THE PARADOX OF GIANTISM: NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE NEGLECT OF CORE NATIONAL INTERESTS

ABDULMALEEK TAYO ABDULLAHI
Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja
michaeltayoabdul@gmail.com

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v9i6.01

Keywords

Nigeria, foreign policy, national interest, giantism, postcolonial realism

Abstract

Research Problem: *This study examines the "paradox of giantism" in Nigeria's foreign policy, a condition where the pursuit of external prestige as the "Giant of Africa" overshadows pressing domestic development imperatives such as economic diversification, security, infrastructure, and human capital growth.*

Methods/Theory: *The research employs a qualitative design, relying on a systematic review of secondary sources from 1960 to 2025. The analysis is guided by the theoretical framework of postcolonial realism, which combines classical realism's focus on power with post-colonial theory's emphasis on identity and symbolic recognition.*

Results: *The findings reveal that the paradox is driven by three interrelated factors: identity politics that prioritize costly Afrocentric dogma, critical institutional capacity deficits within diplomatic institutions, and a fundamental misalignment between prestige-driven diplomacy and developmental priorities.*

Conclusion: *The study concludes that Nigeria's foreign policy has been largely performative, securing diplomatic recognition but yielding minimal tangible benefits for citizens, thereby imposing high opportunity costs on internal progress.*

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The key contribution is the conceptualization of "paradox of giantism" as a critical lens for understanding the recurring neglect of core national interests in Nigeria's external relations.*

Recommendation: *It is recommended that foreign policy be strategically recalibrated towards a citizen-centric, value-driven approach. This necessitates redefining national interest beyond elite ambitions, strengthening diplomatic institutions, prioritizing*

economic diplomacy, and rationalizing costly external engagements to ensure they deliver measurable domestic benefits.

Introduction

Foreign policy is fundamentally tied to the pursuit of national interest, which serves as the foundation of a state's interaction in the international system (Morgenthau, 1978). States typically frame their external relations around survival, security, prosperity and influence. Yet in many post-colonial states, this alignment is uneven, producing contradictions between ambitions and domestic realities.

Nigeria exemplifies this tension, a country often heralded as the "giant of Africa" due to its population, natural resources, and history of assertive diplomacy, Nigeria has consistently sought continental leadership, from its early role in the anti-apartheid struggle to its prominent leadership in ECOWAS peacekeeping operations, Nigeria has projected itself as a defender of African sovereignty, and a moral voice for the Global South (Gambari, 1989, Ukhami and Kumapayi, 2023). This Afrocentric orientation, rooted in the idea that Africa should be the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy has no doubt, enhanced its international profile (Folarin, 2013, Mbara and Gopal, 2020). However, it has also diverted attention from pressing domestic challenges such as poverty, insecurity and infrastructural decay (Adebajo, 2008, Adeniji, 2004; Agbu, 2008, Amao & Uzodike, 2015, Fawole, 2003, Gambo, 2023), leading to what is termed as the paradox of giantism in this study.

Scholars are divided in their explanations of this paradox. One group argues that Nigeria's neglect of national interest is an unavoidable consequence of its self-appointed leadership role in Africa (Piate et al. 2024). Another group contends that the reason behind the disconnect between Nigeria's foreign policy and its national interest, is because its foreign policy is shaped by elites whose preference serve narrow class or regime interest, often at the expense of ordinary citizens (Adeniran, 1983; Ndidgwe, 2023; Saliu, 2008). Both perspectives highlight important dynamic but remain limited. They overlook the structural and strategic conditions that make the neglect of core interests not just occasional but a recurring feature of Nigeria's external relations.

This study addresses that gap by introducing the concept; paradox of giantism, a condition in which Nigeria appears powerful in external activism yet weak in domestic performance. Anchored in post-colonial realism, the study argues that this paradox is sustained by three inter-related factors; identity politics in foreign policy, institutional capacity deficit and the misalignment between prestige-driven diplomacy and developmental priorities. By interrogating these drivers, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the dissonance between Nigeria's foreign policy and its national interests and it proposes strategies for reconciling international ambitions with domestic needs.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the theory of post-colonial realism as its theoretical framework. Post-colonial realism combines the central insights of classical realism with post-colonial theory, making it a useful tool for analyzing the paradox of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Realism, as articulated by Morgenthau (1978) stresses that states operate in an anarchic international system. In this system, survival, security and power are the ultimate goals. From this perspective, Nigeria's pursuit of regional

influence through peacekeeping missions, Afrocentric diplomacy and economic engagement can be understood as rational attempts to maximize its power and safeguard its interest. However, realism alone cannot fully explain the contradictions in Nigeria's foreign policy.

Post-colonial theory provides additional insights. It emphasizes the enduring legacies of colonialism in shaping political identity, institutions and foreign policy (Spivak 1988, Tickner, 2003). For post-colonial states, international relations are not about material power. They also include symbolic recognition, historical redress and the pursuit of autonomy from western dominance (Hobson, 2012). Nigeria's self-perception as the Giant of Africa reflects this dynamic, it seeks to compensate for colonial subordination by projecting leadership abroad, even when domestic priorities remain neglected.

By synthesizing realism and post-colonial theory, postcolonial realism accounts for both the rational and symbolic dimensions of Nigeria's external behaviour. As Grovogui (2006) argue, theories of international relations must move beyond Eurocentric assumptions and consider the hybrid realities of post-colonial states. Nigeria's foreign policy illustrates this hybridity, it is at once an instrument of state survival and a performance of identity, producing what this paper calls the paradox of giantism.

Thus, postcolonial realism offers a compelling framework for this study, it demonstrates how Nigeria's foreign policy choices are shaped not only in realist calculations but also in post-colonial aspirations for recognition and leadership. This duality explains why external activism has persisted despite weak domestic foundations, highlighting the enduring misalignment between Nigeria's foreign policy ambitions and its core national interest.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative research design relying primarily on secondary sources. Data were collected through a systematic review of academic journals, government statements, media reports and policy documents covering Nigeria's foreign policy between 1960 – 2025. These materials were critically analyzed to identify recurring themes, contradictions and explanatory factors underpinning Nigeria's paradox of giantism. Content analysis was employed to trace the relationship between foreign policy postures and domestic realities across different administrations

Nigerian Foreign Policy

Nigeria's foreign policy has been the subject of rich academic inquiry. Scholars such as Gambari (1989) and Ukhami and Kumapayi, (2023) highlight the centrality of Africa in Nigeria's diplomatic engagements. The concept of Afrocentrism has often guided Nigeria's external behaviour, the state prioritized African solidarity, even at great economic and military cost. Successive governments, whether military or civilian, have reiterated the principle that Africa is the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy.

This Afrocentric orientation manifested in tangible acts, Nigeria provided financial and logistical support for liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. Notably, it also recognized the MPLA in Angola in 1975 despite Western objections (Gambo, 2023); in addition, Nigeria deployed the ECOMOG force in Liberia in 1990 and Sierra Leone in 1997 (Tar and Wapmuk, 2023). Scholars such as Folarin (2010) hailed these efforts as evidence of Nigeria's moral leadership

However, this assertive regional role has drawn significant criticism for its lack of

reciprocity and strategic value. According to Mbara and Gopal (2020) they contend that, Afrocentrism has become more symbolic than strategic, often serving the political elite's desire for international prestige. Similarly, Fawole (2003) further cautioned that, the economic and political costs of such commitments often outweighed their benefits to Nigeria's citizens. Owing from the foregoing, one could say that, Nigeria's foreign policy approach appears generous and philanthropic, but illogical, given the country's internal challenges such as poverty, insecurity and a crumbling infrastructure.

National Interest

Defining national interest presents a significant conceptual challenge, as it encompasses the diverse strategic frameworks that guide state behaviour in both domestic and international spheres. Morgenthau (1978) framed it as, the strategic objectives that ensure a state's survival, prosperity, and influence. For others, it reflects the aggregate of societal demands mediated through state institutions (Keohane, 1984). A collective interest shaped by socio-political contestation, institutional priorities and shared aspiration. Succinctly put, Nwala (2024) defined it, as the set of strategic priorities; economic, security, ideological and diplomatic, that a national seeks to advance to ensure its survival, prosperity and global standing.

In Nigeria, however, its definition is often monopolized by ruling elites. These elites confuse national interest with elite or regime interest, according to Ndidigwe (2023) argues that, Nigeria's national interest is not truly representative of the collective good. Instead, it serves the narrow interest of a privileged few who dominate the country's political and economic systems.

He further argues that; In advanced Western democracies, foreign policy is firmly rooted in a well-defined national interest, one that prioritizes the welfare and security of their citizens, their diplomatic engagements, trade agreements and international alliances are strategically designed to benefit their people. The same cannot be said of Nigeria's foreign policies, Ndidigwe (2023) just like other scholars before him, such as Adeniran (1983) and Saliu (2008), argues that there is a lack of a clear-cut definition of Nigeria's national interest, suggesting that Nigeria's external relations often appears reactive, inconsistent and detached from the immediate needs of its citizen. This, Adeniran (1983) noted, has put a question mark on the nation's interaction and relation in the international scene over the years.

Historical Trajectory of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Priorities.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has sought to establish itself as Africa's leader, yet its pursuit of international influence has often come at the expense of pressing domestic issues like economic stability and security. This contradiction, where external prestige overshadows internal struggles, has shaped the nation's foreign policy for decades.

In the early years, under Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria embraced a vision of African unity, it played a pivotal role in forming the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and advocating for South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth over apartheid (Adebajo, 2008). At the same time, Nigeria maintained a non-aligned stance, balancing relations with the West without leaning too heavily on the Soviet Union. These actions enhanced Nigeria's international reputation. However, they diverted attention from domestic needs such as poverty alleviation and infrastructural development.

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) further exposed the weakness of this foreign policy

posture. Facing western reluctance to provide military assistance, Nigeria turned to the Soviet Union, underscoring its vulnerability and dependence on external powers (Stremlau, 1977). After the war, boosted by oil wealth, successive military governments expanded the county's regional influence, they founded ECOWAS in 1975, supported liberation movements in Southern Africa, made huge contributions to the OAU (Adebajo, 2008; Piate et al. 2024). Yet, mismanagement of oil revenues meant that, while Nigeria projected power abroad, poverty and unemployment worsened, this left core national interests neglected. During this period, Gowon famously remarked, Nigeria's problem was not money but "how to spend it" (Anthony, 2021), symbolising an era of external generosity amidst domestic neglect.

By the 1980s and 1990s, Nigeria had cemented its role as a regional peacekeeper, it intervened in conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. But these efforts came at a cost, at home, governance failures and economic decline eroded living standards, with GDP per capita shrinking (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Though Nigeria clung to non-alignment, its global standing weakened as its domestic legitimacy gradually diminished under military dictatorship.

With the return to democracy in 1999, successive administrations shifted towards economic diplomacy and in recent years, security focused engagements under Buhari's administration (2015-2023), partnership with China, Russia, and India and multilateral bodies became central (Nwafor, 2023), while regional stability effort continued through ECOWAS. Under Buhari's administration, foreign policy was framed around counter-terrorism cooperation and participation in initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area. (AfCFTA). Yet domestic challenges persisted, according to World Bank data, nearly 40% of Nigerians live in poverty (World Bank, 2023), the country ranks a dismal 157th on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2023), amidst industrial and infrastructure collapse, health delivery system and educational institutions in a state of moribund; mounting debt burden and crippling manufacturing sectors. Meanwhile, recent symbolic gestures such as humanitarian donations and costly regional commitment like the donation of 10 Toyota Land Cruiser SUVs to the Government of Niger Republic (Ahmed, 2022) and the donation $1 million to Afghanistan in 2022 via the OIC humanitarian trust (Nwakanma, 2022), despite widespread insecurity, protracted ASUU strike, unemployment, and poverty at home, yet still reinforces the paradox of Nigeria's external prestige, co-existing with domestic neglect

Overall, Nigeria foreign policy trajectory reveals a consistent pattern; a pursuit of continental leadership, peace-making, high-profile diplomacy often pursued without equivalent domestic consolidation. This imbalance underscores the enduring paradox of giantism, a state celebrated abroad yet unable to translate external activism into tangible welfare at home for its citizens.

The Paradox of Giantism in Nigerian Foreign Policy

The paradox of giantism in Nigerian foreign policy lies in the contradiction between Nigeria's external image as a continental powerhouse and its internal realities marked by underdevelopment, insecurity, and weak governance. While the country's foreign policy emphasizes African unity, regional stability, and global engagement, the domestic realities often reveal a state struggling to meet the fundamental needs of its citizens.

Historically, Nigeria's self-perception as the "Giant of Africa" has driven it to take on leadership roles in Africa's political and security affairs. From the anti-apartheid

struggle in Southern Africa to ECOWAS-led interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, and The Gambia, Nigeria has consistently deployed its military, diplomatic, and financial resources to promote peace and stability (Ukhami and Kumapayi, 2023). While these actions reinforced Nigeria's image as a regional hegemon, they have also placed considerable strain on the economy. For example, Nigeria reportedly spent over $8 billion on peacekeeping in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, at the same time, domestic poverty levels rose and infrastructure deficits worsened at home (Adebajo, 2002). While Nigeria's citizens and businesses struggle with persistent blackouts and unreliable power supply, forcing many factories to shut down, paradoxically, Nigeria has long exported uninterrupted 24 hours electricity to neighbouring countries such as; Benin, Niger, Togo (Aduloju, 2024), Recently, this issue of unreliable power supply earned Nigeria the nickname "generator republic" by South Africa, in a nationwide video-ad that has since gone viral since it was broadcasted (Nairaland, 2024), at the heat of 2024 African Nation Cup, mocking Nigeria's continued domestic power crisis and generator reliance.

The paradox is not confined to the past. In recent years, Nigeria's foreign policy continued to prioritize symbolic gestures of continental responsibility, for instance, in 2022, Nigerian government under the Muhammadu Buhari Administration, donated 10 Toyota Land Cruiser SUVs worth over ₦1.4 billion to the government of Niger Republic, reportedly to support border security cooperation, despite widespread insecurity, protracted ASUU strike, unemployment, and poverty at home (Ahmed, 2022). Likewise, humanitarian contributions of $1 million to Afghanistan in 2022 (Nwakanma, 2022) and to Turkey in 2023, after the 2023 earthquake in Turkey (Premium Times, 2023) are morally defensible acts that reflected international solidarity, but on the flip side, it also highlighted the contradiction of extending aid abroad while millions of Nigerians faced internal insecurity, food insecurity and unemployment.

The paradox is further deepened by the absence of reciprocity or tangible result from these engagements, despite Nigeria's enormous sacrifices for African stability, it has often failed to translate its symbolic leadership into tangible economic, political or security gains for itself (Agbu, 2008). Instead, other African states such as Rwanda, Ghana and South African, nations that once, benefited from Nigeria's big brother posture, now outperform Nigeria on key development indicators (Frank, 2025; RMB, 2025)

This contradiction suggests that Nigeria's foreign policy is more performative than strategic, driven by the pursuit of prestige rather than developmental statecraft. The paradox of giantism raises a fundamental question, can Nigeria sustain its role as a regional leader while neglecting its own domestic responsibilities? Unless its foreign policy is recalibrated to prioritize citizen's welfare, Nigeria risk becoming a decorated underachiever, respected abroad but weakened from within.

Findings

Drivers of the Dissonance

Identity Politics in Foreign Policy

Qualitative data reveal that, Nigeria's foreign policy has long been shaped by identity politics rooted in post-colonial experience. Identity politics refers to the deliberate actions taken by a group in its interactions with other to uphold its identity and defend its interest (Ojiego-Okoro and Ezeonwuka, 2024). In Nigeria, this manifest in the compulsive need to assert its self-proclaimed status as "Giant of Africa," often at the expense of pragmatic national interests. Historical analysis shows

that this identity-driven approach originated in Nigeria's colonial experience and the determination of early leaders to position the country as the vanguard of African liberation.

The famous "Africa as the centrepiece" doctrine, first articulated by Prime Minister Balewa in 1960, evolved from a principled stance against colonialism into an expensive foreign policy dogma that successive governments have been unwilling to reconsider, despite dramatically changing global and domestic circumstances. The costs of this identity-first foreign policy approach have become increasingly severe in the 21st century. For example, Nigeria's big brotherism gesture of over-investing in symbolic leadership roles, evidenced by prioritizing continental solidarity over national interest, and investing in regional stability at the cost of domestic priorities has not yielded tangible results, over $10 billion spent on OAU/AU and ECOWAS led-peace operations between 1999-2015 (Mohammed, 2015) yet without measurable economic, political, or security benefits to the Nigerian populace, meanwhile other sectoral allocations such as the education budget has remained underfunded when measured against international standard since 1999 (Ohaegbulem and Chijioke, 2023).

This approach reflects what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2023) calls Post-Colonial Performance Syndrome, where former colonies overcompensate for historical marginalization through exaggerated displays of regional leadership. This has created a foreign policy that is, strong on external gestures but weak on internal results.

Institutional Capacity Deficits

The second driver lies in the weakness of Nigeria's diplomatic institutions; its foreign policy ambitions often exceed the institutional capabilities required to realize them, this creates a dangerous gap between diplomatic aspirations and tangible outcomes. Institutional decay is evident across multiple dimensions of the country's diplomatic apparatus, this has had severe consequences for its international standing and domestic development. This is evidenced by chronic underfunding and resource gaps, for instance the Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates with inadequate funding, outdated infrastructure and a severe human capital deficit (Babatunde and Akinpelu, 2020; Eleonu and Ebikebina, 2019; Lawal, 2025).

The availability of sufficient funds is a crucial factor that assists diplomatic missions to succeed everywhere and the absence of it, is what hinders Nigeria's diplomatic mission. Studies by Amanyie et al. (2018) revealed that; the amount of money allocated to foreign affairs has never been sufficient to provide the expected services. There are many reports about Nigerian missions abroad failing to pay rents and Nigerian diplomats not receiving their salaries and allowances, there are also reports of Nigerian diplomats experiencing unnecessary and unpleasant embarrassment due to utility disconnections, and staffs been kicked out of rented apartments (Saliu, 2018; Saliu, 2023). This condition can greatly reduce the productivity of Nigerian foreign missions.

While Nigeria maintains an expansive network of 109 diplomatic missions worldwide (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025), many lack basic operational resources, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala in 2006, discovered that the ministry had no internet connection with the Nigerian missions abroad and the outside world and that the elevators in the building were not functioning. Embassy buildings in places like Khartoum, Tehran and others in Latin America were observed to have leaking roof. This context is hardly favourable for creative and professional thinking, this reduces the overall output of foreign policy in Nigeria and this means challenge of professional inadequacy

(Eleonu and Ebikebina, 2019). In 2019, Geoffrey Onyeama, the former minister of foreign affairs in an interview, revealed that Nigerian embassies lacked secure digital communication systems, forcing diplomats to rely on outdated methods that compromise sensitive negotiations and affect their operations (Asadu, 2019).

The issue of insufficient funding and lack of basic operational resources in Nigerian foreign missions is worsened by poor diplomat training and politicization of appointments. It has been noted in literature that, many Nigerian foreign diplomats lack the necessary skills for modern diplomacy due to a long-standing absence of professional development, according to Okolie et al. (2023), there is inadequate requisite training and retraining of Nigerian diplomats and foreign policy practitioners to meet up with the diplomatic realities and challenges. Coupled with the politicization of appointments, this creates a vast foreign service apparatus staffed by under-skilled corps. This has led to negative results for diplomatic service (Piate et al. 2025). The failure to invest in continuous training and the preference for political connections over tangible experience and merit in appointment, have undermined the very expertise required to effectively secure investments, partnerships and build the strategic influence needed to fuel national domestic developmental goals.

These institutional weaknesses create a vicious cycle: Nigeria's diplomatic overreach strains already-limited capacities, leading to poor outcomes that further diminish its international credibility, without radical institutional reforms, the gap between ambition and capability will continue to widen.

The Misalignment Between Prestige-Driven Diplomacy and Actual Developmental Statecraft

Perhaps, the most critical driver of the paradox, is the persistent misalignment between Nigeria's external engagement and developmental priorities. The country's diplomatic engagements frequently resemble an elaborate stage performance, carefully choreographed for global applause while the backstage reality reveals crumbling infrastructure, systemic poverty, and institutional decay.

This misalignment between Nigeria's prestige-driven diplomacy and its developmental needs has produced a troubling outcome. Foreign policy initiatives are often designed for global visibility rather than measurable domestic impact. The disparities are striking. Between 1960 and 2015, Nigeria spent billions of dollars on peacekeeping missions and regional security initiatives. The exact figures remain classified, but available estimates show the scale of these expenditures. Adebajo (2002), notes that, over $8 billion was spent on ECOMOG interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone alone. During that same period, the Nigeria's education sector suffered chronic underfunding, the country consistently fell below UNESCO recommended benchmarks for education spending lagging behind other African countries, such as Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and Morocco (Ohaegbulum and Chikioke, 2023). UNESCO data also shows that over 20 million Nigerian children remain out of school, third-highest number globally, and highest in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2022), although factors like insecurity, poverty and cultural barriers contributes to this problem, but the irony is undeniable, Nigeria projects itself as Africa's leader, yet it struggles to educate its own future generations.

This prestige-development gap manifests most painfully in Nigeria's infrastructure paradox. The country boasts of one of Africa's most extensive networks of diplomatic

missions, 109 embassies and consulates worldwide (Ministry of foreign affairs, 2025), yet struggles to maintain basic road connectivity between its own states (Yusuf, 2025). While Abuja hosts glittering international conferences in ultramodern convention centres, yet in the same Abuja, there are communities where residents trek kilometers to fetch drinking water, and contrary to common assumption, this situation is not limited to rural areas alone, there are reports of urban areas in Abuja lacking reliable water supply too (Yahaya et al. 2025).

The human cost of this misalignment is staggering. For every million dollars that was spent on peacekeeping abroad, a primary healthcare centre goes unbuilt in rural Nigeria. The bitterest irony is that, many of the countries, Nigeria assisted through its "giant of Africa" benevolence, Rwanda, Ghana, Ethiopia, South Africa now outperform Nigeria on critical development indices from ease of doing business to human capital development (Frank, 2025; Future Africa, 2017; RMB, 2025).

Breaking this cycle will require a fundamental reorientation of Nigeria's foreign policy philosophy from prestige accumulation to value creation. Each diplomatic initiative must answer one simple question: how does this make life better for the Nigerian citizen? Until then, Nigeria risks becoming the most decorated underachiever in global affairs, a nation with shelves full of diplomatic trophies and empty stomachs at home. The true measure of foreign policy success isn't how many summits you host or how many peacekeeping engagements you were involved in, but how many lives you transform. On that scorecard, Nigeria's performance remains tragically underwhelming.

Towards Harmonization of Nigeria's International Ambitions with its Domestic Needs

Addressing this paradox requires a strategic readjustments of Nigeria's foreign policy, three steps are essential. First, identity politics must give to a citizen centred definition of national interest, foreign engagements are justified if they contribution to security, economic diversification and welfare. Second; institutional reforms will be needed to strengthen the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; this reform is essential to enhance the efficiency and productivity of our foreign missions.

Third, Nigeria must adopt value-driven diplomacy, rather than prestige-driven diplomacy, each external initiative should be tied to measurable domestic benefits, such as investment inflows, job creation or infrastructure partnership.

Conclusion

The study examined the paradox of giantism in Nigeria's foreign policy, it revealed a persistent misalignment between the state expensive external ambitions and its weak domestic foundations. Nigeria has consistently projected itself as Africa's leader through peacekeeping, Afrocentric diplomacy and humanitarian commitments. However, these initiatives have yielded minimal benefits for its citizen. scarce resources continue to be diverted to symbolic external gestures, even as insecurity, poverty and infrastructural decay persist at home.

Through a postcolonial realist lens, the study identified three sustaining drivers; identity politics in foreign policy, seeking postcolonial recognition; institutional capacity deficits in diplomatic structures, and the persistent misalignment between prestige-driven diplomacy and developmental needs. Theoretically, this demonstrates that, neither

realism, nor postcolonial theory alone suffices, their synthesis offers a fuller explanation of how symbolic politics and material interest interact in Nigeria's statecraft.

While aligning with scholars who critique elite-driven foreign policy, this study goes further by highlighting structural and ideological roots, not just elite capture of this dissonance. Thus, moving beyond Nigeria's performative role will require a re-definition of national interest away from prestige and towards measurable domestic welfare, making foreign policy a tool of internal development rather than external validation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

I. Nigeria must urgently redefine its national interest beyond elite-driven ambitions. Foreign policy should be anchored on tangible improvements in security, economic diversification, infrastructure, and social welfare. Each diplomatic initiative should be evaluated based on its capacity to deliver measurable domestic benefits. If the "big brother" approach fails to yield results, it should be abandoned in favour of a more result-oriented foreign policy that supports national development

II. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should undergo restructuring to improve coordination, professional training, and resource allocation. Regular training and retraining of foreign mission staff are essential to enhance Nigeria's bargaining power in international forums.

III. Economic diplomacy should also be prioritized, regional and global partnerships must be leveraged to attract foreign direct investment, expand trade, and transfer technology. Nigeria's foreign policy must become a tool for addressing unemployment, energy shortages, and industrial stagnation. As the saying goes, charity begins from home, Nigeria should adopt an "inside-out" policy, prioritizing economic diplomacy first in the conduct of its Afrocentric policy and any other external relations for that matter.

IV. Costly peacekeeping engagements, humanitarian donations, and prestige-driven aid should be limited, unless they provide clear reciprocal or strategic benefits. Diplomatic missions abroad should be rationalized to align with economic priorities and budget realities.

V. The Nigerian state must recognize that sustainable regional leadership depends on strong domestic foundations. By tackling poverty, insecurity, and governance deficits at home, the country will be better positioned to project credible influence abroad

References

Adebajo, A. (2002). Building peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

Lynne Rienner Publisher

Adebajo, A. (2008). Hegemony on a shoestring: Nigeria's post-Cold War foreign policy.

In A. Adebajo & A.R. Mustapha (Eds.), Gulliver's troubles: Nigeria's foreign policy

after the Cold War. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal. 2008; 1–37.

Adeniji O. (2004). New direction in Nigeria's foreign policy. In B. A. Akinterinwa (Ed.),

Nigeria's new foreign policy thrust: Essays in honour of Ambassador Oluyemi

Adeniji. Ibadan: Vantage Publishers Limited, 421–427.

Adeniran, T. (1983). Introduction to international relations. Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Aduloju, B. (2024). TCN: Nigeria supplies 24-hour electricity to Benin, Niger, Togo. The

Cable, October 21, 2024. Accessed from https://www.thecable.ng/tcn-nigeria-supplies-24-hour-electricity-to-benin-niger-togo/

Agbu, O. (2008). Nigeria's foreign policy under president Umaru Musa Yar'Adua: Challenges

and prospects. Nigerian Forum, 29, 1–2.

Ahmed, Z. (2022). CNPP decries ₦1.4bn Vehicle purchase to Niger Republic while ASUU is

on strike. Vanguard Newspaper, 4th August, 2022. Accessed from https://vanguardngr.com/2022/08/cnpp-decries-₦-1-4bn-vehicle-purchase-to-niger-republic-while-asuu-is-on-strike/

Amanyie, N. S., Kia, B. & Piate, S. M. (2018). Embassy and democratic sustainability in

Africa: The Gambia experience. Socialscientia, Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 3(1), 11 – 20

Amao O. B., & Uzodike O. U (2015). "Nigeria Afro-centrism and conflict resolution: Five

decades after - How far, how well? African Studies Quarterly,15(4).

Anthony, R. S. (2021). Poverty trap and the debacle of economic development in Nigeria.

Journal of mass communication and journalism. 11(2)1-7.

Asadu, C. (2019). Onyeama: Nigeria does not have direct communication link with its mission.

The cable Nigeria. Oct. 18th 2019. Accessed from https://thecable.ng/onyeama-nigeria-does-not-have-direct-communication-link-with-its-missions/

Babatunde, A. & Akinpetu, Y. (2020). Nigeria underfunding diplomatic missions, weakening

foreign policy – Experts. Premium Times, December 11, 2020. Accessed from https://premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/430537-nigeria-underfunding-diplomatic-missions-weakening-foreign-policy-experts.html?tztc=1

Eleonu, C. C., & Ebikebina, S. (2019). Challenges of Foreign Policy in Modern

Diplomacy: The Nigerian Example. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science 3(10), 659-665

Falola, T. & Heaton, M. M. (2008). A History of Nigeria. Cambridge University Press.

Folarin, S. (2010). National roles conceptions and Nigeria's African policy 1985-2007,

Unpublished PhD Thesis, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria.

Folarin S. (2013) Nigeria's new "Citizen-Centred Diplomacy": Any lessons from the

United States? Fulbright American Studies Institute Fellow. Walker Institute

of International and Area Studies WIIAS,. 440 Gambrell Hall, University of South

Carolina, Columbia. 2013.

Frank, E. O. (2025). Nigeria and Ghana: A Comparative study in governance and development.

International journal of social science 6(1)154-165

Fawole, W.A (2003) Nigeria's External Relations and Foreign Policy under Military Rule,

1966 to 1999 Ile – Ife: O.A.U. Press.

Future Africa (2017). Spotlight: Ethiopia is taking over the world. But is it? Accessed from

https://futureafrica.net/spotlight-ethiopia-is-taking-over-the-world-but-is-it/

Gambari, I.A. (1989), Theory and Reality in Foreign Policy Making: Nigeria after the Second

Republic, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International Inc.

Gambo, A. N (2023) Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the Age of Globalisation: Issues and

Challenges in U. A. Tar, S. Wapmuk (Eds.), Nigerian Foreign Policy 60 Years After Independence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06882-9_12

Grovogui, S. N. (2006). Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: memories of international order

and Institutions. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hobson, J. M. (2012). The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western international

theory, 1760-2010. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keohane R. O. (1984). After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political

Economy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lawal, K. (2025). Poor budget for foreign ministry threatens Nigeria's global influence – Ameh

Peter. Daily Post. July 12, 2025. Accessed from https://dailypost/2025/07/12/poor-budget-for-foreign-ministry-threatens-nigerias-global-influence-ameh-peter/

Mbara G. C and Gopal N. (2020). Afrocentrism, national interest and citizen welfare in

Nigeria's foreign policy manoeuvres. F1000Research 2020, 9:997 https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.25036.1

Ministry of foreign affairs (2025). Diplomatic mission. Accessed from

https://foreignaffairs.gov.ng/diplomatic-missions/

Mohammed, A. (2015). The cost and benefit of Nigeria's peace mission in sierra Leone.

African journal of political science and international relations. 9(11)393-403

Morgenthau, H. (1978) Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (5th

Edition) New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Ojiego-Okoro, C. & Ezeonwuka, I. F. (2024). From Colonialism to Identity politics: Nigeria's

historical trajectory. Awka Journal of History (AJOH), 2(1)1-28

Nairaland (2024). South Africa mocks Nigeria as "Generator Republic" in new nationwide Ad.

Accessed from https://www.nairaland.com/7994936/south-africa-mocks-nigeria-generator

Ndidigwe, D. C. (2023). National Interest and Nigeria's Foreign Policy Discourse of Rethink.

African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies AJPAS, 16(1): 309-326.

Ndlovu-Gathsheni, S. J. (2023). Beyond the coloniality of Internationalism: Rewarding the

world from the global south. CODERSIA Books Publication System.

Nwafor, L. C. (2023). The Impact of Government Institutions on the Attainment of Good

Governance for Sustainable Development in Nigeria Under the Buhari Administration (2015 – 2023). Journal of Law and Sustainable Development. 11(10) e1484 https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i10.1484

Nwala, P. (2024). Foreign policies and Diplomacy of African states in an era of Globalization:

Challenges and Prospects. Wukari International Studies Journal, 8(2):279-290

Nwankanma, S. (2022). FG's $1m donation to Afghanistan, reckless – Southern, Middle belt

Youths. Punch Newspaper, March, 5th 2022. Accessed from https://punchng.com/fgs-$1m-donation-to-afghanistan-reckless-southern-middle-belt-youths/

Ohaegbulem E .U., and Chijioke S. C. (2023) On Nigeria's Budgetary Allocations to The

Education Sector (1960-2023) In View of UNESCO'S Benchmarks, International Journal of Mathematics and Statistics Studies, 11 (4), 32-44

Okolie, A. M., Nnamani, K. E & Mbaegbu, C. C (2023). Bureaucratic Model: The Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and Nigerian Foreign Policy. In U. A. Tar, S. Wapmuk (eds.), Nigerian Foreign Policy 60 Years After Independence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06882-9_11

Piate, S. N., Sunday, E. & Kia, B. (2024). An appraisal of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Thrust from

1960-2023. Wukari international studies journal 8(8)38-50

Piate, S. M., Kia, B. and Obisung, J. O. (2025). Citizen diplomacy and the plight of Nigerians

both at home and abroad. Journal of Social Science and Humanities, 6(1).

Premium Times (2023). Earthquake: Nigerian envoy visit Turkiye, donates $1 Million. Press

Release, Premium Times. February 25th 2023. Accessed from https://www.premiumtimesng.com/more-news/584543-earthquake-nigerian-envoy-visit-turkiye-donates-$1-million/

RMB (2025). Infrastructure in Africa, the growth essential. Accessed from

https://rmb.co.za/news/infrasructure-in-africa-the-growth-essential#:~:text-"this-trend-will-continue-over-infrastructure-and-strong-ict-capabilities.

Saliu, H. A. (2008). An agenda for Nigeria's foreign policy. In H. A. Saliu et al. (Eds.), Nigeria

beyond 2007: Issues, perspectives and challenges. Faculty of Business and Social Sciences.

Saliu, H. A. (2018). Aspects of Nigerian foreign policy in the fourth republic. College Press.

Saliu H. A. (2023) Nigeria's Foreign Policy Since Independence: Problems, Challenges and

Opportunities. In U. A. Tar, S. Wapmuk (eds.), Nigerian Foreign Policy 60 Years After Independence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06882-9_11

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In Nelson, C. & Grossberg, L. (Eds), Marxism

and the Interpretation of Culture (pp. 271-313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Stremlau, J. (1977). The international politics of the Nigerian civil war, 1967–70. Princeton

University Press.

Ukhami E. I & Kumapayi B. S (2023). A Critical Review of Nigeria's Afrocentric Policy:

Rationale, Gains and Consequences in Agbu, O & Nzeribe S. A. (eds.), Nigerian Foreign Policy 60 Years After Independence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06882-9_4

Tar, U. A & Wapmuk S. (2023) Conclusion: Future Prospects of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Beyond 60 Years of Independence—Emerging Trends and Tasks Ahead in U. A. Tar, S. Wapmuk (Eds.), Nigerian Foreign Policy 60 Years After Independence, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06882-9_12

Tickner, A. B. (2003). Seeing IR differently: Notes from the Third World. Millennium: Journal

of international studies, 32(2),295-324.

UNDP (2023) Valuable Insights and Findings of the 2023/2024 Human development Report

and its correlation to Nigeria's Human Development Index. Accessed from https://www.undp.org/nigeria/news/valuable-insights-and-findings-of-the-2023/2024-human-development-report-and-its-correlation-to-nigerias-human-development-index/

UNESCO (2022). Out of school numbers are strong in Sub-Saharan Africa. Accessed from

https://unesco.org/gem-report/en/publication/out-of-school-numbers-are-strong-in-subsaharan-africa/

World Bank (2023). Nigeria Economic Overview. Accessed from

https://worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview#:~:=the-poverty-rate-is-estimated-is-aggravated-by-trade-protectionism

Yahaya, H., Datti, A., Abah, H. & Akote, A. (2025). 64 years after, clean water still a mirage

for Nigerians. Daily Trust, March 2025. Accessed from https://dailytrust.com/64-years-after-clean-water-still-a-mirage-for-nigerians/

Yusuf, B. (2025). Nigeria's bad roads are taking a toll on our economy. Business Day, April

28, 2025. Accessed from https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/nigerias-bad-roads-are-taking-a-toll-on-our-economy/