The Administrative Capacity of The State and Its International Influence: Examining the Nexus Between Public Administration, Foreign Policy, and Global Governance in Nigeria, 2015–2026

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Abstract
Nigeria's regional leadership ambitions and global diplomatic engagements depend not only on population, economic resources and strategic location but also on the administrative institutions that formulate, coordinate and implement foreign policy. This study examined how state administrative capacity shaped Nigeria's international influence between 2015 and October 2026, identified the institutional mechanisms linking public administration to foreign policy performance, assessed the implications of administrative capacity for Nigeria's regional and global governance roles, and considered the contribution of public service reform to diplomatic effectiveness. The study was anchored in state capacity theory and complemented by foreign policy analysis and role theory. It adopted a qualitative documentary design and analyzed constitutional provisions, foreign policy statements, public service reform strategies, official records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ECOWAS and African Union materials, World Bank governance indicators, and recent scholarly and policy literature published mainly between 2022 and October 2026. The analysis found that Nigeria retained substantial diplomatic assets, including its regional scale, institutional experience, peace and security contributions, and participation in multilateral organisations. However, these assets did not automatically translate into consistent international influence. Policy coordination gaps, uneven implementation capacity, fiscal and personnel constraints, fragmented interagency responsibilities, and weak links between international commitments and domestic delivery limited policy credibility. The 2025 withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS, Nigeria's 4D foreign policy agenda, and the 2021–2025 civil service reform cycle illustrated the importance of administrative capability in managing complex regional and global responsibilities. The study concluded that administrative capacity is not a secondary technical concern but a strategic foundation of foreign policy. It recommended institutionalised foreign-policy coordination, professional diplomatic development, measurable implementation plans, stronger legislative and public accountability, and a successor public service reform framework explicitly connecting domestic administrative performance with Nigeria's international commitments.

Keywords*: administrative capacity; public administration; foreign policy; global governance; Nigeria; ECOWAS; state capacity; diplomatic influence*

1. Introduction

International influence is often explained through a state's population, economic resources, military capability, diplomatic reach and strategic location. These factors matter, but they do not by themselves explain why some states convert resources and international commitments into sustained outcomes while others struggle to do so. A government may announce ambitious

foreign policy goals, join regional agreements, contribute to peace and security initiatives, and participate in global institutions, yet achieve only limited results if its administrative institutions cannot coordinate decisions, retain expertise, mobilise resources, implement agreements and communicate a consistent national position. Public administration is therefore not separate from international relations. It is one of the institutional channels through which international preferences are translated into action.

Nigeria provides a significant case for examining this relationship. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has presented itself as a major African power, an advocate of regional integration, a contributor to peace operations and a supporter of multilateral cooperation. Its population, economy, energy resources, diplomatic history and position in the Gulf of Guinea give it considerable potential influence. The foreign policy objectives contained in Chapter II, Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution include the protection of national interest, promotion of African integration and unity, international cooperation, respect for international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. These objectives require more than presidential declarations. They depend on the administrative systems that coordinate ministries, prepare negotiations, implement treaty obligations, manage missions abroad and connect external commitments to domestic policy.

The period 2015–2026 is analytically useful because it covers three successive presidential administrations and a period of substantial domestic and international change. Nigeria faced continuing insecurity, economic adjustment, pressure on public finances, changing relationships with major powers, regional security crises and demands for more effective economic diplomacy. During the Buhari administration (2015–2023), the country continued to promote regional security and African leadership, but domestic insecurity and economic constraints affected the credibility and reach of those ambitions. The Tinubu administration subsequently introduced a 4D foreign policy framework built around Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs presents this framework as a means of connecting Nigeria's demographic assets, economic transformation, diaspora relationships and democratic commitments to its international engagement (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.) At the same time, public administration reform remained a major domestic policy concern. The Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025 sought to strengthen capability building, talent management, performance management, human-resource administration, innovation, digitalisation and staff welfare. In June 2026, the federal government reported that the end-term review had identified progress as well as continuing needs for institutionalisation, stronger monitoring and evaluation, digital transformation and staff motivation. In July 2026, the government announced a reform tracker, knowledge repository and National Strategy for Public Service Reform dashboard intended to improve transparency, performance monitoring and knowledge management across ministries, departments and agencies (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2026a, 2026b). These initiatives make the relationship between administrative reform and international performance especially timely.

The regional environment also changed sharply. On 29 January 2025, the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) became effective. ECOWAS maintained transitional arrangements concerning travel documents, movement, trade and the treatment of citizens while seeking to manage the separation and preserve regional cooperation (ECOWAS, 2025a). For Nigeria, which has traditionally played a leading role in ECOWAS, this development tested diplomatic coordination, institutional

adaptability and the ability to reconcile political principles with practical regional interdependence. The episode illustrates how regional leadership depends on the quality of diplomatic strategy and the administrative capacity to sustain negotiations, implement decisions and manage cross-border consequences.

The central problem addressed by this study is the gap between Nigeria's international ambitions and the administrative capabilities required to deliver them. Existing discussions of foreign policy frequently emphasise presidential preferences, national interest, security threats, economic diplomacy and geopolitical competition. Public administration studies, in turn, often focus on service delivery, civil service reform, budgeting and institutional performance without fully tracing how these factors affect international influence. The two literatures are connected in practice but are not always integrated analytically. The result is an incomplete explanation of why a state with considerable diplomatic assets may experience uneven influence in regional and global governance.

This paper addresses that gap by asking four questions. How has Nigeria's administrative capacity shaped the formulation and implementation of its foreign policy between 2015 and October 2026? Which administrative mechanisms have most strongly influenced Nigeria's ability to convert international commitments into outcomes? How have administrative strengths and weaknesses affected Nigeria's role in ECOWAS, the African Union and wider global governance? What public administration reforms could strengthen the credibility and effectiveness of Nigeria's international engagement?

The paper argues that Nigeria's international influence is conditioned by the capacity of its domestic institutions to coordinate policy, sustain professional expertise, mobilise resources, implement commitments and demonstrate credible results. Administrative capacity does not determine every foreign policy outcome, because external constraints, competing interests, leadership choices and the actions of other states also matter. It does, however, shape the range of feasible options available to policymakers and the credibility of Nigeria's commitments. The study contributes to international relations by treating administrative capability as a mechanism linking domestic state performance to external influence. It contributes to public administration by showing that reform should be assessed not only through domestic service delivery but also through its implications for diplomacy, treaty implementation and global governance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 State Capacity and International Influence

State capacity refers to the ability of public institutions to formulate collective goals and implement decisions across a territory and population. It includes administrative competence, fiscal capacity, information systems, professional personnel, legal authority and the ability to coordinate public action. The concept differs from state size or formal authority. A state may possess extensive ministries and agencies but remain weak in implementation if responsibilities overlap, staff lack the necessary skills, budgets arrive late or monitoring systems fail to identify poor performance. Fukuyama (2013) distinguishes the scope of government from the strength of its institutions, arguing that the quality of implementation is a central dimension of governance. This distinction is relevant to Nigeria, where the existence of formal institutions and ambitious policy frameworks does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation.

State capacity has international consequences because foreign policy requires sustained administrative work. Negotiating a treaty is only one stage of international engagement. Officials must evaluate the implications of the agreement, coordinate domestic agencies, prepare

implementation plans, allocate resources, report progress and respond to disputes. Trade diplomacy requires customs administration, standards agencies, investment promotion, border management and the ability to communicate predictable rules to external partners. Security cooperation requires intelligence-sharing protocols, procurement controls, joint planning and operational coordination. Climate and development diplomacy require technical data, credible reporting and the capacity to fulfil commitments made in international forums. A weakness in these domestic functions can reduce the value of diplomatic agreements even when negotiations are successful.

The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators provide a comparative lens on governance quality, including government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. The indicators are based on perceptions drawn from multiple sources and should be interpreted as estimates rather than definitive measurements of government performance (World Bank, 2026). Nigeria's government-effectiveness score was 31.8 on the World Bank's 0–100 scale in 2024. The score does not directly measure diplomatic influence, nor can it establish that administrative weaknesses caused a particular foreign policy outcome. It nevertheless provides contextual evidence that the administrative environment in which international commitments must be implemented remains a significant policy concern.

2.2 Public Administration and Foreign Policy Analysis

Foreign policy analysis challenges the assumption that states act as unitary actors with perfectly coherent preferences. Government decisions emerge from institutions, bureaucratic routines, leadership perceptions, organizational interests and political bargaining. Allison and Zelikow's (1999) analysis of the Cuban missile crisis demonstrated how organizational processes and bureaucratic politics can shape international decisions. Although their empirical setting differs from Nigeria, the broader lesson is that a government's external conduct is partly produced by how institutions process information, negotiate competing priorities and execute decisions. In Nigeria, foreign policy involves the presidency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, national security institutions, trade and finance ministries, immigration and customs agencies, legislative committees, subnational authorities and Nigeria's diplomatic missions. Depending on the issue, agencies responsible for energy, maritime security, migration, public health, technology and development may also be involved. This institutional breadth can provide expertise and wider ownership. It can also generate coordination costs when mandates are unclear, information is not shared, or agencies pursue separate initiatives without a common implementation framework. Bureaucratic professionalism is particularly important because diplomatic work requires continuity across administrations. Institutional memory allows officials to understand previous negotiations, preserve relationships, anticipate partners' concerns and avoid repeated policy reversals. Where diplomatic postings are unstable, technical training is inadequate or institutional knowledge is concentrated in a small number of officials, a change in political leadership can disrupt policy execution. The issue is not whether political leaders should direct foreign policy; elected leaders have legitimate authority to define national priorities. The question is whether professional institutions can provide accurate advice and carry out decisions consistently.

2.3 Role Theory and Nigeria's Regional Leadership

Role theory provides another useful perspective because states develop conceptions of the roles they should perform in international society. Holsti (1970) showed that national role conceptions influence how policymakers understand their country's obligations and opportunities. Nigeria

has often conceived of itself as a regional leader, an advocate of African unity, a peace and security contributor and a representative of African interests in global institutions. Such role conceptions can generate diplomatic initiative, but they also create expectations. When a state claims leadership, other actors may judge it against the consistency of its actions, the resources it contributes and its ability to deliver collective outcomes.

Role performance depends on more than intention. A state that seeks to lead regional integration must maintain the technical expertise needed to negotiate protocols, fund its commitments, coordinate with neighbouring states and manage the domestic consequences of regional decisions. A state that seeks influence in global governance must develop positions across complex areas such as climate finance, digital regulation, public health, development financing and international security. Administrative weakness can create a gap between role conception and role performance. This does not mean that Nigeria has lost all regional influence; rather, it means that leadership claims require continued institutional investment and demonstrable delivery.

2.4 Global Governance and Administrative Implementation

Global governance involves the rules, institutions and cooperative practices through which states and non-state actors address transnational problems. Unlike domestic government, global governance lacks a single central authority capable of compelling every state to implement every agreement. Outcomes therefore depend heavily on negotiation, voluntary compliance, mutual monitoring and domestic institutional capacity. International agreements may establish common objectives, but implementation is usually carried out by national ministries, regulators, local authorities and public agencies.

This creates an implementation paradox. States often seek influence by shaping international rules, yet their influence can be undermined when they cannot implement the rules they have supported. In trade, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) requires domestic coordination across customs, standards, transport, finance, trade facilitation and private-sector engagement. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa's synthesis of national AfCFTA implementation strategies emphasises the importance of national strategies and cross-sectoral coordination in translating continental commitments into practical action (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2024). For Nigeria, the value of continental trade diplomacy therefore depends partly on administrative arrangements that make market access, customs procedures and regulatory cooperation work in practice.

The same logic applies to security cooperation, climate agreements, migration governance and development partnerships. A country may participate actively in multilateral negotiations but lose credibility if it does not submit required reports, meet financial obligations, apply agreed standards or coordinate the agencies responsible for implementation. Administrative capacity consequently becomes a form of reputational capital: partners are more likely to take commitments seriously when they expect institutions to deliver.

2.5 Public Service Reform in Nigeria

Nigeria has pursued multiple public service reform programmes, reflecting recurring concerns about efficiency, accountability, professionalism, personnel management and the use of digital technology. The National Strategy for Public Service Reform identifies institutional governance, socioeconomic conditions, public financial management and civil service administration as interrelated pillars. Its stated direction includes a more efficient, productive, incorruptible and

citizen-centred public service capable of delivering government policies and programs (Bureau of Public Service Reforms [BPSR], 2025). The Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025 also placed emphasis on capability building, performance management, human-resource systems, innovation, digitalization and staff welfare (Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, n.d.).

These reform priorities overlap directly with the requirements of foreign policy. Professional staff are needed to analyze international agreements; performance management is needed to track commitments; digital systems can improve coordination between headquarters and diplomatic missions; public financial management determines whether approved activities can be implemented; and staff welfare affects retention and institutional morale. However, reform documents describe intended changes and should not automatically be treated as evidence that those changes have been fully achieved. A distinction must be maintained between policy design, reported implementation activity and independently verified outcomes.

2.6 Nigeria's Foreign Policy Between 2015 and 2026

Research on Nigeria's foreign policy during the Buhari administration has identified tensions between traditional regional leadership ambitions and domestic limitations. A 2026 study argues that insecurity, economic fragility and institutional weaknesses constrained role performance, even where Nigeria continued to articulate regional leadership goals (Nigeria's Foreign Policy Under the Buhari Administration, 2026). Research assessing the first two years of the Tinubu administration similarly treats foreign policy as an evolving policy agenda shaped by regional, economic and institutional considerations (Livinus & Ikegwuiro, 2025). These studies provide a foundation for examining the administrative mechanisms behind policy performance rather than merely cataloguing diplomatic events.

The 4D framework offers an official statement of contemporary foreign policy priorities. Demography, Development, Diaspora and Democracy can connect external engagement to national development, citizen protection, investment, skills and democratic legitimacy. The framework's practical value, however, depends on how priorities are translated into institutional responsibilities, budgets, measurable targets and interagency implementation. Without such translation, a foreign policy doctrine risks functioning mainly as a communication device rather than a programme for coordinated government action.

2.7 Literature Gap

The literature reviewed establishes that state capacity affects policy implementation, bureaucratic processes shape foreign policy, and Nigeria's international role is influenced by domestic constraints. Three gaps remain. First, foreign policy analyses often treat administrative capacity as background context instead of identifying the institutional mechanisms through which it affects outcomes. Second, public administration reform discussions frequently concentrate on domestic service delivery without considering diplomatic credibility, treaty implementation and regional leadership. Third, contemporary changes in West African regional order, especially the departure of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS, make it necessary to examine whether Nigeria's administrative institutions can adapt to complex regional negotiations and changing forms of cooperation. This paper addresses these gaps by linking administrative coordination, professional expertise, implementation capacity and accountability to Nigeria's international influence between 2015 and October 2026.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 State Capacity Theory

The study is anchored in state capacity theory. In broad terms, this perspective focuses on the ability of state institutions to formulate and implement decisions, collect and use information, mobilise resources, maintain order and deliver public objectives. State capacity is multidimensional. Administrative capacity concerns the competence and coordination of public organisations; fiscal capacity concerns the ability to mobilise and deploy revenue; coercive capacity concerns the legitimate management of security; and infrastructural capacity concerns the state's ability to implement policy throughout society. For this study, administrative capacity is the principal dimension because the research examines how bureaucratic competence and institutional processes shape foreign policy and global governance.

The theory generates a clear expectation: states with more coherent, professional and implementation-oriented institutions should be better positioned to translate foreign policy goals into sustained external outcomes. Administrative capacity helps governments gather information, formulate credible negotiating positions, coordinate ministries, preserve institutional memory and fulfil commitments after agreements are signed. Conversely, fragmented responsibilities, weak monitoring, unpredictable financing and limited technical expertise can produce an implementation gap between diplomatic declarations and actual results.

Applied to Nigeria, the framework directs attention to the relationship between formal foreign policy objectives and the administrative systems required to achieve them. It asks whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant domestic agencies possess clear mandates, sufficient expertise, reliable information and effective procedures for joint action. It also considers whether civil service reforms are linked to the tasks that international engagement actually requires. The theory does not assume that greater administrative capacity guarantees international success. Other states may oppose Nigeria's preferences, external crises may overwhelm available resources, and political choices may be poorly designed. Capacity instead influences the likelihood that a government can pursue its chosen objectives consistently and adapt to changing conditions.

3.2 Foreign Policy Analysis as a Complementary Perspective

Foreign policy analysis complements state capacity theory by explaining how international decisions are produced inside government. It highlights the interaction between political leadership, organisational routines, bureaucratic expertise and the information available to decision-makers. In this study, the perspective helps distinguish between policy formulation and policy implementation. A presidential statement or diplomatic initiative may signal political intent, but implementation requires officials to interpret instructions, coordinate across organisations, manage competing interests and report progress.

The combined theoretical proposition is that administrative capacity shapes the conversion of domestic resources and political preferences into international influence through four pathways: policy coordination, professional expertise and institutional memory, implementation and resource mobilisation, and monitoring, accountability and credibility. These pathways are interdependent. Expertise has limited value when agencies do not coordinate; coordination is ineffective when budgets are unavailable; implementation is difficult to sustain without performance monitoring; and credibility declines when international commitments are not matched by domestic action.

3.3 Analytical Expectations

The framework produces three expectations. First, Nigeria's international influence should be strongest where diplomatic priorities are supported by clear mandates, interagency cooperation and sustained implementation. Second, administrative weaknesses should be most visible in policy areas requiring coordination across several ministries or multiple levels of government, such as regional trade, migration, security cooperation and international development commitments. Third, reforms in professional development, digitalisation, performance management and public finance should improve foreign policy performance only when they are embedded in actual workflows and evaluated against measurable external-policy outcomes. The framework also recognises that the relationship is reciprocal. International commitments can stimulate domestic reform by creating reporting requirements, professional standards and incentives for coordination. External partnerships can provide technical support and resources. However, external commitments may also increase administrative burdens if government agencies lack the capacity to manage them. The study therefore treats international influence and administrative capacity as mutually connected rather than as a one-way causal relationship.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design. The design was appropriate because the research questions concern institutional arrangements, policy processes, international commitments and the interpretation of government performance. The documentary approach made it possible to compare policy intentions with publicly documented administrative reforms and regional developments over time. The study covered January 2015 to October 2026, thereby encompassing the Buhari and Tinubu administrations and the major institutional and regional developments observable by the date of analysis.

The documentary corpus comprised five categories. The first consisted of constitutional and official foreign policy materials, including the constitutional objectives of Nigeria's external relations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' explanation of the 4D framework. The second comprised public administration reform documents, including the National Strategy for Public Service Reform, the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025, and official reports concerning the review and digitisation of civil service reform. The third comprised regional and international institutional documents, including ECOWAS statements on the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and materials concerning regional integration and AfCFTA implementation. The fourth consisted of governance indicators, particularly the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators. The fifth comprised peer-reviewed scholarship and policy research relevant to state capacity, foreign policy analysis, role theory and Nigeria's foreign policy.

Documents were selected for their relevance to the research questions, institutional credibility, temporal coverage and usefulness in identifying administrative mechanisms. Official documents were used to establish government priorities, institutional mandates and reported reform activity. Scholarly and policy sources were used to interpret these materials and situate them in the wider literature. World Bank indicators were treated as contextual comparative evidence, not as direct measures of foreign policy effectiveness. Where official statements described progress, the analysis distinguished reported progress from independently verified outcomes.

The material was analysed through qualitative thematic coding. Five dimensions were used: policy coordination, professional expertise and institutional memory, implementation and resource mobilisation, monitoring and accountability, and international credibility and influence.

Each dimension was assessed against evidence of formal policy design, implementation arrangements, coordination requirements and reported outcomes. An ordinal coding scale from zero to three was used as an analytical aid. Zero represented no meaningful evidence in the reviewed corpus; one represented limited or fragmented evidence; two represented substantial evidence of policy activity but incomplete evidence of consistent implementation; and three represented strong evidence of institutionalised and demonstrable implementation. The resulting scores are interpretive indicators of the prominence and maturity of documented mechanisms, not survey findings, official performance scores or measurements of actual diplomatic influence. Triangulation was used to reduce the risk of relying on government self-assessment alone. For example, the existence of a reform strategy was compared with official reports on implementation and with broader governance indicators. Similarly, Nigeria's regional leadership claims were examined alongside the documented withdrawal of three Sahelian states from ECOWAS and the institution's response. The purpose was not to attribute that withdrawal solely to Nigeria or to its administrative capacity. The case was used to assess the demanding nstitutional environment in which Nigerian diplomacy operates.

The study has limitations. Documentary research cannot fully observe informal bureaucratic practices, confidential diplomatic negotiations or unpublished budget and personnel constraints. The World Bank indicators rely on perceptions and are not designed to isolate the causal effect of administration on foreign policy. Official reform reports may emphasise achievements, while critical assessments may focus on failures. The study therefore makes analytical rather than experimental causal claims. Its findings identify plausible institutional mechanisms supported by documentary evidence, while recognising that interviews, budget analysis and process-tracing of specific diplomatic cases could provide further depth in future research.

5. Nigeria's Administrative and Geopolitical Context

Nigeria's international position is shaped by the interaction of material resources and institutional performance. Its population, energy sector, market size, regional security role and longstanding participation in African diplomacy provide important assets. Nigeria has also contributed to regional peace and security initiatives and has been central to ECOWAS diplomacy. These assets create opportunities for leadership, but they also generate administrative demands. A large diplomatic network requires staffing, training, communications, consular support and financial management. Regional leadership requires the ability to prepare policy proposals, negotiate with partners, coordinate domestic implementation and maintain continuity across political administrations.

Nigeria's foreign policy objectives are formally anchored in constitutional principles. Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution identifies the promotion and protection of the national interest, African integration, international cooperation, respect for international law and peaceful settlement of disputes among the country's foreign policy objectives. These principles require coordination between diplomacy and domestic institutions. For example, the protection of Nigerians abroad depends on consular administration, migration agencies and cooperation with host governments. Economic diplomacy requires links between foreign missions, investment agencies, trade institutions and domestic regulators. Regional security cooperation depends on the coordination of diplomatic, military, intelligence and border-management institutions.

The 4D framework attempts to connect international engagement to domestic priorities. Demography can be treated as diplomatic capital through skills, markets and people-to-people relations. Development connects foreign policy to investment, trade, technology and financing.

Diaspora policy involves consular services, remittances, talent networks and citizen protection. Democracy links Nigeria's international position to constitutional governance, regional norms and political legitimacy. These themes provide a broad strategic frame, but their administrative value depends on whether each pillar is translated into agency responsibilities, performance indicators and funded programmes. Without an implementation architecture, a doctrine may be coherent at the level of public communication while remaining uneven at the level of execution.
The public service reform agenda provides a domestic institutional context for this challenge. The National Strategy for Public Service Reform identifies governance and institutional environment, socioeconomic conditions, public financial management and civil service administration as connected reform pillars (BPSR, 2025). This is important because foreign policy implementation rarely falls within one institution alone. A regional trade commitment may require coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, trade and finance ministries, customs, standards agencies, immigration, transport regulators and state-level actors. A diplomatic statement about attracting investment will have limited effect if investors encounter unpredictable regulations, slow approvals or weak contract enforcement after arriving in Nigeria.
The World Bank's 2024 government-effectiveness scores illustrate the broader administrative environment. Nigeria scored 31.8 on the 0–100 scale, compared with Ghana at 52.5, Benin at 47.7, South Africa at 46.9, Senegal at 55.9 and Rwanda at 58.1 (World Bank, 2026). These scores should not be read as a ranking of diplomatic performance. They capture perceptions of public services, civil service quality, policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of government commitments. The comparison suggests that Nigeria's international ambitions operate within a governance context in which the effectiveness of public institutions remains an important challenge.
The chart below presents this comparison as context rather than as proof of causation. The purpose is to show that Nigeria's administrative constraints are not merely rhetorical concerns and to provide a transparent indicator against which the documentary analysis can be interpreted. Cross-country scores cannot account for differences in population, federal structure, security pressures or economic scale. They nevertheless reinforce the importance of distinguishing diplomatic potential from administrative performance.
Nigeria's regional environment has become more complex. The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS, effective 29 January 2025, challenged the regional organisation's cohesion and required a practical response on movement, trade, institutional relations and future cooperation (ECOWAS, 2025a, 2025b). The development exposed the limits of treating regional integration as a matter of summit diplomacy alone. Regional institutions need administrative systems that preserve essential arrangements even when political relations deteriorate. Nigeria's influence in ECOWAS depends not only on its political weight but also on its ability to support coherent, technically credible and politically adaptable regional policy.
The administrative context is therefore central to the paper's argument. Nigeria possesses meaningful international assets and a formal foreign policy framework, but the conversion of these assets into durable influence depends on institutional performance. Diplomatic authority must be supported by professional staff, interagency coordination, fiscal predictability, implementation systems and public accountability.

6. Administrative Capacity and Nigeria's Foreign Policy Performance

6.1 Policy Coordination Across Government

The first major mechanism linking administration to international influence is policy

coordination. Contemporary foreign policy issues rarely fall neatly within the mandate of a single ministry. Economic diplomacy combines external negotiation with domestic regulation, investment promotion, trade facilitation and fiscal policy. Security diplomacy depends on coordination among foreign affairs, defence, intelligence, immigration and border agencies. Diaspora policy involves consular services, labour, education, investment and emergency response. When agencies do not share information or agree on responsibilities, Nigeria may present inconsistent positions, delay implementation or fail to follow through on agreements. The 4D foreign policy framework creates an opportunity to improve coordination because its pillars cut across several sectors. Development requires a link between diplomatic missions and institutions responsible for trade, infrastructure, finance, energy and industrial policy. Demography requires cooperation on skills, education, labour mobility and migration. Diaspora engagement requires accurate data, effective consular services and coordination with relevant domestic agencies. Democracy requires coherence between external commitments and domestic institutions. These connections should be institutionalised through a standing foreign policy coordination mechanism with clear responsibilities, a central record of commitments and a process for resolving interagency disagreements.

The evidence reviewed indicates that coordination is a recurring institutional requirement, while publicly available documents provide less consistent evidence of a single, comprehensive mechanism linking every international commitment to domestic implementation. This should not be interpreted as proof that no coordination occurs. It means that the documentary record more clearly establishes policy priorities and reform initiatives than it demonstrates a fully integrated, outcome-tracked foreign policy delivery system. For an international publication, this distinction is important: the analysis should not confuse the absence of publicly accessible evidence with the absence of institutional activity.

6.2 Professional Expertise and Institutional Memory

The second mechanism is the quality and continuity of professional expertise. Diplomacy requires knowledge of international law, regional institutions, negotiation, economics, security, technology, climate policy and the domestic political conditions of partner states. These areas are increasingly specialised. A government that wants to negotiate effectively on digital governance, energy transition or complex trade arrangements needs officials who understand the technical detail and can coordinate with domestic experts.

Professional expertise is not limited to individual qualifications. It depends on institutional memory, mentoring, access to reliable research, language skills, predictable career development and the ability to retain trained personnel. Diplomatic continuity helps governments preserve knowledge of earlier agreements and relationships. Where staff rotation is too rapid or postings do not adequately match professional expertise to policy needs, institutional learning can be weakened. Political leadership must remain responsible for policy direction, but a professional diplomatic service is necessary to ensure that leadership decisions are informed by evidence and implemented consistently.

The civil service reform agenda's emphasis on capability building and talent management is therefore relevant to international relations. The 2021–2025 reform cycle included capability building, performance management, human-resource systems, innovation, digitalisation and staff welfare. The 2026 end-term review reported progress while also calling for stronger institutionalisation, monitoring, staff motivation and deeper digital transformation (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2026a). These priorities matter for foreign

policy because undertrained or overstretched officials may struggle to coordinate complex negotiations, maintain accurate records or evaluate whether agreements have produced benefits.

6.3 Implementation and Resource Mobilisation

The third mechanism is implementation capacity. International influence is weakened when a state negotiates commitments but cannot execute them. Implementation depends on budgets, personnel, procurement, legal harmonisation, information systems and clear responsibility for delivery. Diplomatic missions may identify trade or investment opportunities, but domestic institutions must provide reliable procedures and a predictable regulatory environment. Nigeria may support regional integration, but customs agencies and border institutions must apply agreed protocols. It may participate in global development initiatives, but domestic agencies must collect data, prepare reports and implement funded projects.

Resource constraints can affect both the scale and predictability of diplomatic activity. International commitments often require financial contributions, technical meetings, expert participation and follow-up visits. Where funding is uncertain or disbursement is delayed, officials may be unable to implement approved plans on schedule. Public financial management is therefore not a narrow domestic issue. It shapes whether the state can maintain a sustained international presence and deliver on obligations. The National Strategy for Public Service Reform's inclusion of public financial management as a core pillar is consistent with this requirement (BPSR, 2025).

The distinction between announced policy and implementation is especially important for economic diplomacy. A foreign investment agreement does not itself create jobs, technology transfer or productive capacity. The expected benefits depend on regulatory clarity, infrastructure, contract enforcement and coordination between federal and subnational institutions. The same principle applies to development partnerships. External partners may provide financing or technical assistance, but results depend on the competence of implementing agencies and the quality of domestic oversight. A credible foreign policy therefore requires an administrative chain that extends beyond negotiation to delivery.

6.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

The fourth mechanism is the capacity to monitor results and hold institutions accountable. Governments need to know which international commitments have been made, which agencies are responsible, what resources have been allocated, what milestones have been achieved and what obstacles remain. Without this information, officials cannot prioritise scarce resources, explain delays or adjust strategies. Monitoring also protects institutional memory when political leadership changes.

The 2026 launch of a reform tracker, knowledge repository and NSPSR dashboard indicates official recognition that reform implementation requires accessible information and systematic monitoring (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2026b). These tools could support foreign policy if they were connected to a broader commitment-management system. Such a system would record international agreements, ECOWAS and African Union decisions, reporting obligations, diplomatic initiatives and implementation deadlines. It would identify lead and supporting agencies, specify performance indicators and provide a mechanism for escalating delays. Accountability must also extend beyond internal reporting. Legislative oversight, public reporting and independent evaluation can strengthen confidence that international commitments serve national interests. Parliamentary committees can scrutinise treaty implementation,

international contributions and the results of diplomatic initiatives. Public reporting can help citizens understand the value and cost of foreign policy. Accountability should not expose confidential negotiating positions or compromise national security; rather, it should make implementation performance visible where disclosure is appropriate.

6.5 Administrative Credibility as Diplomatic Capital

The fifth mechanism is credibility. In international relations, a state's reputation depends partly on whether partners believe its commitments will be honoured. Credibility is shaped by political consistency, but it also rests on administrative performance. A government that reliably implements agreements, provides accurate information, meets reporting deadlines and maintains predictable procedures becomes a more dependable partner. Conversely, repeated delays, contradictory agency positions and failure to implement commitments can reduce the influence gained through formal diplomatic status.

Credibility matters especially for a country that seeks regional leadership. Nigeria's size and history give it a prominent position, but leadership requires more than the ability to convene meetings or issue statements. Other states must see value in cooperation and believe that Nigeria can help deliver collective outcomes. The ECOWAS crisis involving the withdrawal of three Sahelian states illustrates the scale of this challenge. The withdrawal resulted from multiple political and security factors and cannot be reduced to administrative failure by Nigeria. Nevertheless, managing the consequences required technical planning, legal interpretation, trade arrangements, border procedures and sustained diplomatic engagement. Such tasks demonstrate how regional leadership is exercised through institutional competence as well as political influence. Administrative credibility also matters in global governance. Negotiations on climate, trade, migration, development finance and international security often involve complex reporting and implementation requirements. States that can produce reliable data and demonstrate progress are better positioned to shape technical standards and persuade partners. Nigeria's international influence would therefore benefit from treating public administration reform as part of foreign policy strategy rather than as a separate domestic agenda.

7. Nigeria, ECOWAS and Global Governance

7.1 ECOWAS and the Challenge of Regional Adaptation

ECOWAS has been a central arena for Nigeria's regional influence. The organisation's work spans economic integration, free movement, trade liberalisation, peace and security, democratic governance and regional development. Nigeria's scale and diplomatic engagement have made it an important participant in these processes. Yet regional leadership requires administrative endurance: policy positions must be prepared, commitments funded, decisions implemented and institutional responses adjusted when political circumstances change.

The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS became effective on 29 January 2025. ECOWAS announced transitional arrangements to avoid immediate disruption to citizens and businesses, including continued recognition of relevant travel documents, trade treatment and visa-free movement pending further decisions (ECOWAS, 2025a). It also convened discussions on separation modalities, institutional implications and future relations with the three states (ECOWAS, 2025b). These actions demonstrate the administrative complexity of regional integration. Political disagreements do not automatically terminate the everyday interdependence created by trade, migration, transport and public services.

For Nigeria, the lesson is not that diplomacy failed in a simple or singular sense. The Sahelian governments' decisions reflected their own domestic politics, security perceptions and alternative regional alignments. The lesson is that regional influence depends on the capacity to adapt to disagreement while preserving practical cooperation. This requires scenario planning, technical expertise, communication between national and regional officials, and a clear assessment of how decisions affect border communities, businesses and security operations.

7.2 The African Union and Continental Coordination

Nigeria's role in the African Union similarly depends on administrative capacity. Continental initiatives often require national agencies to translate decisions into law, budgets, implementation plans and reports. A government may endorse common African positions on peace and security, economic integration or development financing, but the value of those positions depends on follow-through. Nigeria's federal structure makes coordination especially important because international commitments may intersect with responsibilities held by federal ministries, state governments and regulatory agencies.

The ability to develop technically sound positions also affects influence within continental institutions. Effective participation requires officials to understand draft instruments, assess implications for domestic policy, consult affected sectors and negotiate workable compromises. A large delegation is not necessarily an effective delegation if its members lack a shared position or if technical preparation is weak. Conversely, a well-prepared team with clear instructions and institutional backing can influence negotiations beyond what its material resources alone might suggest.

7.3 AfCFTA and the Administrative Foundations of Economic Diplomacy

The African Continental Free Trade Area illustrates the direct connection between public administration and international economic influence. Trade liberalisation requires more than signing a continental agreement. It requires customs modernisation, standards coordination, transparent rules of origin, reliable border processes, transport links, dispute-resolution mechanisms and communication with businesses. The UNECA synthesis of national AfCFTA implementation strategies highlights the importance of national planning and coordination across sectors (UNECA, 2024). Nigeria's ability to benefit from continental trade and shape its implementation depends on the quality of these domestic systems.

A gap between international commitments and domestic procedures can weaken credibility. If traders face inconsistent documentation requirements or unpredictable administrative decisions, the practical benefits of integration may be reduced. This can affect not only trade volumes but also the perception of Nigeria as a reliable partner in regional economic governance. Public administration reform should therefore include explicit indicators related to implementation of regional trade commitments, such as processing times, publication of procedures, resolution of cross-agency disputes and completion of agreed reporting obligations.

7.4 Global Governance Beyond Regional Institutions

Nigeria's participation in global governance extends beyond ECOWAS and the African Union. It includes the United Nations system, international financial institutions, climate negotiations, migration frameworks, public health cooperation and international development partnerships. These areas require technical and administrative capability. Climate diplomacy, for example, requires emissions data, sectoral planning, coordination with energy and environment

institutions, and the capacity to monitor commitments. Migration diplomacy requires consular services, labour-market information, legal expertise and cooperation with foreign governments. Development finance requires project preparation, procurement competence, financial oversight and reporting. The administrative requirements of global governance are cumulative. Each new agreement or partnership can increase the workload of public institutions. If international commitments are adopted without assessing implementation capacity, agencies may become overextended and reporting may become fragmented. A strategic government should therefore evaluate the administrative implications of international agreements before committing to detailed obligations. This does not mean avoiding ambitious agreements; it means matching commitments with realistic plans, resources and institutional responsibilities.

7.5 Strategic Autonomy and Institutional Dependence

Administrative capacity also shapes strategic autonomy. A state with limited technical expertise may depend heavily on external consultants or partners to interpret agreements, prepare projects and manage implementation. External assistance can be beneficial, but excessive dependence may reduce the government's ability to define priorities independently or negotiate on equal terms. Building domestic expertise in trade law, international finance, security analysis, technology governance and diplomacy can therefore strengthen Nigeria's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy.

Strategic autonomy does not mean isolation or rejection of cooperation. It means having the institutional capacity to evaluate options, negotiate terms, diversify partnerships and implement decisions according to national priorities. Nigeria's scale creates opportunities for such autonomy, but the opportunities require sustained investment in professional institutions. A credible foreign policy must combine ambition with the technical ability to understand consequences and deliver agreed outcomes.

8. Documentary Assessment of Administrative Capacity

The documentary analysis identifies a mixed picture. Nigeria has formal foreign policy objectives, a stated 4D framework, established diplomatic institutions and ongoing public service reform initiatives. The reform agenda explicitly addresses civil service capability, performance management, digitalisation, public finance and institutional coordination. These are important enabling conditions. However, the documentary record is stronger on the existence of strategies and announced reform measures than on independently verified, cross-government evidence showing that administrative improvements have consistently translated into measurable international policy outcomes.

To make this distinction transparent, Table 1 presents the analytical dimensions used in the study and the types of evidence associated with each. Table 2 provides the author's qualitative coding of the documentary record. The scores are not survey results, budget measures or official government ratings. They summarise the extent to which the reviewed documents demonstrate institutionalised mechanisms rather than isolated policy activity.

Table 1. Analytical framework linking administrative capacity to international influence

Dimension	Administrative requirement	International policy implication	Evidence considered

Policy coordination	Clear mandates, shared information and joint planning	Consistent national positions and coherent implementation	Foreign policy framework, cross-sector reform priorities, ECOWAS case
Professional expertise	Training, specialisation, institutional memory and retention	Stronger negotiation, analysis and continuity	Civil service reform priorities and foreign policy documentation
Implementation and resources	Predictable budgets, staffing, legal follow-through and operational systems	Delivery of agreements and credible economic diplomacy	Public finance reform, AfCFTA implementation literature and official plans
Monitoring and accountability	Commitment registers, performance indicators, reporting and oversight	Greater transparency and partner confidence	Reform dashboards, WGI context and official implementation reviews
Institutional credibility	Consistency between statements, decisions and delivery	Stronger bargaining position and regional leadership	Nigeria's formal objectives, ECOWAS developments and governance evidence
Source: Author's analytical framework based on the documentary corpus.			

Source: Author's analytical framework based on the documentary corpus.

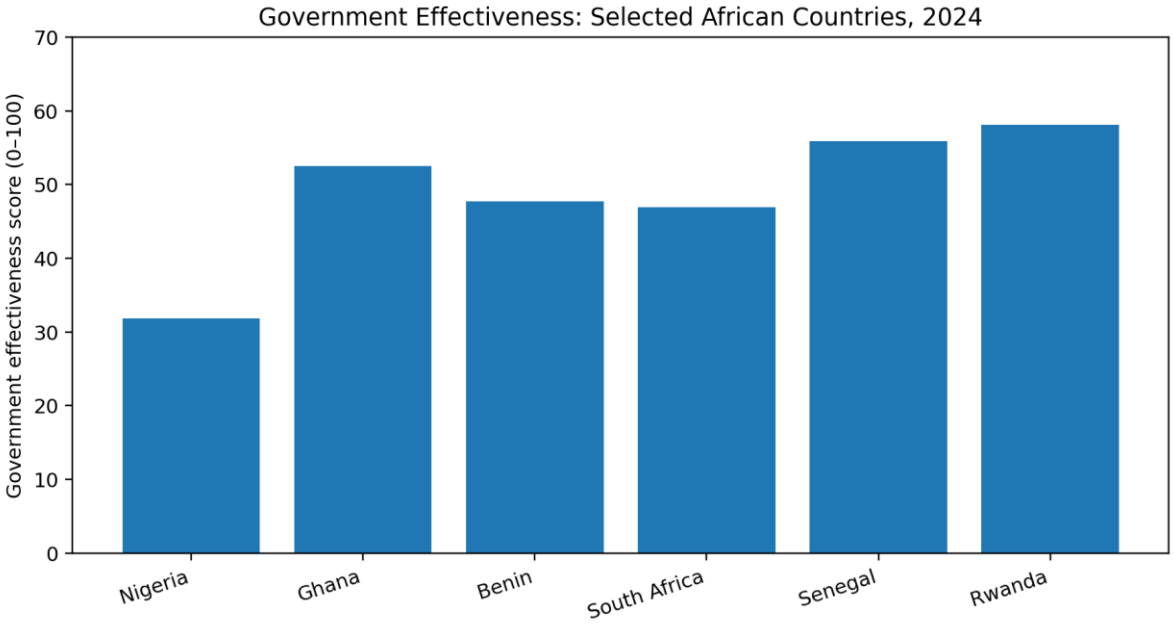
Table 2. Qualitative coding of administrative capacity mechanisms in Nigeria, 2015–2026

Dimension	Score (0–3)	Interpretation
Policy coordination	2	Substantial policy activity, but public evidence of an integrated implementation chain remains uneven
Professional expertise and institutional memory	2	Formal reform priorities recognise capability needs, while outcome evidence is incomplete
Implementation and resource mobilisation	1	Implementation constraints recur across the documentary record; direct causal attribution remains limited

Monitoring and accountability	1	Reform monitoring tools are emerging, but their integration with foreign-policy commitments is not clearly demonstrated
International credibility and influence	2	Nigeria retains major diplomatic assets, but role performance varies by issue and regional context
Source: Author's qualitative coding of official and secondary documents reviewed for this study. Note: scores are interpretive indicators, not measurements of actual diplomatic influence or civil service performance.		
The coding suggests that policy coordination and professional expertise receive relatively substantial attention in formal reform agendas, but the evidence of fully institutionalised implementation remains less clear. Implementation, monitoring and accountability appear to be the most consequential gaps in the public documentary record. The scores should not be interpreted as a finding that Nigeria's entire public service performs at a particular level. They indicate where the reviewed evidence most clearly identifies institutional needs and where further empirical research would be valuable.		

Source: Author's qualitative coding of official and secondary documents reviewed for this study. Note: scores are interpretive indicators, not measurements of actual diplomatic influence or civil service performance.

Figure 1. Government effectiveness in selected African countries, 2024

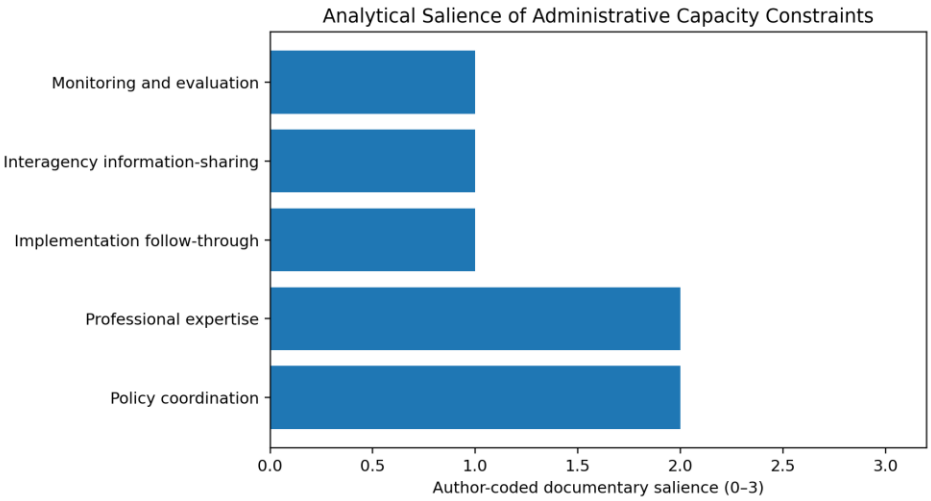


Source: World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2026 update. Scores are on a 0–100 scale.

The indicator reflects perceptions of public service quality, civil service quality, policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of government commitments. It is contextual evidence and is not a direct measure of foreign policy success.

The comparison shows Nigeria at 31.8, below the selected comparators in the chart. This finding supports the need to treat administrative capacity as a serious policy variable. It does not establish that Nigeria's foreign policy influence is proportionately lower, because international influence is multidimensional and depends on power, geography, alliances, issue-specific expertise and other factors. The indicator is most useful as a broad governance context rather than a stand-alone explanation.

Figure 2. Analytical salience of administrative capacity constraints



Source: Author's qualitative coding of the documentary corpus. The 0–3 scale measures the

prominence of documented concerns in the reviewed material, not the statistical frequency of failures or an official performance score.

Figure 2 translates the coding in Table 2 into a visual summary. Implementation follow-through, interagency information-sharing, and monitoring and evaluation received lower scores than the formal attention given to coordination and professional capability. The pattern suggests a potential difference between recognising reform needs and embedding systems that demonstrate results. The conclusion is cautious because the corpus is documentary and does not include confidential administrative records or interviews with officials.

Table 3. Major developments and their administrative implications, 2015–2026

Period	Development	Administrative significance
2015–2019	Continued emphasis on regional security and Nigeria's African leadership role	Required coordination between diplomacy, defence, intelligence and regional institutions
2019–2023	Domestic insecurity, economic pressure and changing regional relationships	Increased demands on fiscal prioritisation, policy continuity and credible external engagement
2021–2025	Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan	Formal focus on capability building, performance management, innovation and digitalisation
2023 onward	Introduction of the 4D foreign policy framework	Required translation of broad pillars into interagency responsibilities and measurable outputs
January 2025	Withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS becomes effective	Required legal, trade, mobility, security and diplomatic adaptation
June–August 2026	Civil service reform review and public-sector digital transformation initiatives	Created opportunities for stronger monitoring, knowledge management and coordination
Source: Author's synthesis of official policy and institutional documents.		

Table 3 shows that the period was marked by both expanding demands and reform initiatives. The central question is whether the initiatives have created a stable administrative system capable of carrying policy commitments across ministries and political administrations. Official announcements demonstrate institutional intent, but an assessment of outcomes requires implementation data, budget execution evidence, staff-capacity measures and case-specific tracing of international commitments.		

Source: Author's synthesis of official policy and institutional documents.

9. Discussion of Findings

The first finding is that administrative capacity shapes Nigeria's international influence by affecting the conversion of political priorities into implemented outcomes. Nigeria's population, regional position and diplomatic history provide significant assets, but the existence of these assets does not guarantee effective policy delivery. State capacity theory explains this distinction: influence depends partly on whether institutions can mobilise resources, coordinate action and sustain implementation. The findings therefore support a qualified proposition that administrative capacity is a necessary enabling condition for international influence, though not a sufficient condition for success.

The second finding is that policy coordination is a central challenge because contemporary foreign policy cuts across many domestic institutions. The 4D framework links foreign engagement to demographic resources, development, diaspora relations and democracy. Each pillar requires cooperation beyond the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This makes coordination an operational necessity rather than an administrative preference. The same is true of AfCFTA implementation, regional security cooperation and international development partnerships. When responsibilities are fragmented, a government may struggle to maintain a consistent position or fulfil the practical obligations that follow diplomatic agreements.

The third finding concerns professional expertise and continuity. Civil service reform documents identify capability building, talent management, performance management and digitalisation as priorities. These are relevant to foreign policy because diplomatic negotiation is increasingly technical. International influence depends on the ability to understand the implications of agreements, provide evidence-based advice and preserve knowledge across administrations. The documentary record demonstrates recognition of these requirements, but it does not establish that all relevant agencies possess adequate staffing, specialist expertise or institutional memory. This is an important evidence gap for future research.

The fourth finding is that implementation and resource mobilisation form the bridge between foreign policy and public administration. The benefits of international agreements are realised through domestic action. Trade commitments require functional customs and standards systems; security cooperation requires information-sharing and operational coordination; investment diplomacy requires credible domestic institutions; and global governance commitments require data, reporting and implementation. Administrative capacity should therefore be assessed by whether international commitments are delivered, not simply by the number of agreements signed or meetings attended.

The fifth finding is that monitoring and accountability remain important areas for institutional development. The 2026 reform tracker and NSPSR dashboard demonstrate official interest in making reform performance more visible. These tools could become strategically significant if connected to the implementation of international commitments. A government-wide register of treaties, regional decisions, financial contributions and reporting obligations would help officials identify delays and assign responsibility. The absence of clear public evidence of such integration does not prove that no internal systems exist; it does, however, point to an opportunity to make the connection between public service reform and foreign policy performance more explicit.

The sixth finding is that Nigeria's regional leadership operates in a changing political environment where administrative competence can preserve cooperation even when political consensus weakens. The ECOWAS withdrawal crisis demonstrates that regional integration involves complex legal, economic, mobility and security arrangements. ECOWAS's transitional measures were intended to limit disruption for citizens and businesses. For Nigeria, the episode underlines the need for scenario planning and technical preparedness alongside high-level diplomacy. It also shows why administrative performance should not be judged solely by whether a government can prevent every political disagreement. More useful criteria include whether it can protect citizens, manage consequences, preserve communication and sustain feasible forms of cooperation.

The seventh finding is that international credibility is partly an administrative product. Credibility is not generated only by speeches or the status of national leaders. It also emerges from whether institutions implement agreed measures, communicate reliably and maintain continuity. In global governance, technical preparation and delivery can strengthen bargaining power because partners value states that can make commitments and carry them out. Nigeria's international influence would therefore benefit from a systematic relationship between diplomatic strategy, civil service performance and public financial management.

The findings also qualify any simple argument that domestic administrative weakness automatically produces international decline. Nigeria continues to possess significant diplomatic assets, and its influence varies by issue. It may exercise considerable influence in some regional or multilateral settings while facing limitations in others. External constraints, the interests of other states, leadership choices and the institutional design of international organisations all affect outcomes. Administrative capacity should thus be understood as a mechanism that shapes the consistency and effectiveness of influence rather than as a single explanation for every foreign policy result.

The overall implication is that Nigeria should treat public administration as part of its strategic infrastructure. Roads, ports, communications systems and security capabilities are commonly recognised as national assets; the institutions that coordinate policy, manage international commitments and deliver public decisions deserve similar recognition. Administrative reform

can improve domestic service delivery and also strengthen the state's capacity to negotiate, cooperate and lead internationally.

10. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between administrative capacity and Nigeria's international influence between 2015 and October 2026. It asked how administrative capacity shaped foreign policy formulation and implementation, which institutional mechanisms mattered most, how these mechanisms affected Nigeria's regional and global governance roles, and which reforms could improve performance. The study was anchored in state capacity theory and complemented by foreign policy analysis. It used qualitative documentary analysis of official foreign policy materials, public service reform documents, regional institutional records, governance indicators and recent scholarship.

The study concludes that administrative capacity is a strategic foundation of foreign policy rather than a secondary technical concern. Nigeria's population, regional position, diplomatic experience and multilateral participation provide substantial opportunities for influence. However, those assets must be supported by institutions capable of coordinating policy, retaining expertise, mobilising resources, implementing agreements and demonstrating results. The 4D foreign policy framework offers a broad connection between external engagement and domestic priorities, while the civil service reform agenda recognises the importance of capability, performance management and digitalisation. The key challenge is to convert these priorities into integrated, measurable and sustained implementation.

The evidence also shows that regional leadership requires adaptability. The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS created demands extending beyond political negotiation to trade, mobility, legal arrangements, security and institutional relations. Nigeria's response to such developments depends partly on the quality of its diplomatic coordination and administrative preparedness. Similar requirements apply to AfCFTA, African Union initiatives and global governance commitments. A state's ability to shape international rules is strengthened when it can implement the decisions it supports.

The analysis does not claim that administrative weakness alone explains every limitation in Nigeria's international influence. Foreign policy outcomes are also shaped by geopolitical competition, domestic political choices, external shocks and the preferences of other states. Rather, the findings demonstrate that administrative capacity affects the consistency, credibility and practical reach of Nigeria's international engagement. State capacity theory is useful because it links institutional performance to the state's ability to pursue collective goals; foreign policy analysis adds an explanation of how bureaucratic processes and organisational coordination influence the translation of political preferences into external action.

A central policy implication follows. Nigeria should integrate foreign policy priorities with civil service reform, public financial management, performance measurement and interagency coordination. The next stage of administrative reform should explicitly include the implementation of international commitments as an outcome area. Such a change would help ensure that Nigeria's foreign policy is evaluated not only by its ambitions but also by the outcomes it delivers for citizens, regional partners and the country's position in global governance.

11. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Nigeria should establish a permanent interagency foreign policy implementation mechanism chaired at a sufficiently senior level to resolve coordination problems. The mechanism should include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ministries and agencies responsible for finance, trade, defence, interior, migration, environment, digital policy and other relevant sectors. Its central task should be to translate presidential priorities and international commitments into clear work plans, identify lead and supporting institutions, record deadlines and resolve implementation bottlenecks. The mechanism should preserve the constitutional authority of political leaders while strengthening professional coordination across government.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should maintain a consolidated register of Nigeria's international commitments. The register should include treaties, ECOWAS and African Union decisions, regional trade obligations, international reporting requirements, financial contributions and major bilateral agreements. Each commitment should be linked to a lead agency, implementation milestone, budget requirement and reporting schedule. Sensitive information could remain protected, but public summaries should be released where appropriate. Connecting this register to the reform tracker and NSPSR dashboard would make it easier to identify delays and evaluate whether public service reforms are improving international delivery.

Diplomatic professional development should be strengthened around the technical requirements of contemporary global governance. Training should cover international law, trade negotiations, public finance, climate diplomacy, data analysis, digital governance, strategic communication, migration, regional security and project evaluation. Career development should reward relevant expertise and institutional learning while ensuring that political direction and professional advice remain properly distinguished. Diplomatic missions should be able to draw on specialist knowledge from domestic ministries, universities and research institutions through structured channels rather than relying on ad hoc contacts.

Public financial management should be linked more directly to foreign policy planning. Before Nigeria enters major international commitments, responsible agencies should assess the financial, staffing and reporting implications. Approved commitments should be supported by predictable funding and realistic timelines. Where implementation depends on several ministries, joint budgeting or clearly allocated financial responsibilities should be used to reduce gaps. This would improve credibility by making it less likely that international promises exceed the government's practical ability to deliver.

Nigeria should strengthen evaluation of its regional leadership and global governance participation. Evaluation should focus on outcomes rather than activity counts alone. Relevant indicators could include the proportion of international commitments implemented on schedule, the completion of treaty-related reporting, the time required to resolve interagency disputes, the execution rate of approved international programmes, consular case-resolution times and the implementation of regional trade procedures. Indicators should be tailored to the relevant policy area and accompanied by explanations of external constraints so that officials are not penalised for outcomes beyond their control.

Regional diplomacy should incorporate stronger scenario planning and technical preparedness. The ECOWAS withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger demonstrates the need to plan for institutional disruption while preserving practical cooperation in areas such as trade, mobility, health and security. Nigeria should support ECOWAS and African Union efforts to maintain technical channels with neighbouring states, strengthen early-warning analysis and assess how political disputes affect border communities and regional markets. Effective leadership requires

the ability to combine principled diplomacy with workable arrangements that protect citizens and preserve long-term options for cooperation.

Finally, public service reform should be evaluated as part of national strategic capability. The successor to the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025 should identify foreign policy implementation as an explicit cross-government objective. The strategy should connect staff capability, digitalisation, institutional memory, performance management and public financial management to the delivery of international commitments. This would not turn the civil service into a diplomatic institution; it would recognise that diplomacy depends on the performance of the wider state. A more professional and accountable administration would strengthen Nigeria's capacity to act consistently, negotiate effectively and convert international engagement into tangible national and regional benefits.

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