

# Estela Morais Westphalen

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## WRITING SAMPLES AND POLICY PORTFOLIO

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Social Media in Conflict: A Tool For or Against Sexual Violence?

DIGITAL PEACEBUILDING 2025 Issue 6

<https://digital-peacebuilding.com/articles/pb2025n6.pdf>

## DIGITAL PEACEBUILDING

2025

Issue 6

Social Media in Conflict: A Tool For or Against Sexual Violence?

Estela Morais Westphalen

### Executive Summary

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) is used as a strategy during wartime to demoralize spirits and erode culture, as well as to weaken security. CRSV is defined by the UN Rome Statute as rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, amongst other acts linked to conflict. It can be both physical and psychological, and despite many UN peacekeeping missions limiting their scope to women and girls, sexual violence is experienced by all. In the 21st century, social media has been both weaponized to further sexual violence as well as instrumentalized for preventing said violence and supporting its victims. From providing a media-based justice and digital literacy training, to exacerbating trauma and inciting real-world violence, social media is powerful at its highs and lows. Platforms like Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and Instagram should be held accountable for upgrading their algorithms according to human rights-based regulations. Strategic partnerships between government, NGOs, public health ministries, and others are also recommended to protect the individuals and nations at risk of sexual violence.

### Introduction

"Sexual violence has been a feature of conflict since ancient history."<sup>1</sup> Social media has magnified the problem and its solutions. This brief outlines the relationship between Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and conflict zones, highlighting key conditions for its occurrence. It will also explore both positive and negative effects of social media on the matter. This analysis is key to supplement current literature on CRSV. Despite a growing evidence-base of authors diligently studying CRSV, ultimately the evidence collected remains an underestimate. The lack of transitional justice and UN involvement in some areas, fear of continued terrorist repression, and male victim shaming, invite further research and technological innovations.

### Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)

CRSV is defined by the UN Rome Statute as referring to "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Stachow, Ela. 2020. "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: A Review." *BMJ Military Health* 166 (3). England: British Medical Journal Publishing Group: 18387. doi:10.1136/jramc-2019-001376.

2 Sandvik, Kristin Bergtora, and Kjersti Lohne. "The Struggle Against Sexual Violence in Conflict: Investigating the Digital Turn." *International Review of the Red Cross* 102, no. 913 (2020): 95-115. <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/reviews-pdf/2021-03/struggle-against-sexual-violence-in-conflict-investigating-digital-turn-913.pdf>.

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Final Portfolio “The Politics of Policymaking in Comparative Perspectives” with Professors Shankar Prasad and Caroline Nordlund & “Policy Analysis and Problem Solving” with Professors David Blanding and Diana Perdomo 2024  
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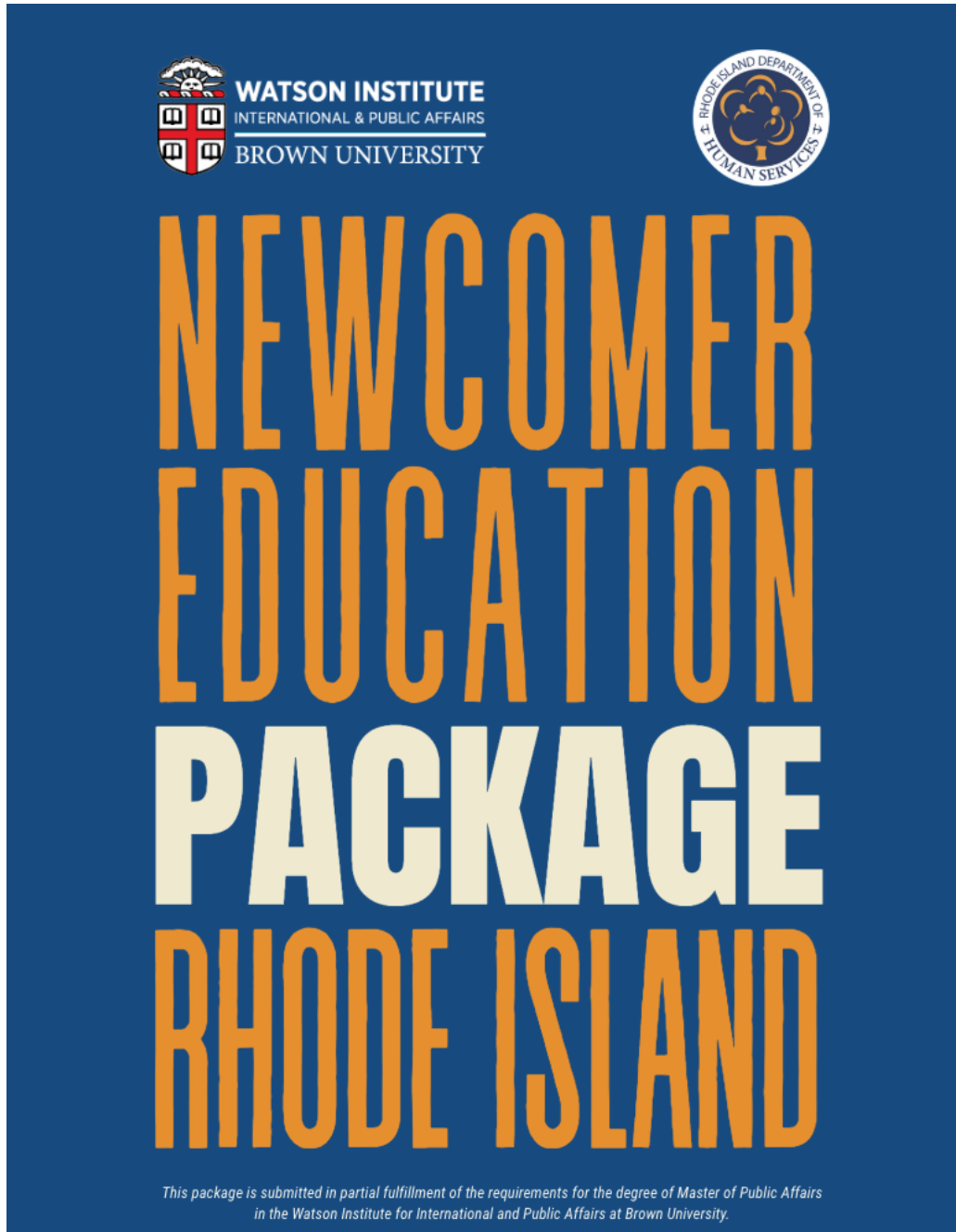


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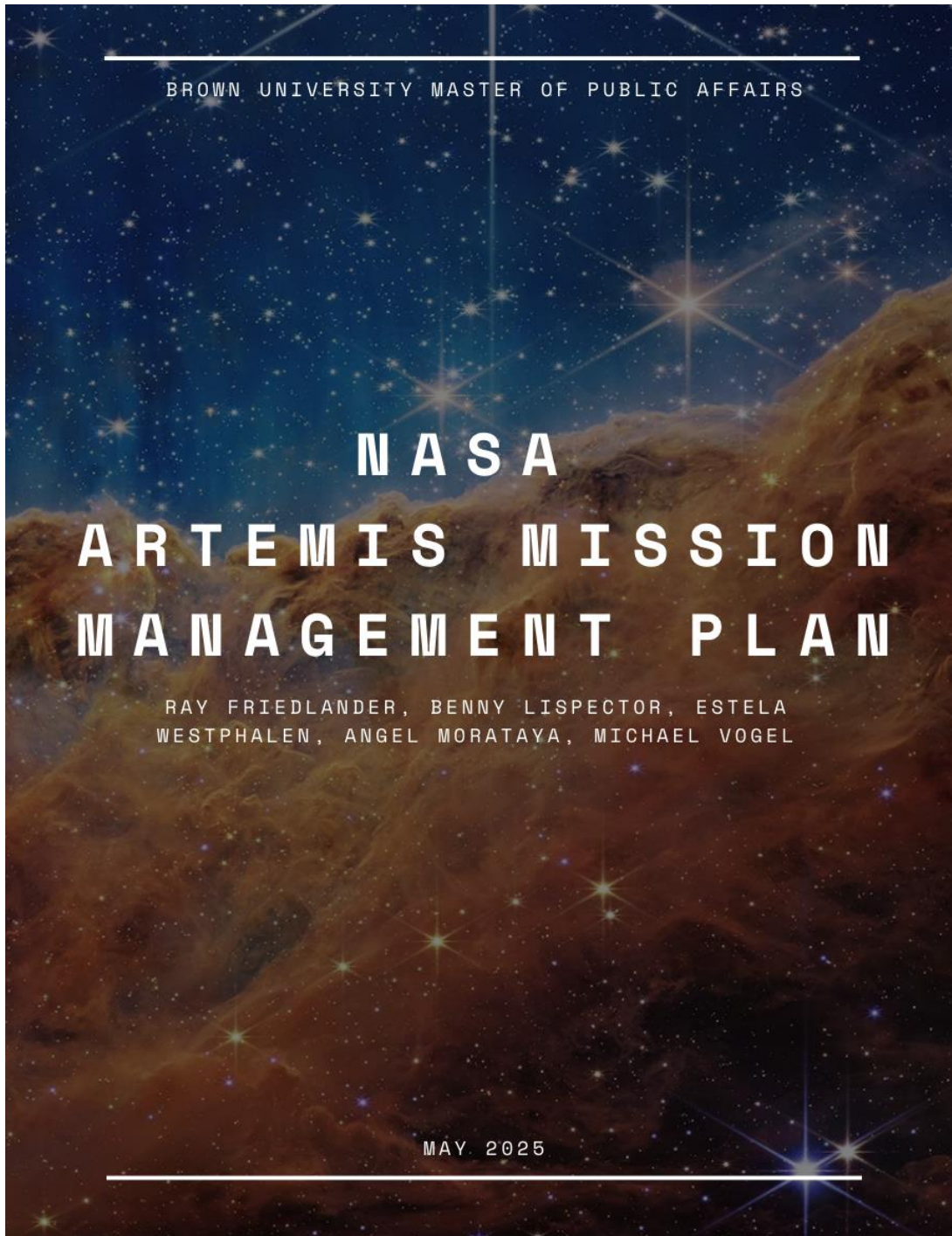


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