An Assessment of Women's Participation in South Africa's Foreign Policy Decision-Making and Execution

by Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji

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Penilaian Partisipasi Perempuan dalam Pengambilan Keputusan dan Pelaksanaan Kebijakan Luar Negeri Afrika Selatan

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai partisipasi perempuan dalam pengambilan keputusan dan implementasi kebijakan luar negeri Afrika Selatan. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh dominasi signifikan partisipasi gender laki-laki dan kepemimpinan dalam DIRCO terkait partisipasi perempuan sejak tahun 1994. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Intersectionality dan Teori Kanter untuk mendukung penelitian ini dengan metode kualitatif. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi perempuan kurang dari 50% ketika mereka memegang posisi junior. Ditemukan bahwa tantangan yang membatasi keterlibatan perempuan dalam pengambilan keputusan kebijakan luar negeri termasuk norma budaya dan tradisional yang tidak menguntungkan, praktik keagamaan, kurangnya dukungan terhadap perempuan, sikap laki-laki berpengaruh, masalah keuangan, dan kurangnya keterwakilan dalam politik.

Kata kunci: Partisipasi perempuan, Kebijakan luar negeri, Proses pengambilan keputusan, Kesetaraan gender, Afrika Selatan

ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess women's participation in decision-making and implementation of South African foreign policy. This research is motivated by the significant dominance of male gender participation and leadership in DIRCO related to female participation since 1994. This study uses Intersectionality theory and Kanter's Theory to support this research with qualitative methods. The findings of this study indicate that women's participation is less than 50% when they hold junior positions. It found that challenges limiting women's involvement in foreign policy decision-making include unfavorable cultural and traditional norms, religious practices, lack of

support for women, attitudes of influential men, financial problems, and lack of representation in politics.

Keywords: Women's participation, Foreign policy, Decision-making process, Gender equality, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

South African women have always remained in the second echelon of culture despite their various ethnic origins. Past policies and practices, such as political parties' leadership representation, deliberately benefited men, particularly white ones. The dominant ideology of masculinity and male dominance has become a global problem that defies the socio-political and economic aspects of liberal democratic states (Haastrup, 2020; Mathur-Helm, 2005). This socio-cultural ideology identifies women as inferior to men in both classes and assigns them the status of minors in both the public and private spheres of existence (National Gender Policy Framework, 2003). In the 21st century, the lack of women's inclusion and limited participation of women in leadership positions and decision-making remain barriers to fair political participation and sustainable development in a democratic setting.

According to Kimbu and Ngoasong (2016), women are often confronted with circumstances in which they play a supporting role in the management of the internal and external relations of the state, irrespective of their power. However, Williams (Williams, 2016) argues that the South African foreign policy has a packed diplomatic agenda in the country's history and that it is time for analysts to begin exploring the nature of the country's foreign policy vision as South African Diplomacy will have to address the challenges of uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the global order.

On the international scene, before 2018, countries such as Sweden and Canada committed to pursuing the participation of females in foreign policy decision-making (Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). This commitment focuses on abolishing all aspects of gender dominance and inequality, which seeks to eradicate class assumptions (Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). This also strives to

provide women with the ability to take part in decisions to serve the state and to confront the problems relevant to the international affairs and position of a nation (Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021). Junk *et al.* (2021) conclude that constantly changing, the world still has a long way to go toward a fair representation of women in public and private decision-making. Gender gap, women tend to experience unequal access to work and low involvement in private and public decision-making.

The Republic of South Africa has moved on from its status as the pariah regime in 1994, which had promoted racial supremacy and patriarchy, to a more inclusive democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society, based on the values of equality, and justice, fairness and non-discrimination. The preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996:1-5) further states that the aim of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution is to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental rights. It further explains that the Republic of South Africa is founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advance of human rights and freedoms such as non-racialism and non-sexism.

However, on the contrary, the role of women's participation both in the ministry and in the legislature continues to be contrasted with the participation of men (Haastrup, 2020). Perhaps the weakness in the concise paradigm is the promotion of gender equality to limit women to pure objects and the fact that gender quotas are an easy way to change feelings without improving their circumstances (Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021). Thus, the status and goals of South Africa's foreign policy cannot be separated from the complexity of its transformation from the repression of apartheid to the creation of a new multiracial democracy. The above discourse shows many issues and guidelines related to South Africa's national goals of equality, inclusivity, and women's participation in foreign policy decision making. From

the previous research above, there is still no research on the causes of women's limitations in decision making. Therefore, this study aims to assess the pitfalls that limit the participation of South African women in decision-making in its foreign policy agenda.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study assessed women's participation in South Africa's foreign policy decision-making and execution. Three research objectives guided this study which is:

1. To evaluate the challenges of women's participation in foreign policy decision-making;

2. Foreign policy decision-making is required to ascertain the strategies that could promote women's participation in politics and the South Africa.

3. To make recommendations to promote women's participation in politics and South African foreign policy decision-making.

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was selected to collect deep meaning and information from the natural setting of the phenomena of women's participation in South Africa's foreign policy decision-making and execution. The exploratory research design was adopted for its suitability to explore the in-depth subjective views of the research participants from a natural study perspective. The study population consisted of all women in the South African diplomatic mission, particularly in the Department of International Relations and Co-operation. This study adopted a non-probability sampling method which does not emphasize the representative nature of the sample. Non-probability sampling is a sampling approach in which the individual members of the population do not have an equal or known likelihood of being selected to be a member of the sample" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher applied the convenience sampling technique because the few research participants included in the study are

conveniently accessible and located in South Africa at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation in Pretoria. The rationale for applying this sampling technique is to make the study feasible by reducing the costs to achieve the study's timelines of the North West University requirements for a Master's degree in International Relations within a reasonable budget.

Ten seasoned female diplomats from South Africa were selected from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and requested to participate voluntarily in the study. Selected research participants were located at the Directorate of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations. The participants identified were better placed in the organization to understand the questions on women's participation issues in foreign policy formulation and implementation. Normally, the educational requirement for an individual to be a diplomat is an Honours degree in political science or international relations. Therefore, the inclusion criteria will focus on participants who have attained a Degree. In addition, the researcher will not be biased on socioeconomic level and age. Exclusion criteria are males, non-South Africans, a diplomat without a degree qualification or one who is not working at the directorate level. As Ivankova (2015) argues, sampling is done from a more or less complete list of individuals in the population to be studied. Those people who have a chance of being included constitute the sample frame. A semi-structured interview was adopted as a data collection tool for its strengths in going in-depth in data gathering. The interview guide was well-formulated with a standard mode of delivery by the researcher. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online at the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO). The Atlas.ti software (version 9) software was used for content analysis, which is a systematic approach to classify, categorize and code observations, field notes and other interview raw data into patterns and themes and to further develop it into the findings, themes, categories, and conclusions of the study. In the presentation phase,

pseudo-names ranging from PA1-PA10 were given to the participants to guarantee anonymity. All ethical observations and trustworthiness applicable to the study were duly observed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Research Problem Statement

With the resurgence of democracy since 1994, South Africa has seen a noticeable trend toward campaigning for women to partake in leadership and politics. Historically, race and gender have subjected women's leadership roles in South Africa to a merely supportive responsibility. Throughout South Africa, white and black women have historically been idealized as mothers, not as politically influential individuals (Musavengane & Leonard, 2019). Perhaps, the role played by black women in the liberation struggle has not been adequately recognized in terms of involvement in leadership and politics in South Africa. Consequently, a limited number of women are participating in South African foreign policy decision-making, as a limited number of women are represented in the political scene. Accordingly, women are still significantly under-represented in structures related to foreign affairs in South Africa. These include the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs, ANC's International Relations committee, ministerial advisory bodies such as the South African International Relations Council, as well as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), as presented in Table 1 .

Table 1: Gender Composition of Top, Senior and Mid-Management of DIRCO

	Male	Female	Total
Top management	11	5	16
Senior management	146	114	260
Professionally qualified and experienced specialist and mid-management	551	490	1041

Source: DIRCO (2018)

The significant dominance of the male gender in DIRCO, as presented in Table 1, shows the negligible number of women participating in foreign affairs, which has had only a male director's general since 1994. The present makeup

of the genders is skewed towards men, and however, after the advent of the new age post-apartheid, the country has embraced and developed a range of programs, organizations and foreign initiatives. These include International Women's Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children, 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence Human Rights Day, and the South African Commission for Gender Equality as an approach to encourage gender equality as a human right in its domestic policies (Commission for Gender Equality Act, 1996).

Similarly, the status of democratic and constitutional changes maintained at all levels of socio-political and economic governance in the modern institutional democratic South African Diplomacy and foreign policy strategy has not yet integrated gender mainstreaming as a critical theory and cornerstone of its regional and global development strategy (Engkus et al., 2019; Musavengane & Leonard, 2019). Perhaps the lack of women's gender inclusivity in foreign policy decision-making in South Africa has historically maintained the dominance of males. To this end, it was identified that previous scholars in this area of studies, such as Haastrup (2020), Afolabi (2017) and Tripp (2017), have carried out studies on the trend of women's participation in politics and leadership. Still, limited studies have been conducted to assess the level of involvement and participation of South African women in foreign policy decision-making. In this context, this study was motivated to assess and evaluate the level of women's participation in South Africa foreign policy decision- making and execution. Hence, it is hoped that the findings of this study will reveal the challenges that have hindered reasonable representation of women in South Africans foreign policy decision making as well as proffer academic solutions that will enhance positive integration of women in the decision-making of South African foreign policies.

Women's participation in politics and leadership in South Africa

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 recognized

women's empowerment, thus, placing it as one of the basic and significant requirements for establishing any good democratic government across the globe. The Beijing Conference became a platform to take action through a body established at the Conference known as the Beijing Platform for Action (Padovani, 2016). This debate on an empowerment plan of action for women in the 21st century. This meeting was seen as a landmark in women's empowerment. Still, there is not much evidence today to show that the recommendations of the Conference were fully implemented, especially in the developing nations where challenges of under-development and representation of women in participation in decision-making are needed the most (Haastrup, 2020). This indicates that a myriad of factors can be attributed to the under-representation of women in the participation of key decision-makers, such as political leadership, patriarchy and governance (2020). Thus, these factors are scanty, disjointed and asymmetrical in the current body of literature concerning the body of knowledge. In contrast, the current published scholarly works look at the problem under investigation from different angles.

However, women in political participation in South Africa have received little concern, as a limited number of women serve as key decision-makers in different political structures. When women are shut out, Haastrup (2020) and Kamenou (2020) emphasize that this not only implies discrimination but also undermines judgment since the reasons for such judgments have not been addressed. Perhaps, the question of patriarchal society and toxic masculinity in South African foreign policy application indicates that this approach is not adequately equitable in involving women in decision-making (Haastrup, 2020). Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa's establishment has pursued responsible foreign policy. This foreign policy perspective reflects the African continent and contains a variety of articulations on social justice principles. Over the last decade, many nations

have found social inequality essential to their foreign policy. Whether expressed as a female foreign policy or not, this is viewed as a proposal toward a radical and responsible foreign policy.

Nonetheless, the participation of South African women in the struggle for independence can be seen in their attempts to persuade the few whites in authority in the 1950s to repeal the passed legislation, which enslaved the black majority and coloured people by imposing 'pass law' on them (Petersen & Matheson, 2020). This resulted in the popular 1956 protest, in which hundreds of women marched to the president's office in Pretoria, pushing for the repeal of such legislation. Women's Day is observed on the 9th of August in South Africa due to this remarkable act of the women. Thus, taking into account the historical record of South Africa, it becomes impossible to exclude the participation of women in the successful and effective governance of South Africa.

Although the present leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa has shown concern towards the inclusion of women in the leadership and policy decision-making positions, more equitable representation is still yet to be addressed, as the majority of the executive and policy decision-making members are men. Therefore, South Africa cannot be viewed as merely a possible beneficiary of pro-gender equity and justice foreign policies but as part of the story of this form of foreign policy. However, South Africa's current foreign policy status and goals cannot be isolated from the history of its transformation from the repression of apartheid to the creation of a new, multiracial democracy. Thus, the lack of knowledge in certain sources about pro-gender or feminine foreign policy activities limits the likelihood of systematic information on female participation in South African foreign policy decision-making. Hence, there is an acute awareness of the need to address these socially constructed inequalities, which has given rise to the work of the Commission on Gender Equality in South Africa.

Women's participation and equitable leadership chances are now universally regarded as important and inseparable aspects of any long-term strategy for economic growth and pro-poor development in Africa. Several stakeholders have suggested that women in leadership positions would significantly impact country governance and that women have special abilities and unique experiences to bring to these processes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020). Female executives are also seen as more honest and ethical by employees than male executives.

Women have a fundamental right to participate in all political decision-making, including peace processes at all levels. Including women in peace processes add a broader range of perspectives and enhance the ability of peacemakers to address the concerns of a wider range of stakeholders, which has been proven to lead to more sustainable peace. Yet, women are often underrepresented or excluded from official peace processes. Therefore, mediators need to promote understanding among the conflicting parties of the value of the participation of women (Dworkin et al., 2012). Table 2 presents the women's representation in the democratic South African Parliament.

Table 2: Women's representation in the democratic South African Parliament (2004-2019)

Parliament of RSA	6th	5th	4th	3rd	2nd	1st
% of women MPs in NA	46%	40%	43%	33%	30%	27.7%
% of women MPs in NCOP	36%	28%	30%	41%	17%	*

Source: NA & NCOP (2019)

Table 2 depicts that the representation of women MPs in NA was very poor in the first Parliament but started improving till the 6th Parliament. However, this needs to be improved until a 50-50 ratio to men representation is achieved. Also, it is observable in Table 2 that women MPs in the NCOP are still improving, as there were no women represented in the 1st Parliament of RSA, but made up 36% of representation in the 6th Parliament. Table 3 presents the participation of women in several offices in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019.

Table 3 Women's participation in several offices

Designation	2004	2009	2014	2019	Comment
Women MPs	33%	43%	40%	46%	The highest proportion of women in Parliament in 2019.
Women in the NCOP	41%	30%	28%	36%	The proportion of women in the NCOP needs substantial increases moving forward.
Women MPLs	30%	41%	37%	46%	Highest proportion of women in 2019.
Women in cabinet	42%	41%	41%	50%	Highest proportion in 2019, 50% cabinet for the first time
Women deputy ministers	60%	39%	44%	46%	Falls short of the 50% mark.
Women premiers	44%	55%	22%	22%	Dropped from 2004 and 2009, 22% in the last two elections, needs urgent action to achieve the 50% mark.
Women voters	55%	55%	56%	55%	Consistently at around 55%
Women as news sources	22%	24%	25%	20%	The lowest proportion of female sources in the last four elections.

Source: NA & NCOP (2019)

Table 3 portrays that women in decision-making are a minority; looking at premiers and presidential offices, women are not in decision-making portfolios.

Post-Election Women's Representation in the South African Parliament

Women gained 23 seats across all parties in the 2019 elections. The present composition of the National Assembly shows that women account for 46% of the total membership. This represents an increase of 11% over the previous Parliament. The growth in women in the national assembly to 45 per cent is a significant result considering that women made up only 2.7 per cent of Parliament before 1994 and 27 per cent in 1994. This is partly owing to the Economic Freedom Fighter's 4.46-percentage-point surge in popularity (EFF). The ANC lost more seats but still holds the majority with 213 MPs, 119 of which are held by women. The formal opposition, the Democratic Alliance, was reduced from 89 to 84 seats, with 31 seats going to women. The EFF now has 44 seats, with 23 of them being filled by women. South Africa, Rwanda and Ethiopia are among the world's few gender-balanced cabinets with 50%, 61%

and 50 %, respectively (Ng'weno, 2020).

Following the 2019 elections, women's representation in provincial legislatures grew from 30% to 43%. The province of Limpopo has the highest proportion of female legislators, with 53 per cent of seats in the legislature held by women, exceeding the SADC parity target. The Western Cape has the lowest gender representation in its legislature, at only 35.7 per cent. Given the DA's attitude against women's political engagement, this is unsurprising (Ng'weno, 2020).

Overall, South Africa has made significant progress, and its Parliament is undoubtedly one of the most gender-diverse in the world, ranking third in Africa and tenth worldwide. However, in terms of gender equity, it still lags short. At the national and provincial levels, some adjustments and advances have been made, but there are still discrepancies between parties. The DA remains gender-neutral; the ANC may have greatly improved, and the EFF is showing signs of progress. However, all of the parties considered continue to have a male-dominated top leadership. As a result, greater effort must be given to ensuring women are in high leadership positions within political parties. Women's political participation should be encouraged by political parties. This could be accomplished by shifting attitudes and views about women's political participation. A key aspect would be affirmative action attempts to ensure women's representation in high positions in political parties, which men have traditionally held. Political parties can unite their efforts in this way to break the current stalemate.

Presentation of Research Results

This section presented the results collected from the selected participants of the study through semi-structured interviews. The results are presented based on the stated objectives of the study. The following section presents the results obtained from research objective 1.

Responses obtained from research objective one

This section perused the challenges of women's participation in foreign policy decision-making. This objective was included in the study to identify the limitations and possible challenges hindering South African women from participating actively in foreign policy decision-making. This section only presented the findings obtained from the study and the direct excerpts obtained from the participants. The responses from the participants are presented in Figure 1:
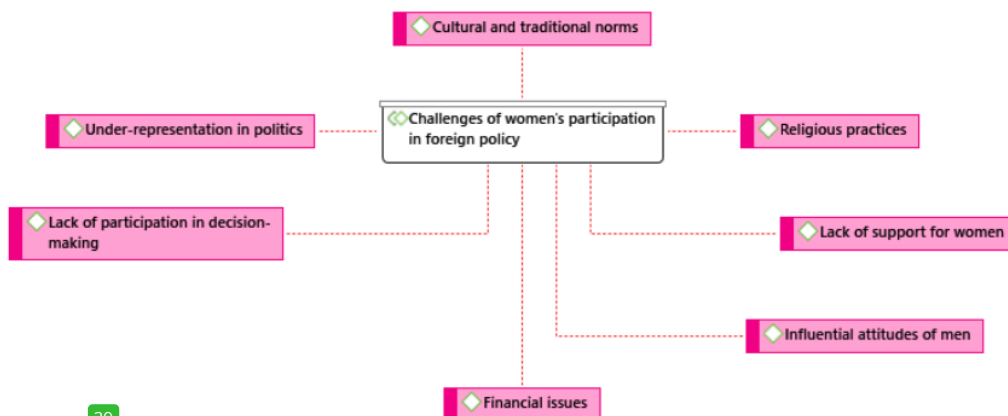
Figure 1: Challenges of women's participation in foreign policy decision-making process

According to Figure 1, the participants indicated that challenges in including women in the foreign policy decision-making process include cultural and traditional norms, religious practices, lack of support for women, an influential attitude of men, financial issues, lack of participation in the decision-making process, and under-representation in politics. Direct excerpts from the participants are as follows:

> **P2 said:** "Challenges of women's participation in foreign policy decision-making process includes male chauvinistic attitude, custom and tradition".
>
> **P3 suggested:** "It incorporates religious rituals and a lack of female support." Religious practices hamper women's participation in politics. Laws, standards, and religious beliefs that have been crafted to legitimize male domination and the relegation of women to the periphery of political discursive practices and engagements

hurt women. Although the South African Constitution guarantees everyone the right to freedom of religion and association, it is argued that these rights are only ideas. In reality, many women's lives are governed by customary Sharia Laws. Some Islamic ideologies, for example, forbid women from actively participating in political activities, forming associations, or giving public remarks, obstructing their political goals."

P4 said: "Challenges of women's participation in the foreign policy decision-making process include men's hostility towards women and wrong perception about women".

P5 said: "Diplomacy is still a male-dominated field, and most women are subjected to great injustice. When posted abroad, for example, women officials, in the event that they fall pregnant, are entitled to come home at their own cost. Secondly, they would have to return to their country of accreditation in 60 days; this places women and their newborns in a very difficult position as, in most cases, they would have to travel with infants as young as three weeks. This needs to be rethought as it doesn't make sense as they have four months' maternity. What is the rationale in having them to risk their lives?".

P6 said: "Women are under-represented in politics which is one of the determinants that shift foreign policy of the country".

P7 said: "Women participate in decision-making at a lower level because they must always struggle against patriarchy. Very few women participate in decision-making compared to the population of women".

P8 affirmed: "Structural limitations on women. Because majority decision makers are men, women continue to be on the sidelines though a few advances have been achieved. Though measures are put in place for gender equality it is difficult to implement them because of social constructs that reinforce and reproduce patriarchy".

P9 attested: "Financial problems. Women's economic position to a great degree, plays a substantial role in increasing their involvement in political decision-making posts. Politics is progressively becoming an expensive venture. Recently, a lot of money is required before a candidate can participate in politics. Women's long history of segregation continues to keep them at a financial disadvantage. The entrenched gender discrimination gave men additional financial cleavage to accomplish their political ambitions. Most women do not have the financial buoyancy to accomplish their political ambitions, as they have to rely solely on their men to get financial support, and most sponsors choose to support male politicians because they are perceived as more

successful in politics than their female counterparts. Empowering women economically and providing them with access to education and information helps them overcome household challenges impeding them from full involvement in politics and political elections".

P10 affirmed: "Women's ability to act politically both inside and outside the voting booth, particularly as community organizers and elected officials, is often moulded by norms that drive wider social structures." An entrenched patriarchal system in which males have family authority and decision-making power is fundamental to the limits that women endure. Traditional views and cultural attitudes about women's duties and standing in society are still strong, particularly in rural regions. Traditional gender roles and labour divisions are still obviously gendered. Social standards make it harder for women to quit their traditional domestic duties in favour of more public roles outside the home. Women's gender identity is still primarily seen as domestic, which continues to be a barrier to women's participation in international affairs."

Responses obtained from research objective two

This section explored the strategies that could be adopted to improve women's participation in foreign policy. This objective was included to opine measures to attract and increase the participation of women in the decision-making process. The responses from the participants are summarized in Figure 2:
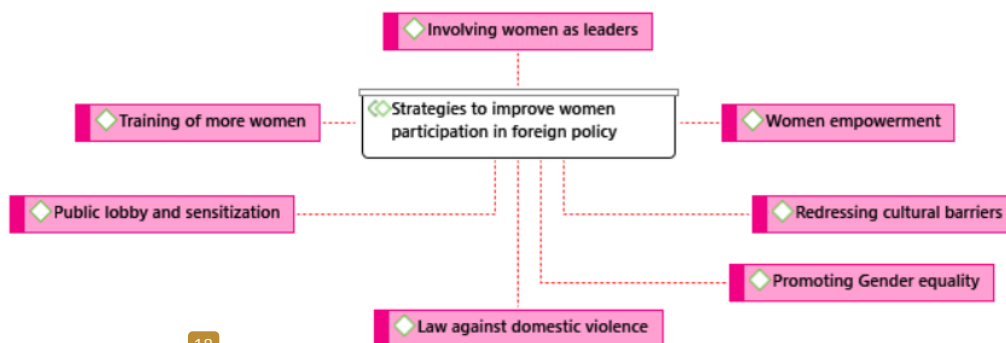
Figure 2: Strategies to improve women's participation in decision-making process

The findings as presented in Figure 2 portrays that strategies to improve the participation of women includes involving women as leaders,

promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, laws against domestic violence, public lobbying and sensitization, training of more women, and redressing cultural barriers.

> **P1 said:** "Involving more women to head foreign policy decision-making bodies will improve women's participation in the decision-making process".
>
> **P2 suggested:** "Quota laws and gender equality and women's empowerment should be addressed. Also law against domestic violence should be enforced". There should be economic empowerment programmers for women and girls".
>
> **P4 said:** "Deliberate policy and laws that compel everyone to observe public lobby and sensitization, and mass mobilization".
>
> **P5 attested:** "There needs to be more investment in training. Government institutions must stop operating in silos and work towards more coordinated efforts".
>
> **P6 said:** "The establishment of a women's branch or a women's policy committee can be the vehicle for beginning the change in male attitudes and a first step in the campaign for affirmative action. Attracting women into the party to get the votes needed to have influence in party decision-making or policy forums is also a vital step. A women's branch can be a more comfortable place for women entering politics for the first time".
>
> **P7 said:** "Empowering women with more skills and education will boost their confidence and open more opportunities for them that will allow them to be mentally sharp and independent thinkers".
>
> **P8 said:** "Facilitating conditions conductive to the speeding of equality between men and women so that women can participate in the political, social and economic life of their country on equal terms with men and ensuring that their right to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour or from performing public functions and being decision-makers". "Facilitating the necessary conditions whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their workload" "Support for women to organize themselves into groups, networks and associations".
>
> **P9 attested:** "Gender-based violence is a major source of worry in South Africa, impacting both women and children. A third of women will encounter sexual violence over their lifetime. The media reports a heinous incident of gender-based violence against women and girls every day in South Africa. According to the government, men should be involved in eliminating violence

against women and promoting gender equality. If the death penalty is implemented in the country, many women will be rescued from violence and violent killings, and women will be able to participate freely without fear."

P10 said: "We must address culture as a barrier to advancement and push for women's affirmative action. Remove substantial structural impediments entrenched in custom, culture, religion, and tradition that prevent women from holding decision-making roles." "Revamp and scale up capacity building for women in politics and leadership: Initiatives to strengthen the knowledge, information, and gender analysis capacities of female members of Parliament and diplomats should be scaled up to give women the confidence to keep their seats and inspire other women to vote." "Political parties must encourage women's engagement by providing free membership to women, so that money is not a barrier to women entering politics because more women in politics can influence decision-making in South African governance."

Discussion

Findings from the study reveal that South African women have been marginalized in foreign policy decision-making duties. This finding conforms to those of Krook (2020), who states that biased laws and norms continue to obstruct women's effective participation in foreign policy decision-making in South Africa. Tlaiss and Kauser (2019) agree that many civilizations' customs and laws are one-sided in modern times, enslaving women to men and so undermining their confidence. Women have a sense of mediocrity due to their sexual orientation predisposition, social standards, and actions, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts in the socio-political arena (Plagerson et al., 2019). As a result of these communally formed conventions and customary roles, women are forced to undervalue their obligations as women by embracing nomenclature such as the 'weaker sexes,' and they are bullied into believing that they cannot reach exceptional achievement as men (Asongu et al., 2020).

Robinson and Gottlieb (2021) view that religious practices obstruct women's participation in politics. By-laws, norms, and religious ideals that

have been crafted to legitimize male supremacy and the relegation of women to the periphery of political discursive practices and engagements have a negative impact on women. Even though the South African Constitution guarantees everyone the right to religious and political equality, research demonstrates that these rights are only opinions. Kumar *et al.* (2019) affirm that lack of support for women and their economic status play a major role in growing their involvement in political decision-making positions. Politics is gradually becoming a costly endeavour. In recent years, a large sum of money has been required before a candidate can participate in politics. Many women in today's society do not own or have access to productive resources (Nassani et al., 2019). As a result, this limits the extent of their political participation. As a result, having access to resources affects their connection and influences their participation in other political organizations and constituent bodies such as the Senate, National Assembly, and others.

In Africa, substantive female representation in decision-making positions is urgently needed, particularly in formulating GEWE-related policies and mainstreaming gender into existing policies, as well as plans and programmes aimed at explicitly advancing the SDGs' gender equality agenda across the continent. Women must have a major presence as important decision-makers in policy-making to achieve gender equality in development, long-term peace, and good governance within the African sub-region. In the view of Baba *et al.* (Baba et al., 2020), another issue contributing to women's underrepresentation in foreign policy decision-making in South Africa is their political viewpoint. Women have a bad perception of politics and political activities, which prevents them from becoming interested in government matters. Most women regard politics as filthy, and the savagery that characterizes African politics has kept them a long way from political participation. Robinson and Gottlieb (2021) confirm that religious practices obstruct women's political participation. By-laws, norms, and religious ideals

that have been crafted to approve male supremacy and the relegation of women to the periphery of political discursive practices and engagements have a negative impact on women (Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021). Even though the South African Constitution guarantees everyone the right to religious and political equality, research demonstrates that these rights are only opinions . In a true sense, many women's lives are governed by customary and Sharia Laws. Some Islamic principles, for example, forbid women from actively participating in political activity, association, or marriage.

Regarding the strategies to improve women's participation in decision-making, findings suggest empowering women would be a solution to achieving equitable representation and participation in foreign policy decision-making. Lv and Deng (2019) point out that women's empowerment promotes their involvement in collective actions and their self-efficacy, ability to contribute to policymaking, bargaining power, leadership capability, resource ownership, and financial independence. However, Barnes and Holman (2020) posit that the representation of women could be improved by promoting gender equality. Barnes and Holman (2020) further affirm that establishing a quota system will establish a predetermined amount of participation for both genders to ensure that decision-making bodies are representative. A quota system is an affirmative action tool that ensures that women are represented in decision-making and policy-making bodies (Labantu, 2021). Quotas, as temporary special measures, are aimed to accelerate de facto parity between men and women, according to Article 4 of the CEDAW Protocol, and are not to be viewed as unequal as specified in the present Convention.

The facilitation of a public lobby and sensitization or training of more women in politics, according to Beauregard (2017), would serve as a means to promote women's participation and representation in decision-making. A prohibition on laws, rituals, and traditions that delegitimize women's positions will help protect women from participating in active politics. Most

traditions, for example, educate male children rather than female children, who are expected to stay at home and care for the family's domestic requirements before marriage, should be readdressed. Geys and Sorensen (2019) believe that political leadership structure provides a significant platform for gender representation through candidate recruitment, thus allowing women to participate in decision-making at both the provincial and national levels. The political party structure, according to Geys and Sorensen (2019), influences the composition and list of elective posts, as well as the list of aspiring candidates. Asongu *et al.* (2020) also note that this form of unequal social order enhances women's illiteracy and reinforces their notions of their inability to compete politically and in life in general. Due to time constraints, women in South Africa struggle to participate in politics (Plagerson et al., 2019). As a result, due to the complexities of their diverse roles in the environmental and parental domains, as mothers and spouses with domestic responsibilities, they have little time to attend to political matters or events.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, males have dominated South African political decision-making, and office holding has been dominated by males, while females hold supporting positions. This study, therefore, explored the extent of women's participation in decision-making and execution in South African foreign policy. Four research objectives guided the study. Data were collected from ten participants using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Atlas-ti software (version 9). Findings revealed that the participation of women in the foreign policy decision-making process is less than 50%. The study also disclosed that women are free and eligible to participate in political activities throughout South Africa. However, it was noted that women have a wide range of challenges limiting them from being involved in active politics. Still, the study emphasized the need to overlook cultural, religious, and unfavourable political environments, patriarchy, and the influential attitude of men and get

involved in active politics to achieve equal representation. Furthermore, the study concludes that women can achieve equal representation in the foreign policy decision-making process if the South African government implements the recommendations of this study

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