



Gender Representation in Nigeria's Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Quantitative Analysis of the Foreign Affairs Committee

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ABSTRACT

The problem of gender representation in political organizations remains an important aspect of contemporary foreign policy decision-making, particularly in situations when women experience limited opportunities to participate in politics. The present paper analyzes the issues of gender representation in Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making, particularly in Foreign Affairs Committee, in order to find out whether gender representation and women's participation result in any political influence. Using the quantitative research design, a structured questionnaire was distributed among 40 respondents using the purposive sampling method. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were utilized for data analysis. The results show that there are average perceptions of women's representation ($M = 3.34$), participation ($M = 3.31$), and political influence ($M = 3.28$) in contrast to gender inclusion in foreign policy decision-making ($M = 3.54$). Significant positive correlation was found between gender representation and political influence ($r = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$), women's participation and political influence ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.001$) as well as gender representation and inclusive foreign policy decision-making ($r = 0.466$, $p = 0.002$). It can be concluded that despite the positive relationship between gender representation and women's political influence, numerical representation does not necessarily result in substantive participation in foreign policy decision-making process. Thus, the need for the promotion of gender representation, participation, and access to influential positions in foreign affairs organizations was identified.

Keywords: Gender Representation; Women's Participation; Political Influence; Foreign Policy; Foreign Affairs Committee; Nigeria.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Foreign policy is one of the key instruments used by states to pursue national interests, manage international relations, and react to events taking place in the international system (Abdullahi, 2023; Bello & Kazibwe, 2023). While the process of developing a country's foreign policy has always been mainly performed by the executive branch, democratic regimes acknowledge the need to include legislature in this process. Legislatures act as venues where citizens' interests are represented and governmental decisions are discussed (Haroun, 2026). Hence, in Nigeria, the National Assembly represents a crucial domestic actor in the foreign policy-making process despite the fact that it remains dominated by the executive (Dubakeme et al., 2023).

Gender is a critical aspect of representation in the legislature (Verma, 2022). Feminist political theories challenge the notion that political institutions are gender-neutral, pointing out that existing systems of power tend to favor men and limit women's access to political decision-making (Bryson, 2016). Similarly, feminist international relations theories reveal that foreign policy-making institutions are constructed around masculinized conceptions of power, security, leadership, and competence (Achilleos-Sarll, 2024). Women's involvement in the foreign policy institutions, therefore, brings up questions about both women's numerical presence and the extent to which their perspectives are taken into account during policy-making process.

Nigeria continues to face a gender gap in political representation. Research indicates such issues as cultural st-



ereotypes, political violence, lack of finances, organizational structure of parties, and gender discrimination as major barriers to women's participation in the National Assembly (Jatula & Adesanya, 2025). As a result, women's representation remains poor throughout the years. This problem is especially salient for foreign policy institutions since representation in these institutions does not necessarily mean political influence.

The distinction between descriptive and substantive representation is, therefore, important for this study. The former refers to the presence of representatives who belong to particular groups of citizens, while the latter describes the extent to which their interests and perspectives are considered in the policy-making process (Mugglin et al., 2025).

There exist few works examining the issue of women's political representation in the National Assembly and the role of the legislature in foreign policy of Nigeria. Most research tends to concentrate on women's representation in the National Assembly or foreign policy-making process (Vincent-Orugbo, 2022; Obianagwa et al., 2024). There exists a gap in the literature regarding the association between gender representation, participation, and political influence within foreign policy-making institutions. This study attempts to fill in this gap by measuring numerically women's representation and political influence in the process of foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria, paying special attention to the Foreign Affairs Committee.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's representation in political institutions has been studied extensively by researchers because of the fact that the composition of these institutions affects whose interests, experiences, and perspectives are taken into account when making public policies. Empirical research draws a distinction between women's presence and their political influence (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999). This distinction is especially relevant to foreign policy where decision-making has traditionally been associated with the executive branch and the concept of masculine leadership and expertise (Tickner, 1992; Enloe, 2000).

Research conducted in Nigeria proves that there continues to be a significant gender gap in representation in legislative institutions. Dan-Azumi and Asan (2021), studying women's representation in the National Assembly from 1999 to 2020, found that there has been little change in women's presence despite the great interest shown in politics. Gender stereotypes, cultural and religious barriers, lack of money, electoral violence, unfavorable political environment, and organizational structures of political parties are among the most prominent barriers. Similarly, Iheanacho (2019), who studied women's representation from 1999 to 2015, concluded that there has been little progress in improving women's presence in the legislature due to the reasons such as political violence, lack of finances, limited political education, and weak party democracy. Ayetigbo (2023) also studied women's participation in the National Assembly in 1999-2019 and found that women's representation has been low in both chambers of the legislature. Recent evidence suggests that this problem has not yet been solved. For instance, Yakubu (2025) found that women's representation has been below the levels set forth by the gender policy goals, while Kartay (2025) indicated that party structures, nomination processes, internal democracy of political parties, and sociocultural barriers continue to affect women's legislative representation. Thus, there is empirical evidence suggesting that the problem of women's representation cannot be attributed only to individual choices but is strongly connected with institutional and sociopolitical structures.

The importance of this fact becomes obvious when distinguishing between representation and influence. As Pitkin (1967) explains, representation involves more than just presence of certain people in institutions. Likewise, Phillips (1995) stresses that presence is an important factor for democratic representation. Mansbridge (1999) agrees that representation is valuable in a sense that representatives' experiences allow to identify interests which might otherwise remain unattended. Therefore, increasing women's presence does not necessarily mean increasing women's political influence.

This distinction becomes especially important for foreign policy. Foreign policy institutions have traditionally been patriarchal, while the concepts of diplomacy, security, and international affairs were traditionally associated with the idea of masculinity (Tickner, 1992; Enloe, 2000). Women's participation in these



institutions, therefore, goes beyond numerical equality because it broadens the perspectives that will be reflected in international decision-making.

Empirical research investigating women and foreign policy of Nigeria is still comparatively scarce. For example, Ezeonwuka and Onyeabor (2024), analyzing women's representation and role in Nigeria's foreign policy from 1960 to 2023, revealed that there has been an increase in women's participation in Nigeria's diplomatic activity, however, they continue facing many barriers which prevent them from full engagement. According to the authors, including gender perspective in diplomacy could lead to more inclusive diplomatic environment. This finding is relevant to this study because it shows that the problem of gender representation remains relevant for Nigeria's foreign affairs as well as domestic political institutions. Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023) also reveal that the political environment of Nigeria remains patriarchal, limiting women's participation in politics. Though this study highlights women's political agency, it demonstrates that institutional and sociocultural context limits women's participation in politics. Therefore, increasing women's representation does not solve all the problems of gender inequality in politics.

The institutional environment of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making makes the situation even more complicated. Arowosegbe and Akomolafe (2016) found that the National Assembly has constitutional duties regarding the state's external relations and participates in negotiation of treaties. Fineman (2019) identified the legislature as an institution that helps to make the foreign policy decision-making process democratic but noted the continuing domination of the executive branch. Moreover, Ngara (2025) questioned the actual influence of African legislatures, including the National Assembly of Nigeria, on foreign policy decision-making. Thus, there is evidence that women's political influence should be understood against the background of institutional power relations.

The literature, therefore, reveals three interconnected tendencies. First, women's representation in the National Assembly of Nigeria remains insufficient (Iheanacho, 2019; Dan-Azumi and Asan, 2021; Ayetigbo, 2023). Second, though the participation of women in diplomacy and foreign affairs has been growing, it still faces many obstacles (Ezeonwuka and Onyeabor, 2024). Third, the influence of the National Assembly on foreign policy process is affected by power relations, especially executive dominance (Arowosegbe and Akomolafe, 2016; Fineman, 2019; Ngara, 2025).

Empirical Gap

While the literature contributes much to the field, there is still one important gap. Research has traditionally concentrated either on women's representation, barriers to political participation, diplomatic participation, or the role of the National Assembly in foreign policy decision-making. Little attention has been paid to the quantitative relationship between gender representation and political influence within the foreign policy decision-making process.

This study will contribute to the literature by quantifying perceptions of women's representation, participation, and influence within the foreign policy legislative environment of Nigeria. Rather than simply estimating whether women are represented, the study will focus on whether representation leads to political influence and more inclusive foreign policy decision-making process. This is the central empirical contribution of this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Political Theory

This study will be based on the ideas of Feminist Political Theory. This theory analyzes gender inequalities in political participation, representation, and decision-making. Feminist Political Theory rejects the assumption that political institutions are gender-neutral because certain structures of authority may favor men and deprive women of opportunities to participate in political decision-making (Bryson, 2016; Tickner, 1992). Women's underrepresentation should, therefore, be interpreted not as mere numerical deficiency but as an expression of institutional context which determines the distribution of authority and whose perspectives should be taken into consideration.



This theoretical perspective is relevant to the case of Nigeria where women remain significantly underrepresented in the National Assembly and still face institutional and sociocultural barriers to political participation (Dan-Azumi and Asan, 2021; Eke, 2022). Evidence about women's underrepresentation in the leadership of parliamentary committees also shows that mere numerical presence does not equal institutional power (Vincent-Orugbo, 2022). Feminist Political Theory, therefore, helps to understand the relationship between gender, institutional power, and political influence, allowing to analyze whether women's participation in foreign policy institutions gives them opportunities to influence decision-making process.

Theory of Political Representation

The Theory of Political Representation is another theoretical approach used in this study. It distinguishes between descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999). Descriptive representation involves the presence of representatives who are similar to those whom they represent (e.g., women), while substantive representation implies that these representatives articulate and promote relevant interests (Pitkin, 1967).

This distinction is important because in the case of Nigeria, the question is not whether women are present in foreign policy institutions, but whether this presence leads to participation, political agency, and influence. According to the existing literature, while female legislators contribute to legislative activity, women's lack of numerical presence can affect their institutional influence (Eke, 2022).

Application to the Study

The two theories complement each other: Feminist Political Theory explains gender inequalities in political institutions, while Theory of Political Representation provides grounds to analyze whether numerical presence of women results in political influence. Accordingly, this study assumes that gender representation is an independent variable and its relationship with women's participation, political influence, and inclusive foreign policy decision-making will be examined.

The conceptual framework is:

Gender Representation → Political Participation → Political Influence → Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Therefore, this framework allows to conclude that gender representation goes beyond numerical representation and involves women's participation and influence (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used to investigate the relationship between gender representation and political influence in the foreign policy decision-making process in Nigeria. Quantitative research is applicable in this case because it helps to measure systematically the variables and examine their relationships (Lim, 2024).

The population includes individuals who have sufficient knowledge of the political institutions, legislative process, and foreign policy of Nigeria. A sample of 40 respondents were selected using purposive sampling because there is a need to get responses from the people who have enough information about the object of the study.

The primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and Likert-scale questions intended to evaluate the respondents' perceptions of gender representation, women's participation, political agency, expertise, and influence in foreign policy decision-making process. Substantive questions were measured with the help of a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'.



The main independent variable was gender representation measured through such indicators as women's presence and participation in the process of foreign policy decision-making. Dependent variable was political influence in the process of foreign policy decision-making and will be measured through the perception of the ability of women to participate in the discussion of issues, contribute to policy discussions, and influence decisions. This way, it was possible to analyze whether gender representation results in women's participation and political influence.

Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze the data. Frequencies and percentages will be used to summarize the demographic information of the respondents, while the means and standard deviations will show the average responses to the Likert-scale questions. Correlation analysis revealed the direction and strength of the relationship between gender representation and political influence. Hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

The questionnaire was developed on the basis of the objectives, research questions, and the literature on the topic to increase content validity. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the confidentiality of the respondents was guaranteed throughout the whole process. One of the limitations is the use of a small sample of 40 respondents, which does not allow to generalize findings to the entire population. Another limitation is that the study measures perceptions, hence establishing associations rather than causal relationships.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile provides the background for interpreting respondents' perceptions of gender representation and foreign-policy decision-making.

Table 5.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	24	60
Female	16	40
Total	40	100

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

Based on this distribution, there were 24 males (60.0%) and 16 females (40.0%). Even though there are more male subjects than female subjects, the presence of both sexes results in an even distribution to base the study of perceptions about women's representation and influence in foreign policy on.

Table 5.2: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's degree	13	32.5
Master's degree	19	47.5
Doctorate	6	15
Other	2	5
Total	40	100

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

The results suggest that the respondent sample is mainly highly educated people. The group that had master's degree was found to be the most numerous (47.5%) followed by the group with bachelor's degrees (32.5%). People who had doctorate were 15.0% whereas others were 5.0%. It may serve as an interesting background for analyzing the answers to the politically complicated question regarding gender representation in foreign policy decision-making.



Gender Representation in Foreign-Policy Decision-Making

This was the first political dimension that was analyzed with respect to respondents' perception of the representation of women in Nigerian foreign policy institutions.

Table 5.3: Respondents' Perceptions of Gender Representation

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women are adequately represented in foreign-policy institutions.	3.43	0.84
Women have visible representation in foreign-affairs deliberations.	3.23	0.95
Women have sufficient opportunities to contribute to foreign-policy decisions.	3.25	0.95
Gender representation improves the diversity of foreign-policy perspectives.	3.48	0.91
Aggregate Mean	3.34	0.73

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

The overall mean of 3.34 shows that the perception of women's representation is moderately positive. However, these results do not demonstrate the idea that the respondents believe that women's representation is very adequate. The highest mean (3.48) is associated with the statement on the role of gender representation in the diversification of foreign policy outlook, implying the respondents' understanding of the significance of gender representation.

The relatively low mean for the visibility (3.23) and the opportunity to contribute (3.25) are especially significant. They reveal that the representation is possible but does not necessarily result in the corresponding opportunity for women to participate in foreign policy processes. The latter is consistent with the distinction made in the theory between the descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995).

Women's Participation in Foreign Policy Processes

The second aspect under discussion is concerned with the participation of women in foreign policy discussion and contribution to decision making.

Table 5.4: Perceptions of Women's Participation

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women participate actively in foreign-policy deliberations.	3.28	0.93
Female legislators have adequate opportunities to contribute to foreign-affairs discussions.	3.18	0.98
Women's perspectives are considered in foreign-policy deliberations.	3.4	1.08
Women demonstrate meaningful participation in foreign-policy processes.	3.4	0.96
Aggregate Mean	3.31	0.82

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

With regard to the overall mean of 3.31, there is a moderate level of agreement with regard to women's involvement in foreign policy. The highest mean values relate to women's opinions being taken into consideration and women's meaningful involvement, both giving means of 3.40. However, the relatively low value of 3.18 in terms of opportunities to participate shows that access to institutions can be uneven. Such results show that the problem goes beyond women's presence in foreign policy and refers to the opportunity provided by institutions to make women's political voices heard.



Perceived Political Influence of Women

Neither representation nor participation guarantee political influence. Therefore, the following question was raised in this study whether women are capable of influencing foreign policy.

Table 5.5: Perceived Political Influence of Women

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women have significant influence on foreign-policy decisions.	3.43	1.03
Female legislators can effectively influence foreign-affairs deliberations.	3.3	1.22
Women's contributions to foreign-policy discussions are taken seriously.	3.13	1.07
Greater female participation would strengthen foreign-policy decision-making.	3.28	1.13
Aggregate Mean	3.28	0.94

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

An aggregate mean of 3.28 reveals a moderate level of influence attributed to women. The highest mean (3.43) refers to the influence of women in making foreign-policy decisions, while the lowest mean (3.13) relates to whether women's contributions are recognized.

It is noteworthy that the relatively low value of the latter measure requires special consideration. Indeed, it can be interpreted to mean that respondents recognize the possibility of women participating, but at the same time perceive some obstacles in recognizing women's contributions. This result corroborates the notion that numbers and influence are analytically different concepts.

Gender Inclusion and Foreign-Policy Decision-Making

Another research question explored in the study concerns whether gender inclusion improves the process of making foreign-policy decisions.

Table 5.6: Gender Inclusion and Foreign-Policy Decision-Making

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Greater women's representation would make foreign-policy decision-making more inclusive.	3.58	0.93
Gender diversity would improve the range of perspectives in foreign-policy deliberations.	3.45	0.81
Women's participation can strengthen the responsiveness of foreign-policy decisions.	3.58	1.01
Greater gender inclusion would improve the legitimacy of foreign-policy decisions.	3.58	0.98
Aggregate Mean	3.54	0.78

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

It was in this dimension where the highest mean value (3.54) emerged among all the major dimensions. The results imply that most of the respondents view gender inclusion as a positive factor in terms of making foreign policy decisions. It is especially important from the point of view that the respondents are not only concerned about equality in numbers when it comes to including women in the decision-making process. On the contrary, there are more broad perspectives as well as higher legitimacy and responsiveness associated with it.



Descriptive Summary of Major Variables

Table 5.7: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Gender Representation	3.34	0.73	Moderate
Women's Participation	3.31	0.82	Moderate
Political Influence	3.28	0.94	Moderate
Inclusive Foreign-Policy Decision-Making	3.54	0.78	Relatively high

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

It is evident from the descriptive data analysis that there is a consistent trend among all the variables. It can be seen that in all four variables, the average value is higher than the neutral point of 3.00. It should be mentioned that political influence is the variable having the lowest average value (3.28), while the highest one is that of inclusive foreign policy decision making (3.54).

It is important to discuss the meaning of such results. It appears that respondents value gender inclusion higher than they consider women to exert political influence. In other words, it can be assumed that there is some kind of gap between representation and influence of women.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation was used in order to measure the relationship between gender representation and political influence.

Table 5.8: Correlation Between Gender Representation and Political Influence

Variables	Gender Representation	Political Influence
Gender Representation	1	0.563
Political Influence	0.563	1
Significance (2-tailed)	—	0
N	40	40

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

From the analysis, the results show the existence of a positive and significant correlation between gender representation and perceived political influence ($r = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 40$). The coefficient r reflects a moderate positive relationship and shows that those respondents who have a higher level of gender representation also have a higher perception of political influence by women in foreign policy decision-making.

The findings of this paper empirically verify the existence of a relationship between representation and influence. Nonetheless, a relatively low value of the correlation rather than an extremely high value means that the influence does not depend only on the level of representation but may also be affected by other factors.

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between gender representation and perceived influence in foreign-policy decision-making in Nigeria.

H_{11} : There is a significant relationship between gender representation and perceived influence in foreign-policy decision-making in Nigeria.

As $p < 0.001$, being lower than the significance level of 0.05, H_0 is rejected. Thus, the hypothesis is that there is a significant relationship between gender representation and political influence is confirmed.

Relationship Between Women's Participation and Political Influence

To see whether women's participation affects political influence, a second correlation was conducted.

Table 5.9: Correlation Between Women's Participation and Political Influence

Variables	Women's Participation	Political Influence
Women's Participation	1	0.573
Political Influence	0.573	1
Significance (2-tailed)	—	0
N	40	40

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

This shows that there exists a positive and statistically significant relationship between women's participation and perceived political influence ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between women's participation and perceived effectiveness of foreign policy decision making.

H_{12} : There is a significant relationship between women's participation and perceived effectiveness of foreign policy decision making.

Based on the above results, it is reasonable to reject H_{02} at a significance level of 0.05. There is a significant relationship between women's participation and both political influence and effectiveness in foreign policy decision making.

Gender Representation and Inclusive Foreign Policy Decision Making

The last relationship to be considered is that between gender representation and inclusive foreign policy decision making.

Table 5.10: Correlation Between Gender Representation and Inclusive Decision-Making

Variables	Gender Representation	Inclusive Decision-Making
Gender Representation	1	0.466
Inclusive Decision-Making	0.466	1
Significance (2-tailed)	—	0.002
N	40	40

Source: Survey Data, 2026.

The coefficient of correlation of 0.466 represents a moderate positive relation between gender representation and the level of perceived inclusiveness of foreign-policy decision-making. The said relationship is significant ($p=0.002$) in a sense that high perceptions about gender representation are linked with more inclusive decision-making.



Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: Gender-inclusive representation does not significantly predict perceived inclusiveness of Nigeria's foreign-policy decision-making.

H₁₃: Gender-inclusive representation significantly predicts perceived inclusiveness of Nigeria's foreign-policy decision-making.

The p-value of 0.002 is lower than 0.05, so H₀₃ is rejected and there is a statistically significant positive relationship between gender representation and perceived inclusiveness.

Summary of Findings

Five main findings can be outlined based on the quantitative analysis. First, respondents demonstrate a moderately positive perception of women's representation, but it is not considered adequate enough. Second, women's participation receives a moderately positive evaluation, which means that it is perceived that women take part in the foreign-policy decision-making process, though not equally to men.

Third, perceived political influence is represented by the lowest aggregate mean (3.28), which suggests that the presence and participation of women do not provide them with the same institutional influence as male participants do. Fourth, there is a greater support among respondents regarding the idea that gender inclusion improves foreign-policy decision-making, while the highest aggregate mean of 3.54 is associated with inclusive foreign-policy decision-making.

Finally, the results of inference are found to be statistically significant in positive correlation between gender representation and political influence ($r=0.563$, $p<0.001$), between women's participation and political influence ($r=0.573$, $p<0.001$), and between gender representation and inclusive decision-making ($r=0.466$, $p=0.002$). In general, it can be concluded that gender representation is important, but is not enough. These findings point at the difference between the presence in foreign-policy institutions and the real influence on foreign-policy discussion and decision-making. This is what can be used for further discussion of the findings in comparison with the studies of Pitkin (1967), Phillips (1995), Mansbridge (1999), Dan-Azumi and Asan (2021), Ezeonwuka and Onyeabor (2024), as well as other literature on Nigeria's involvement in foreign policy through legislation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In the current study, gender representation and political influence in Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making are discussed. Overall, the results suggest that respondents acknowledge the importance of women's participation in foreign-policy institutions, perceiving certain limitations in terms of how far women are capable of exerting political influence. This corresponds to the distinction between descriptive representation and substantive representation introduced by Pitkin (1967) and later discussed by Phillips (1995) and Mansbridge (1999).

First of all, respondents believe in the presence of women in foreign-policy processes to a considerable extent, scoring the overall mean at 3.34. However, although the existence of women in foreign policy was recognised by respondents, the representation was perceived as sufficient only partially. This result agrees with existing data on women's political representation in Nigeria. According to Dan-Azumi and Asan (2021), the representation of women in the National Assembly of the country remains limited due to institutional, cultural, financial, and political barriers. Furthermore, Ayetigbo (2023) finds that the representation of women in the National Assembly remains low in all democratic periods. Thus, the result obtained in this study agrees with existing data indicating that Nigeria's formal democratic institutions have not led to balanced political representation in terms of gender.

With respect to women's participation, the overall mean is 3.31. Although participants admit that women are represented in foreign policy institutions, the relatively low score indicates that there are still some limitations

to their participation. More specifically, women's opportunities to participate in foreign-affairs discussions are lower, suggesting that the existence in political institutions does not mean the same opportunities to participate in the discussion of foreign policy. This result agrees with the argument of Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023) claiming that Nigerian women face certain gender-specific challenges when participating in political structures.

The result obtained also supports Phillips' (1995) argument about the importance of the politics of presence since historically underrepresented groups need to have meaningful access to political institutions in order to bring their experiences to influence decision-making. In the case of foreign policy, the issue becomes especially relevant since foreign affairs are historically linked with elite and executive forms of political governance (Hill, 2016). Thus, the presence of women in legislative foreign-affairs structures increases the variety of perspectives in policy deliberation.

An important result concerns women's perceived political influence, which scored the aggregate mean at 3.28, which is the lowest among the principal dimensions measured. This means that respondents are less sure in women's political influence compared to their representation. Thus, this result provides the empirical evidence supporting the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation. Following Pitkin (1967), the representation cannot be reduced to the mere existence of representatives; it also involves the articulation of interests and participation in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the result obtained is relevant to existing studies related to the National Assembly of Nigeria. For example, Arowosegbe and Akomolafe (2016) prove that the legislature plays constitutionally significant role in the foreign relations of the country, and Fineman (2019) argues that the dominance of the executive continues to prevent the involvement of the National Assembly in foreign policy processes. Similar views are expressed by Ngara (2025), who questions the capability of African legislatures, including that of Nigeria, to influence foreign policy decisions. Thus, in combination with the underrepresentation of women, the institutional limitations of the National Assembly may further limit their political influence.

Finally, the most notable result concerning descriptive representation refers to gender inclusion and foreign policy decision-making, which scored the aggregate mean at 3.54. The results suggest that participants believe that the higher degree of women's participation is associated with the higher degree of inclusiveness, responsiveness, diversity and legitimacy of foreign policy decisions. This result supports Phillips' (1995) argument about the enrichment of the democratic decision-making process through including previously underrepresented groups since this approach allows bringing more perspectives to decision-making. It is also in line with the result obtained by Ezeonwuka and Onyeabor (2024) showing that the more gender perspectives are integrated into Nigerian diplomacy, the more inclusive diplomatic climate is created.

As far as correlation analysis is concerned, the results obtained also support the arguments of the study. First of all, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between gender representation and perceived political influence ($r = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$), which means that the participants who perceive more gender representation also tend to perceive more political influence among women. This result proves the idea that the representation provides an institutional opportunity for participation and influence, although the moderate strength of the relationship suggests that representation alone does not explain the variance in political influence.

Moreover, the participation of women exhibits a statistically significant positive relationship with the perceived political influence ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.001$), which represents the highest value among the relationships identified. This result implies that the participation is important for translation of representation into political influence. Practically, the higher representation of women in political institutions without their participation in various processes of decision-making will not result in higher levels of political influence.

Finally, the relationship between gender representation and inclusive foreign policy decision-making was found positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.466$, $p = 0.002$). Although this relationship is weaker than the other two, this result is important since it shows that the higher gender representation is associated with more



inclusive foreign policy processes. This supports the core proposition of the study according to which the issues of gender representation are more than numbers.

Thus, collectively the results revealed a representation-participation-influence continuum. Representation refers to the institutional presence of women, participation provides opportunities for articulating perspectives, and influence relates to the effect of such perspectives on deliberations and decision-making. As the results show, the first two dimensions are not automatically followed by the third one. This is in accordance with Mansbridge's (1999) idea that the descriptive representation may have some substantive value under certain institutional conditions but not necessarily guarantees the substantive representation.

Therefore, the current study has important implications for the understanding of the issue of gender within the foreign policy decision-making of Nigeria. To address the problem of women's underrepresentation, it is necessary to provide women not only with positions in legislative bodies but also to introduce institutional changes providing participation, access to influential committees, recognition of expertise, and participation in agenda-setting and policy deliberation processes. Such measures would be particularly relevant to foreign-affairs institutions since the participation in them is already affected by the executive-legislative power relation (Arowosegbe and Akomolafe, 2016; Fineman, 2019).

The results of the study support the major theory that gender representation has a positive relationship with political influence and inclusiveness of the decision-making process of the foreign policies in Nigeria. In addition, since there are moderate levels of influence, then number of representation cannot be seen as an end to gender inclusion. This requires an inclusive process where women can use their numbers to have their voices heard and influence the decision-making process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In this study it is shown that there is a positive correlation between gender representation and participation of women in terms of influence in Nigeria's foreign-policy decision-making process. However, representation alone cannot guarantee influence. Therefore, inclusion, participation, and recognition of women are crucial elements in order to make the decision-making process more inclusive.

Recommendations

1. Increased representation of women in legislative foreign affairs organizations.
2. Meaningful participation of women in foreign policy discussions and decision making.
3. Women's participation in committee leadership positions.
4. Gender responsiveness in foreign policy process of Nigeria.
5. Further research with larger sample size.

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