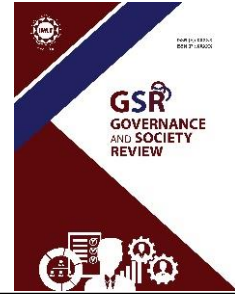


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Title: A Critical Assessment of Nigeria's Foreign Policy and National Interest under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007–2015)

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A Critical Assessment of Nigeria's Foreign Policy and National Interest under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan Administrations (2007–2015)

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Abstract

This study evaluates the foreign policy approaches of Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan between 2007 and 2015, with a focus on their administrations' advancement of Nigeria's national interest. It explores the shift from regime-centered diplomacy to citizen- and economy-driven foreign engagement, reflecting broader efforts to rebrand Nigeria's global image. Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy emphasized the protection of Nigerians abroad, while Jonathan prioritized economic diplomacy aimed at attracting foreign investment and repositioning Nigeria as a key player in global markets. Despite these ambitions, both administrations faced implementation challenges, including weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and internal insecurity. The study applies a critical lens to assess the extent to which these foreign policy strategies translated into tangible gains for Nigeria's national interest. Recommendations include aligning foreign policy with domestic reforms and strengthening institutional capacity to sustain diplomatic initiatives.

Keywords: foreign policy, Jonathan, national interest, Nigeria, Yar'adua

Introduction

To clearly connect how external and internal issues shape the need to rethink Nigeria's national interests, it is essential to understand the dynamic interaction between Nigeria's domestic context and its global aspirations. Nigeria's foreign policy, since independence, has oscillated between pan-Africanist idealism and pragmatic national interest, shaped largely by its domestic political structure and leadership orientation. The return to democratic governance in 1999 marked a significant shift in foreign policy direction, moving from militarized realism to diplomacy that emphasized democratic values, multilateralism, and regional leadership (Akinboye,

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[2013](#)). However, this shift did not fully resolve the fundamental misalignment between Nigeria's internal weaknesses and its external ambitions.

The administrations of Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007–2010) and Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015) exemplify this tension. Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy aimed at reshaping Nigeria's international image by prioritizing the protection of Nigerians abroad and asserting state responsibility for citizen welfare on the global stage (Adebajo, [2010](#)). Jonathan's economic diplomacy, on the other hand, sought to reposition Nigeria as a key investment destination while leveraging foreign policy to boost economic growth (Saleh, [2022](#)).

These approaches reflected a more strategic, citizen-centered and economically-motivated foreign policy vision (Ogunnubi & Isike, [2015](#); Saliu et al., [2014](#)).

Nonetheless, both strategies were undermined by internal crises—endemic corruption, widespread insecurity, institutional inefficiencies, and economic mismanagement—which restricted Nigeria's capacity to project its influence effectively and achieve foreign policy goals (Adamaagashi et al., [2014](#)). Externally, Nigeria faced increasing regional competition, shifting global power dynamics, and transnational threats, such as terrorism and migration that demanded a more agile and coherent foreign policy posture.

These realities highlight the need to rethink Nigeria's national interests in a way that meaningfully connects domestic governance with international ambitions. A foreign policy disconnected from internal development priorities risks being ineffective and unsustainable. Therefore, Nigeria's national interest must be redefined to integrate internal political stability, economic reform, and institutional capacity as prerequisites for credible and effective international engagement.

This study critically assesses the foreign policy strategies of both Yar'Adua's and Jonathan's administrations with a focus on their articulation and pursuit of Nigeria's national interest. It adopts Social Constructivist Theory to explore how shared norms, identity, and global perceptions shaped foreign policy decisions during this period. The study has the following objectives:

- To examine the key foreign policy strategies under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations.
- To assess the extent to which these policies aligned with Nigeria's national interests.
- To evaluate the domestic and international impacts of citizenship and economic diplomacy.
- To analyze the role of identity and perception in shaping foreign policy using the Social Constructivist framework.
- To offer policy recommendations to align Nigeria's foreign policy with sustainable national development and international credibility.

Significance and Novelty of the Study

This paper offers a timely and critical reassessment of Nigeria's foreign policy direction and pursuit of national interest during the administrations of Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2007–2015). The significance of this era lies in its transitional character—marking a shift from Obasanjo's activist diplomacy to a more nuanced, regionally-focused, and economically pragmatic foreign policy stance. It was during this period that Nigeria confronted emerging global and regional challenges including terrorism, oil price volatility, and shifts in global power dynamics, while simultaneously grappling with internal governance crises.

The study is novel in that it interrogates how both administrations attempted to balance normative commitments to ECOWAS and African solidarity with realist national interests in an increasingly competitive international system (Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzodike, [2016](#)). In particular, the paper critically evaluates the Seven-Point Agenda and the Transformation Agenda as foreign policy frameworks—arguing that while both were domestically inclined, they significantly shaped Nigeria's external engagements, especially in West Africa, the AU, and with emerging powers like China and Brazil (Saliu & Aremu, [2013](#)).

Furthermore, the study fills a scholarly gap by analyzing the understudied tenure of President Yar'Adua, whose foreign policy was curtailed by ill health and limited global travel, yet influenced key diplomatic choices—such as Nigeria's withdrawal from the Bakassi Peninsula in 2008 and the Niger Delta amnesty policy with regional implications (Under

Jonathan, however, Nigeria sought a more assertive global image, participating in UN peacekeeping missions and securing a seat on the UN Security Council (2014–2015), despite criticisms of incoherence and elite-driven diplomacy (Akinola, [2024](#)).

During this period, Nigeria was confronted with complex global and regional challenges including the rise of terrorism, fluctuations in global oil markets, and a shifting geopolitical landscape. Domestically, both administrations grappled with governance constraints, national insecurity, and development pressures that inevitably influenced foreign policy priorities and strategic choices.

The novelty of this study lies in its interrogation of how both leaders navigated the competing imperatives of regional solidarity, especially with ECOWAS and the African Union, alongside Nigeria's strategic national interests. The analysis focuses particularly on the foreign policy impact of the Seven-Point Agenda and the Transformation Agenda—frameworks that, while largely domestic in scope, significantly shaped Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral engagements, including with emerging powers such as China, India, and Brazil.

This paper also fills a notable gap in scholarly discourse by critically examining the often-overlooked foreign policy contributions of President Yar'Adua. Despite limitations due to ill health, his administration took key diplomatic steps such as the peaceful resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula dispute and the launch of the Niger Delta amnesty program, both of which carried significant regional implications.

Under Jonathan, Nigeria assumed a more outward-facing and assertive international profile—engaging in peacekeeping operations, seeking multilateral influence, and pursuing global partnerships. However, the paper also raises important questions about coherence, elite-driven diplomacy, and the broader strategic vision behind these engagements.

By situating the analysis within the tension between idealism and pragmatism, this study contributes fresh insights to the understanding of Nigeria's role in regional leadership and international diplomacy. It offers critical reflections on the intersection of domestic politics and foreign policy, while highlighting the importance of leadership style, internal security dynamics, and global shifts in shaping a country's external engagements.

By anchoring the analysis in the tension between idealism and pragmatism, and by situating Nigerian foreign policy within the broader context of post-Cold War African diplomacy, the paper contributes fresh insights to the field of African international relations. It also offers policy-relevant reflections on how leadership styles, internal security dynamics, and global alliances shape Nigeria's foreign policy choices.

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the understanding that foreign policy is a dynamic tool used by states to pursue and protect their national interest in the international system. In the Nigerian context, foreign policy has historically oscillated between pan-African idealism and pragmatic responses to shifting domestic and global realities (Gambari, [1980](#)). The conceptual framework draws on key concepts such as national interest, citizen diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and democratic governance, all of which define the contours of Nigeria's foreign engagements during the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations.

National interest refers to the strategic goals and core values that guide a country's international behavior, including security, economic development, and international prestige (Liu, [2014](#)). Under Yar'Adua, citizen diplomacy emerged as a strategy aimed at defending the dignity of Nigerians abroad and aligning foreign policy with domestic legitimacy. Jonathan's economic diplomacy, on the other hand, prioritized trade, investment, and economic partnerships to drive national growth.

Furthermore, the framework situates these foreign policy strategies within the context of democratic governance, which influences foreign policy legitimacy and coherence. As democratic governance improved after 1999, the need to project a positive international image became more pronounced (Ogunnubi & Isike, [2015](#)). However, institutional weakness, poor human rights records, and corruption undermined the effectiveness of these diplomatic strategies.

Thus, this framework connects leadership priorities, governance quality, and foreign policy outcomes to evaluate how national interest was defined and pursued in the two administrations.

National Interest

National interest is a foundational concept in the study of international

relations and foreign policy. It refers to the strategic goals and values that a state seeks to protect and advance in the international system. These typically include security, economic prosperity, political stability, and global prestige. Scholars like Morgenthau (1949) view national interest through a realist lens, arguing that it is primarily defined in terms of power and survival. For realists, states act rationally to maximize power and ensure their sovereignty in an anarchic international environment.

However, the definition and pursuit of national interest are not fixed; they are shaped by domestic political structures, leadership perceptions, and ideological orientations (Rosenau, 1966). In the context of Nigeria, national interest has been interpreted in ways that reflect evolving priorities—from pan-Africanism and anti-colonial solidarity during the post-independence era to economic diplomacy and citizen protection in recent democratic regimes (Akinboye, 2013).

Under Presidents Yar'Adua and Jonathan, national interest was framed around citizenship diplomacy and economic diplomacy, respectively. Yar'Adua emphasized protecting Nigerians abroad, linking domestic legitimacy to foreign engagement, while Jonathan focused on attracting foreign investment and repositioning Nigeria as a regional economic hub (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2015). These approaches highlight the social constructivist view that national interest is shaped by identity, norms, and leadership beliefs, not just material power (Wendt, 1999).

Despite these efforts, Nigeria's national interest has often been undermined by poor governance, corruption, and weak institutions, which create a disconnect between foreign policy ambitions and domestic capacity to implement them.

National interest remains a foundational yet evolving concept in international relations and foreign policy analysis. It typically encompasses a state's pursuit of security, economic prosperity, political stability, and international recognition. However, the formulation and interpretation of national interest are neither static nor universally defined—they are shaped by internal political dynamics, leadership priorities, and shifting global conditions.

In the Nigerian context, national interest has historically reflected the country's changing strategic focus. While earlier governments emphasized African solidarity and decolonization, recent administrations have redefined

national interest through the lenses of economic development, regional leadership, and diaspora protection. This evolution underscores that national interest is not merely a function of military or economic power—it is deeply influenced by how leaders perceive Nigeria's role in the world and how they link foreign policy to domestic legitimacy.

During the administration of President Yar'Adua, national interest was framed largely through the idea of "citizenship diplomacy," emphasizing the protection and dignity of Nigerians abroad. This approach tied foreign policy credibility to internal governance and public trust. Conversely, under President Jonathan, the focus shifted toward "economic diplomacy," prioritizing foreign investment, global branding, and strategic partnerships to project Nigeria as a regional economic leader.

These shifts illustrate that national interest is a dynamic and socially constructed idea. It reflects not only strategic calculations but also identity, values, and leadership vision. The pursuit of national interest, therefore, is as much about perception and normative aspiration as it is about material advantage or geopolitical influence.

Citizen Diplomacy

Citizen diplomacy emerged as a defining feature of Nigeria's foreign policy under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007–2010), marking a shift from traditional state-centric diplomacy to a people-oriented approach. The concept emphasizes the protection, welfare, and global image of Nigerian citizens abroad as a key component of national interest and foreign engagement. Rooted in liberal and constructivist paradigms, citizen diplomacy prioritizes human security, rights, and dignity as vital tools in advancing a country's soft power and international legitimacy (Saliu et al., 2014).

The policy arose in response to the growing international stigma associated with Nigerians due to incidents of fraud, drug trafficking, and irregular migration, which affected how Nigerians were treated globally (Akinboye, 2013). As a corrective strategy, citizen diplomacy sought to repair Nigeria's image while ensuring that Nigerian missions abroad were more responsive to the needs and protection of its nationals.

From a theoretical lens, citizen diplomacy aligns with social constructivism, which argues that the identity and norms promoted by a state—such as commitment to human rights and citizen welfare—shape its

foreign policy behavior (Wendt, [1999](#)). By elevating citizens as key actors in international relations, this approach democratizes diplomacy and enhances a state's legitimacy in the global arena.

However, critics argue that citizen diplomacy under Yar'Adua remained largely rhetorical, constrained by weak institutions, limited consular capacity, and inconsistent implementation (Adebajo, [2010](#)). The policy's effectiveness was also undermined by domestic issues such as corruption and human rights violations, which contradicted the international image the policy sought to promote.

Citizen diplomacy under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua represented a notable shift in Nigeria's foreign policy, placing citizens at the heart of international engagement. It sought to protect Nigerians abroad, restore the nation's global image, and promote human dignity as a core foreign policy objective. While the policy signaled a progressive, people-centered approach, its practical impact was limited. Institutional weaknesses, lack of diplomatic capacity, and contradictions between domestic governance and external messaging hindered effective implementation. The initiative struggled to move beyond rhetoric, as embassies often lacked the resources and political backing to support citizens meaningfully. Moreover, unresolved internal issues—such as corruption, insecurity, and poor service delivery—undermined the credibility of Nigeria's commitment to citizen welfare abroad. Ultimately, while citizen diplomacy introduced a moral dimension to foreign policy, it failed to fully translate into consistent state practice, revealing the gap between vision and execution in Nigeria's international relations strategy.

Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy has become a cornerstone of contemporary foreign policy, especially for developing nations seeking economic growth, investment, and global integration. In the Nigerian context, economic diplomacy gained renewed prominence under President Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015), reflecting a strategic reorientation from ideological engagement to market-oriented international cooperation (Ogunnubi & Isike, [2015](#)). The administration's approach was premised on attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), expanding trade relations, and fostering bilateral and multilateral economic partnerships.

Jonathan's Transformation Agenda prioritized economic diversification and infrastructural development, leveraging diplomacy to secure investments from both traditional Western partners and emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil (Saleh, [2022](#)). This South-South pivot aimed to reduce Nigeria's overdependence on Western aid and promote sustainable development through mutual economic cooperation.

From a theoretical standpoint, economic diplomacy reflects liberal internationalist principles, which view international institutions, interdependence, and cooperation as pathways to peace and prosperity (Keohane & Nye, [2001](#)). It also connects with the concept of "soft power", asserting that economic tools—such as trade, aid, and investment—can serve as instruments of influence without coercion (Nye, [2004](#)).

However, critics argue that Nigeria's economic diplomacy was undermined by systemic domestic challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and insecurity (Agbu & Nzeribe, [2023](#)). Much of the foreign capital was concentrated in extractive industries, with limited spillover into sectors that promote inclusive development. Furthermore, the absence of institutional continuity and policy coherence weakened long-term outcomes and investor confidence (Ogunnoiki, [2017](#)).

Economic diplomacy became a defining element of Nigeria's foreign policy under President Goodluck Jonathan, reflecting a shift toward market-driven engagement aimed at attracting investment and fostering global economic partnerships. His administration sought to reposition Nigeria as a preferred investment destination, aligning foreign policy with national development goals. While the strategy yielded some diplomatic openings and inflow of capital—especially from emerging economies—the impact was uneven. Much of the investment remained concentrated in the oil sector, with minimal diversification into sectors that could drive inclusive growth. Structural issues such as corruption, poor infrastructure, and insecurity continued to deter long-term investor confidence. Additionally, weak institutional coordination and a lack of policy continuity limited the sustainability of many initiatives. Despite its ambitious outlook, economic diplomacy under Jonathan struggled to overcome the domestic constraints that undermined Nigeria's external credibility and economic transformation. Nonetheless, it marked an important evolution in aligning foreign policy with developmental objectives.

Democratic Governance

Democratic governance refers to a system of rules that combines representative political institutions with accountability, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and effective public administration. It transcends the mere conduct of periodic elections to encompass broader principles such as transparency, responsiveness, equity, and citizen participation in policy-making (United Nations Development Programme, [2002](#)).

In the Nigerian context, democratic governance since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999 has been characterized by both progress and setbacks. The administrations of Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan (2007–2015) operated within a framework of constitutional democracy but faced significant challenges including electoral irregularities, corruption, weak institutions, and insecurity (Ogundiya, [2010](#)).

Yar'Adua, for instance, acknowledged flaws in the 2007 elections that brought him to power and initiated electoral reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions. However, his tenure was short-lived, and the reforms were only partially implemented (Adejumobi, [2000](#)). Jonathan's administration also professed a commitment to good governance and democratic deepening, yet it was marred by widespread corruption scandals, impunity, and an increasingly securitized response to dissent and terrorism (Ayodeji, [2016](#)).

Theoretically, democratic governance is rooted in liberal democratic theory, which emphasizes civil liberties, political rights, and institutional checks and balances (Dahl, [1989](#)). However, in practice, Nigeria's democracy has struggled with institutional weaknesses, elite domination, and limited civic engagement, thereby diluting the democratic dividend for the populace.

Thus, while Nigeria has retained the formal structures of democratic governance, its substantive democratic performance remains constrained by structural and political impediments. Strengthening the rule of law, enhancing electoral credibility, and promoting civic inclusion are essential for improving governance outcomes.

Literature Review

Nigeria's foreign policy between 2007 and 2015, spanning the Yar'Adua

and Jonathan administrations, was significantly influenced by domestic political priorities, leadership orientations, and shifting global dynamics. Empirical studies suggest that both administrations adopted strategies aimed at redefining Nigeria's global image, enhancing national interests, and responding to international expectations.

Under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, *citizen diplomacy* emerged as a policy response to the mistreatment of Nigerians abroad, aiming to project the country as a responsible actor while safeguarding the dignity of its citizens (Saliu et al., [2014](#)). Empirical data from the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during this period show increased consular engagements and diplomatic protests over discriminatory practices against Nigerians, especially in Asia and Europe. However, scholars argue that these efforts were largely symbolic due to poor institutional coordination and under-resourced diplomatic missions (Adamaagashi et al., [2014](#)).

President Goodluck Jonathan's administration adopted *economic diplomacy* as its central foreign policy framework. Empirical evidence shows an upsurge in foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows between 2011 and 2013, attributed to high-level diplomatic visits and international investment forums in China, India, and Europe (Ogunnubi & Isike, [2015](#)). However, much of the investment focused on extractive sectors, offering limited benefit to broader economic diversification or job creation (Ogunnoiki, [2017](#)). Additionally, corruption and insecurity continued to impede long-term investor confidence.

Furthermore, Nigeria's leadership role in ECOWAS and peacekeeping efforts was empirically supported by financial and military commitments to regional stability operations in Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire (Bach, [2013](#)). These engagements reflected Nigeria's aspiration to maintain regional influence but were often criticized as being disconnected from domestic socio-economic realities.

Between 2007 and 2015, Nigeria's foreign policy reflected the interplay between leadership vision, domestic imperatives, and evolving global trends. Under President Yar'Adua, the focus on citizen diplomacy sought to repair Nigeria's international image and protect nationals abroad. While the policy was morally compelling, its implementation lacked institutional depth and was undermined by weak diplomatic infrastructure. President Jonathan's embrace of economic diplomacy marked a pragmatic turn,

leveraging international partnerships to attract investment and reposition Nigeria in global markets. However, the benefits were unevenly distributed, with limited impact on broader economic transformation. Both administrations also pursued regional leadership through peacekeeping and mediation efforts, affirming Nigeria's hegemonic aspirations in West Africa. Yet, these external engagements often contrasted with unresolved internal challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and economic inequality. Overall, while the period was rich in ambition and diplomatic activity, foreign policy outcomes were constrained by systemic governance deficits and inconsistency in execution.

Studies also show that Nigeria's global reputation was constrained by internal governance challenges. For instance, international governance indicators during Jonathan's tenure recorded low scores in areas such as rule of law, control of corruption, and political stability (World Bank, [2014](#)). These domestic weaknesses undermined the credibility of Nigeria's foreign policy claims and weakened its normative power.

Overall, empirical literature suggests that while Nigeria's foreign policy between 2007 and 2015 demonstrated active international engagement and ambition, it was hindered by inconsistencies between external projections and internal conditions.

Citizen Diplomacy under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua

President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's introduction of *citizen diplomacy* marked a significant shift in Nigeria's foreign policy direction, particularly within the framework of a democratizing post-military era. The policy sought to rebrand Nigeria internationally by prioritizing the protection of its citizens abroad and asserting state responsibility for their welfare. This approach emerged in response to increasing global incidents of discrimination, arrests, and deportations involving Nigerian nationals, especially in countries across Asia and Europe.

Empirical evidence from the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during 2007–2010 indicates a notable increase in diplomatic protests and consular interventions, signaling a more responsive and protective role of the state (Aleyomi & Abu Bakar, [2017](#)). This period also saw the institutionalization of citizen-centered dialogues in bilateral engagements, particularly with nations where Nigerians faced systemic abuse.

However, critical assessments reveal that Yar'Adua's citizen diplomacy, while normatively commendable, lacked practical effectiveness due to poor implementation mechanisms. Scholars argue that embassies remained underfunded, personnel lacked training in citizen protection, and responses to abuses were inconsistent (Adamaagashi et al., [2014](#)). Furthermore, the domestic legitimacy required to reinforce international diplomatic efforts was undermined by Nigeria's internal challenges, including weak institutions and human rights violations at home.

President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's adoption of citizen diplomacy signaled a notable departure from traditional elite-centered foreign policy toward a more people-focused agenda. It aimed to project Nigeria as a responsible state committed to the dignity and protection of its citizens abroad, especially in the face of rising incidents of mistreatment in foreign countries. The policy emphasized the moral obligation of the Nigerian state to safeguard its nationals and improve the country's global image. However, while the policy had strong symbolic and normative appeal, its practical implementation faced major hurdles. Nigerian embassies were often underfunded, lacked trained personnel, and operated without clear protocols for citizen protection. The inconsistency in diplomatic responses and the gap between policy rhetoric and institutional capacity limited its overall effectiveness. Moreover, the credibility of the initiative was weakened by Nigeria's unresolved domestic issues, including insecurity, corruption, and human rights abuses, which diluted the legitimacy of its global advocacy.

In sum, citizen diplomacy under Yar'Adua reflected a strategic intention to align foreign policy with democratic values and citizen welfare. Yet, its limited institutional support and symbolic execution exposed the fragility of Nigeria's foreign policy apparatus, thereby diminishing its long-term impact on national interest and international credibility.

President Goodluck Jonathan's Economic Diplomacy and Its Limitations

President Goodluck Jonathan's administration (2010–2015) marked a period of intensified economic diplomacy, strategically designed to reposition Nigeria as a favorable destination for global investment. Building on the Transformation Agenda (2011–2015), Jonathan's government sought to harness international partnerships to stimulate domestic economic

growth, attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and diversify beyond oil dependency.

High-level diplomatic engagements with China, India, Brazil, and Europe resulted in a surge of investment pledges and bilateral agreements. According to Ogunnubi and Isike (2015), FDI inflows notably increased between 2011 and 2013, reaching billions in sectors such as telecommunications, oil, and construction. These were often showcased through international investment forums in London, New York, and Beijing, which promoted Nigeria's vast market potential.

However, a closer empirical assessment reveals that these gains were uneven and narrow in impact. Most foreign investments were channeled into extractive industries, particularly oil and gas, reinforcing Nigeria's historical dependence on natural resources. As noted by Ogunnoiki (2017), this sectoral concentration did little to foster industrialization, transfer of technology, or widespread job creation. President Goodluck Jonathan's administration pursued economic diplomacy with renewed vigor, positioning Nigeria as an attractive hub for global investment. Anchored in the Transformation Agenda, the strategy emphasized diversifying the economy, attracting foreign capital, and building strategic international partnerships. While high-level diplomatic visits and global investment forums generated visibility and financial commitments, the outcomes were uneven. Foreign investment largely concentrated in extractive sectors, particularly oil and gas, perpetuating Nigeria's reliance on resource exports. The anticipated ripple effects—such as job creation, technology transfer, and industrial growth—were minimal. Critical sectors like agriculture and manufacturing remained underfunded and underdeveloped. Additionally, persistent domestic challenges, including corruption, insecurity, and weak infrastructure, continued to deter long-term investor confidence. Thus, while economic diplomacy under Jonathan signaled ambition and international engagement, it fell short of transforming Nigeria's economic structure or ensuring broad-based, inclusive development.

Theoretical framework

A scholarly analysis of the Social Constructivist Theory highlights its relevance and utility in explaining the interplay between Nigeria's foreign relations and internal democratic governance, particularly from 1999 to 2023. Developed principally by Alexander Wendt (1992), social

constructivism emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, norms, and social interactions in shaping state behavior in international relations, contrasting the materialist focus of realism and liberalism.

Basic Assumptions

The theory is grounded on the belief that international politics is socially constructed through intersubjective understandings. States act not only based on material capabilities but also based on shared beliefs, cultural practices, and normative expectations (Wendt, [1999](#)). Actors, including states, are socially embedded, and their interests are not fixed but constructed through interaction and discourse (Checkel, [1998](#)).

Strengths

Social constructivism offers a powerful framework for understanding how norms such as human rights, democracy, and citizenship rights influence foreign policy. It helps explain how Nigeria's global image and identity have informed its foreign engagements, especially during the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations. For instance, Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy and Jonathan's economic diplomacy can be seen as norm-driven efforts to reshape Nigeria's international identity and secure legitimacy on the global stage (Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzodike, [2016](#)).

The theory also allows for the inclusion of non-material factors such as image, reputation, and diplomatic signaling, which are critical in evaluating Nigeria's positioning in regional bodies like ECOWAS and international forums like the UN Security Council.

Weaknesses

Despite its strengths, constructivism has been critiqued for lacking predictive power and being too idealistic. Critics argue that it often underestimates material interests and power asymmetries, which remain salient in international politics (Mearsheimer, [2017](#)). Moreover, its emphasis on identity and norms sometimes leads to ambiguous operationalization, making empirical testing difficult (Hopf, [1998](#)).

Relevance to the Study

Social constructivism offers a powerful analytical framework for interpreting Nigeria's foreign relations, particularly in how identity, norms, and international expectations shape state behavior and policy choices.

Unlike realism, which focuses on material power, or liberalism, which emphasizes institutional cooperation, social constructivism centers on the idea that international politics is socially constructed through shared values, ideas, and beliefs.

In Nigeria's case, the country's foreign policy and democratic aspirations have increasingly been influenced by the global normative environment. Engagements with multilateral institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and regional bodies like ECOWAS reflect more than just strategic calculations—they also signal a desire to align with global standards of democracy, good governance, anti-corruption, and human rights.

This normative alignment can be seen, for instance, in Nigeria's repeated commitments to electoral reforms, anti-corruption measures, and institutional transparency following international criticisms or conditions tied to foreign aid and investment. By complying with or at least adopting the language of these expectations, Nigerian leaders attempt to project an image of a responsible democratic state, even when domestic governance structures remain weak.

Social constructivism also sheds light on the performative aspect of foreign policy. Presidents and diplomats often use international platforms—such as the UN General Assembly, AU summits, or global economic forums—to construct a national identity narrative. This narrative portrays Nigeria as a democratic leader in Africa, committed to peace, regional stability, and economic transformation. However, this external image is frequently contradicted by internal governance failures, electoral violence, corruption scandals, and insecurity.

The theory is particularly useful in explaining the disconnect between rhetoric and reality. For example, while Nigeria may advocate for democratic norms abroad and contribute to peacekeeping missions, its domestic struggles with judicial independence, press freedom, and electoral transparency suggest that these commitments are often superficial or strategically adopted to enhance legitimacy on the world stage.

Furthermore, social constructivism helps account for norm diffusion, where domestic reforms are driven not just by external pressure but also by internal actors who internalize global norms. Civil society, the media, and academic institutions in Nigeria often invoke international standards to

critique government performance, demonstrating how global norms are localized and contested within domestic politics.

In essence, Nigeria's foreign relations are not only shaped by power dynamics and material interests but also by the ongoing negotiation of identity, legitimacy, and international standing. Social constructivism, therefore, provides a nuanced lens to understand how ideas and norms influence both the conduct of foreign policy and the trajectory of democratic governance, highlighting the tension between external image-making and internal state capacity.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, relying on secondary sources to critically assess Nigeria's foreign policy and national interest under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations (2007–2015). The survey method used here refers to a systematic review of existing literature and documentary analysis, rather than a questionnaire-based field survey.

Data Collection

Relevant data were collected from a variety of secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official government documents, seminar and conference papers, reputable newspapers and magazines, and online publications. These materials were accessed through university and public libraries across Nigeria, including the National Library, academic institutions, and online databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the African Journals Online (AJOL).

Source Selection Criteria

Sources were selected based on the following criteria:

- *Relevance* to the research topic (foreign policy, national interest, citizen diplomacy, economic diplomacy).
- *Credibility* of the authors or publishing institutions (e.g., academic experts, research institutes, or government agencies).
- *Publication date*, giving preference to works published between 2007 and 2023 to maintain contextual accuracy.

- *Analytical depth*, with priority given to sources that offered critical perspectives or empirical insights.

Analysis and Discussion

Collected data were subjected to qualitative content analysis, involving thematic categorization, interpretation, and cross-comparison of narratives and arguments. The study utilized a constructivist lens, identifying how ideas, identities, and norms shaped Nigeria's foreign policy behavior during the specified period. This methodological approach ensured that the research was grounded in documented evidence while maintaining analytical rigor and contextual relevance.

This section discusses the key findings from the critical assessment of Nigeria's foreign policy and pursuit of national interest under the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations (2007–2015). It explores how both leaders adopted distinct diplomatic strategies—citizen diplomacy under Yar'Adua and economic diplomacy under Jonathan—to enhance Nigeria's global standing and protect national interests. Despite these initiatives, findings indicate a significant gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes, largely due to weak institutional capacity, corruption, and internal insecurity. While both administrations made efforts to reposition Nigeria in regional and global affairs, the implementation of their foreign policy agendas lacked coherence and sustainability. The analysis highlights how domestic challenges undermined foreign policy effectiveness, revealing the complex interplay between internal governance and external relations. The discussion draws from empirical insights, theoretical underpinnings, and existing literature to evaluate the extent to which Nigeria's foreign engagements reflected and advanced its national interest during the period under review.

Assessing Yar'Adua's involvement in citizenship diplomacy

Scholars generally recognize President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy (2007–2010) as a shift in Nigeria's foreign policy aimed at protecting the dignity and welfare of Nigerian citizens abroad while improving the country's global image. According to Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016), the Yar'Adua administration sought to rebrand Nigeria through proactive diplomatic engagements that prioritized the rights and safety of its nationals, particularly in response to mounting international criticisms related to corruption, insecurity, and poor governance. Adebajo

(2010) argues that this citizen-centered diplomacy marked a deliberate turn from previous elite-driven foreign policy, placing Nigerian citizens at the heart of diplomatic priorities. Similarly, Saliu et al. (2014) emphasize that citizenship diplomacy under Yar'Adua was both reactive and strategic, aiming to counter external stigmatization of Nigerians and assert the government's responsibility for their welfare overseas. However, critics like (Adamaagashi et al., 2014). note that the initiative, though ambitious, was constrained by weak implementation mechanisms, inadequate institutional support, and inconsistent engagement with host countries. Despite these limitations, Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy is widely viewed as a progressive effort to humanize Nigeria's foreign policy, reinforcing the link between domestic legitimacy and international reputation.

Based on the above explanation, the citizenship diplomacy under Yar'Adua reflected a broader transformation in Nigeria's approach to international relations—one that emphasized reciprocity, national pride, and the protection of citizens' rights as fundamental pillars of diplomacy. The administration's policy was not only symbolic but also tactical, seeking to redefine Nigeria's identity in the international arena following years of negative perception stemming from issues such as drug trafficking, internet fraud, and political instability. By prioritizing the treatment of Nigerians abroad, the policy aimed to compel foreign governments to engage with Nigeria on more respectful and equitable terms.

Moreover, the policy attempted to re-establish trust between the Nigerian state and its diaspora, encouraging remittances, investment, and transnational networks that could contribute to national development. Embassies and consulates were increasingly expected to act as advocates for Nigerian citizens, moving beyond ceremonial roles to provide real-time support and protection in host countries.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this diplomacy was hindered by structural and bureaucratic limitations. Inconsistencies in the training and capacity of diplomatic staff, coupled with Nigeria's own internal governance challenges, meant that the policy often lacked follow-through. Many citizens abroad remained skeptical of government intervention, citing continued experiences of neglect, harassment, or insufficient consular assistance. As such, while citizenship diplomacy under Yar'Adua was visionary in intent, its long-term success was contingent on institutional

reform and sustained political commitment—issues that successive administrations have struggled to fully address.

Critique of Yar'Adua's Citizen Diplomacy

A scholarly analysis of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's *citizenship diplomacy* reveals both its strategic significance and operational shortcomings within Nigeria's foreign policy framework. The initiative, launched during his administration (2007–2010), was lauded as a paradigm shift from regime-centered diplomacy to a people-focused approach. Scholars like Adebajo (2010) and Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016) emphasize that this diplomacy aimed to enhance Nigeria's global image by defending the dignity and welfare of its citizens abroad. It was seen as a soft power strategy to project Nigeria as a responsible and people-oriented state actor.

However, from a critical standpoint, several scholars argue that the implementation of citizen diplomacy fell short of its rhetorical aspirations. Adamaagashi et al. (2014) contend that while the idea was normatively attractive, it lacked structural and institutional mechanisms to deliver meaningful protection or support to Nigerians abroad. Embassies often remained underfunded and ill-equipped, and there was a disconnect between policy declaration and actionable strategy. This gap led to criticisms that citizen diplomacy was more symbolic than transformative.

Further, Saliu et al. (2014) argue that the initiative was reactive—largely a response to rising cases of discrimination, detentions, and deportations of Nigerians, especially in Asia and Europe. Rather than a proactive reimagining of foreign policy, it served more as a public relations effort to offset mounting international concerns over Nigeria's global reputation related to corruption, human trafficking, and cybercrime.

Moreover, the policy's internal contradictions became apparent in the inconsistency of its application. While citizen diplomacy advocated for the welfare of Nigerians abroad, the government struggled to guarantee citizens' rights domestically—an issue raised by critics like Saleh (2022), who questioned the legitimacy of a government demanding international respect for its people while failing to uphold justice and security at home.

From the above scholar's perspective, in my own view, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy marked a shift toward a citizen-focused foreign policy aimed at improving Nigeria's global image

and protecting its nationals abroad. While it was strategically significant, the initiative struggled with weak implementation, underfunded embassies, and a lack of institutional support. It often appeared more reactive than proactive, responding to external criticisms rather than shaping a coherent diplomatic vision. The policy's inconsistency and limited impact exposed a disconnect between its goals and the realities on the ground. Although symbolically powerful, it failed to fully translate into meaningful protections for Nigerians overseas, especially as domestic governance challenges undermined the credibility of advocating for citizens' rights internationally.

Goodluck Jonathan's Foreign Policy

A scholarly analysis of President Goodluck Jonathan's foreign policy (2010–2015) reveals a pragmatic, economy-driven, and security-conscious approach that aimed to reposition Nigeria as a key player in both regional and global affairs. Jonathan's administration emphasized economic diplomacy, seeking to attract foreign direct investment and enhance Nigeria's trade relations. As Saleh ([2022](#)) notes, this was evident in Nigeria's increased engagement with emerging economies such as China, Brazil, and India, alongside traditional Western partners.

Security was another major pillar of Jonathan's foreign policy, particularly due to the escalating threat of Boko Haram. According to Ogunnubi and Isike ([2015](#)), Nigeria took on a more assertive leadership role in West Africa, supporting ECOWAS peace operations and enhancing military cooperation with neighboring countries to combat terrorism. Jonathan's administration also sought international assistance and partnerships, especially from the United States and the United Nations, to address internal insecurity.

However, critics argue that Jonathan's foreign policy lacked a coherent strategic vision. Adebajo ([2018](#)) contends that while the administration was active internationally, it often reacted to crises rather than implementing a proactive or ideologically grounded foreign policy. Moreover, Nigeria's image continued to be affected by corruption and poor governance, which limited the effectiveness of its international engagements.

Despite these criticisms, the Jonathan era did witness some diplomatic achievements, such as Nigeria's non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (2014–2015) and increased participation in global climate

change dialogues. These moves helped raise Nigeria's diplomatic profile, even if questions remained about their long-term impact.

President Goodluck Jonathan's foreign policy (2010–2015) reflected a pragmatic focus on economic growth and national security. His administration emphasized economic diplomacy to boost trade and attract investment, especially from emerging markets, while also strengthening ties with traditional partners. In response to growing insecurity from Boko Haram, Nigeria assumed a more active role in regional security through ECOWAS and partnerships with international allies. However, the policy approach was often seen as reactive rather than guided by a clear long-term vision. While the government made strides in enhancing Nigeria's global profile—such as gaining a seat at the UN Security Council—its efforts were undercut by persistent domestic issues like corruption and weak governance, which undermined foreign policy credibility and limited its broader impact.

Assessment of Jonathan's Economic Diplomacy

A scholarly assessment of President Goodluck Jonathan's economic diplomacy (2010–2015) reveals a deliberate attempt to reposition Nigeria as a preferred investment destination through strategic international partnerships. Jonathan's administration focused on diversifying Nigeria's economic relations by engaging emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil, while maintaining ties with Western partners (Ogunnubi & Isike, [2015](#)). This pivot toward South-South cooperation was aimed at reducing over-dependence on traditional Western allies and encouraging infrastructural development and technology transfer.

Jonathan launched the Transformation Agenda (2011–2015), which prioritized public-private partnerships and sought to leverage foreign direct investment (FDI) for job creation and infrastructure growth (Saleh, [2022](#)). Nigeria hosted high-profile investment forums in London, Washington, and Beijing to attract global investors. Under his leadership, Nigeria became Africa's largest economy in 2014 following a GDP rebasing exercise, reflecting the growing diversification of the economy (National Bureau of Statistics, [2014](#)).

Despite these advances, critics argue that the gains of economic diplomacy under Jonathan were not widely felt due to poor implementation, systemic corruption, and insecurity, particularly in the Northeast. While

foreign capital inflow increased, much of it was concentrated in the oil and telecommunications sectors, with limited impact on broader economic inclusion and industrialization (Ogunnoiki, [2017](#)). Additionally, bureaucratic inefficiencies and inconsistent policy signals discouraged long-term investor confidence.

Overall, Jonathan's economic diplomacy was ambitious and yielded some short-term gains, but structural challenges within Nigeria's political economy hindered its full realization.

Based on the above assessment of President Goodluck Jonathan's economic diplomacy highlights a focused effort to attract foreign investment and enhance Nigeria's economic stature globally. His administration pursued diversified partnerships with both emerging and traditional economies, promoting South-South cooperation to reduce dependency on Western nations. The Transformation Agenda emphasized infrastructure, job creation, and public-private collaboration. This period saw increased foreign investment and the rebasing of Nigeria's GDP, positioning it as Africa's largest economy. However, these gains were undermined by weak implementation, insecurity, and corruption. Investment largely favored specific sectors like oil and telecoms, leaving broader industrial growth unaddressed. Additionally, policy inconsistency and bureaucratic delays weakened investor confidence. Overall, Jonathan's strategy showed promise but was limited by structural inefficiencies in governance and economic management.

Critique of Jonathan's Economic Diplomacy

The critique of President Goodluck Jonathan's economic diplomacy (2010–2015) reveals that, while the administration sought to attract foreign investment and diversify the economy, several structural and institutional weaknesses hindered its long-term impact. Ogunnubi and Isike ([2015](#)) observe that Jonathan's pivot to emerging economies, particularly China, Brazil, and India, reflected a strategic South-South orientation. However, these partnerships were often transactional and lacked a coherent ideological framework, resulting in policy inconsistencies and ad hoc decision-making.

Despite the celebrated GDP rebasing in 2014, which made Nigeria the largest economy in Africa (National Bureau of Statistics, [2014](#)), critics like Ogunnoiki ([2017](#)) note that this growth did not translate into improved

living standards for most Nigerians. Corruption, insecurity—particularly the Boko Haram insurgency—and bureaucratic bottlenecks continued to undermine investor confidence and policy implementation (Saleh, [2022](#)). Additionally, much of the foreign investment was concentrated in extractive sectors, offering limited support for inclusive development or industrialization.

While the administration organized high-profile international investment forums and signed numerous bilateral agreements, the lack of institutional follow-through meant that many of these initiatives did not result in substantial economic transformation. Thus, Jonathan's economic diplomacy was ambitious and globally engaging but ultimately fell short of creating sustainable economic development due to weak domestic governance structures.

Looking at above views of scholars the critical evaluation of President Goodluck Jonathan's economic diplomacy (2010–2015) highlights both its ambition and its underlying flaws. The administration aimed to attract foreign investment and diversify economic partnerships, especially through increased engagement with emerging economies. However, these efforts were largely reactive and lacked a cohesive long-term strategic framework. Despite the symbolic success of Nigeria's GDP rebasing, the benefits were not widely felt by the population due to persistent structural issues such as corruption, insecurity, and bureaucratic inefficiency.

Foreign investments were heavily concentrated in the oil and telecom sectors, with limited spillover into broader economic development or industrialization. Furthermore, numerous bilateral agreements and international investment summits often failed to yield substantial results due to poor policy continuity and institutional inertia. In essence, while Jonathan's economic diplomacy raised Nigeria's profile, it struggled to achieve deep and lasting economic transformation.

The Future of Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Guiding Principles for National Prosperity

The future of Nigeria's foreign policy must be shaped by lessons from the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations, which highlighted the importance of aligning diplomatic initiatives with internal governance and national development goals. Scholars such as Akinboye ([2013](#)) and Ogunnubi and Isike ([2015](#)) emphasize the need for coherence, strategic

focus, and institutional capacity to drive foreign policy that supports national prosperity. Moving forward, Nigeria must prioritize a foreign policy that is proactive, economically strategic, and citizen-centered—anchored on good governance, domestic stability, and regional leadership.

A reformed foreign policy must strengthen economic diplomacy, leveraging global partnerships for infrastructure development, technology transfer, and trade diversification. Simultaneously, it must defend the rights and dignity of Nigerian citizens abroad through more robust and efficient diplomatic institutions. Analysts such as Saliu et al. (2014) argue that effective foreign policy must reflect a country's internal realities, reinforcing the link between governance credibility and international image.

Additionally, Nigeria's foreign engagements should increasingly reflect multilateralism and South-South cooperation, particularly within ECOWAS and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). By integrating foreign policy with long-term development strategies like the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), Nigeria can harness global partnerships for inclusive growth.

Furthermore, Nigeria's future foreign policy must go beyond symbolic diplomacy to address structural and institutional gaps, promoting national interest through sustained global engagement, peacekeeping leadership, and people-centered diplomacy.

Conclusion

This study critically assessed Nigeria's foreign policy and national interest under the administrations of Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan (2007–2015), revealing a shift toward more people-focused and economically-driven diplomatic approaches. Yar'Adua's citizenship diplomacy aimed to protect the dignity and welfare of Nigerians abroad, while Jonathan's economic diplomacy sought to position Nigeria as a key investment destination. Despite these commendable efforts, both administrations struggled with implementation challenges, including institutional weakness, corruption, and domestic insecurity, which limited the effectiveness of their foreign policies.

The analysis underscores that foreign policy cannot be divorced from internal governance. A credible and coherent foreign policy must reflect a nation's internal political stability, democratic values, and development priorities. For Nigeria to advance its national interest effectively on the

global stage, future administrations must bridge the gap between foreign policy rhetoric and domestic realities. Strengthening diplomatic institutions, ensuring policy continuity, and aligning international engagements with national development goals are critical steps toward achieving this.

Ultimately, Nigeria's global relevance will depend on its ability to maintain a consistent, strategic, and credible foreign policy that balances international expectations with domestic priorities—anchoring diplomacy not just in external image-making but in sustainable national development.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings of this study, which highlighted the gap between Nigeria's foreign policy rhetoric and its domestic realities during the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations (2007–2015), several policy-oriented recommendations are proposed to improve the alignment of Nigeria's foreign policy with its national interest:

Strengthen Domestic Institutions: To enhance the credibility of foreign policy, the Nigerian government must build strong democratic institutions that uphold the rule of law, reduce corruption, and promote human rights. A sound domestic foundation enhances international trust and cooperation.

Align Foreign Policy with National Development Goals: Foreign engagements should directly support national development priorities, such as job creation, infrastructure development, and technological advancement. Diplomatic missions should be empowered to attract investment in these areas.

Enhance Capacity of Diplomatic Institutions: Nigeria's embassies and consulates require better funding, training, and strategic mandates to effectively protect citizens abroad and promote Nigeria's interests.

Promote Policy Continuity and Strategic Planning: Successive administrations should adopt long-term foreign policy strategies, avoiding abrupt changes that undermine diplomatic consistency and national interest.

Improve Public Diplomacy and Image Management: The government should invest in soft power tools—such as cultural diplomacy, education exchange, and media engagement—to reshape global perceptions and project Nigeria as a responsible international actor.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can create a more coherent and impactful foreign policy that genuinely serves its national interest and reflects its democratic aspirations.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

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