

# Exploring Nigeria's National Interest in the Context of International Relations

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**Received:** 07-01-25

**Accepted:** 11-03-25

**Published:** 30-04-25

This paper examines Nigeria's national interests in international relations, focusing on historical, geopolitical, economic, and security dimensions. The objective is to analyze how these factors shape Nigeria's foreign policy and its role in global affairs. Using secondary sources and content analysis, the study explores Nigeria's foreign policy through the lens of the realist theory, which emphasizes the pursuit of national interests and power in an anarchic international system. Findings reveal that Nigeria's foreign policy is significantly influenced by its colonial history, regional leadership within ECOWAS, economic dependence on oil, and pressing security concerns such as terrorism and maritime piracy. The realist perspective underscores Nigeria's focus on maintaining regional dominance while balancing economic and security priorities. The paper concludes that while Nigeria has made strides in asserting itself as a regional power, more strategic collaboration is required to address internal security threats and economic diversification. Recommendations include strengthening regional partnerships, diversifying economic interests beyond oil, and enhancing security cooperation both regionally and internationally to better align with its evolving foreign policy objectives.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, National Interest, International Relations, Realism

## 1.0 Introduction

Nigeria's stature as a consequential player in international relations has garnered recognition across scholarly discourse. Esteemed scholars such as Akinboye (2018) have delved deeply into Nigeria's historical trajectory, meticulously tracing its colonial legacy and subsequent post-independence evolution to elucidate the underpinnings of its foreign policy objectives. Moreover, the scholarly contributions of Osaghae and Suberu (2018) underscore Nigeria's concerted efforts to assert itself as a pivotal leader within the African continent, emphasizing the imperative of scrutinizing its national interest within the broader regional and global milieu. The intricacies of Nigeria's landscape are marked by a plethora of challenges, extensively documented by Eneke and Ojukwu (2016). These challenges encompass a spectrum ranging from political volatility, ethnic heterogeneity,

economic disparities, to pervasive security threats. This intricate tapestry of obstacles intersects with Nigeria's strategic imperatives, as aptly elucidated by Onuoha (2020), wherein considerations such as energy security, regional stability, and socio-economic development profoundly shape the nation's engagements with international stakeholders and multilateral institutions.

Amidst Nigeria's growing interconnectedness and influence in global dynamics, this paper seeks to provide a clear objective by examining Nigeria's national interests and foreign policy within the framework of international relations. The primary objective is to analyze Nigeria's strategic priorities, challenges, and opportunities through a comprehensive interdisciplinary lens, integrating perspectives from political science, economics, and security studies. Using secondary

data and content analysis, this research is grounded in the realist theory, focusing on how Nigeria pursues its national interests in an increasingly competitive global arena.

### **Conceptual Analysis:**

#### ***National Interest:***

The concept of national interest is intricate and multifaceted, encompassing a diverse array of objectives, strategies, and values that guide a state's interactions with the world. At its core, national interest encapsulates the pursuit of security, prosperity, and sovereignty, alongside the promotion of ideological, cultural, and normative interests essential for the state's well-being and survival (Morgenthau, 1967). National interest is not static but evolves over time, reflecting the changing dynamics of global politics and the shifting priorities of states. It is influenced by a myriad of factors, including historical experiences, geographic location, and socio-political context. These elements collectively shape the collective goals and aspirations of a nation-state, guiding its foreign policy decisions and strategic engagements (Waltz, 1979).

Central to the concept of national interest is the safeguarding of vital interests, such as territorial integrity, economic prosperity, and national identity. These interests serve as the cornerstone of foreign policy formulation, driving states to pursue strategies that advance their core objectives and protect their sovereignty (Waltz, 1979). Moreover, national interest encompasses both material and non-material interests, including security, economic well-being, values, norms, and prestige. These elements collectively define a state's identity and role in the international system, shaping its interactions with other actors and influencing global outcomes (Keohane, 1986).

Strategically, national interest represents the culmination of careful calculations and assessments, guiding states in their pursuit of key objectives. These objectives may include preserving territorial integrity, ensuring national security, promoting economic growth, fostering social stability, and projecting cultural influence. National interest serves as a guiding principle for statecraft, informing diplomatic engagements, military interventions, and economic policies to

protect and advance the state's core interests on the global stage (Grieco, 1993).

In essence, the concept of national interest is multifaceted and dynamic, reflecting the diverse array of objectives, strategies, and values that guide a state's interactions with the international community. It encompasses both material and non-material interests, serving as a guiding principle for foreign policy formulation and strategic decision-making. By understanding and prioritizing their national interests, states can navigate the complexities of global politics and pursue strategies that safeguard their sovereignty and promote their well-being in an ever-changing world.

#### ***International Relations:***

International relations (IR) is a dynamic and interdisciplinary field concerned with International Relations (IR) is a field dedicated to analyzing the intricate interactions among states, non-state actors, and international organizations on the global stage. It delves into patterns of cooperation, conflict, and negotiation, shedding light on the underlying structures, processes, and institutions that shape world politics (Baylis et al., 2017). At its core, IR seeks to understand the complexities of global governance, addressing power dynamics, diplomacy, international law, and transnational challenges such as terrorism, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses.

One of the key aspects of IR is its examination of global interactions across various levels, ranging from bilateral relations between states to broader structures and norms governing states and non-state actors. By analyzing these interactions, IR provides insights into the role of power, ideology, identity, and institutions in shaping international outcomes (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016). Moreover, IR considers the impacts of globalization, technology, and social change on global dynamics, recognizing their profound influence on the contemporary international system.

IR is inherently multidisciplinary, drawing insights from political science, history, economics, sociology, and other disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the study of international relations, allowing scholars to explore a wide range of factors that influence

global politics. By integrating diverse perspectives, IR offers a comprehensive understanding of the distribution of power, dynamics of cooperation and conflict, and decision-making processes at the international level. Furthermore, IR provides theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to inform policy debates and enhance understanding of the contemporary world order (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2017). Through rigorous analysis and research, IR scholars contribute to the development of strategies and policies aimed at addressing global challenges and advancing international cooperation.

In essence, International Relations is a dynamic and interdisciplinary field that explores the complexities of global politics. By analyzing interactions among states, non-state actors, and international organizations, IR seeks to uncover patterns of cooperation, conflict, and negotiation while examining the underlying structures and processes that shape world politics. Through its multidisciplinary approach, IR offers valuable insights into the distribution of power, dynamics of cooperation and conflict, and decision-making processes at the international level, contributing to a deeper understanding of the contemporary world order.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Realism, a dominant theoretical perspective in international relations, has been articulated by prominent scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. Morgenthau's seminal work, "Politics Among Nations," laid the groundwork for classical realism, emphasizing the primacy of power politics and the pursuit of national interest in international affairs (Morgenthau, 1967). Waltz further developed realism with his theory of structural realism, which focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system and the role of states' capabilities in shaping their behavior (Waltz, 1979).

The realist theoretical framework operates on several key assumptions that inform its analysis of states' behavior in international relations. Firstly, realists assume that states are rational actors motivated primarily by self-interest, particularly the desire for security and survival. Secondly, realists posit that the international system is anarchic, meaning there is no

overarching authority to enforce rules or agreements among states. Thirdly, realists contend that power is the primary currency of international politics, with states seeking to maximize their relative power position to ensure their security and advance their interests.

While realism provides valuable insights into state behavior and power dynamics in international relations, it has faced criticism on several fronts. One critique is that realism oversimplifies states' motivations by reducing them to narrow calculations of power and security, neglecting other factors such as ideology, identity, and domestic politics. Additionally, realism's focus on state-centric analysis may overlook the role of non-state actors, transnational issues, and global governance mechanisms in shaping international outcomes. Critics also argue that realism's pessimistic view of international relations as a zero-sum game undermines efforts to promote cooperation, diplomacy, and collective security in the pursuit of common interests.

In the context of exploring Nigeria's national interest in international relations, the realist theoretical framework offers valuable insights into the country's strategic priorities, foreign policy decisions, and interactions with the global community. Nigeria's pursuit of its national interest is shaped by realist considerations of power, security, and survival, as the country seeks to assert its influence regionally and globally amidst complex geopolitical dynamics. Realism helps explain Nigeria's strategic calculations in areas such as military capabilities, diplomatic alliances, and economic partnerships, as well as its responses to security threats, territorial disputes, and international crises. Moreover, realism highlights the competitive nature of international politics and the challenges Nigeria faces in navigating a world where power disparities, geopolitical rivalries, and shifting alliances shape the dynamics of global affairs. By applying the realist lens to Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and engagements, scholars can gain deeper insights into the country's strategic calculus, decision-making processes, and efforts to safeguard its national interests in a complex and uncertain international environment.

## 2.0 The Nexus Between National Interest, Foreign Policy, and International Relations

The relationship between national interest, foreign policy, and international relations is dynamic and multifaceted, requiring a comprehensive analysis to understand the complex interplay between these concepts. Foreign policy acts as the instrument through which national interests are projected in the international arena, giving states the means to pursue their strategic goals. Without foreign policy, a nation's interests would lack expression, and its international engagements would lack coherence. This paper focuses on Nigeria, analyzing how its foreign policy reflects its national interests within the broader context of international relations, using historical, geopolitical, economic, and security lenses to demonstrate this connection. Grounded in realist theory, this study offers insights into Nigeria's evolving role on the global stage.

### Foreign Policy as a Vehicle for National Interest

Foreign policy serves as the essential link between national interest and international relations. According to Morgenthau (1948), foreign policy is the tool through which nations pursue their interests in a world marked by anarchy and power struggles. Realist theory posits that states act primarily in their own self-interest, prioritizing security, power, and survival. Nigeria's foreign policy, rooted in this framework, is shaped by its quest for regional leadership, economic growth, and internal security, all critical aspects of its national interest. National interest, as defined by Hill (2003), includes the economic, security, and political objectives that a state seeks to achieve in its dealings with other states. For Nigeria, these objectives are shaped by its colonial history, geographical location, resource wealth, and security challenges, which directly influence its international relations.

### Historical Legacies and National Interest

Nigeria's foreign policy is significantly influenced by its colonial history, which

continues to shape its national interest. Colonialism left an indelible mark on African nations, creating arbitrary borders and ethnic fragmentation that reverberate in their contemporary diplomatic strategies (Ajayi & Crowder, 1985). Nigeria's colonial experience, particularly its struggle for sovereignty and identity, has informed its foreign policy, especially in its post-independence years. As a result, Nigeria's national interest has been characterized by a strong emphasis on territorial integrity, sovereignty, and regional leadership, particularly within West Africa. Moreover, Nigeria's historical involvement in peacekeeping missions and conflict resolution in Africa, as part of its foreign policy, underscores its commitment to regional stability—a key component of its national interest (Obi, 2010). This aligns with the realist perspective that prioritizes power and security. Nigeria's leadership in regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) demonstrates its desire to project power and influence, reinforcing its national interest in maintaining regional hegemony and stability (Okolo, 2012).

### Geopolitical Considerations

Nigeria's strategic location in West Africa further informs its national interest and foreign policy. Geopolitically, Nigeria is positioned as a regional powerhouse, with its size, population, and economic potential giving it a dominant role in West African politics and economics. Nigeria's involvement in ECOWAS is a manifestation of its geopolitical imperatives. As a leading player in the region, Nigeria's national interest is closely tied to promoting regional stability, mediating conflicts, and fostering economic cooperation among neighboring states. Okolo (2012) highlights Nigeria's status as an African giant, shaping its foreign policy to enhance its leadership role within the region. Nigeria's national interest, therefore, includes securing its borders, fostering good relations with its neighbors, and ensuring that it remains a key actor in West African affairs. This geopolitical positioning also affects its relations with global powers, as Nigeria's leadership in regional issues often attracts attention and partnership from larger global actors.

### **Economic Interests and Foreign Policy**

Nigeria's vast economic resources, particularly its oil wealth, play a significant role in shaping its national interest and foreign policy. Oil accounts for the majority of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, making it a critical factor in the country's foreign policy decisions (Akinboye & Ottoh, 2005). Nigeria's economic interest lies in maximizing the benefits of its natural resources while navigating global markets and trade partnerships. As such, its foreign policy often emphasizes economic diplomacy, aimed at securing favorable trade agreements and attracting foreign investments. However, economic interests must be balanced against broader national priorities, such as poverty reduction, infrastructure development, and environmental sustainability. Nigeria's economic diplomacy, driven by its resource wealth, has often focused on securing better terms in its engagements with foreign investors and multinational corporations. Nonetheless, this reliance on oil has created vulnerabilities, making Nigeria's foreign policy highly sensitive to global oil price fluctuations. This economic dependency reinforces the realist view that states pursue their national interests based on available resources and strategic priorities.

### **Security Concerns and National Interest**

Security considerations are central to Nigeria's foreign policy and national interest, especially in the face of threats such as terrorism, insurgency, and maritime piracy. Nigeria's experiences with the Boko Haram insurgency and internal communal conflicts highlight the importance of security in its foreign policy agenda. The realist perspective emphasizes the primacy of security in a state's national interest, and for Nigeria, ensuring internal stability is crucial to its international standing and regional leadership (Waltz, 1979). Delgado's (2022) report on Nigeria's security challenges, published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), provides an in-depth analysis of Nigeria's struggles with terrorism and insurgency. The report underscores the need for Nigeria to cooperate with international partners and regional organizations to address these security threats. Nigeria's national interest,

therefore, includes strengthening its security apparatus, both domestically and through international cooperation, to safeguard its territorial integrity and contribute to global security efforts.

### **Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power**

Beyond hard power and economic interests, cultural diplomacy and soft power play an increasingly important role in shaping Nigeria's national interest. Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, including its vibrant arts, music, and film industry, serves as a tool for projecting its values and ideals on the global stage. Cultural diplomacy enhances Nigeria's international image, fostering goodwill and creating opportunities for collaboration beyond traditional diplomatic channels.

Reports from cultural organizations, such as the British Council (n.d.) and the Pew Research Center (2020), provide insights into Nigeria's use of soft power in its foreign policy. The British Council's report, *Culture and Development in Nigeria*, highlights the role of culture in promoting Nigeria's national interest and advancing its diplomatic objectives. By leveraging its cultural assets, Nigeria can strengthen its international influence and promote its interests in a more subtle yet effective manner. In summary, the nexus between Nigeria's national interest, foreign policy, and international relations is complex and multifaceted, shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical considerations, economic interests, and security concerns. Foreign policy serves as the crucial link that allows Nigeria to pursue its national interests on the global stage, aligning its domestic priorities with international engagements. Grounded in realist theory, this study demonstrates that Nigeria's foreign policy is primarily concerned with securing regional dominance, promoting economic growth, and addressing internal and external security threats. To further enhance its foreign policy, Nigeria must continue to diversify its economy, reducing its reliance on oil and strengthening its engagement in global markets. Additionally, Nigeria should enhance its security cooperation with international partners, addressing the root causes of terrorism and insurgency. Finally, Nigeria should capitalize on its cultural assets, expanding its soft power

influence to build stronger international partnerships. By aligning its foreign policy with its evolving national interests, Nigeria can navigate the complexities of the global arena more effectively, asserting its position as a leading African nation.

### **Nigeria's national interest**

To properly examine Nigeria's national interest from a constitutional perspective, we must first trace its foundation within the Nigerian Constitution. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides a comprehensive framework for defining the nation's objectives, both internally and externally. Anchoring Nigeria's national interest on the Constitution ensures that any discourse remains academic, as the Constitution serves as the supreme legal guide for the nation's policies and actions.

### ***National Security and Sovereignty***

The primary focus of Nigeria's national interest is the protection of its sovereignty and the security of its people. Section 14(2)(b) of the Nigerian Constitution explicitly states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government" (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). This provision emphasizes that the government's foremost responsibility is ensuring the security of its citizens and safeguarding the country's territorial integrity. This principle underpins Nigeria's defense policies and its involvement in regional security initiatives such as peacekeeping missions under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Scholarly discussions, such as Akinboye (2018), highlight the historical evolution of Nigeria's security framework, connecting it to the constitutional mandate that prioritizes national defense.

### **Economic Development and Prosperity**

Economic advancement is another cornerstone of Nigeria's national interest, deeply rooted in the Constitution. Section 16(1) mandates that "the state shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this Constitution... harness the resources of the nation, promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic, and self-reliant economy"

(Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). This clause indicates that Nigeria's economic policies must be geared toward fostering development, reducing poverty, and addressing inequality. Scholarly analysis, such as Euka and Ojukwu (2016), discusses how these constitutional goals shape Nigeria's engagement with foreign investors and trade partners. The country's focus on economic diversification, attracting foreign direct investment, and promoting industrial growth is directly tied to the constitutional directive to ensure the economic welfare of its citizens.

### ***Social Justice and Equity***

In addition to security and economic growth, social justice is a critical component of Nigeria's national interest as outlined in the Constitution. Section 17(1) stresses "the equality of rights, obligations, and opportunities before the law" (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). This reflects Nigeria's commitment to upholding human rights, promoting social equality, and ensuring that all citizens have access to basic services. According to Osaghae and Suberu (2018), Nigeria's national interest extends to addressing social issues such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, aligning with global norms on social justice and human rights. Domestically, this translates into initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and improving access to services, while internationally, it influences Nigeria's alignment with human rights treaties and conventions.

### **Pan-Africanism and Global Engagement**

Nigeria's Constitution also addresses the country's regional and global responsibilities, particularly through its commitment to Pan-Africanism and international cooperation. Section 19 outlines Nigeria's foreign policy objectives, including the "promotion and protection of the national interest" and the "promotion of African integration and support for African unity" (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). This constitutional mandate underpins Nigeria's leadership role in Africa, guiding its active participation in regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and its involvement in peacekeeping missions across the

continent. Akinboye (2018) notes that Nigeria's Pan-Africanist policies are not just expressions of its national interest but are deeply grounded in its constitutional obligations. The promotion of peace, stability, and economic integration in Africa is an essential aspect of Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **The Global Stage and National Interest**

Beyond its regional focus, Nigeria's national interest extends to global governance and the protection of international human rights. Section 19(d) and (e) of the Constitution emphasize Nigeria's commitment to "international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace" and "respect for international law and treaty obligations" (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Osaghae and Suberu (2018) assert that Nigeria's participation in global forums like the United Nations and its advocacy for sustainable development reflect its constitutional alignment with international norms. Nigeria's efforts to influence global discussions on climate change, human rights, and economic justice are therefore rooted in its constitutional directives, which guide the country's role as a responsible global actor.

In sum, Nigeria's national interest, as defined by its Constitution, is multifaceted, encompassing security, economic development, social justice, regional leadership, and global engagement. The 1999 Constitution provides a clear, legal framework that shapes the country's domestic policies and foreign engagements. Any academic discussion of Nigeria's national interest must be grounded in this constitutional context to maintain its validity and rigor. By adhering to constitutional provisions, Nigeria can navigate its evolving role on the regional and global stage while protecting the welfare of its citizens and safeguarding its sovereignty.

### **3.0 Unraveling Nigeria's National Interest in the Global Arena: A Multifaceted Analysis Across Historical, Geopolitical, and Contemporary Dimensions**

An expansive exploration of Nigeria's national interest within the intricate web of international relations necessitates a multifaceted analysis informed by diverse scholarly perspectives. Spanning historical antecedents, geopolitical

imperatives, and contemporary challenges, this endeavor unveils the nuanced dynamics shaping Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and its interactions within the global arena.

**Historical Antecedents:** Exploring Nigeria's colonial past provides a profound understanding of the nation's national interest, encapsulating a broader narrative of historical legacies and their enduring impact on contemporary dynamics. For instance, scholars like Falola and Heaton (2008) delve deep into the intricate web of British imperialism, offering invaluable insights into the arbitrary borders drawn and the resultant ethnic fragmentation, which continue to resonate within Nigeria's political and socio-economic landscape to this day. The imposition of colonial rule not only left indelible marks on the nation's territorial boundaries but also shaped its national identity and foreign policy outlook in profound ways. Moreover, a comprehensive examination of Nigeria's pre-colonial history unveils yet another layer of influence on its national interest. Ejiogu (2019) underscores the resilience of indigenous governance structures and societal values amidst external pressures, highlighting the intricate tapestry of traditions, customs, and cultural heritage that have informed Nigeria's collective identity over centuries. These historical antecedents, rooted in both colonial legacies and indigenous heritage, underscore the complexity of Nigeria's national interest, serving as foundational pillars that continue to shape its diplomatic engagements and strategic priorities on the global stage.

The legacy of colonialism in Nigeria extends far beyond mere territorial delineations; it has deeply influenced the nation's socio-political fabric and its approach to international relations. The arbitrary drawing of borders by colonial powers disregarded existing ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, leading to internal divisions and conflicts that persist to this day. This legacy has profoundly shaped Nigeria's national interest, as the country grapples with issues of identity, unity, and nation-building in a diverse and fragmented society. Furthermore, Nigeria's pre-colonial history provides insight into the resilience of indigenous governance structures and societal norms. Despite centuries of external influence, Nigeria has maintained a rich tapestry

of traditions and customs that inform its national identity. These indigenous heritage elements continue to shape Nigeria's national interest, influencing its diplomatic relations, cultural diplomacy efforts, and pursuit of regional leadership.

Therefore, Nigeria's colonial past and pre-colonial history are integral to understanding the complexities of its national interest. Scholars' research illuminates the enduring impact of colonialism on Nigeria's territorial integrity, ethnic diversity, and socio-political dynamics. Additionally, insights into Nigeria's indigenous heritage underscore the resilience of its cultural identity and the influence of traditional values on its foreign policy objectives. By examining these historical legacies, policymakers and analysts gain valuable insights into Nigeria's diplomatic engagements, strategic priorities, and aspirations on the global stage.

**Geopolitical Imperatives:** Scholars like Ebegbulem (2016) have meticulously scrutinized Nigeria's strategic positioning within the African continent, highlighting the nation's quest for regional leadership and hegemony in West Africa. This regional ambition, underscored by considerations of security, economic interests, and cultural affinity, underscores Nigeria's pivotal role as a key actor in shaping regional dynamics.

Nigeria's strategic engagement within the African continent is multifaceted, encompassing efforts to foster regional stability, promote economic integration, and uphold shared values and principles. Scholars have extensively examined Nigeria's involvement in regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), where the nation plays a central role in peacekeeping missions, conflict resolution efforts, and economic partnerships. Nigeria's proactive stance in advancing regional cooperation reflects its commitment to promoting peace, security, and prosperity within the West African sub-region. Furthermore, Folarin (2011) delves into Nigeria's aspirations for global relevance, elucidating how the nation's robust economic potential and demographic significance position it as a linchpin in the emerging multipolar world order. Nigeria's vast natural resources, burgeoning population,

and strategic geographic location amplify its influence and leverage on the global stage, affording the nation a platform to assert its voice and contribute meaningfully to international discourse and decision-making processes.

Nigeria's economic significance extends beyond its regional borders, with the nation emerging as a key player in global markets and trade networks. Scholars have analyzed Nigeria's role in shaping international economic policies, attracting foreign investment, and fostering partnerships with both traditional and emerging powers. Nigeria's membership in international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its participation in initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) underscore its commitment to promoting economic development and integration at the global level. As Nigeria navigates its geopolitical imperatives, its strategic engagements both regionally and globally underscore its emergence as a formidable player in shaping the contours of contemporary international relations. The nation's diplomatic efforts, security initiatives, and economic partnerships contribute to fostering stability, promoting prosperity, and upholding shared values within the global community. By leveraging its strategic assets and diplomatic prowess, Nigeria continues to assert its influence on the world stage, advancing its national interests while contributing to the collective efforts towards a more peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

**Contemporary Challenges:** Scholars like Olowu (2015) shine a spotlight on the myriad contemporary challenges that cast a shadow on Nigeria's national interest. Governance failures, pervasive corruption, and deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities emerge as formidable obstacles that undermine Nigeria's development agenda. These internal challenges not only erode public trust in government institutions but also impede the nation's ability to harness its full potential for sustainable growth and prosperity. Furthermore, scholars such as Ibeanu (2018) and Folarin & Oviasogie (2014) delve into the complex array of security challenges confronting Nigeria, ranging from insurgency and terrorism to communal conflicts. The Boko Haram



insurgency in the northeast, communal clashes in the Middle Belt region, and ethno-religious tensions in various parts of the country pose significant threats to Nigeria's stability and regional influence. These security challenges not only exact a heavy toll on human lives and livelihoods but also strain the nation's resources and capacity to effectively address them.

In essence, an in-depth exploration of Nigeria's national interest within the realm of international relations requires a nuanced understanding informed by diverse scholarly perspectives. By synthesizing insights from historical, geopolitical, and contemporary analyses, scholars can unravel the complexities of Nigeria's strategic priorities, diplomatic engagements, and contributions to the evolving dynamics of global affairs.

Understanding Nigeria's national interest necessitates a holistic approach that considers the intricate interplay of domestic challenges, security threats, and geopolitical imperatives. Scholars play a crucial role in shedding light on these multifaceted issues, offering valuable perspectives and insights that inform policymaking and strategic decision-making processes. Moreover, scholars like Akinboye (2018) and Osaghae and Suberu (2018) provide critical analyses of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives, regional aspirations, and global ambitions. By examining Nigeria's historical context, regional dynamics, and economic challenges, scholars offer valuable insights into the factors shaping Nigeria's interactions within the international community. As Nigeria navigates its path in the global arena, scholars continue to play a vital role in deepening our understanding of the country's national interest and its implications for regional and global stability. By fostering dialogue, conducting empirical research, and challenging prevailing narratives, scholars contribute to the development of informed and effective strategies that advance Nigeria's national interests while promoting peace, prosperity, and security both at home and abroad.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Nigeria's national interest within the broader framework of international relations reveals a complex tapestry

of historical legacies, geopolitical imperatives, and contemporary challenges. Throughout this analysis, it becomes evident that Nigeria's national interest is shaped by a multitude of factors, each exerting its influence on the nation's strategic priorities, diplomatic engagements, and contributions to the global community.

Historically, Nigeria's colonial past and pre-colonial heritage leave lasting imprints on the nation's national identity and foreign policy outlook. The legacy of colonialism, marked by arbitrary borders and ethnic fragmentation, continues to shape Nigeria's territorial integrity and regional dynamics. Similarly, Nigeria's pre-colonial history and cultural heritage reflect the resilience of indigenous governance structures amidst external pressures, informing the nation's collective identity and sense of national interest.

Geopolitically, Nigeria's strategic positioning within Africa underscores its aspirations for regional leadership and influence. As a pivotal actor in West Africa, Nigeria actively seeks to advance regional stability, economic integration, and cultural affinity within organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Moreover, Nigeria's quest for global relevance is underscored by its robust economic potential, demographic significance, and strategic geographic location, positioning the nation as a key player in the emerging multipolar world order.

However, Nigeria faces a myriad of contemporary challenges that threaten to undermine its national interest. Governance failures, corruption, and socio-economic inequalities hinder the nation's development agenda, eroding public trust and impeding sustainable growth. Additionally, security threats such as insurgency, terrorism, and communal conflicts pose significant challenges to Nigeria's stability and regional influence, straining its resources and capacity to address these pressing issues.

Despite these challenges, Nigeria remains resilient and adaptive, navigating the complexities of international relations with pragmatism and determination. By understanding Nigeria's national interest in the context of international relations, scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders can gain deeper insights into the nation's strategic priorities, diplomatic

engagements, and responses to global dynamics. Through collaboration, innovation, and collective action, Nigeria can continue to assert its role as a responsible global actor, contributing positively to regional and global peace, prosperity, and development.

### 5.0 Recommendations

Exploring Nigeria's national interest in the context of international relations requires a strong constitutional foundation. The Nigerian Constitution, particularly Section 19, outlines key principles such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity. These should serve as the guiding framework for any foreign policy decision. Aligning Nigeria's actions on the global stage with constitutional mandates ensures that the national interest is prioritized over personal or political interests. By adhering to these principles, Nigeria can craft a foreign policy that promotes the welfare and security of its people. A key component of Nigeria's national interest lies in its commitment to security and sovereignty. Given the persistent threat of insurgency, especially from groups like Boko Haram, Nigeria should actively strengthen international alliances that support national security. Collaborating with regional and global organizations such as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, and the United Nations (UN) can enhance Nigeria's capacity to combat transnational threats. Ensuring security is critical not only for protecting the nation but also for creating a stable environment that supports economic growth and social development.

Economic diplomacy is another essential area where Nigeria can advance its national interest. The potential for Nigeria to join the BRICS group presents an opportunity to bolster its economic growth and diversify its trade partnerships. As a member of BRICS, Nigeria would gain access to a broader network of emerging markets, positioning itself for greater foreign investment and infrastructure development. This would also allow Nigeria to influence global economic policies, giving it a stronger voice in shaping international financial and trade systems in ways that benefit its economy. Regionally, Nigeria should continue its leadership role within ECOWAS, promoting deeper economic integration and collective security. A stable and prosperous West Africa aligns with Nigeria's

national interest, as it helps secure peace along its borders, fosters economic cooperation, and addresses shared challenges such as migration and climate change. By supporting regional integration, Nigeria not only strengthens its own economy but also reinforces its standing as a regional power.

Nigeria's longstanding involvement in peacekeeping missions also plays an important role in advancing its national interest. By expanding its participation in multilateral diplomacy, particularly through the United Nations and the African Union, Nigeria can continue to build its reputation as a leader in global peace-building efforts. This commitment to peace not only aligns with Nigeria's constitutional values but also enhances its influence in international forums, helping to shape global policies that reflect its interests. Human development should also be a central focus of Nigeria's foreign policy. Engaging with the Nigerian diaspora in international forums can help promote partnerships in education, healthcare, and technology. The diaspora's expertise and influence can be leveraged to meet Nigeria's developmental goals, while also improving its standing in global arenas related to human capital and development.

Another key aspect of Nigeria's national interest is environmental sustainability. As climate change and environmental degradation increasingly affect Nigeria's economy and social fabric, the country must prioritize climate diplomacy in its international relations. Advocating for global support to address environmental challenges such as desertification, deforestation, and oil spillage is essential. This aligns with Nigeria's national interest by protecting the environment, ensuring the well-being of its citizens, and safeguarding future generations. Lastly, Nigeria should maintain a non-aligned stance in global geopolitics, seeking strategic autonomy while forming partnerships that align with its security and economic interests. In a multipolar world, Nigeria can maximize its national interest by avoiding entanglement in global power struggles. By maintaining this flexibility, Nigeria can navigate international relations in a way that strengthens its sovereignty and advances its development goals.

In sum, Nigeria's national interest in international relations should be anchored in constitutional principles and focused on promoting security, economic growth, regional integration, and sustainable development. By leveraging both regional and global partnerships, Nigeria can advance its interests on the international stage while safeguarding the well-being of its citizens.

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