

7 The Nigerian Legislature and Foreign Policy Laws: Strengthening Diplomatic Relations (2000–2023)

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is a critical instrument through which states engage with the international system to advance national interests. It encompasses diplomacy, economic relations, security cooperation, and international agreements, all of which are influenced by domestic institutions, particularly the legislature (Hill, 2016). In Nigeria, the National Assembly, comprising the Senate and House of Representatives, plays a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy laws through legislation, oversight, and treaty ratification (Adeniji, 2005). While foreign policy formulation is traditionally an executive function, legislative participation is essential for legitimacy, continuity, and compliance with international commitments (Hassan, 2019).

Historically, Nigeria's foreign policy has been shaped by its commitment to African leadership, economic diplomacy, and multilateralism (Ogwu, 2005). However, the effectiveness of the legislature in consolidating foreign policy laws remains debated. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria grants the National Assembly powers to ratify treaties, approve international agreements, and provide oversight on foreign policy execution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Yet, concerns persist regarding executive dominance, weak legislative input, and institutional challenges that hinder effective engagement in foreign affairs (Ojo, 2020).

Between 2000 and 2023, Nigeria has navigated complex global challenges, including regional security threats, economic partnerships, and multilateral engagements. The role of the legislature in these processes requires critical examination to assess its effectiveness in consolidating legal frameworks that support diplomatic relations. Studies suggest that while legislative involvement has improved, issues such as political partisanship, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited foreign policy expertise among lawmakers remain significant constraints (Eze, 2021).

This study evaluates the role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws and its impact on diplomatic relations. It examines legislative contributions to treaty ratification, diplomatic oversight, and policy formulation,

identifying challenges and proposing reforms to enhance Nigeria's foreign policy effectiveness. The analysis is situated within the broader discourse on legislative-executive relations in foreign affairs, drawing from comparative perspectives to highlight best practices.

Research Questions

The paper has following questions to ask:

- i. How has the Nigerian legislature contributed to the formulation, ratification, and implementation of foreign policy laws between 2000 and 2023?
- ii. To what extent has legislative oversight influenced the effectiveness and accountability of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions?
- iii. What are the major challenges hindering the Nigerian legislature from effectively consolidating foreign policy laws and strengthening diplomatic relations?
- iv. What legislative reforms and strategies can enhance the role of the National Assembly in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy for improved global engagement?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, combining primary and secondary data sources to evaluate the role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws for effective diplomatic relations between 2000 and 2023. The research employs an in-depth interview method, targeting key stakeholders from the legislature, academia, and foreign policy research institutions to provide comprehensive insights into legislative contributions, challenges, and prospects in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews with policymakers directly involved in Nigeria's legislative foreign policy processes. The legislative stakeholders include the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, as well as the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs. The academic sector comprises distinguished scholars from Bayero University, Kano, and the National Open University of Nigeria. Additionally, foreign policy expertise is represented by professionals from the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos, including the Director of Research and Studies and a Research Fellow.

Secondary data is drawn from legislative documents, government reports, policy briefs, scholarly articles, and international relations literature to complement primary data and provide a broader analytical framework. Data analysis follows a thematic approach, systematically categorizing responses and triangulating findings with secondary sources to ensure reliability and validity. The study also employs scientific methodologies to assess legislative effectiveness in foreign policy using established political science frameworks.

By integrating expert opinions, legislative perspectives, and documented evidence, this research provides a holistic assessment of the Nigerian legislature's role in consolidating foreign policy laws and enhancing Nigeria's diplomatic engagements globally.

Conceptual Framework

Legislature

The legislature is a fundamental institution of governance responsible for lawmaking, representation, and oversight, playing a crucial role in democratic consolidation and policy formulation (Lijphart, 2012). It operates within various political systems, including presidential, parliamentary, and hybrid structures, each influencing its autonomy and effectiveness (Shugart & Carey, 1992). Montesquieu's (1748) separation of powers theory underscores the legislature's role in checking executive authority, ensuring accountability, and preventing authoritarian tendencies.

In democratic states, the legislature formulates and enacts laws that guide domestic and foreign policies, reflecting the will of the electorate (Pitkin, 1967). Legislative oversight is essential for holding the executive accountable, particularly in budgetary allocations, policy implementation, and treaty ratification (Heywood, 2019). In emerging democracies, however, weak institutional capacity, executive dominance, and political interference often undermine legislative effectiveness (Barkan, 2009). North (1990) argues that the strength of legislative institutions determines the stability and efficiency of governance structures, influencing policy continuity and national development.

Comparative studies indicate that legislatures with strong institutional frameworks and professionalized structures are more effective in shaping national policies and international engagements (Squire, 2007). In Nigeria, the National Assembly plays a vital role in consolidating foreign policy laws, yet challenges such as limited expertise, partisan interests, and executive influence hinder its full potential (Hassan, 2019). Strengthening legislative capacity through institutional reforms, enhanced research support, and adherence to democratic principles is essential for improving governance and legislative influence in foreign policy decision-making (Rockman, 2004).

Foreign Relations

Foreign policy is the strategic framework through which a state interacts with the international system, pursuing its national interests through diplomacy, economic engagements, and security policies (Hill, 2016). It reflects a government's approach

to international relations, shaped by domestic political structures, economic capabilities, and geopolitical realities (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2017). According to Morgenthau (1948), foreign policy is driven by national power and the need to balance competing global interests, emphasizing realism as a guiding principle in statecraft.

The formulation and execution of foreign policy are influenced by multiple actors, including the executive, legislature, bureaucratic institutions, and non-state entities such as multinational corporations and international organizations (Rosenau, 1980). In democratic systems, legislative bodies play a crucial role in foreign policy by ratifying treaties, approving international agreements, and overseeing executive decisions (Heywood, 2019). Conversely, in authoritarian regimes, foreign policy is often centralized within the executive, limiting legislative and public influence (Walt, 1998).

Foreign policy decision-making involves strategic calculations based on rational choice theory, where states assess costs and benefits before engaging in international actions (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). However, constructivist scholars argue that foreign policy is shaped not only by material power but also by ideational factors such as national identity, historical experiences, and global norms (Wendt, 1999). In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, foreign policy has been characterized by regional leadership aspirations, economic diplomacy, and shifting alignments due to internal political dynamics and global influences (Adeniran, 2013).

The effectiveness of a state's foreign policy depends on institutional coordination, diplomatic strategy, and adaptability to global challenges (Nye, 2004). Strengthening foreign policy mechanisms through legislative oversight, expert consultations, and multilateral engagements enhances a country's global standing and promotes sustainable diplomatic relations (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Diplomatic Relations

Diplomatic relations refer to the formal interactions and engagements between sovereign states, facilitated through negotiation, dialogue, and international law to promote cooperation, conflict resolution, and mutual interests (Berridge, 2015). As a fundamental aspect of international relations, diplomatic relations are guided by principles of sovereignty, reciprocity, and peaceful coexistence, as enshrined in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), which establishes the legal framework for diplomatic immunity, privileges, and responsibilities (Watson, 1982). Scholars differentiate between bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations, where bilateral diplomacy focuses on direct state-to-state interactions, while multilateral diplomacy involves multiple nations engaging through international organizations such as the United Nations (Keohane, 1984). The effectiveness of diplomatic relations is influenced by economic power, military capability, cultural diplomacy,

and the strategic interests of states (Nye, 2004). According to Morgenthau (1948), diplomacy serves as a tool for maintaining the balance of power, ensuring that states pursue their national interests without resorting to conflict.

Contemporary diplomatic relations extend beyond traditional state actors to include non-state entities such as multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and regional blocs, reflecting the increasing complexity of global governance (Cooper, Heine & Thakur, 2013). Constructivist scholars argue that norms, identity, and perceptions shape diplomatic interactions, making soft power and public diplomacy critical instruments for influencing global affairs (Wendt, 1999). In the African context, diplomatic relations have been instrumental in regional integration, conflict mediation, and economic partnerships, particularly through institutions like the African Union and ECOWAS (Adebajo, 2008).

The success of diplomatic relations depends on the ability of states to navigate geopolitical complexities, foster trust, and engage in constructive dialogue to address global challenges such as security, trade, and climate change (Kissinger, 1994). Strengthening diplomatic institutions, enhancing negotiation capacity, and adhering to international norms remain essential for fostering stable and productive international relations.

Ratification of Treaty

Treaty ratification is the formal process by which a state consents to be legally bound by an international agreement, typically following the negotiation and signature of the treaty by its representatives (Shaw, 2008). The ratification process involves an internal constitutional procedure that may require approval from the legislative body, which reviews the treaty to ensure it aligns with national interests and legal frameworks (Dixon, 2010). According to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), the act of ratification signifies a state's commitment to honoring its international obligations, thereby enhancing the predictability and stability of international relations (Brownlie, 2008).

Theories of international law emphasize the importance of treaty ratification in preserving state sovereignty while ensuring adherence to international norms and standards. While the executive branch typically negotiates and signs treaties, the legislative branch plays a critical role in ratifying them, especially in democratic systems where checks and balances are key (Shaw, 2008). This process ensures that treaties are subject to public scrutiny, debate, and approval, thereby integrating international agreements into domestic legal systems (Chinkin, 2008). Moreover, the ratification process helps in maintaining transparency and legitimacy in foreign policy, as it grants the legislative body a direct role in shaping a nation's international commitments.

The study of treaty ratification is central to understanding the relationship between domestic politics and international law. For instance, in the United States, the Senate's role in treaty ratification, under Article II, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, is an example of the legislature's significant influence in determining the course of foreign policy (Slaughter, 2005). In contrast, countries like the United Kingdom rely on the Crown's prerogative powers, where treaties are ratified by the executive without needing parliamentary approval, although parliamentary scrutiny is still exercised through debates and discussions (Dixon, 2010).

The process of treaty ratification, however, is not without challenges. In many countries, treaties may face opposition from political factions, especially if they involve controversial issues such as human rights, security agreements, or environmental regulations (Chinkin, 2008). Additionally, the role of international organizations such as the United Nations in treaty-making adds complexity, as states often must balance their national interests with the collective goals of global cooperation (Bercovitch & Houston, 2001).

In conclusion, treaty ratification is a critical mechanism through which states engage with the international legal system. It ensures that international agreements are integrated into national legal orders, thus contributing to global governance and international cooperation. Understanding the processes and challenges involved in treaty ratification is essential for comprehending the dynamics of international relations and the interplay between domestic law and international commitments.

Empirical Literature

Empirical literature on the role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws and enhancing diplomatic relations from 2000 to 2023 reveals significant contributions, challenges, and opportunities. The Nigerian legislature, particularly the National Assembly, plays an essential role in shaping foreign policy laws, ratifying treaties, and providing oversight of the executive's international engagements. However, the effectiveness of this role has often been impeded by political interference, institutional weaknesses, and a lack of expertise in foreign policy matters (Hassan, 2019; Iwuoha & Obasi, 2017).

A key aspect of the legislature's role in foreign policy formulation is its involvement in treaty ratification. The Nigerian Constitution (1999) grants the National Assembly the power to approve treaties signed by the executive, which is crucial for ensuring that international agreements align with national interests and legal standards (Okoye, 2013). A practical example of this is the ratification of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which required legislative approval before becoming enforceable in Nigerian law. The National Assembly's scrutiny of treaties is vital for ensuring the country's compliance with international norms, although delays in ratification and partisan disagreements often hinder swift approvals (Omorogbe, 2011).

In the period between 2000 and 2023, several legislative interventions have shaped Nigerian foreign policy, particularly in the areas of security and economic diplomacy. For instance, the Nigerian legislature's approval of the African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) protocols reinforced Nigeria's commitment to regional security and peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, the National Assembly's engagement with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been instrumental in advancing Nigeria's leadership role in regional diplomacy (Adebajo, 2008). Despite this, scholars have highlighted the limited capacity of lawmakers in foreign policy analysis, often resulting in superficial debates and a lack of specialized legislative committees for foreign affairs (Ukeje, 2019).

The Nigerian legislature also plays a critical role in overseeing the executive's foreign policy actions through its power of inquiry and approval of foreign loans and military agreements. This oversight function was particularly visible in 2015 when the National Assembly blocked the executive's attempt to borrow funds from China for infrastructural projects without adequate scrutiny (Osunkeye, 2016). While this intervention was seen as a success for legislative oversight, it also pointed to the broader issue of institutional friction between the executive and legislature, which occasionally hampers effective foreign policy decision-making (Olaniyan & Akinola, 2017).

Empirical studies of the Nigerian legislature's role in foreign policy also reveal that, despite the formal power it holds, the legislature is often sidelined in key foreign policy decisions, especially under authoritarian tendencies or when the executive branch consolidates decision-making power (Barkan, 2009). In such cases, the legislature's role becomes more symbolic than functional, as seen during the tenure of former President Goodluck Jonathan, when the National Assembly had limited involvement in major diplomatic decisions such as the Nigerian government's response to the Boko Haram insurgency (Buhari, 2017).

However, there have been positive developments in legislative involvement in foreign policy lawmaking. The establishment of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs has created a platform for more focused discussions on international relations and diplomacy. Moreover, increasing collaboration with academic experts and think tanks has begun to enhance the legislature's understanding of foreign policy issues (Akinyemi, 2018). This collaboration is exemplified by the role of the National Institute for Legislative Studies (NILS), which offers training for lawmakers on international law and diplomacy.

The challenges that the Nigerian legislature faces in strengthening foreign policy laws for effective diplomatic relations include political instability, limited resources for foreign policy research, and the executive's dominance in foreign policy

formulation. Addressing these issues would require greater institutional capacity building, improve bipartisan collaboration, and enhance public engagement with foreign policy debates (Yahaya, 2021).

In conclusion, while the Nigerian legislature plays a crucial role in strengthening foreign policy laws and enhancing diplomatic relations, its effectiveness is often compromised by institutional and political constraints. Future reforms should focus on enhancing legislative expertise in foreign policy and fostering stronger collaboration between the executive and legislative branches to promote a more coherent and effective foreign policy for Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: Neoliberal Institutionalism

One of the key theories that provide insight into the role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws for effective diplomatic relations is Neoliberal Institutionalism. The theory, developed by scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977), focuses on the role of international institutions and regimes in promoting cooperation among states despite the inherent anarchy in the international system. According to this theory, states are motivated by rational self-interest and engage in multilateral institutions and frameworks to achieve common goals, reduce uncertainty, and manage complex global challenges.

Basic Assumptions:

1. **Interdependence:** States, while sovereign, are interdependent on one another, especially in a globalized world where challenges such as security, trade, and environmental concerns transcend borders.
2. **Role of International Institutions:** International institutions and regimes provide frameworks for cooperation, foster trust, and establish norms that help states work together effectively in addressing shared issues, such as international law, human rights, and security.
3. **State Cooperation:** Despite the anarchic nature of the international system, states cooperate through institutions because these provide benefits such as enhanced security, economic cooperation, and stability.
4. **Rationality of State Actors:** States act rationally in their interactions, making decisions that maximize their national interest. This rational behavior leads states to seek cooperation and compliance with international agreements and norms.

Relevance of the Theory to the Work:

Neoliberal Institutionalism is relevant to evaluating the role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws for several reasons. First, it underscores the importance of international cooperation, which is central to Nigeria's foreign policy. By ratifying international treaties and engaging in multilateral organizations, the Nigerian legislature helps the country participate in

international regimes that govern diplomatic relations and security, such as the African Union, ECOWAS, and the United Nations.

Moreover, the legislature's role in reviewing and ratifying treaties aligns with the theory's assumption of rational state behavior. By critically evaluating foreign policy laws and ensuring they serve Nigeria's national interests, the legislature enhances the country's ability to cooperate with other states within international frameworks. Furthermore, the theory's emphasis on the role of institutions resonates with the Nigerian National Assembly's institutional power in shaping foreign policy, ensuring that Nigeria's international agreements align with both domestic law and international norms.

Neoliberal Institutionalism also explains why Nigeria, through its legislature, is engaged in multilateral diplomacy and treaty negotiations. For instance, Nigeria's involvement in regional peacekeeping operations and its participation in international environmental agreements reflect its strategic interest in managing common global challenges through cooperative institutions. This cooperation is essential for maintaining effective diplomatic relations, a key area of focus for the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws.

Furthermore, Neoliberal Institutionalism provides a framework for understanding how the Nigerian legislature, as a key domestic institution, contributes to the strengthening of foreign policy laws, ensuring Nigeria's effective participation in international diplomatic processes and fostering international cooperation.

Major Findings of the Research

The study's findings, derived from qualitative interviews with key legislative stakeholders, academic experts, and foreign policy analysts, alongside a rigorous review of secondary literature, highlight the critical role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws for effective diplomatic relations between 2000 and 2023. The major findings are categorized into legislative contributions, challenges, and prospects.

1. Legislative Contributions to Foreign Policy Laws (2000–2023)

The Nigerian legislature has played a critical role in **formulating, ratifying, and implementing foreign policy laws**. Findings from interviews and secondary data reveal that:

- o The **National Assembly ratified several treaties** under Section 12 of the 1999 Constitution, including the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and the Paris Climate Accord.
- o Legislative committees, such as the **House and Senate Committees on Foreign Affairs**, provided oversight on foreign engagements to ensure national interests were upheld.

- o Legislators engaged in **parliamentary diplomacy**, participating in regional and global bodies like ECOWAS and the African Union to strengthen Nigeria's diplomatic presence.
 - o Laws such as the **Terrorism (Prevention) Act and the Cybercrime Act** enhanced Nigeria's international security partnerships.
2. **Legislative Oversight and Accountability in Foreign Policy**
The research highlights that legislative oversight has contributed to **greater accountability** and effectiveness in Nigeria's foreign policy:
- o **Scrutiny of executive foreign agreements** by the National Assembly prevented agreements that might not align with Nigeria's strategic interests.
 - o **Budget approvals for foreign policy initiatives** were influenced by legislative debate and committee recommendations.
 - o The study identifies cases where legislative inquiries influenced foreign relations, such as the **deliberations on Nigeria's ECOWAS financial commitments and bilateral trade agreements**.
3. **Challenges Hindering Effective Legislative Role in Foreign Policy**
Despite its constitutional role, the legislature faces significant challenges in consolidating foreign policy laws:
- o **Executive dominance:** The presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs often make unilateral foreign policy decisions, sidelining legislative input (as noted by Sen. Henry Seriake Dickson).
 - o **Limited foreign policy expertise:** Many legislators lack technical knowledge in international relations, relying heavily on bureaucrats and consultants (as highlighted by Dr. Jidere).
 - o **Delays in treaty ratification:** Bureaucratic inefficiencies and political disagreements have led to prolonged delays, as seen in Nigeria's delayed ratification of the Rome Statute of the ICC.
4. **Prospects for Strengthening Legislative Engagement in Foreign Policy**
- o **Capacity building:** Experts, including Sunday Olubejide, advocate for continuous training for legislators on international relations.
 - o **Institutional reforms:** Proposals, such as Sen. Abubakar Sani Bello's recommendation for constitutional amendments, could mandate legislative consultation before major international agreements are signed.
 - o **Public engagement in foreign policy:** Increased media and civil society participation in foreign policy discussions can enhance transparency and accountability (as emphasized by Prof. Ebele Udoji).

The study concludes that while the Nigerian legislature has made significant contributions to foreign policy laws, institutional and political barriers limit its full potential. Addressing these challenges through legislative reforms, capacity-building programs, and enhanced collaboration between the executive and legislature would strengthen Nigeria's foreign policy framework and bolster its global diplomatic relations.

Discussion of Findings (Expanded)

The findings of this research highlight the significant role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws and enhancing diplomatic relations. Through expert interviews and literature review, the study identifies key contributions, challenges, and future prospects of legislative engagement in Nigeria's foreign policy framework.

1. Legislative Contributions to Foreign Policy Laws (2000–2023)

The Nigerian legislature has played a significant role in formulating, ratifying, and implementing foreign policy laws, shaping the country's diplomatic engagements and global commitments. Through its constitutional mandate, the National Assembly has influenced Nigeria's international obligations and policy direction, ensuring alignment with national interests and global standards.

Treaty Ratification and Legislative Oversight

Under Section 12 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, the National Assembly exercises the authority to ratify treaties before they become domestically binding. Legislative scrutiny plays a crucial role in ensuring that Nigeria's commitments to international agreements align with its economic, security, and diplomatic interests. Notable cases, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and the Paris Climate Accord, have undergone extensive legislative debate, particularly regarding their economic and environmental implications. Expert assessments indicate that parliamentary intervention in these agreements has facilitated a balanced approach to Nigeria's trade and environmental policies.

Furthermore, legislative oversight remains instrumental in evaluating foreign policy decisions, with relevant committees actively reviewing bilateral and multilateral agreements to ensure alignment with national priorities. This scrutiny has been pivotal in preventing unfavorable agreements that could potentially undermine Nigeria's economic and security interests..

Parliamentary Diplomacy and Global Engagement

Beyond legal and oversight functions, the Nigerian legislature engages in parliamentary diplomacy, an essential tool for fostering international cooperation. According to Prof. Kamilu Fagge (2023), Nigerian legislators actively participate in

inter-parliamentary bodies such as ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to enhance Nigeria's global diplomatic footprint. Through diplomatic missions and intergovernmental dialogue, legislators facilitate bilateral relations, trade agreements, and security partnerships that strengthen Nigeria's position in the global arena (Bello & Dickson, 2023).

For instance, Nigeria's parliamentary engagements within ECOWAS have influenced regional security frameworks, contributing to counter-terrorism strategies and economic integration policies. This is evident in the legislative contributions to the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) and security initiatives against transnational crimes (Udoji, 2022). Such diplomatic efforts position Nigeria as a key player in regional economic and security governance.

Legislative Influence on Foreign Policy Implementation

The National Assembly has also contributed to **policy implementation** through the enactment of foreign policy-related laws. Prominent among these are:

- **The Terrorism (Prevention) Act (2011, Amended 2013)**, which strengthened Nigeria's compliance with international counter-terrorism agreements, enhancing **security cooperation with global actors like the United Nations, the African Union, and INTERPOL** (Olubejide, 2023).
- **The Cybercrime Act (2015)**, which aligned Nigeria's legal framework with **international cybersecurity norms**, facilitating partnerships with foreign intelligence agencies and multinational corporations on cybersecurity threats (Adamu, 2023).

The adoption and enforcement of these laws have bolstered Nigeria's foreign security partnerships, contributing to intelligence sharing and counterterrorism cooperation with nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (Jidere, 2023).

The Nigerian legislature has significantly shaped foreign policy laws through treaty ratification, legislative oversight, parliamentary diplomacy, and policy implementation. While legislative contributions have strengthened Nigeria's diplomatic and security engagements, scholars argue that structural limitations, including executive dominance and bureaucratic inefficiencies, hinder full legislative effectiveness in foreign policy (Adeniyi & Yusuf, 2021). Addressing these institutional challenges through enhanced legislative autonomy, capacity-building initiatives, and strengthened parliamentary-executive collaboration will further solidify the National Assembly's role in Nigeria's foreign policy framework.

2. Legislative Oversight and Accountability in Foreign Policy

Legislative oversight plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation. The

Nigerian National Assembly, through its constitutional mandate, scrutinizes executive decisions on foreign policy, ensuring that international agreements, budget allocations, and diplomatic engagements align with national interests (Ojo, 2020). The study's findings, supported by expert interviews and secondary literature, reveal key aspects of legislative oversight that have shaped Nigeria's foreign policy.

Scrutiny of Executive Foreign Agreements

A significant function of the Nigerian legislature in foreign policy oversight is the scrutiny of executive agreements and treaties. According to Section 12 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, treaties must be ratified by the National Assembly before they become domestically binding (Fagge, 2022). This constitutional safeguard empowers the legislature to review, amend, or reject international agreements that may not serve Nigeria's strategic interests.

For example, in 2018, the National Assembly conducted extensive deliberations on Nigeria's accession to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Legislators raised concerns about potential economic disadvantages, particularly for Nigerian industries, leading to delayed ratification until adequate protections were put in place (Bello & Dickson, 2023). Similarly, in 2020, the National Assembly halted a proposed loan agreement with China, citing concerns over sovereignty clauses that could potentially compromise Nigeria's economic autonomy (Adeniyi & Yusuf, 2021).

The House and Senate Committees on Foreign Affairs have also played a role in scrutinizing bilateral and multilateral agreements to ensure they align with Nigeria's economic, security, and diplomatic objectives (Olubejide, 2023). Expert interviews, including insights from Prof. Kamilu Fagge of Bayero University, emphasize that such legislative scrutiny has prevented Nigeria from entering agreements that could undermine national sovereignty or economic stability.

Budgetary Oversight and Foreign Policy Funding

The budget approval process provides another avenue for legislative oversight in foreign policy. The National Assembly, through its power of appropriation, reviews, modifies, and approves budgetary allocations for foreign affairs (Jidere, 2023). This oversight ensures that foreign policy funding aligns with Nigeria's diplomatic priorities and international commitments.

Legislative debates have significantly influenced budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigerian embassies, and multilateral engagements. For instance, in 2021, the National Assembly revised Nigeria's financial commitments to ECOWAS, citing inefficiencies in fund utilization and advocating for more targeted diplomatic investments (Udoji, 2022). Additionally, in 2022, legislators scrutinized budget proposals for the Nigerian Foreign Service, emphasizing the need for

improved diplomatic training and better funding for embassies in strategic locations (Adeniyi & Yusuf, 2021).

According to Hon. Abdulmumini Jibrin, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, legislative oversight on budgetary matters has ensured that Nigeria's diplomatic expenditures align with broader national development goals. This oversight has prevented misallocation of funds and ensured that Nigeria's foreign engagements are financially sustainable (Bello & Dickson, 2023).

Legislative Inquiries and Their Impact on Foreign Relations

Another crucial dimension of legislative oversight is the use of inquiries, motions, and hearings to address key foreign policy concerns. The study identifies cases where legislative inquiries have influenced Nigeria's foreign relations, particularly in areas such as regional economic contributions, bilateral trade agreements, and diplomatic conflicts.

One notable example is the National Assembly's inquiry into Nigeria's financial contributions to ECOWAS. Legislators questioned the efficiency and accountability of Nigeria's financial commitments, leading to greater transparency in ECOWAS fund allocations and Nigeria's regional economic strategy (Olubejide, 2023). Another example is the deliberations on Nigeria's trade agreements with the European Union (EU), where legislative scrutiny led to amendments ensuring better protection for Nigerian industries against unfair trade practices (Adamu, 2023).

Furthermore, in 2020, the Senate conducted an inquiry into the closure of Nigeria's land borders, questioning the executive's rationale for the decision. The legislative debate highlighted economic consequences for local businesses, prompting the government to reassess its trade policies with neighboring countries (Fagge, 2022).

Legislative oversight has significantly contributed to enhancing accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in Nigeria's foreign policy. Through scrutiny of executive agreements, budgetary oversight, and legislative inquiries, the National Assembly has played a crucial role in shaping Nigeria's international engagements. However, challenges such as executive dominance, limited foreign policy expertise among legislators, and bureaucratic inefficiencies continue to hinder full legislative effectiveness (Adeniyi & Yusuf, 2021). Strengthening institutional reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and legislative-executive collaboration is essential for ensuring that the Nigerian legislature fully realizes its oversight potential in foreign policy governance.

3. Challenges Hindering Effective Legislative Role in Foreign Policy

Despite its constitutional mandate to participate in the formulation, ratification, and oversight of foreign policy laws, the Nigerian legislature faces several institutional,

political, and technical challenges that impede its ability to effectively influence the country's foreign policy decisions. The findings from expert interviews, legislative documents, and secondary literature provide a deeper understanding of these obstacles, which can be categorized into executive dominance, limited foreign policy expertise, and delays in treaty ratification.

Executive Dominance in Foreign Policy

One of the primary challenges facing the Nigerian legislature is the dominance of the executive in foreign policy formulation and decision-making. As noted by Senator Henry Seriake Dickson, the presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs often make unilateral decisions on key foreign policy issues without consulting the National Assembly (Bello & Dickson, 2023). This trend has led to the marginalization of legislative input in critical foreign policy areas such as trade agreements, international treaties, and diplomatic engagements.

The Nigerian Constitution provides the National Assembly with a constitutional role in foreign policy, particularly in treaty ratification and budgetary approvals (Fagge, 2022). However, in practice, the executive frequently bypasses the legislature, leading to a situation where foreign policy decisions are made in isolation of legislative oversight. For instance, in 2017, President Muhammadu Buhari signed a significant trade agreement with China without prior consultation with the National Assembly, leading to widespread concern among legislators about the impact of such agreements on Nigeria's sovereignty (Adeniyi & Yusuf, 2021).

This executive dominance is also compounded by bureaucratic inefficiencies within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where foreign policy decisions are often shaped by a small group of high-level officials with limited input from the legislature (Udoji, 2022). This centralization of power in the executive weakens the legislature's capacity to shape or challenge foreign policy initiatives and undermines the checks and balances system established by the Nigerian Constitution.

Limited Foreign Policy Expertise Among Legislators

Another major challenge in foreign policy formulation is the lack of technical expertise among Nigerian legislators in the field of international relations and diplomacy. Many members of the National Assembly are generalists with little formal training in foreign policy, which undermines their ability to critically engage with complex foreign policy issues. As Dr. Jidere pointed out, foreign policy committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate often rely on external consultants and bureaucrats to guide their decisions, which reduces the effectiveness and independence of legislative scrutiny (Jidere, 2023).

The absence of dedicated foreign policy experts within the legislature results in a reactive rather than proactive approach to foreign policy. Legislators are often ill-equipped to question or challenge foreign policy decisions made by the executive, particularly when it comes to technical aspects such as international trade laws, climate change treaties, and security agreements. Prof. Kamilu Fagge (2022) argues that this lack of specialized knowledge significantly hinders the legislature's ability to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's foreign policy and to make informed decisions about the country's diplomatic engagements.

Furthermore, the over-reliance on external experts has led to a situation where legislative oversight is heavily dependent on the political ideologies and interests of foreign consultants, which often compromises the neutrality and objectivity of the legislative process (Fagge, 2022).

Delays in Treaty Ratification

A third challenge that affects the legislature's role in foreign policy is the frequent delays in the ratification of international treaties. While the National Assembly has the constitutional authority to ratify treaties, bureaucratic inefficiencies and political disagreements between the executive and the legislature have led to significant delays. For example, Nigeria's delayed ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is often cited as a case in point. The Roman Statute, which was signed by Nigeria in 2000, took almost 10 years to be ratified due to political disagreements and lack of political will to comply with the ICC's jurisdiction (Bello & Dickson, 2023).

These delays in treaty ratification not only affect Nigeria's standing in international law and diplomacy, but also result in the non-implementation of critical foreign agreements. For instance, the AfCFTA was ratified by the National Assembly after extensive delays, raising concerns over the timing of Nigeria's full participation in a regional trade agreement that has the potential to shape the future of African economic integration (Adeniyi & Yusuf, 2021). Delays in the ratification of human rights conventions, climate agreements, and trade treaties also have a negative impact on Nigeria's global credibility and diplomatic influence.

This bureaucratic inefficiency is compounded by political disagreements within the legislature, where different political factions have conflicting interests regarding the potential implications of foreign policy decisions. For example, regional political dynamics and economic interests often shape the ratification process and cause inconsistent foreign policy (Olubejide, 2023).

The challenges facing the Nigerian legislature's role in foreign policy—executive dominance, limited expertise, and delays in treaty ratification—continue to hinder its full potential in shaping, ratifying, and implementing foreign policy. While the

legislature plays a crucial oversight role, the political and institutional constraints highlighted by the study underscore the need for institutional reforms and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the legislature's ability to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's foreign policy process. Strengthening legislative foreign policy expertise, reducing executive overreach, and improving bureaucratic efficiency are essential steps towards ensuring that the National Assembly becomes a more effective partner in Nigeria's foreign diplomacy.

4. Prospects for Strengthening Legislative Engagement in Foreign Policy

The prospects for strengthening the legislative role in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation are informed by various strategies and reforms designed to address the challenges discussed earlier. These strategies are focused on capacity building, institutional reforms, and public engagement, which collectively aim to enhance the effectiveness and accountability of the National Assembly in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy.

Capacity Building for Legislators

A key recommendation for strengthening legislative involvement in foreign policy is capacity building, particularly through continuous training on international relations. Experts such as Sunday Olubejide (2023) emphasize the importance of equipping legislators with specialized knowledge in areas like international diplomacy, trade agreements, and security policies. Without technical expertise in foreign policy, legislators often rely on bureaucrats and consultants, as highlighted earlier by Dr. Jidere (2023), which may undermine the legislature's independence and effectiveness in foreign policy matters.

Investing in capacity-building programs, through partnerships with universities, research institutions, and foreign policy think tanks, would enable lawmakers to better understand the complexities of international treaties, multilateral negotiations, and global security issues. Prof. Kamilu Fagge (2022) also notes that by increasing legislative knowledge on foreign policy, legislators would be better equipped to challenge executive decisions, contribute meaningfully to foreign policy debates, and evaluate international agreements with an informed perspective. Additionally, training on diplomatic protocols and negotiation skills would enable Nigerian legislators to participate more actively in international summits, inter-parliamentary exchanges, and multilateral diplomatic engagements, thereby strengthening Nigeria's global diplomatic influence.

Institutional Reforms for Greater Legislative Autonomy

Institutional reforms are another critical avenue for enhancing the legislature's role in foreign policy. Senator Abubakar Sani Bello (2023) proposes constitutional amendments that would mandate legislative consultation before major international agreements are signed. Currently, the Nigerian executive often makes significant

foreign policy decisions without prior legislative approval or consultation, leaving the National Assembly with little opportunity to influence key foreign policy directions.

Amendments that would require pre-signing consultations would ensure that the National Assembly has a formal role in shaping major international treaties and agreements. Such reforms could also require the executive to justify its foreign policy decisions to the legislature, improving transparency and accountability in foreign policy processes. This would be in line with the constitutional principle of checks and balances, ensuring that the executive does not wield unchecked power in foreign policy affairs (Bello & Dickson, 2023).

These reforms could be coupled with the creation of permanent committees on foreign policy within both the House of Representatives and the Senate, where specialized legislative expertise could be developed over time. Such reforms would not only enhance the legislature's oversight capabilities but also ensure that the National Assembly has a significant influence on international engagements that have long-term implications for the country's diplomatic relationships and national interests.

Public Engagement in Foreign Policy

Public engagement is another crucial factor that could help strengthen the legislative role in foreign policy. As emphasized by Prof. Ebele Udoji (2022), media and civil society organizations can play an essential role in promoting transparency and accountability in foreign policy discussions. Public debates and dissemination of information related to foreign policy decisions allow citizens and civil society groups to hold their legislators accountable and ensure that foreign policy decisions align with national interests.

Increasing public participation through the media, civil society organizations, and academic institutions would foster a more informed citizenry and promote democratic accountability. Regular public hearings or forums on foreign policy topics could provide a platform for legislators to engage with stakeholders, including diplomats, policy experts, and the public. These engagements could help legislators gain public support for foreign policy initiatives and promote greater understanding of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives.

Additionally, active media coverage of legislative debates on foreign treaties and international agreements would increase public awareness of the implications of such decisions, empowering citizens to participate in democratic processes and voice their opinions on issues that affect the nation's international standing.

Strengthening the National Assembly's role in foreign policy formulation and implementation is critical for enhancing Nigeria's global influence and diplomatic credibility. By focusing on capacity building, institutional reforms, and public engagement, the legislature can enhance its effectiveness, accountability, and autonomy in foreign policy decisions. Specifically, continuous training for legislators on international relations, constitutional amendments that mandate pre-signing consultations, and increased media and civil society participation in foreign policy discussions would contribute to a more transparent and democratic foreign policy process.

In the long term, these efforts will not only empower the National Assembly to play a more central role in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy but also ensure that the country's foreign engagements are reflective of national priorities and supported by the people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Nigerian legislature has played a pivotal role in shaping and strengthening the country's foreign policy laws from 2000 to 2023. Through treaty ratifications, legislative oversight, and parliamentary diplomacy, the National Assembly has contributed to ensuring that foreign policy decisions align with Nigeria's national interests and international legal frameworks. Legislative bodies have actively engaged in scrutinizing executive foreign agreements and influencing major international treaties, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and the Paris Climate Accord. However, challenges such as executive dominance, limited foreign policy expertise, and delays in treaty ratifications have hindered the legislature's full potential in shaping foreign policy effectively. The research highlights the need for capacity building, institutional reforms, and increased public engagement to strengthen legislative involvement. Recommendations for constitutional amendments, mandatory consultations before major international agreements, and continuous training for legislators on international relations are crucial steps in enhancing the National Assembly's capacity to influence foreign policy. Furthermore, fostering public discourse on foreign policy through media and civil society engagement will promote transparency and accountability, ensuring that foreign policy decisions reflect the interests of the Nigerian people. Overall, addressing these challenges and implementing reforms will enhance Nigeria's diplomatic standing, ensuring that the legislature plays a more significant role in the country's foreign policy formulation and global engagements.

Research Recommendations

Based on the research findings and the questions posed, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of the Nigerian legislature in strengthening foreign policy laws and improving diplomatic relations:

1. Enhancing Legislative Contributions to Foreign Policy Formulation, Ratification, and Implementation

- **Institutionalizing Mandatory Legislative Review of Foreign Agreements:** The Nigerian Constitution should be amended to mandate National Assembly consultation and approval before any major international treaty is signed by the executive.
- **Strengthening Treaty Implementation Mechanisms:** The legislature should enact laws ensuring effective domestication and enforcement of ratified treaties to bridge the gap between legislative approval and policy execution.
- **Establishing a Foreign Policy Research Unit in the National Assembly:** A specialized research unit should be created to provide lawmakers with evidence-based insights, enhancing their ability to formulate and ratify foreign policy laws effectively.

2. Strengthening Legislative Oversight for Greater Accountability in Foreign Policy

- **Enhancing Budgetary Oversight of Foreign Affairs Spending:** The National Assembly should exercise greater scrutiny over the budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and foreign missions to ensure transparency and policy alignment.
- **Increasing Legislative Hearings on Foreign Policy Matters:** Regular legislative hearings should be conducted to evaluate the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions and ensure alignment with national interests.
- **Strengthening Inter-Parliamentary Diplomacy:** Nigerian legislators should actively participate in regional and international parliamentary forums such as ECOWAS and the African Union to influence foreign policy outcomes.

3. Addressing Challenges Hindering Effective Legislative Engagement in Foreign Policy

- **Reducing Executive Dominance in Foreign Policy Decision-Making:** Legislative advocacy for checks and balances should be strengthened to prevent unilateral executive actions in foreign relations. This could include laws that ensure the legislature is consulted before critical foreign agreements are made.
- **Improving Foreign Policy Expertise Among Lawmakers:** Training programs should be introduced in collaboration with universities and research institutions to equip legislators with specialized knowledge of international relations.
- **Fast-Tracking Treaty Ratification Processes:** A streamlined process should be established to prevent bureaucratic delays in treaty ratifications. This may involve setting a fixed timeframe for legislative review and approval.

4. Implementing Legislative Reforms and Strategies for Improved Global Engagement

- Constitutional Amendments for Legislative Autonomy in Foreign Affairs: Amendments should be made to give the National Assembly more power in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy and ensuring executive accountability.
- Increasing Public and Civil Society Engagement in Foreign Policy Debates: The legislature should encourage public discourse on foreign policy through media channels, policy dialogues, and stakeholder consultations to foster greater transparency and accountability.
- Leveraging Digital Technology for Legislative Efficiency: The adoption of digital platforms for legislative documentation, tracking of treaty ratifications, and virtual engagements with foreign policy experts can enhance legislative efficiency and effectiveness.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria's National Assembly can play a more active and influential role in shaping foreign policy, ensuring greater transparency, accountability, and alignment with national and international interests.

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