; funding streams and programs focused on youth; and formalized reporting commitments at the UNSC. For work on the implications of the YPS agenda since 2015, see among others Leclerc and Roushahbaz (2021) and Berents and Mollica (2022).

⁶SCR2250 defines youth as 18–29 years of age while recognizing the definition might vary in different contexts and jurisdictions. More broadly, the UN defines youth as between 15 and 24 years "for statistical purposes" (UNGA 1981), but it is notable that this definition also overlaps with the UN's definition of "child" as up to 18 years old (UNCRC 1989), and different UN entities use different ranges for their own purposes. Beyond the UN, the African Charter, for example, defines youth as 15–35 years.

youth-led organizations working on peace and security.⁷ They found that despite most youth-led organizations operating on budgets of less than US\$5000 per year and with almost entirely volunteer staff, they worked across a wide range of spaces including integrating youth into formal decision-making spaces, creating education and employment opportunities, preventing violence in their communities, training and capacity building of youth and other community members, and building networks of youth- and non-youth-led organizations (UNOY and SFCG 2016). Youth themselves often are at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts in local contexts despite limited recognition and support (see, e.g., McEvoy-Levy 2001; Schwartz 2010; Mollica 2017; Berents 2018; Ragandang 2020).

Youth have long pushed back against the deficit framing of youth in peace and conflict contexts and structural practices that position them as powerless. These efforts to reframe their identities on their own terms, through their own actions, both illustrate framing practices of youth advocates and point to why youth can be understood as norm entrepreneurs themselves. Pervasive norms about youth are largely built on assumptions and stereotypes, meaning that youth themselves can challenge these to relocate their agency and reframe the normative context of their participation.

Seeking Legitimacy and Accountability: Advocating for a UNSC Resolution

In response to this context in which stereotypes about youth dominated, and limited attention had been paid at elite levels to youth-led peacebuilding, advocates argued that including youth formally in peacebuilding architecture and policy would help build more inclusive and sustainable peace. The goal of a UNSC resolution was seen as a way to offer legitimacy of youth capacity and secure accountability of institutions to include youth; it was seen as a key step in addressing the persistence of youth exclusion. The capacities of youth were positioned as central in arguments for their inclusion, and these efforts drew on the existing narratives of “inclusive peace” at the UN, which argued for participation of a broader range of peace actors (Berents and Mollica 2022).

LEGITIMACY

The idea to advocate for a UNSC resolution was, in the words of one interviewee, “one of those ideas that emerged in different people’s minds at the same time.”⁸ The first argument made by YPS advocates was about the nature of the UNSC, as the “highest forum”⁹ for peace and security. Success at the UNSC was seen to formalize and legitimize the agenda in a way previous UN attention on youth could not. Attention to youth at the UN had largely been undertaken by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and had focused largely on youth in social and cultural spaces or in development contexts, and as beneficiaries. When the UNOY

⁷In 2015, SCR2250 requested that a progress study be carried out “on youth’s positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels.” The resulting *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* was presented to the UNSC in April 2018 (Simpson 2018). The UNOY and SFCG survey in 2016 was one of several commissioned studies undertaken to help inform this progress study; it received almost 400 responses that allowed it to map the *already existing* activities and efforts that youth-led organizations were undertaking before the global attention provided by SCR2250.

⁸Interview, Solvi Karlsson, former Co-Coordinator of UNOY Peacebuilders, April 2019.

⁹Interview, Andrade, current Network Coordinator for UNOY, April 2019.

Youth Advocacy Team traveled to New York for their advocacy missions, they would often find that in meetings with permanent representatives they would be connected to the Third Committee¹⁰ person because “that was where ‘youth stuff’ was done,”¹¹ and UNOY advocates worked very hard to challenge that framing. Even three years after the passing of SCR2250, at the 2018 UNSC Open Debate on YPS, the Russian Federation argued that there were other UN bodies more appropriate for “youth issues” than the Security Council (UNSC 2018). This difficulty in shifting youth from the frame of social and economic development to “peace and security” demonstrates, in part, the reason why advocates were emphatic about the need for a thematic UNSC resolution.

One advocacy strategy supported by the Working Group and led by UNOY to reframe the issue of youth was a report on the existing “agreed language” used at the UNSC on youth, to demonstrate that even though what little the UNSC was saying was “often negative,”¹² youth were already being considered within the space of peace and security in ad hoc ways:

It is exactly because of this reason that the Security Council. . . should recognize the positive role youth are playing in peacebuilding processes all over the world, and provide young people with opportunities to contribute to peaceful communities. (UNOY 2014, 11)

UNOY’s report neatly shows the way in which advocates attempted to shift the framing around youth, demonstrating the flawed basis of the assumptions, offering a rationale for why this was an issue to be taken seriously, and demonstrating in concrete ways that youth could be partnered with for peace.

Capitalizing on the contemporary moment of increased attention on the rise of violent extremism and particularly youth recruitment in 2014–2015, advocates used this increased focus on youth to offer a different frame, through strategic framing processes (Keck and Sikkink 1998), and offered a reframing as a solution to a pressing problem (Joachim 2003, 250). Perhaps ironically, it was the construction of youth-as-threat that opened space for advocates to push for a resolution that recognized young people’s positive potential as Member States were receptive to issues concerning youth. Jordan, the key state champion of the idea of YPS, demonstrates the centrality of this tension: the UNSC Open Debate chaired by Jordan in April 2015, eight months before the passing of UNSCR2250, was on “The role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace” (UNSC 2015a). The support and mobilization of key allies depended in part on their persistent reproduction of dominant assumptions of youths’ role. Resultantly, one of the two key goals of this normative shift was moving away from a narrative of youth as risks and rather to one of youth as contributors to peace:

¹⁰The Third Committee is one of six committees of the UNGA. The UNGA allocates to the Third Committee agenda items relating to social, humanitarian, and cultural issues. Issues to do with youth that come up in the UNGA are frequently referred to here. As Flemming explains, “Especially in the beginning when we were talking to all these Perm Reps and their advisors they were like yeah, but [youth] is a soft issue, it’s really a Third Committee issue. . . So when we set up meetings we always wanted to make sure we talked to the peacebuilding person and the Third Committee person would also be very welcome. But if someone was like ‘oh you can meet with the Third Committee person’ we’d say we didn’t want to just meet with the Third Committee. It was two sectors that were not at all use to talking to each other.”

¹¹Interview, Flemming, former UNOY Co-Coordinator.

¹²Interview, Cecile Mazzacurati, UN Co-Chair of the Working Group/Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security (UNPBSO), April 2019.

The whole point of YPS was to fight with them gently with the CVE agenda, because it is different agendas, but they always brought it back. And we said yes, you are working under people who are focused on those who are doing harm. We are trying to say 99.9 percent of youth did not chose [violent extremism], how can we cultivate that? . . . That was the push back, and it was hard.¹³

Throughout advocacy efforts, the challenge was finding a balance between forwarding a narrative of positive youth capabilities and speaking to the concerns and interests of the gatekeepers at the UN, particularly the UNSC.

The relationship between peacebuilding and countering-violent extremism (CVE) within SCR2250 and the broader YPS agenda is one of tension and at times uncomfortable negotiation. In highlighting this tension, youth leaders are aware of the pressing issues caused by violent extremism and that it is a real concern and a priority topic of work for youth peacebuilders in parts of the world¹⁴; however, they continue to contest the framing of the issue.¹⁵ The challenge that faced those working toward consensus building for a resolution—and which continues to pose a challenge to the agenda in the years since—is, as Mazzacurati describes, that “we’ve [YPS advocates] really pushed the angle of PVE [preventing violent extremism], as in *how do young people prevent violent extremism*, but not *how do we prevent young people from becoming violent extremists*.”¹⁶ In early advocacy efforts, youth delegates from UNOY used the interest in CVE and youth to their advantage in lobbying, for example, agreeing to meet and speak with the UN’s Counter-Terrorism Office or speak at a high-level forum on CVE as a representative of a youth-led organization. Youth advocates were very conscious of the delicate balance: “we [had to be] aware of issues like instrumentalization,”¹⁷ that organizations would also use the presence of youth speakers to legitimize their own agendas.

YPS advocates also learned from and followed the success of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) advocates fifteen years early in having a global framework for their work,¹⁸ with some interviewees seeing a “path” for YPS in this history. The YPS agenda was described by interviewees as the “little sister of WPS”¹⁹ and as a “complementary agenda.”²⁰ Experiences and knowledge from WPS helped inform YPS advocates in how to frame debates, but also quite simply the presence of WPS on the UNSC’s thematic agenda since 2000 demonstrated the relevance of recognizing a broader range of actors to help address the peace and security issues confronting the UNSC (see Berents and Mollica 2022). The inclusion of WPS in the UNSC agenda helped break a “formal barrier” between issues seen as “traditionally soft socio-political issues” and the “hard security” issues seen to “belong” to the UNSC agenda (Tryggestad 2009, 541). While important cautions exist and were articulated by interviewees about maintaining distinctions between the two agendas, youth advocates engaged in clear “issue alignment” (Carpenter 2005), situating their claims for youth inclusion

within language, pathways, and practices for lobbying the UNSC used by WPS advocates.

In focusing attention on the UNSC, advocates were aware of the limitations and politics. Saji Prelis, SFCG, and Co-Chair of the Working Group (and continuing in this role in the renamed Global Coalition), emphasizes that YPS is not a “UN-only agenda”; however, the UNSC is a “vehicle” for legitimization.²¹ Finnemore and Sikkink note that for emergent norms to reach an eventual threshold for broader adoption, institutionalization of “specific sets of international rules and organisations” is key (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 900). In seeking a UNSC resolution, YPS advocates helped push the norm toward that threshold.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The second reason given by advocates for a UNSC resolution is to ensure accountability and a mandate to act. In formalizing a thematic space for youth, peace, and security on the UNSC’s agenda, SCR2250 provides a framework for following up on Member States and UN bodies to ensure it was being undertaken, formalizing efforts beyond “goodwill.”²² While the existence of a resolution is a success, some involved with the process caution overattention to SCR2250 itself following its passing. For Solvi Karlsson, who was UNOY’s Co-Coordinator at the time of the resolution’s passing, the content is not as important as how the community has used it to gain legitimacy, “what matters is that it’s a recognition of the UN Security Council that young people matter. It’s a tool, it’s an instrument. And I’d say it’s an instrument we’ve used fairly well.” This argument was echoed by others, who saw a UNSC resolution as a practical step to “get youth participation on the agenda” but that actual change and success in forwarding this newly legitimized norm would come from other places such as embedding it in national policies,²³ leveraging it for regional institutional support,²⁴ supporting the UN and other INGOs to include youth focal points,²⁵ or opening funding opportunities to youth-led organizations themselves.²⁶ With hindsight, youth advocates and their allies identify the UNSC resolution as what the literature on norm adoption calls the tipping or threshold point (Risse, Roppe, and Sikkink 1999) toward broader efforts for youth-inclusive practices.

Advocates’ efforts to shift the norm and discourse from one of youth as risks to youth as positive partners for peace required legitimation, something that a UNSC resolution offered. A resolution at the UNSC came with some enforceability and an obligation on Member States to take up the positions within it, further socializing the norm. It also ensured a political mandate and mechanisms for accountability, which advocates felt would help embed the norm and allow them to leverage it into action in future. A UNSC resolution was seen by advocates as a way to achieve “real commitment from the international community” (UNOY 2014, 14) and to challenge the negative framing and exclusion of

²¹ Interview, Saji Prelis, SFCG, Co-Chair of the Working Group/Global Coalition, April 2019.

²² Interview, Saji Prelis.

²³ Interview Ali Altiok, independent researcher, consultant to joint secretariat UNPBSO and UNPFA, April 2019; Interview, Saji Prelis.

²⁴ Interview, anonymous male youth peacebuilder, working in West and Central Africa.

²⁵ Interview, Gizem Killinç, UNOY Leading Co-Coordinator 2016–2020, April 2019.

²⁶ Interview, Mazzacurati. In July 2020 the UNSC passed the third YPS resolution, SCR2535, which is the first to provide concrete objectives for implementation, including embedding in national policy and in UN processes and missions, and funding and evaluation. Some of these goals, articulated by interviewees in 2019, are evident in the development of the agenda since that time.

¹³ Interview, Kobi Skolnick, AC4 Columbia University, member of Working Group and advisory panel for YPS Progress Study, April 2019.

¹⁴ Interviews anonymous male youth peacebuilder, working in West and Central Africa, 2019; Killinç, anonymous interviewee 2022.

¹⁵ Interviews, Flemming, Andrade, anonymous male youth peacebuilder.

¹⁶ Interview, Mazzacurati; italics added to indicate emphasis of speaker.

¹⁷ Interview, Flemming.

¹⁸ Interview, Andrade.

¹⁹ Interview, Mazzacurati.

²⁰ Interview, Killinç.

youth and position youth as positive partners for peace. In the elite context of the UNSC, such a move sought to legitimize the already-existing youth-led peacebuilding activity and to build accountability mechanisms that shifted the established norms of youth as merely recipients of peace and security policies.

Actors, Access, and Allies: Getting to Resolution 2250

While the existing literature's framing of the agenda-setting process resonates in the case of advocacy toward a UNSC resolution on youth, peace, and security, the distinctive feature is the partnership and power-sharing with youth that characterized the work of the Working Group. Centrally, this included the acknowledgment of youth leadership and their partnership in coalition building, and the practices the Working Group engaged for success. It recognizes the activities of youth as norm entrepreneurs, involved in shifting normative frameworks.

The literature demonstrates that agenda-setting efforts of advocacy networks succeed when successful in a combination of the contexts in which advocates are working—the “political opportunity structures,” and the functioning and interactions of the networks themselves—the “mobilizing structures” (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Joachim 2003; Carpenter 2005). Joachim (2003, 251) understands the political opportunity structures broadly, not just formal elements but also “cultural and normative components,” while McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996, 3) describe mobilizing structures as the “collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.” For Carpenter, this distinction is difficult because “in reality it is often difficult to analytically disaggregate these interrelated concepts,” choosing to refer to the “strategic environment” instead (Carpenter 2005, 313, footnote 28). Drawing on this work, this section examines *actors*, *access*, and *allies* to explore the unique features of the environment and agenda-setting efforts of YPS advocates.

Actors

This section explores the critical role of youth advocates themselves as norm entrepreneurs, before examining coalition building as a crucial element of advocates' success. Within these relationships, the negotiation of power and centrality of partnerships with youth are evident.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Work by Acharya (2004), Goddard (2009), and Carpenter et al. (2014) highlights the importance of paying closer attention to the behaviors and practices of actors within networks, to better understand the impact networks of advocates can have on issue adoption in international politics. Here, I focus on the actors within the network advocating for UNSC recognition of the importance of youth inclusion in peace and security.²⁷

A core claim of advocates for a resolution on youth-inclusive peace was the centrality of youth; this extended

²⁷ As noted previously, this article focuses particularly on key actors within the Working Group (Global Coalition). This is not meant to discount the efforts by other members of the Working Group or broader advocacy for youth participation and recognition at the UN by individuals and groups not associated with the Working Group (the importance of broad coalitions and diverse actors applying pressure in different contexts has been explored by others). Further work would be valuable on how these efforts by the formalized Working Group to engage the UN, international institutions, and governments were perceived and influenced by more diffuse relationships and actors within the network.

existing practices surrounding youth participation in peacebuilding and in formal gatherings. While “consultation” with youth often features in justifications for youth inclusion, valid concerns of tokenism persist. “Participation,” argues Kwon in her study on UN global youth conferences, is often limited by the “culture of power and engagement mechanisms” and can “reinforce existing relationships of power” (Kwon 2019, 3; see also Sukarieh and Tannock 2014; Altiok et al. 2020). Given that youth are usually not seen as political actors, and not recognized in practice or scholarship as having influence in this space, the fact that youth advocates faced challenges is not surprising. What is unique is how youth advocates harnessed opportunity structures as they presented themselves, despite the barriers inherent within them. One of the key features of the advocacy toward SCR2250 was the active presence of youth themselves as leaders within the coalition of the Working Group and beyond. The YPS agenda was not created only *for* youth but was created *with* youth. The central role of UNOY as norm entrepreneur is notable in this process.

Matilda Flemming, who led the UNOY Youth Advocacy Team on its advocacy missions from The Hague to New York between 2012 and 2015, recognizes that the UNOY missions to New York were “sort of special”:

We did sort of stand out in a crowd, in that we went to meetings sort of three or four or five people. All young people. . . I know one of my colleagues. . . was asked “how old are you?” and she was like “22,” and he was really flabbergasted by how professional we were for that age.²⁸

The fact that it was youth leaders themselves who were lobbying representatives of the UN—and not an adult-led organization on behalf of youth—was significant.

In advocacy efforts, representativeness is important—that those who are lobbying have the credibility to ask for the thing being sought. The WPS movement had to ensure and establish this (see Shepherd 2015), as did efforts toward Indigenous recognition at the UN (see Davis 2008). Subsequent members of UNOY's Secretariat after SCR2250's passage argue that UNOY's important role in navigating their “representative” status in spaces such as the Working Group/Global Coalition is to be a “bridge”²⁹ between these elite spaces and their members on the ground.³⁰ These efforts highlight how youth work to address power imbalances and maximize their impact within existing opportunity structures to ensure their presence as norm creators in spaces that historically have marginalized or ignored them.

UNOY, as a network of youth-led peacebuilding organizations, can be understood to occupy a position of a credible outsider in the process. Flemming argues that:

what [UNOY] had and what I think was of great value, was people that did youth peacebuilding work hands on could talk to their own experience very clearly. Sometimes in youth settings people become far removed very quickly, and I think UNOY had quite some credibility quite early on here.

The fact that UNOY can be understood as a “credible outsider” is significant; Busby notes that the attributes of norm entrepreneurs, many of whom come from outside gatekeeping organizations, can enhance credibility and access (Busby 2010, 169). It also allowed youth to occupy the

²⁸ Interview, Flemming.

²⁹ Interview, Andrade.

³⁰ Interview, Kilinc.

position of experts (Keck and Sikkink 1998), via testimony of lived experience and professional expertise. For the Working Group, having a youth-led organization prominently lobbying for a UNSC resolution was crucial. The centrality of youth leaders within the network demonstrates how advocates not only advocate but also how their practices can reflect the norms they are working toward as Joachim (2003) and McAdam (1996) have noted in other contexts also.

COALITION BUILDING

While the presence of youth as leaders within the network was vital, there are two features that assisted in their success, which are features of other successful agenda-setting: the intra-network relationships and a coherent strategy that was socialized to reach broad support within the network. Carpenter et al. (2014) found that in transnational advocacy network working on human security issues, intra-network relations were one of the key factors in helping form issue perceptions and successfully negotiating gatekeeper preferences. While intra-network relations in advocacy networks can be fractious, almost all interviewees, when discussing advocacy efforts, identified the generally productive and positive relationships that characterized work in this space. Identified as “extraordinary coalition building,”³¹ by a “group of people who were coming from different contexts but who got into synch very quickly,”³² the Working Group as a formalized space of coalition building provided a structured space for advocates to plan and strategize. The interpersonal relationships described by participants who were involved in the advocacy toward SCR2250 highlight trust and commitment as key. The relative newness of the agenda helped, as the space had not previously been formally occupied by an existing organization.

However, the process of establishing youth, peace, and security as an issue on the UNSC agenda, while remembered as positive once momentum started, was not straightforward. As evidence demonstrates, issues must be both defined by (Carpenter 2007a) and adopted by major “gatekeepers” (Bob 2005) to enable effective advocacy. The establishment in 2012 of a Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding marked a shift, as interested parties from the UN and beyond realized the need for a space where people working on issues of youth and peacebuilding across many different sites could come together. However, while the Working Group evidenced a shift in how youth were framed at the UN, gatekeepers—significant figures within the Working Group itself—had to come to “buy-in” to the argument for the need for a UNSC resolution as a meaningful goal and worthy of spending time and resources to achieve. Within the Working Group, there was skepticism of the potential success of efforts toward a UNSC resolution³³; however, the professionalism and leadership of the youth representatives impressed other members. Support from within the Working Group early on was critical for the youth leaders.³⁴ This buy-in represents a shift from the Working Group as a gatekeeper to a political entrepreneur for this new norm (see Carpenter 2007b, 115).

Advocates not only had to overcome the gatekeeping of youth participation as a norm worth pursuing but also had to collectively navigate diverse interests, perspectives, and practices of the Working Group members. In 2014–2015, as the Working Group worked toward a UNSC resolution,

the group comprised of over forty members; these included NGOs and civil society, youth-led organizations, regional bodies, and offices and bodies of the UN itself. The heterogeneity of the network, a feature of other successful agenda-setting efforts (see Tarrow 1994; Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997), had the benefit of enhancing the legitimacy of the framing of youth as positive contributors to peace; however, like any civil society coalition (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 899), the Working Group had to negotiate different frames of reference, operational priorities, practices, and agendas. Saji Prelis outlines how one key strategy for the Working Group was creating a shared language:

Part of that process required that we had UN actors, we had international NGOs, we had different donors, we had partners like USAID, we had young people. All of these entities speak very different languages, when it comes to youth participation in peacebuilding writ large. And over the two and a half years what ended up coming together was a common language which appeared as the guiding principles [the Working Group’s *Guiding Principles on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding*, 2014]. [They] became the common language to talk about youth and peacebuilding: what we know now as youth, peace and security.

These deliberate efforts to build a shared language and shared framework enhanced the internal coherence of the Working Group and simultaneously provided concrete documents that could be used for advocacy and lobbying by members.

The Working Group, since the passing of SCR2250, has come to be known as the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security. However, the sense of this network being what Khagram, Rikker, and Sikkink (2002, 7) identify as a “coalition” is evident right from the beginning in the ways they undertook coordinated efforts to promote the issue. Literature on agenda setting identifies coalitions as more than a loose collective and motivated by “shared, principled discourse” (Carpenter 2007b, 101). Using UNOY’s *Agreed Language Report* and the Working Group’s *Guiding Principles*, holding launch events, and disseminating these coherent materials to stakeholders at UN headquarters,³⁵ the Working Group built awareness and sympathy for their normative agenda. Their efforts toward building international consensus in the lead up to the passing of a resolution are evidence of focused efforts of a coalition working toward normative change, and the practices of the Working Group demonstrate commitment to the goal of centering youth as partners also.

Access

The strategic environment (Carpenter 2005) that advocates work within shape and mediate their efforts to frame issues and encourage norm changes (see also Payne 2001; Joachim 2003). Access is one of the most important elements in efforts to gain support for normative change (Joachim 2003; Carpenter 2005). In ensuring the agenda-setting efforts of this network of actors, the access Working Group members had to different forums and decision makers was a strength. Coupled with strategic use of showcase events to build support for youth-inclusive practices, and momentum toward a resolution, advocates capitalized on the political moment to achieve their objectives.

³¹ Interview, Flemming.

³² Interview, Karlsson.

³³ Interviews, Mazzacurati, Karlsson.

³⁴ Interviews, Flemming, Mazzacurati, anonymous interviewee 2022.

³⁵ Interviews with Flemming, Karlsson, Mazzacurati, anonymous interviewees 2019 and 2022.

The “broad constituency” (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997) of the Working Group also ensured multiple points of access to decision makers and potential partners. Illustratively, the willingness for individuals from UNFPA, UNDP, and UNPBSO to work with civil society, and the establishment of the Working Group, strengthened the capacity of the coalition to successfully leverage their agenda. The leadership of key civil society groups, including SFCG, and the Working Group’s willingness to include and partner with youth broadened the points of entry in advocating for a resolution.

Keck and Sikkink highlight “symbolic events” that can function to raise the profile of an issue (Keck and Sikkink 1998); they can “recast or challenge prevailing definitions of the situation” (Zald 1996, 268) and be used to gain further access and leverage. Advocacy toward a UNSC resolution was amplified through two key events in 2015 before the December passage of SCR2250. In April, with Jordan in the presidency of the UNSC, the Council held an Open Debate on the “Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace”; while focused on CVE as the central theme of contributions from Member States, this debate capitalized on the political environment of the time and centered youth as a focus of peace and security activity. In August, Jordan hosted the Global Forum on Youth, Peace, and Security in Amman, leading to a Youth Declaration on YPS—attended by over 400 young people, youth-led organizations, civil society, government representatives, UN entities, and experts. These events not only have symbolic power but also function as practical spaces for networking, coalition building, and strengthening the chosen frame as key elements of advocates’ agenda-setting efforts.

Allies

Advocates were very successful in building support for their normative agenda by getting allies to invest in the agenda. As Joachim argues, “[i]nfluential allies can amplify and legitimize the frames of NGOs because they possess resources that these non-state actors themselves lack, such as money, institutional privileges, or prestige” (Joachim 2003, 251). Two kinds of allies identified elsewhere in the literature were particularly vital for YPS advocates: a specialized UN office (see Willetts 2000) and states (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999).

The first was a specialized office in the UN, that of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, created in 2013. The Youth Envoy’s role is to be the Secretary General’s representative on issues of youth. At the time of the lobbying for a resolution, the Youth Envoy was twenty-nine-year-old Jordanian-born Ahmad Alhendawi. When approached by members of the Working Group, Alhendawi was enthused and was important in getting Jordan on board.³⁶ Mazzacurati identifies the Youth Envoy as a “bridge”: “he knew that this work was happening, but it was really at the technical level, so he helped create the bridge so it could be lifted to the political level.”³⁷ This ally within the UN, with legitimacy of his own as a young person, institutional power due to his position, and the ability to leverage the strategic resources of the institution was of great benefit to advocates’ efforts.

³⁶ Interview, Prelis.

³⁷ The ally-ship and close relationship between the Working Group and the position of the UN Secretary General Envoy on Youth has continued. When Alhendawi’s term ended, and twenty-six-year-old Jayathma Wickramanayake was appointed in June 2017, she has maintained a strong ongoing relationship and support for the YPS agenda.

The second was the key role Jordan played, “very much embrac[ing]”³⁸ the agenda. The political dynamics of the UNSC, according to one interviewee, meant that it was unlikely that a YPS resolution would be successful if led by one of the UNSC P5, but Jordan’s position as a nonpermanent member and its geopolitical context allowed it to successfully propose the resolution. WPS advocates similarly chose to work with a non-P5 member, Namibia, to introduce SCR1325 in 2000 because of the existing work Namibia had been involved in and geopolitical considerations (Somerville and Aroushi 2019; see also Cockburn 2007). Jordan’s own interest stemmed from a concern about conflict in its region, an influx of refugees, and the large population of refugee young men in particular.³⁹ The Crown Prince of Jordan, who was only twenty-one years old, was a “receptive champion,”⁴⁰ and when he chaired the Security Council Open Debate in April he was the youngest person ever to chair a session of the Security Council. This political motivation for a legacy for their time as President of the Security Council coincided well for advocacy efforts by the Working Group.⁴¹

Together, efforts to engage the strategic environment included attention to the *actors* involved, the possibilities of *access*, and clever engagement with *allies*. Youth leaders’ central role in the network demonstrated a commitment to the norm that was being advocated for, as well as legitimating and expanding the efforts of advocates. Carefully built coalitions that navigated gatekeeping behaviors and built consensus enabled the coalition to function effectively. Such practices positioned advocates well to take advantage of the political environment, and capitalize on symbolic events and influential allies, to build support for normative change. These practices evidence new kinds of agenda-setting practices, which negotiate the uneven power relations between elite actors and youth who are commonly not seen as having capacity or political agency. The efforts of the Working Group were not perfect, and inequalities and institutionalized relationships and practices at times contradicted efforts for inclusivity and partnership. However, the centrality of youth as leaders and co-creators through the usual agenda-setting mechanisms of actors, access, and allies demonstrates a novel approach to conceptualizing norm entrepreneurship in elite spaces.

Cautions, Considerations, and Future Directions

Given the fact that there has been limited work exploring the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda to date, and that this article focuses its attention on the time period up to the adoption of the first resolution in 2015, it is important and appropriate to offer some reflections on the contributions and analytical limits of this article, and possible future directions for work on YPS and youth-led peacebuilding.

This article has focused on the Working Group (Global Coalition) as the key actors who had the access and allies to

³⁸ Interview, Kilinç.

³⁹ Interview, Mazzacurati; see also UNSC (2015a).

⁴⁰ Interview, Prelis.

⁴¹ Other states have been instrumental in supporting the YPS agenda since SCR2250—Peru and Sweden co-sponsored Resolution 2419 (2018); Finland, Qatar, and Colombia co-hosted the first international Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes as a follow-up to Resolution 2419, held in Helsinki, March 2019, and then the High Level Global Conference on Youth Inclusive Peace Processes, held in Doha/virtually, January 2022; and in 2020 France and the Dominican Republic co-sponsored the third YPS resolution, SCR2535. These key states, within and outside of the Security Council, have provided resources, legitimacy, and political weight for the agenda.

make inroads in their advocacy in the elite space of the UN. This focus merits two observations and caveats. First, that while the Working Group consciously worked to expand the range of actors, particularly to include youth, those youth who were able to participate were still “elite” in some sense themselves. While detailed discussion on the valuable considerations of complexities of representation and inclusion is beyond the scope of this article (on this see [Kwon 2019](#); [Lee-Koo and Pruitt 2020](#); [Berents and Mollica 2022](#)), it is important to note that the ongoing challenges of ensuring “meaningful participation” of a true diversity of youth exist in advocacy coalitions as much as in formal institutional spaces such as the UN.

Second, there must be necessary caution about the claims made by those working within the Working Group/Global Coalition about their own advocacy and success and about the role of youth. Cautions about the tokenization of youth in such spaces are valid, yet it was interviewees—both adult and youth—from within the Working Group who were universally self-critical, and vocal about both the positive experiences and the limits of power-sharing between youth and adults. Youth leaders are also very aware of the conditions of their participation at times and work within these constraints. One young man explained that “of course tokenism exists” but:

the question [should] go to the very hard matter of the issues. . . are they creating the sort of institutional reforms that opens space more permanently for young people? Are they actually building programs for young people? . . . The speaking opportunities don't matter. . . They are going to be tokens. I mean, politicians themselves are tokens [at the UN] most of the time. . . Tokenism is actually about the larger system problem of by bringing in youth voices or faces they make people forget the real problems, like what's going on with institutional reform.⁴²

Youth are aware of the contexts in which they are working and highlight the ways the Working Group has genuinely approached partnership between adults and youth, and enabled youth to access platforms and opportunities, while not being afraid to call out the challenges. As one adult interviewee said, “we are not afraid to notice where we are getting it wrong and work to change it. This is new, it's all new, but overall, this group is unique in being willing to try to do it differently, keep doing it better.”⁴³ These two observations point to issues where further work would be beneficial to draw out the hierarchies of youth participation in elite spaces and the complexities of tokenization and partnership in coalition building with youth.

It is also important when considering the emergence of this new norm for youth positive participation to consider the limitations, skepticism, and contestations that have or may emerge. Earlier, I have previously examined the tensions between YPS and CVE discourses, and the risks of securitizing youth. Additionally, thinking with Wiener's work on norm contestation ([Wiener 2014, 2017](#)), possibilities for contestation in other ways also exist as attention to and engagement with the YPS agenda expand to more actors and a broader diversity of contexts. Although beyond the time frame of focus and the scope of this article to discuss in detail, two groups of actors are worthy of mention here. The first is the tensions that exist between the YPS and WPS agendas and their epistemic communities. As mentioned

above, the YPS agenda owes a debt to the successes of the WPS agenda, “resonating” ([Barnett 1999](#)) with the preexisting norm of women's participation to help its successful adoption. The lessons-learned potential of exchanges between WPS and YPS advocates highlights how grafting can help YPS as a new normative framework overcome some of the challenges that WPS faced. However, other interviewees caution against too close an alignment between the agendas as the two demographics are “very different in their dynamics and how they work,”⁴⁴ and while gender is a fundamentally important element of the YPS agenda, the WPS and YPS agendas have different priorities and goals. Similarly, interviewees note instances where the agendas are positioned in competition for resources, for political attention, and for advocates' time.

Second, the YPS agenda forwarded a normative framework for positive youth inclusion and participation in the formal international peace architecture; however, interviews with youth peacebuilders highlight the challenges facing youth in adopting the language and framing of SCR2250 and associated documents to local contexts. Youth peacebuilders themselves often contest the framing of the agenda, asking “who is it for?.” These tensions have the potential to either fracture normative advances or actually strengthen efforts of advocates. In both instances, skepticism, contestation, and competition offer challenges to the norm, which are worth exploring further in future work.

Finally, as the YPS agenda has successfully become integrated into the international peace and security architecture, and is increasingly institutionalized at international, regional, national, and local levels, there is a risk that attention to practices of youth-led peacebuilding become narrowed to activities, practices, and policies labeled as “YPS.” As I have noted elsewhere, there is a risk that in institutionalizing a notion that is fundamentally political and challenging, that of youth inclusion and leadership, the radical edge of what youth leaders are calling for is blunted or erased. It is a monumental achievement that advocacy characterized by partnership between youth and adults led to a UNSC resolution; however, careful attention to this new norm and its emergent normative environment must not lose sight of the broader context.

Conclusion

The groundbreaking nature of SCR2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security is due to the committed work of a coalition of norm entrepreneurs who effectively campaigned and capitalized on the political climate and will of Member States at the UN. The centrality of youth-led organization's involvement in lobbying is a critical feature of the success of the normative change that was achieved. Advocates wanted to achieve two things: to reframe the policy discourse away from a deficit model of youth to a model that recognized the capacity of youth to contribute to peace and security, and to legitimize and support existing work being undertaken by youth-led peacebuilders around the world. The Working Group's clear focus on a UNSC resolution was strengthened by constructive interpersonal relationships within the coalition, clear strategy, and successful recruitment of allies to champion the agenda. Together, this enabled advocates to make a case for the “unique demographic dividend” offered by youth, building on resonances with existing efforts to expand ideas of inclusive peace and security, particularly with the WPS agenda.

⁴² Male youth leader, April 2019.

⁴³ Adult Working Group member, April 2019.

⁴⁴ Female youth leader, April 2019.

However, YPS is a norm that was complicated at its inception. Advocates wanted a new norm of youth participation in peacebuilding, which they got, but only by allowing continued discourses of youth propensity to violence within discourses and documents around the agenda. Carpenter argues that “even seemingly good norms may emerge as dysfunctional, and therefore their robustness may be illusory, if they are framed in a way that undermines their normative logic” (Carpenter 2005, 297). While this is not to suggest the efforts toward a normative framing of youth as positive peacebuilders are rendered entirely “dysfunctional,” the way in which the YPS agenda was immediately “securitized” via various parties (see Altiok et al. 2020; Altiok 2021) has the potential to undermine the normative logics of the agenda. In the negotiation of a new norm, old norms have been reinforced, which contest the emergent norm of positive youth participation in peace. These contestations may impact how successful this new norm will eventually be over time.

Efforts toward a new normative policy framework that would create political will around positive youth inclusion have succeeded in their stated aims. How, and in what form, the YPS agenda will be taken up by international organizations, governments, and civil society is still emerging and will remain contested and fraught. The previous UNOY Co-Chair of the Global Coalition 2016–2020, Gizem Kilinç, notes she does feel optimistic, because while there are many implementation challenges, the YPS agenda is

now owned by youth organisations and young persons themselves; and they feel such a responsibility for it. So whatever happens at a [global] level, it exists now as a thing that can be held and used, and that is a good place to be.

Advocates for YPS were successful in establishing a new normative agenda on youth participation in peace and security; how they capitalize on it going forward will determine the longevity and success of these efforts to date. This article has situated the agenda-setting efforts of YPS advocates within existing literature on agenda setting. It demonstrates that while youth are often not considered political actors, they do in fact have a key role to play as norm entrepreneurs toward establishing a new normative agenda on youth participation in peace and security.

The centrality of youth leaders within the coalition of agenda-setters is a unique feature of the advocacy toward SCR2250. In contexts since the passage of SCR2250, youth peacebuilders around the world, on social media and through their own advocacy materials, often have used the slogan popularized by the disability rights movement in the 1980s: “nothing about us, without us.” While UNOY occupied a niche position in the elite context of lobbying at the UN, it is ownership of the agenda by youth peacebuilders more broadly that is the legacy of the way in which space was opened and claimed by youth for the first time. Positioning themselves as norm entrepreneurs and norm advocates, UNOY and other youth-led advocates globally demonstrate their success in shifting the discourse to a recognition of youth as positive contributors to peace and security.

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