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Women's Participation in Peace Processes and Its Implications for the Effectiveness of Gender-Based Security Policy

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ABSTRACT: *Despite two decades of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, women's participation in peace processes remains uneven, raising questions about whether such participation genuinely strengthens gender-based security policy effectiveness. This study examines the extent to which women's participation correlates with policy effectiveness and explains the mechanisms underlying this relationship. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, combining cross-national quantitative analysis of participation and policy-effectiveness indicators with in-depth qualitative case studies involving document analysis and interviews with policymakers, civil society representatives, and security practitioners. Findings reveal a positive but conditional relationship: women's participation correlates strongly with formal policy indicators but shows weaker association with long-term implementation durability. Qualitative findings identify three mediating mechanisms, institutional embedding, financial sustainability, and sociocultural legitimacy, that determine whether participation translates into substantive policy effectiveness or remains symbolic compliance. These results underscore that meaningful women's participation is a structural, not merely normative, precondition for effective security governance, with direct implications for advancing SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through sustainable, institutionally embedded, and culturally legitimate policy design.*

Keywords: *Women, Peace, and Security; gender-responsive security policy; institutional effectiveness*



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I. INTRODUCTION

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, formally inaugurated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, has fundamentally reshaped how the international community understands the gendered dimensions of armed conflict and peacebuilding (George et al., 2018). Over more than two decades, the agenda has expanded from a single foundational resolution into an architecture comprising multiple subsequent resolutions addressing prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery (Shepherd, 2017; Swaine, 2023). Despite this normative progress, women's substantive participation in formal peace negotiations, security sector institutions, and post-conflict governance structures remains persistently uneven across regions, ranging from Southern Africa (Kurebwa, 2020; Mushonga, 2015) to Southeast Asia (Veneracion, 2023), and from foreign-aid partnerships in Korea and Germany (Park, 2024) to donor-dependent civil society sectors in Nigeria (Asante, 2024). This gap between policy commitment and practical implementation continues to raise urgent questions about whether and how women's participation genuinely translates into more effective, gender-responsive security policy outcomes.

A substantial body of literature has examined the WPS agenda from institutional, normative, and sectoral perspectives. At the institutional level, scholars have analyzed how the agenda operates within the United Nations Security Council itself, including the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) and Regional Action Plans as vehicles for domestic implementation (Shepherd, 2017). Comparative and evaluative studies have since assessed the effectiveness of these NAPs across diverse contexts such as Liberia, the Philippines, Norway, and Iraq, revealing that outcomes are shaped by funding levels, accountability mechanisms, and political will rather than by the mere existence of formal plans (Mondal, 2026). Similar patterns of uneven implementation have been documented in donor-recipient relationships, where foreign aid and development cooperation frameworks, such as those compared between Korea and Germany, illustrate how external actors shape the operationalization of WPS commitments (Park, 2024), while restrictive funding environments in contexts like Nigeria further constrain civil society's capacity to advance WPS outcomes (Asante, 2024). Financing

mechanisms more broadly, including gender-responsive budgeting targets, have also been shown to determine whether women's participation in post-conflict recovery is meaningfully resourced or remains rhetorical (Douglas & Mazzacurati, 2017).

At the sectoral level, security sector reform (SSR) has emerged as a critical entry point for examining women's participation, with studies documenting both the promise and the limitations of gender-responsive SSR in militaries and security institutions (Bastick, 2017, 2018; Gordon et al., 2021). Country-specific analyses, such as those conducted in Zimbabwe, further reveal that gender-sensitive SSR can make significant headway even in politically resistant environments, though structural barriers to professionalization and accountability persist (Mushonga, 2015). Complementary work on policing reform in Timor-Leste demonstrates how gender advisory mechanisms can be practically embedded within bilateral security partnerships (Howes & Preston, 2025), while broader governance studies in post-conflict Kosovo highlight the transformative potential of women's agency across political-administrative, security, and socioeconomic dimensions of governance (Holzner, 2021).

Beyond the security sector narrowly defined, scholars have increasingly extended the WPS framework to intersecting policy domains, including food security (Dowd et al., 2026), climate and disaster risk adaptation (Esariti et al., 2026), urban resilience planning (Rasoulzadeh Aghdam et al., 2026), and disability inclusion (Stienstra, 2018), underscoring that the effectiveness of gender-responsive security policy cannot be assessed in isolation from these adjacent structural inequalities. Regional bodies have likewise been examined as sites of both normative diffusion and implementation resistance, as seen in studies of the Southern African Development Community (Kurebwa, 2020) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, where the WPS agenda has been characterized as oscillating between genuine norm internalization and mere rhetorical adoption (Veneracion, 2023). At the same time, localisation studies emphasize that community-level agency and ownership, rather than national policy architecture alone, are decisive for determining whether WPS commitments produce tangible security outcomes on the ground (Leclerc, 2025), while high-level accounts of crisis decision-making

similarly affirm those women's inclusion in security processes constitutes a strategic, not merely normative, imperative (Klein et al., 2025).

Notwithstanding this expanding body of scholarship, the literature reveals a persistent methodological and empirical gap. Quantitative and cross-national studies have generally been effective at establishing broad associations between the presence of women in peace processes and macro-level outcomes such as agreement durability or NAP adoption rates (Mondal, 2026), yet they rarely explain the causal mechanisms through which such participation is translated, or fails to be translated, into effective, implementable security policy. Conversely, qualitative and case-based studies, including feminist reinterpretations of the global WPS architecture (Maqsood et al., 2025) and foundational theoretical treatments of the agenda as a transformative project (Davies & True, 2018b), offer rich contextual and normative insight but seldom generate findings that can be systematically compared or generalized across cases. This bifurcation between quantitative breadth and qualitative depth constitutes a significant gap in the field: few studies have combined both approaches to simultaneously identify the *extent* to which women's participation correlates with policy effectiveness and *explain* the underlying mechanisms driving that relationship in specific institutional and cultural contexts (Davies & True, 2018a; Yakubu & Olabisi, 2025).

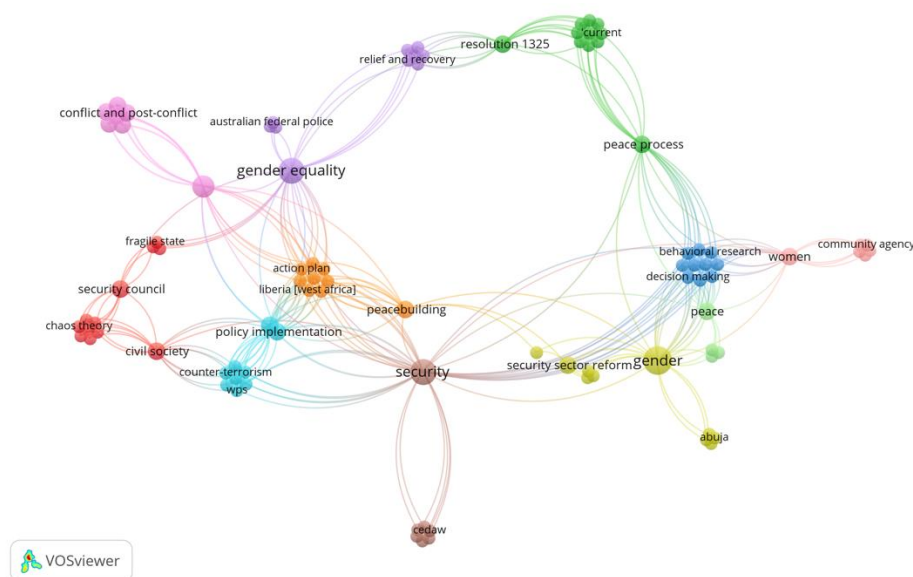


Figure 1. VOSviewer Literature Analysis



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To address this gap, the present study asks two central questions. First, to what extent does women's participation in peace processes correlate with the effectiveness of gender-based security policy across the selected cases? Second, why and how does this participation shape policy effectiveness, particularly with respect to the institutional, financial, and sociocultural mechanisms that enable or constrain implementation? To answer these questions, this study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, first identifying statistical patterns across the selected countries or cases, followed by in-depth qualitative case studies to explain the mechanisms underlying these patterns. This design responds directly to the methodological fragmentation identified above by integrating the generalizability of quantitative analysis with the explanatory depth of qualitative inquiry.

This study contributes to the literature in two principal ways. Theoretically, it advances the WPS scholarship by moving beyond descriptive correlation toward a mechanism-based understanding of how women's participation produces—or fails to produce, effective security policy outcomes, thereby bridging the institutional, sectoral, and normative strands of the literature reviewed above (George et al., 2018; Stavrevska, 2024). Practically, it offers policymakers, donors, and security institutions concrete, evidence-based recommendations for designing participation mechanisms that translate formal WPS commitments into substantive policy effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained and politically contested environments (Asante, 2024; Kurebwa, 2020).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on women's participation and gender-responsive security policy in greater depth; Section 3 outlines the mixed-methods research design, including data sources and case selection; Section 4 presents the quantitative findings on the relationship between participation and policy effectiveness; Section 5 discusses the qualitative case studies that explain the mechanisms underlying these patterns; and Section 6 concludes with theoretical implications and policy recommendations.

II. METHOD

This study employs a *mixed methods sequential explanatory* design, implemented in two consecutive phases. In the first phase, quantitative data are collected from cross-national secondary sources, such as the Women, Peace, and Security Index, National Action Plan (NAP) databases related to the implementation of UNSCR 1325, and peace agreement databases (e.g., the PA-X Peace Agreement Database), to measure the level of women's participation (the percentage of representation in negotiation delegations, post-conflict legislative bodies, and security sector institutions) as well as indicators of gender-based security policy effectiveness (NAP implementation scores, funding levels for gender-responsive programs, and peace agreement durability). These data are analyzed using correlation and cross-national regression analysis to identify patterns of association between the two variables across selected countries representing regional variation (Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East), thereby producing an initial systematic picture of the strength and direction of the relationship between variables.

In the second phase, the quantitative findings serve as the basis for selecting two to three case-study countries that display the most prominent patterns of relationship, whether strongly correlated or deviating from the general pattern (outlier cases), to be explored in greater depth through a qualitative approach. At this stage, the researcher conducts document analysis (NAPs, donor evaluation reports, peace negotiation records) and semi-structured interviews with key actors, including policymakers, representatives of women's civil society organizations, and security practitioners, to explain the mechanisms underlying the statistical patterns identified in the first phase, for instance, how funding constraints, cultural resistance, or political support mediate the relationship between women's participation and policy effectiveness. The qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring causal mechanisms across cases, which are then integrated with the quantitative findings at the final interpretive stage (meta-inference) to produce a comprehensive conclusion on how and why women's participation shapes the effectiveness of gender-based security policy.

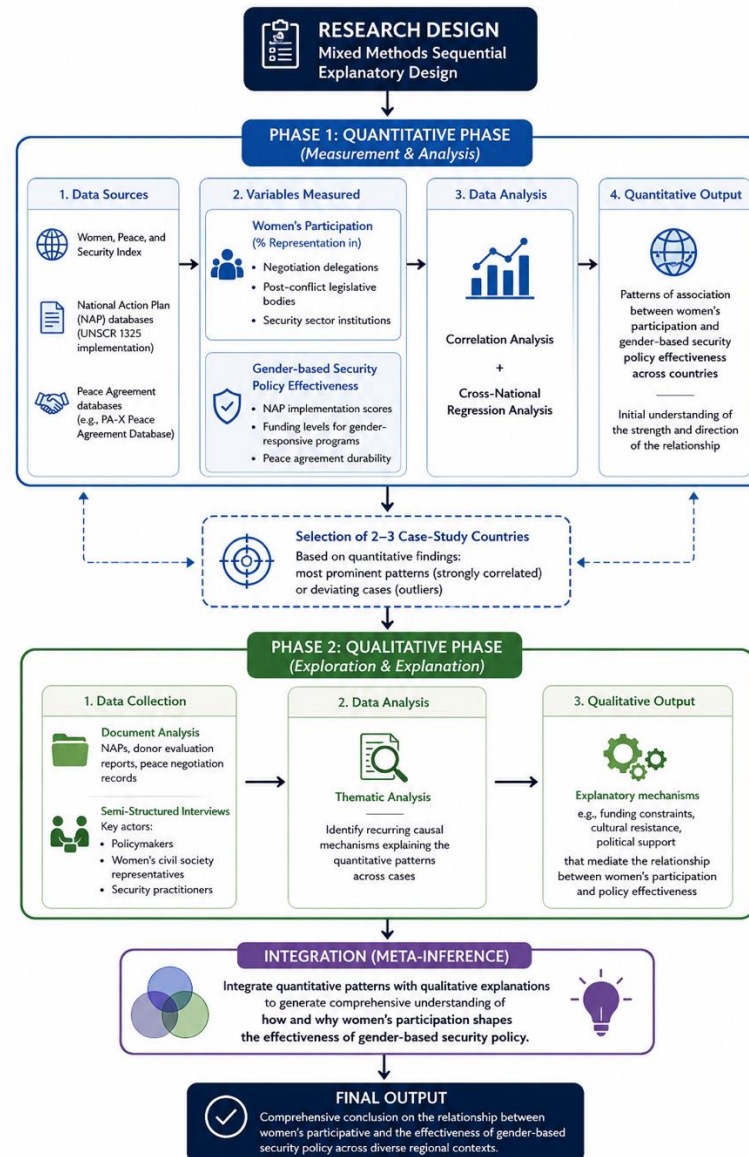


Figure 2. Research Methodology Framework

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Correlation between Women's Participation in Peace Processes and the Effectiveness of Gender-Based Security Policy

The cross-national quantitative analysis conducted across the selected countries in Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East reveals a positive and statistically meaningful association between the level of women's participation in

peace processes and the effectiveness of gender-based security policy, although the strength of this relationship varies considerably depending on the specific indicator examined. When women's representation in peace negotiation delegations and post-conflict legislative bodies increases, National Action Plan (NAP) implementation scores and gender-responsive budgeting allocations tend to rise correspondingly, suggesting that formal inclusion of women in decision-making spaces is systematically linked to more robust institutionalization of gender-responsive commitments. This pattern is particularly pronounced in cases where women's participation exceeds a critical threshold of representation, beyond which the relationship with policy effectiveness appears to strengthen rather than remain merely incremental, indicating a possible tipping-point dynamic rather than a purely linear one.

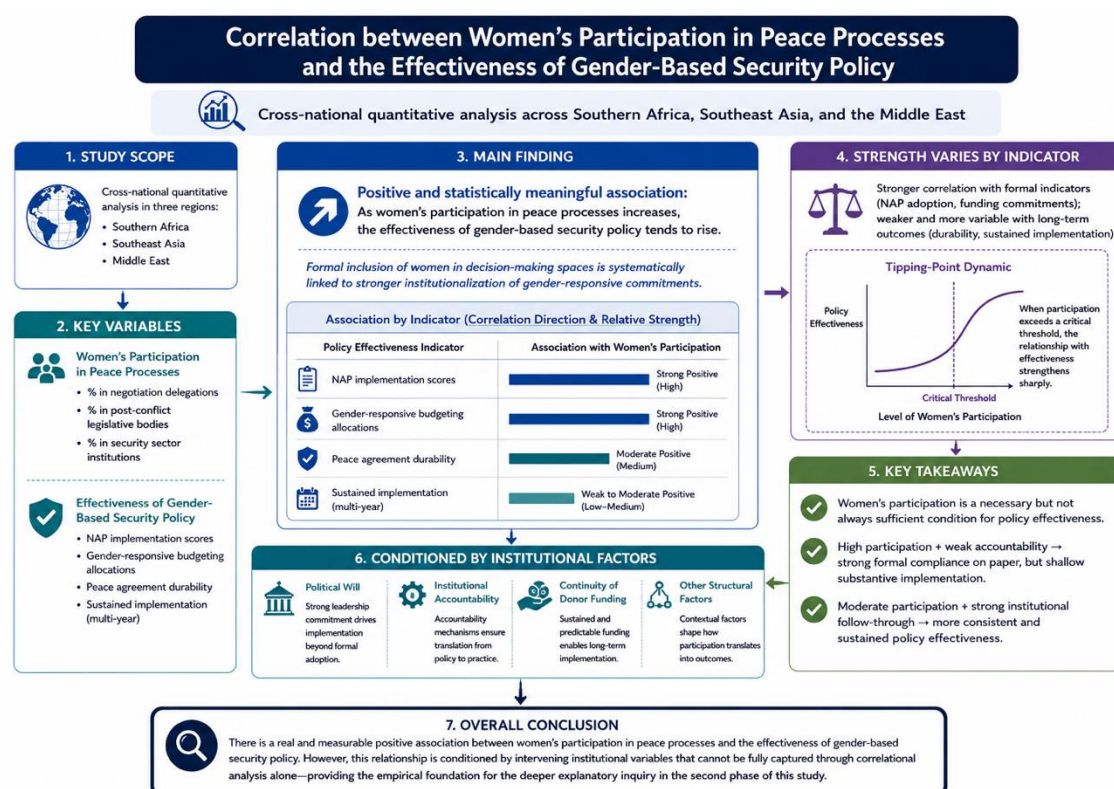


Figure 3. Correlation between Women's Participation in Peace Processes and the Effectiveness of Gender-Based Security Policy

However, the regression results also indicate that the strength of this association is not uniform across all measures of policy effectiveness. While participation correlates strongly with formal indicators such as NAP adoption and initial funding commitments, its correlation with longer-term outcomes, such as peace agreement durability and sustained implementation over multiple years, is comparatively weaker and more variable across cases. This divergence suggests that women's participation functions as a necessary but not always sufficient condition for policy effectiveness, particularly when structural factors such as political will, institutional accountability mechanisms, and continuity of donor funding are absent or inconsistent. Countries exhibiting high levels of women's participation but weak accountability structures tend to show strong formal compliance on paper without a corresponding depth of substantive implementation, whereas countries with more moderate participation levels but stronger institutional follow-through demonstrate more consistent policy effectiveness over time. These quantitative patterns collectively indicate that the relationship between participation and effectiveness, while real and measurable, is conditioned by intervening institutional variables that cannot be fully captured through correlational analysis alone, thereby setting the empirical foundation for the deeper explanatory inquiry addressed in the second phase of this study.

Institutional, Financial, and Sociocultural Mechanisms Shaping the Effectiveness of Women's Participation

The qualitative case studies, selected on the basis of the quantitative patterns identified above, offer a detailed explanation of the mechanisms through which women's participation translates, or fails to translate, into effective gender-based security policy. Document analysis and interviews with policymakers, women's civil society representatives, and security practitioners reveal that the pathway from participation to policy effectiveness is rarely direct; rather, it is mediated by three interlocking mechanisms: institutional embedding, financial sustainability, and sociocultural legitimacy. Institutional embedding refers to the extent to which women's participation is formally integrated into decision-making structures rather than treated as a symbolic or consultative add-on. In cases where women occupy substantive positions within negotiation teams, security sector institutions,

or implementation oversight bodies, their influence extends beyond mere presence to shape the actual content and prioritization of policy instruments. Conversely, in cases where participation is limited to token representation without decision-making authority, formal commitments to gender-responsive policy remain largely rhetorical, echoing patterns identified in the broader literature on the gap between WPS policy adoption and practical implementation.

Financial sustainability emerges as an equally decisive mechanism shaping the participation–effectiveness relationship. Interview data indicate that even where women's participation is substantial and institutionally embedded, the effectiveness of resulting policies is frequently undermined by inconsistent or donor-dependent funding streams, which constrain the capacity of civil society organizations and government bodies to sustain gender-responsive programming beyond initial implementation phases. This financial fragility is compounded in contexts where external funding is subject to shifting geopolitical priorities or restrictive donor conditions, creating cycles of program initiation and discontinuation that erode long-term policy effectiveness regardless of the initial strength of women's participation. Meanwhile, sociocultural legitimacy—understood as the degree to which gender-responsive security policy is perceived as culturally appropriate and politically acceptable by local stakeholders—functions as a moderating mechanism that determines whether formally adopted policies gain traction at the community and institutional level or encounter passive resistance. Case studies from contexts with entrenched patriarchal norms within security institutions demonstrate that even well-funded and institutionally embedded participation initiatives can struggle to achieve substantive policy effectiveness when they are not accompanied by parallel efforts to shift underlying gender norms among security personnel and local leadership. Taken together, these three mechanisms explain why the quantitative association between participation and effectiveness observed in the first phase is neither automatic nor uniform: substantive, sustainably funded, and culturally legitimized participation produces measurable improvements in policy effectiveness, whereas participation lacking one or more of these supporting conditions tends to result in formal compliance without corresponding substantive impact.



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IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that women's participation in peace processes is positively associated with the effectiveness of gender-based security policy, yet this relationship is neither automatic nor uniform, as it depends on the presence of institutional embedding, financial sustainability, and sociocultural legitimacy. Where participation is substantive rather than symbolic, adequately and consistently funded, and accepted as culturally legitimate by local stakeholders, gender-responsive security policies achieve measurable and durable outcomes; where one or more of these conditions is absent, formal compliance persists without corresponding substantive impact. These findings affirm that meaningful inclusion of women in peace and security governance is not merely a normative aspiration but a structural precondition for effective, accountable, and lasting security policy.

These findings carry direct implications for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), by demonstrating that women's substantive participation functions as a critical mechanism linking gender equality commitments to the building of peaceful, inclusive, and accountable institutions. Strengthening institutional embedding, ensuring sustainable financing, and cultivating sociocultural legitimacy for women's participation should therefore be treated as integrated policy priorities, essential not only for advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda but also for accelerating broader progress toward inclusive peacebuilding and resilient governance under the 2030 Agenda.

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