

BOOMERANG STRATEGY AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE: THE CASE OF WE WILL STOP FEMICIDE PLATFORM IN TÜRKİYE

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Abstract: The increasing rate of femicide in Türkiye has raised serious human rights concerns, yet state responses remain inadequate and often repressive toward civil society organizations. This article analyzes how the We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), a leading local NGO, formulates and implements its advocacy strategies amidst shrinking civic space and governmental hostility. Drawing on normative feminism theory, Keck and Sikkink's boomerang pattern and the framework of transnational advocacy networks (TANs), this study explores how WWSF navigates around domestic constraints by forging international alliances to exert external pressure on the Turkish government. This approach allows a contextual and in-depth understanding of the dynamics between local repression and transnational advocacy. This article employs a qualitative research method using literature study, drawing data from academic publications, official reports, news articles, and organizational documents related to WWSF and femicide in Türkiye. The findings reveal that WWSF engages in transnational mobilization through partnerships with international NGOs, global media outreach, and strategic use of international norms, especially following Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and state-led efforts to dissolve the organization. This article contributes to the discourse in International Relations by highlighting a bottom-up perspective on global human rights advocacy, emphasizing the agency of non-state actors in challenging authoritarian practices through cross-border solidarity.

Keywords: *boomerang pattern, femicide, gender-based violence, transnational advocacy networks, Türkiye, We Will Stop Femicide.*

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of femicide or the killing of women because of their gender identity has emerged as a pressing global issue that has increasingly drawn attention in the study of human rights and gender. The United Nations reports that in 2020 approximately 47,000 women were killed by their partners or family members worldwide, accounting for 81 percent of all female homicide victims.¹

In Türkiye, femicide has risen sharply over the past decade. The We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), a civil society organization in Türkiye dedicated to combating this issue, reports that more than 300 women have been killed annually since 2010, most often by intimate partners or close family members.² Femicide in Türkiye is closely linked to gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, which persists due to entrenched patriarchal norms that grant men greater authority over women, thus normalizing violent practices. Domestic violence in Türkiye, therefore, constitutes a deeply rooted social problem.

At the same time, state efforts to provide protection and justice for women remain weak. Human Rights Watch observes that although courts have issued numerous protection orders for victims of domestic violence, weak enforcement leaves women vulnerable to continued abuse.³ In some instances, in Türkiye women have been murdered despite having received court-issued protection orders.

Rather than strengthening legal protections, the Turkish government regressed by withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention in 2021, a

¹ UNODC, *Killings of Women and Girls by Their Intimate Partner or Other Family Members* (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021).

² We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), “Annual Report on Femicide in Turkey”, 2022, <https://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net>

³ Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Withdrawing from Istanbul Convention Harms Women”, March 20, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org>.

key international treaty on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.⁴ This underscores that femicide in Türkiye is not merely a criminal matter but a structural issue tied to gender inequality and the state's failure to protect women.

Furthermore, government responses have often been accompanied by repression of civil society organizations that advocate on these issues. WWSF, as a central actor in highlighting femicide and promoting women's legal protection, has faced various forms of domestic repression. The Ministry of Home Affairs filed a lawsuit against the organization, accusing it of acting "contrary to law and morality". This action is widely regarded as an attempt to dissolve the group.⁵

This situation illustrates the phenomenon of local repression, in which access to domestic advocacy is curtailed through intimidation, restrictive laws, and the criminalization of activists. It reflects the broader global trend of shrinking civic space, whereby authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes increasingly constrain civil society organizations.⁶ This paradox, rising gender-based violence alongside narrowing civic space creates the necessity of moving the issue to the international arena when domestic channels are blocked. NGOs such as WWSF are therefore compelled to seek alternative strategies to sustain their advocacy.

In the context of International Relations, the domestic repression faced by WWSF can be analyzed through the boomerang pattern

⁴ Council of Europe, "Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention: What Impact on European Efforts to Combat Violence against Women?", March 22, 2021, <https://www.coe.int>.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Court Case to Shut Down Leading Rights Group", April 12, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org>.

⁶ T. Carothers and S. Brechenmacher, *Closing Space: Democracy and Human Rights Support Under Fire* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014).

framework developed by Keck and Sikkink.⁷ According to this theory, when domestic advocacy channels are blocked, civil society organizations bypass the state and build transnational advocacy networks (TANs). Through this strategy, issues silenced at the national level can gain international visibility, ultimately generating external pressure on the state.⁸

Against this background, this study seeks to answer the question: How does WWSF strategize its advocacy against femicide in Türkiye? The research aims to analyze the dynamics of domestic repression faced by WWSF, examine its advocacy strategies through feminism perspective, the boomerang pattern and transnational advocacy networks, and contribute to an understanding of the role of non-state actors in International Relations, particularly in advancing human rights and gender issues.

Literature Review

The literature review in this study is divided into two main parts. The first part examines empirical data trends as well as structural and political obstacles in addressing femicide in Türkiye. Koc analyzed 1,000 femicide cases collected from 100 newspapers between 2010 and 2017, finding that the majority of perpetrators were intimate partners, with motives such as possession, jealousy, and conflicts following separation or divorce.⁹ Koc also highlighted the relationship between histories of violence and femicide. Önal & Marangoz explored the rise in suspicious female deaths and

⁷ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁸ Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹ Koç, G, "A Study of Femicide in Turkey From 2010 to 2017," *SAGE Open* 12, no. 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221119831>.

femicides after Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.¹⁰ Their findings show that women who were employed, had children, or had previously sought protection orders were disproportionately represented among the victims. Şahin, drawing on social conflict theory, emphasized the structural barriers to addressing violence against women in Türkiye, arguing that the country's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention reflected the patriarchal bias embedded in governmental policy.¹¹

The second part of the literature review focuses on the anti-femicide movement in Türkiye and its strategies. Alnıaçık and Altan-Olcay discuss how platforms such as EŞİK and cross-identity coalitions (feminist and LGBTQ+) emerged in response to anti-gender campaigns, highlighting the importance of inter-organizational solidarity, international networks, and the use of shadow reports to CEDAW in strengthening international pressure.¹² The role of social media as a strategic tool has been widely examined. Dinçer emphasizes that social media has become vital for expanding campaign outreach, particularly in the face of shrinking civic space due to state repression.¹³ Digital strategies allow feminist movements to articulate gender-based violence, including femicide, while

¹⁰ F. G. Önal and B. Marangoz, "The Impact of Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on Suspicious Female Deaths and Femicides," *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228241271702>.

¹¹ S. B. Sahin, "Combatting Violence against Women in Turkey: Structural Obstacles," *Contemporary Politics* 28, no. 2 (2021): 204–224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2021.1992131>.

¹² A., Alnıaçık and Ö. Altan-Olcay, "Anti-Feminist and Anti-Gender Coalitions and Feminist Resilience in Turkey," in *Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe and the Feminist Response*, edited by R. Smrdelj and R. Kuhar, *Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87693-6_6.

¹³ Pelin Dinçer, "Digital Feminist Activism in Turkey: Has Long-Awaited Fourth Wave Feminism Arrived?" *Mediterranean Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): 282–303, <https://doi.org/10.33708/ktc.1175381>.

creating new spaces of solidarity beyond direct state control. Caltekin, using resource mobilization theory, explains how women's organizations deploy social media and hashtag campaigns as tools for advocacy and reframing narratives.¹⁴ Similarly, Özdemir & Sarıoğlu analyze how social media activism surrounding femicide influences legal processes while also facing legal challenges, concluding that digital activism is effective in shaping public opinion and accelerating judicial procedures, albeit with legal risks.¹⁵ Ogan & Baş, drawing on theories of connective action and affective publics, examine hashtag activism around violence against women, showing that while online support has grown, authoritarian pressures have hindered its translation into sustained organized movements.¹⁶

This body of literature is highly relevant to the present study. The first set of works provides empirical data and macro-level explanations of patriarchal culture and structural barriers as root causes of Türkiye's persistently high femicide rates. For this research, they help illustrate the domestic obstacles and structural repression that constrain feminist advocacy and limit WWSF's ability to operate within national boundaries. The second set of studies elaborates on the strategies of anti-femicide activism in Türkiye, including coalition-building, international advocacy, and the strategic use of social media. They underscore both the strengths and limitations of digital activism as an advocacy channel under

¹⁴ D. A. Caltekin, "Women's Organisations' Role in (Re)Constructing the Narratives in Femicide Cases: Şule Çet's Case," *Laws* 11, no. 1 (2022): 12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws11010012>

¹⁵ Ö. Özdemir, and E. B. Sarıoğlu, "Seeking Justice on Social Media for Femicides in Türkiye," *Etkileşim* 13 (2024): 142–156, <https://doi.org/10.32739/etkilesim.2024.7.13.244>.

¹⁶ C. L. Ogan and Ö. Baş, "Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Turkey: Use of Social Media in the Struggle Surrounding Violence against Turkish Women," *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020), <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12028/3256>.

conditions of domestic repression. Finally, these insights offer a foundation for analyzing how WWSF employs transnational advocacy networks and the boomerang strategy when domestic avenues of influence are blocked.

Theoretical Framework

Normative feminism in International Relations emphasizes the ethical and moral dimensions of global politics, focusing on how power, justice, and equality shape international norms and practices. Unlike positivist approaches that merely seek to explain or predict political behaviour, normative feminism aims to critically question and transform the gendered structures embedded within international systems. As Sylvester argues, “all forms of feminist theorizing are normative, in the sense that they help us to question certain meanings and interpretations in IR theory.”¹⁷

From this perspective, feminist theory is inherently value-oriented, driven by an agenda for global normative change. It challenges the state-centric and masculine foundations of traditional IR by highlighting marginalized actors, everyday experiences, and the ethics of care and justice. Feminist scholars contend that issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and human security are central to understanding global politics and the legitimacy of international institutions.¹⁸¹⁹²⁰

In this study, normative feminism provides a conceptual lens to analyze how an NGO like the We Will Stop Femicide Platform

¹⁷ Christine Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ J. Ann. Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (Columbia University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey*.

²⁰ Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women* (Oxford University Press, 2012)

(WWSF) acts as a normative feminist actor within the international system. WWSF's advocacy against femicide represents an effort to redefine moral and legal norms surrounding gender-based violence, framing femicide as a human rights violation rather than a private or domestic issue.

In carrying out their advocacy roles, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are often embedded within transnational advocacy networks (TANs). TANs are organizational forms characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of.²¹ These networks are organized to promote specific issues, ideas, and norms in order to influence policy change. Within TANs, key actors collaborate to support one another and jointly advocate around a shared concern. NGOs, alongside other TAN actors, serve as facilitators that amplify the voices of communities in the realm of international politics. To achieve their goals, NGOs require systematic strategies, which highlight the significance of cross-border networks as channels of influence, information exchange, and solidarity.

Keck and Sikkink identify four main strategies of transnational advocacy networks (TANs):

1. Information Politics – the collection, verification, and rapid dissemination of reliable information.
2. Symbolic Politics – the use of symbols, narratives, or representative cases to attract international attention.
3. Leverage Politics – engaging international actors with influence (such as international organizations or powerful states) to exert pressure on specific governments.

²¹ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

4. Accountability Politics – holding states accountable for aligning their formal commitments with actual practices in the fields of human rights and social justice.²²

For NGOs to conduct effective advocacy, particularly when governments are the primary targets, a structured strategy becomes indispensable. Keck and Sikkink introduced the concept of the boomerang pattern, a form of advocacy that emerges when domestic channels of influence are blocked.²³ As they explain: “When channels between domestic groups and their government are blocked or severed, domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside. This is what we call the boomerang pattern of influence.”²⁴ In such situations, NGOs bypass their home state by seeking international allies, including foreign NGOs, international organizations, other states, and media outlets in order to generate external pressure that ultimately boomerangs back on the repressive government.

According to Keck and Sikkink, the boomerang pattern strategy operates through TANs, enabling cross-border actors to build solidarity and amplify pressure on states that restrict domestic activism.²⁵ Thus, this strategy creates opportunities for NGOs constrained at the domestic level to influence policy indirectly through the mobilization of international actors.

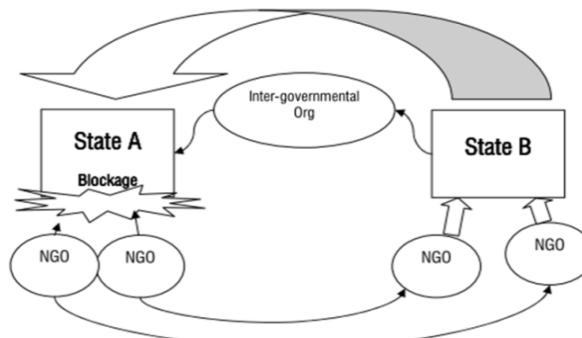
²² Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

²³ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

²⁴ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

²⁵ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

Figure 1. The Mechanism of the Boomerang Pattern Strategy



Source: Keck & Sikkink, 1998

The sequence of action in the boomerang pattern can be described as follows:

1. Local NGOs or civil society groups attempt to influence their government.
2. The state blocks access or refuses to respond.
3. Local NGOs then reach out to international organizations or global media.
4. International actors provide support through advocacy, campaigns, or diplomatic pressure.
5. This pressure is then reflected back onto the original state, compelling policy change or government response.

This feminist-led re-framing is the normative payload that is carried by the mechanisms of transnational advocacy. When domestic channels are blocked, as Keck and Sikkink argue, these normative claims cannot be adjudicated nationally. Therefore, feminist actors like WWSF must embed themselves in Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs). These TANs function as the conduits for normative feminist arguments, allowing them to bypass repressive states. The Boomerang Pattern is, in this context, the process by which a feminist normative claim is exported, validated by international arbiters, and returned with the force of global human

rights law. The following analysis will thus use the TANs/Boomerang framework to trace the material process of WWSF's advocacy, and Normative Feminism to analyze the ideational content and ethical stakes of that advocacy.

Through transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and the boomerang pattern strategy, WWSF employs TANs strategy to pressure the Turkish government while mobilizing international allies to strengthen accountability. By linking local activism to transnational advocacy, WWSF can be analyzed as embodying the feminist normative agenda in practice—challenging patriarchal state structures while advancing universal principles of gender justice and human rights.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the advocacy strategies of WWSF in confronting domestic repression in Türkiye. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research lies in understanding the processes, strategies, and dynamics of interaction between civil society organizations, the state, and transnational actors. The data are derived entirely from secondary sources, collected through a literature review of official WWSF reports, academic publications, international organizational reports, and credible media coverage. The analysis is conducted descriptively, emphasizing the interrelation between WWSF's advocacy strategies, government responses, and international support.

The temporal scope of the research is set between 2018 and 2023. This period covers the submission of a dissolution request against WWSF by the Istanbul Governorship Directorate of Associations in 2018; the continuation of state-led dissolution efforts in December

2021 on the grounds of being “contrary to moral norms”; recurring administrative pressures throughout 2022–2023; and the court ruling of 13 September 2023, which rejected the dissolution demand and marked a legal victory for WWSF. Accordingly, this study focuses on WWSF’s advocacy dynamics during this critical period and its utilization of transnational advocacy networks through the framework of the boomerang pattern.

RESULTS

General Overview of Femicide in Türkiye

Femicide has emerged as one of the most pressing issues in Türkiye, with cases steadily increasing over the past decade. In recent years, the phenomenon of femicide has shown persistently high levels, with only minor fluctuations in the number of victims each year. Data compiled by the *We Will Stop Femicide Platform* (WWSF) has become the primary point of reference, given that the Turkish government does not routinely publish transparent official statistics on femicide.

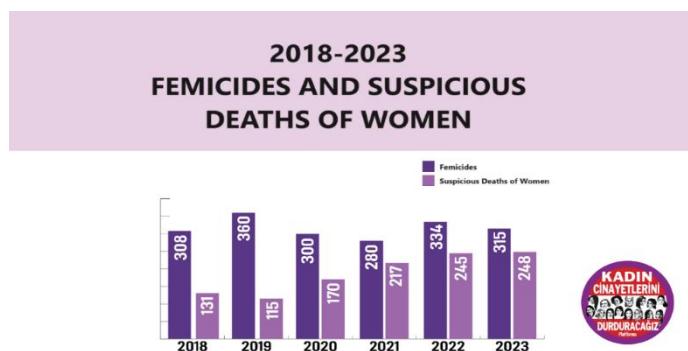
Femicide in Türkiye has become a structural social problem rooted in patriarchal values reinforced by cultural and political systems. Although legal frameworks exist to prevent gender-based violence, their implementation remains weak and inconsistent. Patriarchal norms normalize male dominance and the subordination of women, shaping a society where violence against women is seen as preserving moral order.²⁶ Türkiye’s patriarchal culture defines women’s identities through family honor (namus), making them responsible for moral integrity.

²⁶ Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305.

Data from We Will Stop Femicides show most cases occur when women make independent life decisions, showing femicide as an instrument of patriarchal control.²⁷ Political conservatism under the Justice and Development Party and President Erdogan reinforces these foundations. The government's shift from "gender equality" to "gender justice," and Erdogan's rejection of feminism, institutionalize patriarchy.²⁸ Thus, femicide reflects not only interpersonal violence but also deeply entrenched cultural and structural violence legitimized through patriarchy, religion, and state ideology.

According to WWSF reports, between 2018 and 2023, a total of 1,897 women were killed by men, in addition to 1,126 suspicious deaths that were not officially recognized as femicides.²⁹ These figures underscore the state's failure to provide transparent data, thereby positioning civil society reporting as the main source of reliable information.

**Figure 2. Female Homicides and Suspicious Deaths in Türkiye
(2018–2023)**



Source: We Will Stop Femicides, 2023

²⁷ We Will Stop Femicide Platform, "Annual Report on Femicide in Turkey", 2023, <https://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net>.

²⁸ E. G. Küçükalioglu, "Framing Gender-Based Violence in Turkey." *Les cahiers du CEDREF* 22 (2018): 128–157.

²⁹ We Will Stop Femicide Platform, *Annual Report on Femicide in Turkey*, 2023

In 2018, 308 cases of femicide were recorded, the majority committed by intimate partners or close relatives, with most incidents taking place in the domestic sphere.³⁰ Throughout 2019–2020, the numbers remained in the hundreds, indicating a consistent pattern without significant decline. The situation worsened after Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in July 2021. That year, approximately 280 femicides were reported, accompanied by a rise in suspicious female deaths.³¹ Many observers argued that this withdrawal weakened legal protections and reinforced a culture of impunity.

In 2022, WWSF reported 334 femicides, while in 2023 no substantial improvement was observed, with 315 femicides and 248 suspicious deaths.³²³³ The same patterns persisted: most perpetrators were individuals close to the victims, with motives linked to women's refusal to submit to male control—for instance, seeking divorce or making independent life choices.

Taken together, the period 2018–2023 underscores two key points. First, femicide in Türkiye is not incidental but a structural phenomenon rooted in patriarchal power relations and the weakness of state protection mechanisms. Second, the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention further deteriorated conditions for women by reducing the legal legitimacy of protections. This context highlights

³⁰ Hürriyet Daily News, "440 Women Were Killed in Turkey in 2018: Women's Rights Group." January 2, 2019, <https://www.hurriyedailynews.com/440-women-were-killed-in-2018-in-turkey-womens-rights-group-141464>.

³¹ ANF News, "Gender-Based Violence Is a Deepening Crisis in Turkey." November 25, 2021, <https://anfenglishmobile.com/women/gender-based-violence-is-a-deepening-crisis-in-turkey-79867>.

³² We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), *Annual Report on Femicide in Turkey, 2022*.

³³ ANF News, "KCDP: 315 Women Were Murdered in Turkey in 2023." December 31, 2023, <https://anfenglishmobile.com/women/kcdp-315-women-were-murdered-in-turkey-in-2023-71098>.

the crucial role of WWSF in advocacy, whether through the publication of data, legal assistance, or international campaigns, in pressuring the state to take femicide seriously and safeguard women's rights.

WWSF's Advocacy as an Anti-Femicide NGO

The We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), originally established in Turkish as “*Kadin Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu*” (Platform to Stop Femicide), is one of the largest civil society organizations (non-governmental organizations/NGOs) in Türkiye dedicated to gender-based violence, particularly femicide. Founded between 2010 and 2012 in response to the tragic murder of a teenage girl, Münevver Karabulut—a case that provoked widespread public outrage over the state's failure to protect women—WWSF emerged as a movement for justice and as an advocate for legal and policy reforms to safeguard women.³⁴³⁵ Since then, WWSF has evolved into a central actor in contemporary feminist movements in Türkiye.

As a national NGO, WWSF engages in multiple domains of advocacy. First, the organization systematically publishes monthly femicide data based on media reports and field investigations, compensating for the absence of transparent official statistics. These publications serve not only as an alternative database but also as a tool for enhancing public awareness and transparency regarding the scale of the femicide crisis in Türkiye.³⁶ Second, WWSF provides legal assistance to victims of gender-based violence and supports the

³⁴ Women's Media Center, “Women's Groups in Turkey Protest against Femicide.” 2020, <https://womensmediacenter.com>.

³⁵ The Guardian, “Protests as Turkey Pulls Out of Treaty to Protect Women.” March 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/20/turkey-pulls-out-of-international-accord-designed-to-protect-women>.

³⁶ ANF News, “Gender-Based Violence Is a Deepening Crisis in Turkey.”

families of femicide victims during court proceedings, while also monitoring judicial processes to ensure adherence to the principles of justice.³⁷ Third, WWSF actively mobilizes society through public demonstrations and campaigns, both offline in the form of street protests and online through social media platforms. This strategy has proven effective in shaping public opinion, building solidarity across diverse social groups, and internationalizing the issue of femicide in Türkiye.³⁸ In addition, WWSF has expanded its advocacy to include the rights of LGBTQ+ communities as an integral part of the broader struggle against gender-based discrimination.³⁹ Fourth, WWSF consistently exerts policy pressure on the Turkish government to re-ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, widely regarded as the most comprehensive legal instrument for preventing violence against women. Türkiye's withdrawal from the convention in 2021 was denounced by WWSF as a dangerous regression in the protection of women, and it has since become a central focus of the organization's political campaigns.⁴⁰

Through this profile and its activities, WWSF operates not only as a platform for legal advocacy but also as a transnational mobilization agent linking local feminist movements to international networks. This dual role positions WWSF as a central actor in the struggle against femicide in Türkiye, and as a symbol of feminist resilience in the face of state repression and rising gender conservatism.

From the perspective of normative feminism, the advocacy of WWSF represents more than a social movement; it embodies a moral and political project to transform the gendered norms of the Turkish state and society. Feminist theorists such as Tickner and Sylvester argue

³⁷ Women's Media Center, "Women's Groups in Turkey Protest against Femicide."

³⁸ The Guardian, "Protests as Turkey Pulls Out of Treaty to Protect Women."

³⁹ Women's Media Center, "Women's Groups in Turkey Protest against Femicide."

⁴⁰ ANF News, "Gender-Based Violence Is a Deepening Crisis in Turkey."

that feminist movements seek not only equality in rights but also a redefinition of justice, security, and power through ethical engagement.⁴¹⁴² WWSF's campaigns against femicide challenge the patriarchal moral order that normalizes violence against women, while its public mobilizations and legal advocacy work to reconstruct femicide as a violation of human rights, rather than a private or domestic issue. In doing so, WWSF performs the very function that normative feminism envisions, bringing ethical reflection into global and domestic politics by asserting that gender equality is a normative foundation of legitimate governance.

Moreover, WWSF's activism illustrates how normative feminist agency operates in practice through both grassroots and transnational engagement. By linking local struggles with international advocacy networks, WWSF participates in what True describes as the transnationalization of feminist ethics, where local actors articulate claims for justice that resonate within global human rights norms.⁴³ The organization's emphasis on solidarity, inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights, and insistence on accountability reflects a feminist ethical stance that seeks to humanize politics and center lived experiences as a basis for moral legitimacy. Through this lens, WWSF is not only a domestic NGO confronting state repression. it is also a normative actor contributing to the diffusion of global values of equality, care, and justice within international relations.

Domestic Repression Dynamics in WWSF's Advocacy against Femicide in Türkiye

The international advocacy efforts of WWSF cannot be separated from the structural challenges it faces at the domestic level. Within

⁴¹ Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*,

⁴² Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey*

⁴³ True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*.

Türkiye's increasingly authoritarian context, WWSF confronts severe restrictions on civic space. In recent years, the government has displayed a markedly repressive stance toward groups advocating for gender equality, human rights, and civil liberties. This phenomenon aligns with the global trend of shrinking civic space observed in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes.⁴⁴

Domestic repression manifests most clearly in the state's neglect of law enforcement. Although WWSF documents more than 300 cases of femicide annually, many are not investigated seriously and are often treated as ordinary crimes without acknowledging their gender-based dimension. WWSF reports show that several women were murdered despite having court-issued protection orders, underscoring the state's failure to uphold its fundamental duty of protection.⁴⁵

One of the most significant forms of repression was Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021. As the most comprehensive international legal instrument for the prevention of violence against women, the withdrawal was strongly criticized by WWSF and other feminist groups for weakening women's legal protections amid rising femicide rates.⁴⁶⁴⁷

In addition, the Turkish government directly targeted WWSF through legal attempts to dissolve the organization, repeatedly accusing it of acting "contrary to moral norms." Since 2018, the Istanbul Governorship Directorate of Associations filed petitions with the

⁴⁴ Carothers and Brechenmacher, *Closing Space: Democracy and Human Rights Support Under Fire*.

⁴⁵ We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), *Annual Report on Femicide in Turkey*, 2022.

⁴⁶ Council of Europe, "Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention: What Impact on European Efforts to Combat Violence against Women?".

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Withdrawing from Istanbul Convention Harms Women."

Public Prosecutor's Office for its dissolution. This effort continued in December 2021, when the government formally alleged that WWSF's activities violated "Turkish moral values".⁴⁸ Although the lawsuit was ultimately dismissed by the courts in 2023, the prolonged legal process created an atmosphere of intimidation and threatened the sustainability of WWSF's advocacy activities.⁴⁹

WWSF also operates within an environment of restricted civic space and limited freedom of association under an authoritarian regime. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government frequently relies on conservative rhetoric to constrain feminist movements.⁵⁰ Official discourse often emphasizes women's traditional roles within the family and frames feminist and LGBTQ+ groups as threats to national moral values.⁵¹ The government regularly employs legal and regulatory instruments to limit freedom of assembly and expression, including against feminist organizations. This has increasingly narrowed domestic avenues for advocacy, making it difficult for civil society movements to voice demands through formal political channels. In this context, WWSF's advocacy—which encompasses not only women's rights but also solidarity with LGBTQ+ communities—renders the organization even more vulnerable to political and legal attacks.

These forms of domestic repression create a condition of blocked access, in which internal advocacy channels are effectively closed. Consequently, WWSF has been compelled to internationalize the

⁴⁸ ANF News, "Gender-Based Violence Is a Deepening Crisis in Turkey."

⁴⁹ AP News, "Turkish Court Rejects Move to Shut Down Women's Rights Group." April 13, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-istanbul-52fe1ada82b11c4e51f279fff49fc688>.

⁵⁰ The Guardian, "Protests as Turkey Pulls Out of Treaty to Protect Women."

⁵¹ B. Esen and S. Gümüşcu, "Authoritarian Consolidation in Turkey: The Politics of the AKP Regime." *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2021): 336–354.

issue of femicide by building transnational advocacy networks and mobilizing cross-border solidarity.

The Transnational Advocacy Networks of WWSF

Transnational advocacy networks play a role in widening the reach of local data and voices to the global level so that the issue of femicide in Türkiye receives greater international attention and stronger international pressure. Through this mechanism, field findings compiled by civil society organizations can be used as the basis for reports, policy analyses, and official recommendations in various human rights forums. This collaboration involves various international organizations and cross-border non-governmental organizations that have mandates in the promotion of human rights and gender equality. To face the challenges of domestic repression, WWSF utilizes the support of these global networks to strengthen its advocacy position, ensure the continuity of campaigns, and pressure the government to fulfill its obligations to protect women.

One of the strengths of transnational advocacy networks is their ability to combine field documentation with digital visibility: campaigns and hashtags on social media expand the reach of local reports so they attract the attention of international actors, although such online actions are often episodic and do not always translate into organized collective movements.⁵² The role of women's organizations and platforms such as WWSF not only supplies numbers; they also construct counter-narratives that transform individual cases into public issues demanding a response from the state and international institutions. Case studies that examine efforts of narrative reconstruction by women's organizations show that collective advocacy, including cause-lawyering and the use of media,

⁵² Ogan and Baş, "Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Turkey: Use of Social Media in the Struggle Surrounding Violence against Turkish Women."

can compel the public sphere and the judicial system to pay attention to field evidence that was previously ignored.⁵³

The European Parliament is a supranational legislative body that is part of the European Union and falls into the category of international organizations.⁵⁴ This institution actively uses WWSF data in its annual reports on the human rights situation, such as in the 2022 report that highlighted the increase in femicide and urged the Turkish government to rejoin the Istanbul Convention and strengthen legal protections for women.⁵⁵ In its 2023 report, point 23 on page 13, the European Parliament stated that the femicide figures in Türkiye in 2024 were the highest since 2010 and that this data referred to the WWSF report. The institution extends its influence by issuing policy recommendations, calling on the Turkish government to reverse its decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, and emphasizing full implementation of Protection Law No. 6284 to combat violence against women and stop killings in the name of honor.

GREVIO, as a group of experts under the Council of Europe and an international organization, networks with WWSF to monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye.⁵⁶ In the monitoring process, GREVIO uses field data from WWSF as evaluation material, such as the November 2017 visit to Türkiye which recorded 337 women killed since the beginning of the year and highlighted the absence of official government data.⁵⁷ Independent

⁵³ Caltekin, "Women's Organisations' Role in (Re)Constructing the Narratives in Femicide Cases: Şule Çet's Case".

⁵⁴ European Parliament, *Texts Adopted — 2022 Report on Türkiye*. Strasbourg: European Parliament, 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0320_EN.html.

⁵⁵ European Parliament, *Texts Adopted — 2022 Report on Türkiye*

⁵⁶ Council of Europe, "Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention: What Impact on European Efforts to Combat Violence against Women?"

⁵⁷ Council of Europe, "Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention: What Impact on European Efforts to Combat Violence against Women?"

field findings like these are important because reporting rates and trust in domestic institutions are often low; quantitative studies show that there are few efforts by victims to seek official protection before femicide occurs, so the data collected by NGOs becomes a critical evidentiary source to close these information gaps.⁵⁸ GREVIO's mechanism has a legal basis in the Istanbul Convention that authorizes it to send questionnaires, conduct field visits, review additional information from NGOs and human rights institutions, and produce evaluation reports and recommendations.

The Human Rights Foundation, as an international NGO, networks with WWSF on the issue of femicide in Türkiye.⁵⁹ In its report, HRF cites the number of women killed obtained from data collected by WWSF and uses that information to pressure the Turkish government at the international level.⁶⁰ The report highlights violations of human rights norms through structural discrimination, inadequate victim protection, and the government's failure to protect women and children from violence.

The Advocates for Human Rights is an international human rights organization focused on legal advocacy that networks with the We Will Stop Femicide Platform to raise the issue of femicide in Türkiye.⁶¹ In the shadow report submitted to the 82nd Session of the

⁵⁸ Koç, "A Study of Femicide in Turkey From 2010 to 2017.".

⁵⁹ Human Rights Foundation, "Submission to the Universal Periodic Review: Türkiye (Contribution Prepared for the UN Human Rights Council)". Geneva: United Nations, 2024, <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?file=EnglishTranslation&filename=14089>.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Foundation, "Submission to the Universal Periodic Review: Türkiye (Contribution Prepared for the UN Human Rights Council)"

⁶¹ The Advocates for Human Rights, "Turkey's Compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Shadow Report on Domestic Violence and Femicide for the 82nd Session of the CEDAW Committee", Minneapolis: The Advocates for Human Rights, 2022,

CEDAW Committee, The Advocates cited WWSF data, including the “We Will End Femicide, 2020 Platform Report,” to assert that Türkiye does not meet its international legal obligations to protect women from violence.⁶²⁶³ Through the official CEDAW mechanism, which allows the submission of alternative reports and oral briefings at pre-sessions, WWSF’s data gains international legitimacy and becomes the basis for the Committee’s recommendations to the Turkish government.

Women’s Platform for Equality Türkiye (EŞİK) is a national coalition focused on gender equality that builds advocacy networks with WWSF to raise the issue of femicide in Türkiye to the international level.⁶⁴ In its 2021 report to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, EŞİK cited WWSF data alongside official sources such as the Justice Ministry, FSS Ministry, Interior Ministry, Police Academy Report, and Bianet.⁶⁵ Data compiled from 2012 to 2020 confirm the trend of increasing deaths of women, indicating that WWSF’s field records have become an important reference in pressuring the Turkish government through UN mechanisms and amplifying the issue of femicide on the global stage.

<https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/FINAL%20Turkey%20CEDAW%20Alternative%20Report%20DV%20Femicide.pdf>.

⁶² The Advocates for Human Rights, “Turkey’s Compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Shadow Report on Domestic Violence and Femicide for the 82nd Session of the CEDAW Committee”.

⁶³ We Will Stop Femicide Platform (WWSF), *Annual Report on Femicide in Turkey*, 2022.

⁶⁴ Women’s Platform for Equality Turkey (EŞİK), “Input to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women: Submission from Women’s Platform for Equality Turkey (EŞİK)”, 2021, https://esikplatform.net/s/2547/i/ESIK-Input-to-Special-Rapporteur_30-April-2021.pdf.

⁶⁵ Women’s Platform for Equality Turkey (EŞİK), “Input to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women: Submission from Women’s Platform for Equality Turkey (EŞİK)”

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) build advocacy networks with WWSF through a joint program called the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.⁶⁶ Both are international human rights organizations that work based on the framework of global human rights law, rather than through commercial agreements or formal memoranda of understanding.⁶⁷ Information submitted by WWSF is verified by the international networks of FIDH and OMCT and then compiled into analyses that are widely published.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI) are NGOs that act as human rights monitors documenting violations and formulating policy recommendations in accordance with international standards.⁶⁸ Through this approach, both build alliances with WWSF to strengthen data and advocacy, as seen when HRW explicitly cited WWSF in its report “Türkiye’s Human Rights Rollback,” which noted “at least 214 women were killed in 2013 in circumstances suspected to be related to domestic violence”, and when Amnesty cited WWSF data on femicide and domestic violence in its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 2024 submission.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), “The Observatory – Part III: Drowned in Procedure, Sentenced to Fail: Administrative Harassment Against Civil Society in Turkey”, Paris / Geneva: Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH / OMCT), June 2022, https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/Turkey-report_june-2022_English.pdf

⁶⁷ International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), “The Observatory – Part III: Drowned in Procedure, Sentenced to Fail: Administrative Harassment Against Civil Society in Turkey”

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Withdrawing from Istanbul Convention Harms Women.”

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Withdrawing from Istanbul Convention Harms Women.”

These transnational advocacy networks ultimately form a flow of data from the local to the global level, with WWSF acting as the central collector of field data and a primary reference point. The operational pattern that emerges is consistent: local data, international verification, and policy pressure. WWSF compiles and documents facts about femicide, after which various international actors such as HRW, Amnesty, the European Parliament, GREVIO, and other NGO networks verify and integrate that information into official reports and human rights monitoring mechanisms. This chain of processes provides global legitimacy to field findings, expands the scope of advocacy, and generates stronger policy pressure on the Turkish government to fulfill human rights obligations and protect women from gender-based violence. Through this networked advocacy, the normative feminist agenda of redefining gender justice extends beyond national borders, linking local struggles with global norms of women's rights.

DISCUSSION

WWSF's Advocacy Strategy through the Boomerang Pattern

The transnational advocacy strategies of the WWSF demonstrate the critical role of civil society organizations when domestic advocacy channels are blocked. Drawing on Keck and Sikkink's framework of Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) and the boomerang pattern strategy, WWSF's engagement highlights how local NGOs facing state repression can expand their influence globally through alliances with international actors.⁷⁰

WWSF functions as both a data producer and an agenda-setter within TANs. By systematically documenting cases of femicide and

⁷⁰ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

suspicious female deaths in Türkiye, WWSF fills the information gap left by the state's lack of transparent official data. According to Keck and Sikkink, information politics is a central strategy within TANs, as data and case documentation enable advocacy actors to frame issues as urgent human rights violations.⁷¹ WWSF's monthly reports, later cited by organizations such as the European Parliament, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and GREVIO, illustrate how local data collection becomes the foundation for international advocacy. This demonstrates a clear instance of leverage politics; wherein international allies amplify local voices and exert external pressure on the Turkish state.

Domestic legal shortcomings further underscore the necessity of WWSF's role as a data provider. In Türkiye, there is no separate criminal category for femicide; instead, killings of women are prosecuted under ordinary homicide provisions. This legal ambiguity has two main effects. First, it obscures the structural and gendered dimensions of these crimes, making them appear as isolated incidents rather than part of a broader pattern of violence against women. Second, it allows for judicial discretion that often works against victims, as courts frequently apply "unjust provocation" clauses to reduce perpetrators' sentences. In practice, this means that men who kill their partners or female relatives can receive mitigated penalties if they claim that the victim "provoked" them through behavior such as seeking divorce, exercising independence, or violating expectations of honor. Such practices not only minimize the severity of femicide but also reproduce patriarchal norms within the legal system itself.

Official statistics therefore underreport the scope of the problem and fail to capture the societal dynamics that drive it. WWSF's

⁷¹ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

independent documentation directly addresses this gap by categorizing cases according to gendered motives, compiling detailed case files, and publicizing the systemic nature of femicide. By doing so, the organization provides an evidentiary basis that international actors can use to hold Türkiye accountable, while also contesting the state's framing that diminishes the gravity of gender-based killings.

Moreover, WWSF's participation in shadow reports to mechanisms such as CEDAW, in collaboration with The Advocates for Human Rights and ESIK, reflects the accountability politics dimension of TANs. Through these channels, WWSF successfully transforms local grievances into transnational claims, thereby compelling international institutions to hold Türkiye accountable for its human rights obligations.

Beyond supplying raw data, WWSF and its allies also engage in reconstructing the narratives surrounding femicide cases. Many deaths of women in Türkiye are officially recorded as suicides, accidents, or isolated domestic disputes, which has the effect of erasing their gendered dimensions. WWSF challenges these state framings by systematically gathering testimonies from families, monitoring court hearings, and documenting inconsistencies in official reports.

This process allows the organization to expose patterns of systemic violence and situate individual cases within a broader structure of patriarchal control. The reframing of cases from "private tragedies" into "public wrongs" transforms the way they are received both domestically and internationally. Instead of appearing as isolated crimes, WWSF presents them as evidence of institutional neglect and state failure to protect women. When incorporated into shadow reports for mechanisms such as CEDAW, these reconstructed narratives not only give victims a voice but also compel international institutions to recognize them as symptomatic of deeper governance

problems. In this way, WWSF demonstrates that advocacy is not only about collecting statistics but also about contesting the meanings of those statistics in legal, political, and social arenas.

The boomerang pattern strategy provides an apt lens to interpret WWSF's trajectory under domestic repression. As Keck and Sikkink argue, when domestic channels are blocked, NGOs bypass their state and seek international allies to pressure the government from the outside. In WWSF's case, the Turkish government's repeated attempts to dissolve the organization on the grounds of being "contrary to moral norms," combined with the state's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021, exemplify the blocked access condition.⁷²

The effectiveness of the boomerang pattern is also shaped by the backlash it provokes within Türkiye's domestic political environment. While international allies amplify WWSF's data and press the government to meet its obligations, the Turkish state often responds with counter-narratives designed to delegitimize feminist movements. Authorities and conservative groups frequently frame women's rights activism and international conventions such as the Istanbul Convention as threats to "family unity" or as instruments of Western cultural intrusion. By casting gender equality as a foreign agenda, the state cultivates skepticism among the domestic public, making it harder for NGOs to build broad-based support. This backlash serves two purposes: it allows the government to justify restrictive legal measures against organizations like WWSF, and it shifts the debate away from human rights obligations toward questions of cultural authenticity and morality.

As a result, even when external pressure intensifies, the state mobilizes nationalist and moralistic discourses to resist compliance,

⁷² Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*.

portraying itself as the defender of traditional values against external interference. For WWSF, this dynamic creates a paradoxical environment: the more visible and global their advocacy becomes, the more vulnerable they are to domestic delegitimization and repression. Nevertheless, by persisting in their engagement with transnational networks, WWSF demonstrates how local organizations can endure and adapt even under hostile political conditions.

In response, WWSF expanded its advocacy through transnational networks. The cycle of the boomerang effect is clearly observable in WWSF's case: domestic repression triggers international mobilization, which then rebounds as external pressure on Türkiye. For instance, the European Parliament explicitly cited WWSF's data in its 2022 and 2023 annual reports, urging Türkiye to re-ratify the Istanbul Convention and fully implement Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women. GREVIO, under the Council of Europe, relied on WWSF's field data to evaluate Türkiye's compliance with international human rights norms. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International utilized WWSF's findings in reports such as the Türkiye Human Rights Rollback and Universal Periodic Review submissions, thereby amplifying WWSF's advocacy at the global level. This cycle exemplifies the boomerang effect: domestic repression forced WWSF to internationalize its advocacy, which then generated external pressure that "returned" to Türkiye in the form of diplomatic and normative pressure.

The WWSF case underscores the significance of non-state actors as agents of norm diffusion in International Relations. By embedding itself in transnational advocacy networks, WWSF transcends national boundaries and mobilizes global solidarity to address gender-based violence. The boomerang pattern in this context illustrates the

paradox of authoritarian repression: by closing domestic civic space, the state inadvertently pushes NGOs to internationalize their struggles, thereby exposing itself to greater scrutiny.

The results of this boomerang pattern strategy are evident not only in international advocacy but also in its domestic impact. Sustained external pressure from allies, through European Parliament resolutions, GREVIO assessments, and reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, created heightened scrutiny of Türkiye's gender-based violence policies. This transnational attention amplified public awareness and limited the state's ability to suppress feminist organizations. In several cases, intensified monitoring and diplomatic engagement contributed to shifts in judicial behavior as courts faced international expectations for compliance with human rights standards.

A notable outcome was the Turkish judiciary's rejection of government efforts to dissolve WWSF for "violating moral norms." Citing constitutional protections of association and WWSF's international partnerships, the court ruled in favor of the organization, affirming its legitimacy. This demonstrates how external pressure reshaped the legal environment, safeguarding civil society space even in an authoritarian context.

These finding highlights two broader implications. First, transnational advocacy provides resilience for local feminist movements facing authoritarian constraints, enabling them to sustain campaigns and enhance legitimacy despite domestic repression. Second, the effectiveness of WWSF's strategy demonstrates that data transparency and agenda framing are powerful tools in shaping international discourse on human rights, particularly when state denial or neglect persists.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that WWSF has been able to continue its advocacy against femicide in Türkiye despite facing strong domestic repression. By using transnational advocacy networks and the boomerang pattern strategy, WWSF transformed blocked access at the national level into opportunities for international engagement. Through systematic data collection and collaboration with global actors such as the European Parliament, GREVIO, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, WWSF expanded its influence and kept the issue of femicide visible on the international agenda.

The case of WWSF highlights two main points. First, reliable data and consistent reporting are powerful tools that can strengthen advocacy even when governments restrict civic space. Second, repression at the domestic level can unintentionally push NGOs to seek international allies, which in turn increases external pressure on the state. Thus, WWSF demonstrates how local feminist organizations can become influential global actors in the fight against gender-based violence.

Ultimately, WWSF's experience underlines the importance of bottom-up perspectives in international relations. Civil society organizations, particularly those representing marginalized groups, play a central role in norm diffusion and in challenging authoritarian repression. By situating itself within transnational advocacy networks, WWSF not only advances the protection of women's rights in Türkiye but also contributes to strengthening global human rights norms and the international struggle for gender equality.

From a normative feminist perspective, WWSF's advocacy illustrates how local feminist movements can act as moral agents in reshaping international norms. By turning women's lived experiences of violence into matters of global concern, WWSF challenges the gendered boundaries of what is considered political

and legitimate in international relations. Its work represents not only a struggle for legal reform but also an ethical effort to redefine justice, equality, and protection as universal principles rooted in women's realities.

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