Economic Diplomacy in Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Implementation and Outcomes

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https://doi.org/10.56201/JLGP.vol.11.no5.2026.pg1.10

Abstract
This study seeks to assess the economic diplomacy in Nigeria's foreign policy development and its implementation and outcomes. The study considered various layers of Nigeria's global partnerships aimed at advocacy that will direct the commercial interest of the country to pursue economic growth. Contemporary studies were analyzed to determine their findings and recommendations which form the basis for the methodology adopted. A mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative analysis of macroeconomic indicators with qualitative semi-structured interviews to examine the efficacy of Nigeria's economic statecraft is deployed for the study. The primary source of evidence is archival government reports and open-ended interviews with diverse stakeholders, including academic experts, diplomatic officials, and media representatives. The outcomes of foreign policy outcomes are measured by evaluating shifts in intra-African trade volumes and foreign direct investment inflows, utilizing a dual-metric approach that captures both qualitative perceptions of diplomatic efficacy and quantitative economic growth indicators. Findings indicates that Nigeria's strategic engagement is complicated by its dual-track foreign policy, which simultaneously pursues traditional Western partnerships while exploring the economic potential of emerging BRICS-led initiatives. Contrary to desired favorable outcomes, policy somersault has resulted in Nigeria's strained bilateral relations with South Africa and others in its cohort, where a lack of formalized institutional structures has often led to personality-driven diplomacy that remains vulnerable to cyclical political shifts. A key recommendation of this study is that, Nigeria transitions toward a more integrated, evidence-based foreign policy that harmonizes domestic economic reform with its regional leadership ambitions. Prioritizing the modernization of diplomatic infrastructure and the professionalization of its foreign service which is essential to bridge the current implementation gap and restore institutional continuity.

Key Words: *Economic Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Implementation, Nigeria*

Introduction

Economic diplomacy within the Nigerian context is defined as the strategic application of statecraft to advocate for domestic commercial interests, encompassing the negotiation of global economic rules, the attraction of foreign direct investment, and the pursuit of national economic diversification (Lawal & Aluko, 2016; Ojo & Adebayo, 2023). This practice involves leveraging

regional integration and bilateral partnerships to mitigate structural dependencies, effectively transitioning from traditional power dynamics toward the use of economic instruments as primary tools of statecraft. This study seeks to establish a comprehensive framework to assess the implementation of foreign policy instruments by evaluating the coherence between high-level policy initiatives and tangible developmental indicators. The assessment also investigates the extent to which protectionist measures and delayed multilateral engagements have historically constrained Nigeria's regional influence and economic integration objectives. By examining the shift toward economy-driven engagement, this analysis scrutinizes how systemic institutional weaknesses and internal insecurity have historically mediated the conversion of these diplomatic initiatives into sustainable national development. Furthermore, the evaluation emphasizes the critical role of domestic leadership integrity as the primary determinant for the success of result-oriented economic diplomacy, which remains essential for overcoming recurrent fiscal instabilities. By examining the historical tension between Nigeria's long-standing Afrocentric foreign policy and its commitment to economic diplomacy since 1988, this research evaluates how policy implementation has struggled to align with evolving internal developmental priorities. Accordingly, the scope of this research encompasses an appraisal of Nigeria's participation in multilateral institutions to determine if these engagements effectively translate into tangible national benefits (Oladimeji, 2017). This study further investigates the systemic "paradox of giantism," wherein the pursuit of regional prestige frequently supersedes the foundational imperative to leverage foreign engagement for domestic industrial growth and infrastructure development. Analysis contrasts the strategic objectives of bilateral trade pacts against actual economic output, utilizing an Autoregressive Distributed Lag framework to isolate the causal links between diplomatic engagement and long-term equilibrium in trade and investment. Furthermore, inquiry in this study contextualizes the dynamics within the broader framework of realism and liberalism, acknowledging the state's pursuit of national interests amid intensifying global competition. This study specifically benchmarks Nigeria's performance against the tenets of Mercantilism to determine if its contemporary trade strategies effectively prioritize self-sufficiency and favorable balance of trade outcomes over mere diplomatic posturing. The multidimensional approach further scrutinizes how domestic governance and electoral cycles periodically disrupt the continuity of these economic strategies, often forcing transitions from long-term developmental planning to reactive policy shifts. Consequently, the study assesses the efficacy of these maneuvers by analyzing how Nigeria reconciles its reliance on diverse international partnerships with the necessity of maintaining strategic autonomy (Blessing, 2026; Gwadabe, 2025). By analyzing the transition from traditional Pan-African non-alignment to an array of overlapping partnerships with both Western alliances and rising Asian powers, this research elucidates how Nigeria attempts to expand its bargaining leverage. This strategic diversification is scrutinized through the lens of dependency theory, which characterizes Nigeria's peripheral position in global markets while questioning the extent to which these engagements mitigate chronic trade imbalances (Selim, 2025). Ultimately, the assessment evaluates whether these complex diplomatic maneuvers merely facilitate resource extraction or genuinely catalyze industrial capacity through infrastructure and technology transfer (Boge & Olawoyin, 2026; Chukwudozie, 2025). Building on this, the inquiry further interrogates how historical trade imbalances and a reliance on mono-product exports continue to impede the translation of diplomatic outcomes into robust domestic industrialization. This analysis further examines the institutional constraints and policy inconsistencies that hinder the conversion of diplomatic

interactions into meaningful developmental outcomes (Okpevra & Usiemure, 2024). Specifically, this research examines how presidential diplomatic shuttles function as a mechanism for negotiating bilateral economic benefits, while simultaneously accounting for the structural limitations imposed by domestic political rivalries ((JPS, 2024; Oso, 2022). Such efforts often underscore the complex interplay between the administration's drive for foreign investment and the internal constraints of bureaucratically entrenched interests ((JPS, 2024).

Literature Review

Theoretical discourse on economic diplomacy increasingly characterizes it as a critical instrument for navigating the complexities of globalization and the deepening interdependence of the international system (Sajadi, 2025). Scholars frequently employ Luttwak's theory of geo-economics to explain this transition, positing that economic tools have effectively supplanted military power as the principal mechanism for achieving state influence. Despite this conceptual evolution, scholarly literature on the Nigerian experience remains fragmented, often failing to reconcile the tension between stated geo-economics objectives and the persistent structural dependencies that limit strategic autonomy. Existing analyses frequently overlook how domestic institutional capacities—or the lack thereof—undermine the practical execution of these diplomatic maneuvers (Oso, Udochukwu *et al.,* 2026). Moreover, current academic discourse frequently neglects the impact of exogenous shocks, such as global trade disputes, which expose the systemic vulnerabilities inherent in Nigeria's reliance on extractive industries (Udochukwu *et al.,* 2026). Furthermore, while studies often prioritize elite-level decision-making processes, there is a notable deficit in empirical research concerning how localized security crises and internal political rivalries constrain the long-term effectiveness of these external economic engagements ((JPS), 2024, 2024). Beyond these internal impediments, scholarship has yet to adequately bridge the gap between abstract foreign policy rhetoric and the granular, micro-level outcomes of bilateral trade pacts (Udochukwu *et al.,* 2026; Nygmetova, 2024). This omission is particularly critical, as the theoretical literature on economic diplomacy as a normative instrument of state policy often assumes a level of institutional coherence that is frequently absent in the Nigerian context (Gvelesiani & Gogorishvili, 2026). Furthermore, although numerous studies have addressed Nigeria's diplomatic initiatives and contributions to the African Union, they consistently fail to interrogate the fundamental contradictions between these expansive external commitments and the country's precarious socio-economic reality (Umezurike *et al.,* 2017). Consequently, there remains a critical need for a more rigorous, empirically driven framework that synthesizes structural realism and interdependence theory to evaluate how material resource constraints specifically dictate Nigeria's diplomatic efficacy. Such an analytical approach is essential to determine whether these state-led interventions generate genuine developmental agency or merely perpetuate existing power asymmetries within the global economic order (Arslan, 2025; Okano-Heijmans, 2011). By integrating the study of foreign policy analysis with international political economy, this research identifies the disconnect between high-level diplomatic statecraft and the governance failures that perpetuate economic subordination (Fouquet *et al.,* 2026; Olaniyi-Quadri, 2026). Furthermore, current scholarship often fails to adequately address how entrenched domestic challenges, such as widespread unemployment, corruption, and systemic insecurity, fundamentally sabotage the implementation of otherwise ambitious economic policy frameworks (Shehu, 2024). In particular, existing literature rarely examines how the persistent lack of environmental sustainability and internal security in regions like the Niger Delta serves as a primary structural constraint,

undermining the credibility of the state's diplomatic initiatives (Njoku *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the literature lacks a comprehensive exploration of the structural and policy-level disconnects between Nigeria's foreign policy agenda and its broader international commitments, particularly regarding the harmonization of global climate governance frameworks with national economic priorities (Liadi, 2022). Moreover, the prevailing literature exhibits a significant lacuna in its failure to empirically evaluate the nexus between migration management and diaspora diplomacy, often overlooking how remittances and skill transfers are mediated by unstable domestic policy environments (Ishaq, 2026). Furthermore, the academic discourse continues to overlook the role of sub-regional instability as a deterrent to foreign direct investment, thereby limiting the state's capacity to leverage its regional influence into tangible economic gains (Liadi, 2022). Ultimately, reconciling these theoretical perspectives requires a nuanced understanding of how historical political shifts from military to democratic governance have conditioned, and at times restricted, the practical efficacy of contemporary economic diplomacy (Erondu *et al.,* 2026). Moreover, the growing, albeit informal, involvement of subnational government actors in international economic interactions represents an underexplored frontier that challenges traditional federalist assumptions about who speaks for the state (Omiunu & Aniyie, 2018). This oversight is compounded by a persistent neglect of non-state actors in formal diplomatic processes, which often undermines the coherence of national economic strategy when private interests diverge from public policy objectives (Lee & Hudson, 2004). Specifically, the literature fails to account for how these competing domestic and international interests impede a multi-stakeholder approach to economic statecraft, which is increasingly vital for integrating non-state actors into formal strategy (Margiansyah, 2020). In light of this, evaluating the diplomat-politician nexus through a comparative lens is essential to theorizing how internal institutional tensions and turf wars actively shape or constrain the specific outcomes of Nigerian economic diplomacy. Establishing a robust analytical framework requires moving beyond purely state-centric models to account for the complex interplay between government agencies and private sector stakeholders (Csabay & Cséfalvayová, 2022; Ogunbode *et al.,* 2026). Such a synthesis must acknowledge that current research remains hampered by significant conceptual and methodological deficiencies, particularly regarding the lack of consensus on the core variables that constitute economic diplomacy as a distinct academic discipline (Killian, 2021). This conceptual ambiguity is exacerbated by a reliance on qualitative assessments that lack the quantitative rigor necessary to validate the causal links between diplomatic effort and measurable trade outcomes (Bratosin-Vasilache, 2025; Moons & Bergeijk, 2016)

Research Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative analysis of macroeconomic indicators with qualitative semi-structured interviews to examine the efficacy of Nigeria's economic statecraft. Primary evidence is derived from archival government reports and open-ended interviews with diverse stakeholders, including academic experts, diplomatic officials, and media representatives. Assessment criteria for policy implementation focus on the alignment between stated trade objectives and the actual institutional capacity to execute bilateral mandates. Outcomes are subsequently measured by evaluating shifts in intra-African trade volumes and foreign direct investment inflows, utilizing a dual-metric approach that captures both qualitative perceptions of diplomatic efficacy and quantitative economic growth indicators. This methodological triangulation ensures that the analysis captures both the procedural efficiency of

diplomatic initiatives and their tangible impact on long-term macroeconomic stability. By systematically cross-validating these diverse datasets, the study mitigates the biases inherent in singular methodological approaches, thereby providing a robust empirical foundation for evaluating how domestic constraints mediate the success of international economic engagements (Akbal, 2026). Furthermore, this assessment incorporates thematic analysis to evaluate policy relevance and fidelity, identifying critical implementation gaps that often impede the achievement of stated diplomatic goals. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, the study employs a comparative framework that contrasts Nigeria's diplomatic performance against regional peers, identifying both structural constraints and successful maneuvers. This comparative analysis facilitates a rigorous assessment of how varying levels of institutional cohesion and political stability dictate the relative success of regional economic initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (Ahmed & Najimu, 2025). This analytical strategy is further supported by a theory-guided approach that examines the globalization trilemma, specifically assessing how Nigeria balances sovereign development priorities with the rigorous demands of regional and global integration regimes (Jaiyeola, 2026). By scrutinizing the tension between sovereignty-forward interventions and market liberalization, this research maps the distributional politics and institutional capacity constraints that frequently disrupt the sequencing of economic reforms. Drawing on Putnam's "two-level games" framework, this approach analyzes how internal interest groups and domestic political dynamics constrain the state's bargaining power during regional negotiations.

Result and Findings

The implementation of Nigeria's economic diplomacy reveals a pattern of oscillation between ambitious regional leadership and protectionist domestic impulses, frequently undermining the efficacy of trade initiatives like the AfCFTA (Julia, 2025). Specifically, the 2019–2020 border closure served as a pivotal example of how inward-looking security and trade policies can stifle regional integration, creating a persistent gap between Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomatic rhetoric and its operational commitment to the Economic Community of West African States (Mohammed-Yinusa *et al.,* 2026). Even though Nigeria is a core member of the sub-regional bloc – ECOWAS, logistical hurdles stemming from disparate levels of development among member states continue to impede the realization of seamless cross-border trade (Adedotun & Musa, 2003). Beyond these structural bottlenecks, Nigeria's strategic engagement is further complicated by its dual-track foreign policy, which simultaneously pursues traditional Western partnerships while exploring the economic potential of emerging BRICS-led initiatives. This evolving South–South alignment is fundamentally shaped by global power asymmetries and the domestic political settlements that define state capacity (Onya, 2025). Furthermore, the inconsistent application of these policies suggests a recurring tension between historical commitments to multilateral cooperation—as evidenced by Nigeria's long-standing institutional engagements—and the pragmatic, often ad-hoc reactions to immediate domestic socio-economic pressures (Panin, 2025). These outcomes are particularly evident in Nigeria's strained bilateral relations with South Africa, where a lack of formalized institutional structures has often led to personality-driven diplomacy that remains vulnerable to cyclical political shifts. These intermittent conflicts, highlighted by incidents such as the 2019 xenophobic assaults and the 2012 deportation of Nigerians, demonstrate how nationalist rhetoric and elite populism frequently override long-term economic imperatives in bilateral engagements.

Discussion

Nigeria's diplomatic outcomes are fundamentally constrained by the persistent friction between its stated Pan-Africanist objectives and the fragile institutional frameworks that govern policy execution. Internal institutional failures, such as the limited analytical impact and operational rivalry within the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, further exacerbate these inconsistencies by decoupling strategic formulation from actual diplomatic implementation (Kurfi *et al.,* 2025). Moreover, the prevalence of bureaucratic inefficiencies and resource constraints within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hinders the consistent execution of long-term economic strategies, often leaving diplomatic missions understaffed and ill-equipped to navigate complex global crises (Okpevra & Usiemure, 2024). External pressures, such as the competitive drive for multilateral leadership within the African Union, further complicate these domestic shortcomings, often leading to a reliance on reactive measures rather than proactive, sustained engagement (Abubakar, 2025). Additionally, the state's pursuit of strategic autonomy is frequently hampered by structural inequalities and geopolitical asymmetries within the Global South, which restrict its capacity to effectively leverage multilateral partnerships for domestic industrial advancement (Adesimbo *et al.,* 2026). Consequently, the pursuit of national interest remains stifled by the inability to align domestic socio-economic demands with a coherent, long-term strategic vision, a challenge that consistently hinders the realization of its regional and global ambitions (Rosemary & Dayi, 2022). Ultimately, this underscores a critical debate regarding whether Nigeria's foreign policy framework remains anchored in a clear, actionable center or is instead relegated to the aspirational, yet often detached, visions of its strategic planners.

Conclusion

To navigate these systemic challenges, Nigeria must transition toward a more integrated, evidence-based foreign policy that harmonizes domestic economic reform with its regional leadership ambitions. Prioritizing the modernization of diplomatic infrastructure and the professionalization of its foreign service is essential to bridge the current implementation gap and restore institutional continuity. Furthermore, future economic diplomacy necessitates a departure from idealistic, prescriptive initiatives toward data-driven, stable macroeconomic frameworks, as industrial growth and export diversification are currently stifled by high inflation and persistent infrastructural deficiencies. Strategic success in this arena requires that stabilization measures precede large-scale sectoral interventions, ensuring that domestic manufacturing can compete within the broader African Continental Free Trade Area. Ultimately, the state must overcome its reliance on oil-centric trade by implementing deliberate, consistent export readiness programs that address the underlying logistics and energy constraints currently hindering industrial expansion.

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