

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the influence of religion on Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making during the Buhari administration (2015-2019). Using Constructivism, foreign policy Decision-making Approach and Two Level Game theory, all assess how religious identity, domestic religious pressure, and International expectations intersected in shaping Nigeria's diplomatic positions. The paper finds that while foreign policy remained officially secular, religious dynamics – especially Christian/Muslim tensions and elite perceptions – subtly influenced Nigeria's foreign policy engagements, particularly on matters involving the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Israel- Palestine, and International humanitarian issues. The seminar paper concludes by advocating for more inclusive and transparent policy-making that reflects Nigerian's religious diversity.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Decision making process, Religion

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INTRODUCTION

Religion has long played a significant role in shaping both domestic and International relations in Nigeria, Africa's most populous and religiously diverse nation. With a near-equal population of Muslims and Christians, Nigeria's political leadership often walks a delicate line to maintain religious balance, unity, and legitimacy. While foreign policy is conventionally viewed through the lens of national interest, economic priorities, and geopolitical strategy, in Nigeria, religions identity and affiliation subtly influence diplomatic choices, International alignments, and soft power projection.

Between 2015 and 2019, under the administration of late president Muhammadu Buhari, these dynamics became particularly pronounced. Buhari, a Muslim from northern Nigeria, governed a country grappling with religious tensions, extremist violence from Boko Haram, and growing interfaith mistrust. These domestic challenges inevitably spilled over into Nigeria's foreign policy conduct, as the government engaged with both Islamic and Christian – majority nations, participated in religiously oriented multilateral forums such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and framed counterterrorism diplomacy in part through religious narratives.

The study explores the interplay between religion and foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria during the Buhari administration's first term. It investigates

how religious considerations – both symbolic and strategic – shaped Nigeria's international engagements and diplomatic posture. While not the sole determinant of foreign policy, religion emerged as an important soft- power tool and a factor in legitimizing Nigeria's actions on the global stage.

Foreign policy is a decision directed by a government to the governments of other states. It is a policy that is meant to influence other states in the international political system. Decision making process in Nigeria's foreign policy refers to the several actions, consultations, and institutions involved in formulating and implementing Nigeria's external relations and diplomatic actions. Religion is a structured system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and value centred-around questions of existence, purpose, morality, and the divine or sacred. It often involves worship of a higher power (God or gods), ethical guidelines, and a community of believers.

This study on foreign policy decision making in Nigeria, covers four years of the first tenure of president Mohammadu Buhari as duly elected of the Federal Republic of Nigeria between 2015 and 2019. It covers only areas where religion influenced Nigeria's foreign decision making in Nigeria. The study aims to; Examine the influence of religion on Nigeria's foreign policy decision making during the first tenure of President Muhammad Buhari as an elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2015 - 2019). Discuss the extent the President Buhari's administration prioritise religious considerations in its

foreign policy decisions between 2015 and 2019.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign policy is a critical area of study in international relations that seeks to explore how a state interacts with other states and non-state actors in the global arena. It involves the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of a state strategy towards achieving its national interests and objectives.

Foreign policy refers to a set of principles that guide the conduct of a nation's external relations. That is why in Western literature, it is sometimes called 'foreign relations policy'. Foreign policy is sometimes loosely referred to as diplomacy; but in actual fact, all foreign policies are conducted by instruments of diplomacy. Foreign policy is premised on national self-interest: policy-makers articulate goals or objectives of the nation in the international community with the view of gaining mileage and strategic advantage in international politics.

Foreign policy is therefore, the general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012). It is very instructive to note that the foreign policies of states are primarily determined by domestic considerations, including strategic interests, economic and military potentials, quality of leadership and citizens, quality of ideas government has. etc. Foreign policy is a coordinated strategy with which a country's decision

makers seek to manipulate the international environment in order to achieve certain national objectives (Idang, 1973)

According to University of York (2022), foreign policy is the mechanism, national governments use to guide their diplomatic interactions and relationships with other countries. A state's foreign policy reflects its values and goals, and helps drive its political and economic aims in the global arena. Many foreign policies also have a strong focus on national and international security, and will help determine how a country interacts with international organisations, such as the United Nations, and citizens of other countries.

According to The Encyclopaedia Britannica in its 2009 edition, Foreign policy is general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its Interactions with other states. According to Najmuddin, A.S. (2021), Foreign policy is the key element in the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into concrete courses of action to attain these objectives and promote its interests.

Hugh Gibson in his own view, viewed foreign policy as a well-rounded, comprehensive plan, based on knowledge and experience, for conducting the business of government with the rest of the world. It is aimed at promoting and protecting the interests of the nation. According to Sesay, et al (2011), foreign policy is regarded as an array of activities that states engage in to change the behaviour of other International actors

and for advertising and promoting their national goals and objectives in the International community. The importance of foreign policy to a nation cannot therefore be overemphasised. It has been argued that through foreign policy, ‘‘a nation is able to announce to other independent states, its appearance on the global stage as an independent actor, and to also establish its identity and promote national symbols such as flag and national anthem’’. Thus, foreign policy is not only a unique symbol of political independence and sovereignty, but also one of the main instruments for advancing a state’s national interest broadly defined in the community of nations.

Also, foreign policy provides a country or nation the means to identify and develop close ties with friends and if possible, neutralise the policies of enemies, perceived or real. A country’s foreign policy statement or declaration, especially, principles and objectives, provides other nations insights into its world view’s and aspirations and enables other nations to relate with it effectively to achieve its goals through either bilateral or multilateral cooperation, which could be at the regional, continental and global levels.

Jones, H., and Modelski, see foreign policy as the behaviour of states towards external actors. States interact with each other on the one hand, and with other non- state actors on the other through their foreign policies. Therefore, in International politics, foreign policies are like a charter containing national interests showing the areas of agreement and

disagreement. It explains the ideas with which the state would exert its influence in a very effective way. Foreign policy of a state is bilaterally and multilaterally formulated primarily to safeguard and promote its national interests. It is a direct reflection of a country’s traditional values and overall national policies, her aspirations and self-perception (Ahmed, 2020).

Frankel (1963), sees foreign policy as a ‘‘dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and support and the changing external circumstances. By this, foreign policy involves set of actions or inactions that are made within state’s borders, intended towards forces existing outside the country’s borders. It comprises the formation and implementation of a set of ideas that govern the behaviour of states, while interacting with state and non-state actors to defend and enhance their national interests. Through it, every state decides what course, it will pursue in world affairs within the limits of its strength and the realities of the external environment. Foreign policy therefore, confers a sense of direction to a state. It provides adequate instruments for the convenient journey towards this direction. It creates a sense of purpose as well as a confidence to achieve that purpose. In that context, it acts as an indispensable equipment of every state in world affairs (Bojang 2018).

Foreign policy, can be reduced to its fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them. The interaction

between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft. In its ingredients, the foreign policy of all nations, great and small, is the same.(Fashagba, J.O. &Ajayi R. 2014). In the same vein, foreign policy comprises of decisions, actions, and inactions as evident in state interaction with external actors, foreign policy involves decisions and actions, which includes to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others.

DETERMINANTS OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The foreign policy of any state is conditioned by two determinants, namely: through domestic and the external environments.

Domestic Environment

Cultural and Religious diversity: There are many cultural, social and strong religious forces, and special interests that are operative. Diversity is not necessarily a source of weakness. However, it unquestionably presents special challenges in the making of foreign policy. To obtain consensus on foreign policy, policy makers will have to try to balance these interests. The religions dichotomy which has always been an undercurrent factor especially in Nigeria's relations with countries in the Middle East, has become more pronounced with the growth of some degree of religious fundamentalism.

Economic Factor: Another domestic factor that has influenced the formulation and conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy has been the state of the economy. There

is a strong correlation between the domestic healthy and prosperity of the economy and Nigeria's foreign policy performance and conduct. Nigeria's foreign policy has been conditioned by economic status of the country, the economy of Nigeria exhibits largely a neo-colonial structure, depending on export of primary goods and import of finished commodities, thus the economy has remained under-developed. This has in turn inhibited the country from playing a dynamic foreign policy.

Military Factor: The ultimate arbitrator in cases of interactions and disputes between states is military force. States that are more powerful militarily usually hold the day. But, because Nigeria is militarily weak, she does not have the military capability to pursue a dynamic revolutionary or radically progressive foreign policy. Nigeria's military is a dependent institution because Nigeria does not produce its own weapons, the weapons or military hard-wears are procured from developed countries, based on this fact, Nigeria cannot pursue foreign policy that will go against the interest of those developed countries.

Geo-Political location of the country: The position and location of countries influence their foreign policies. A country that has access to the sea is more endowed and advantageous than one that is land-locked. Nigeria's geo-political location is advantageous in this context. The country has access to the sea, this is why land-locked countries like Niger and Chad would prefer to settle any dispute with Nigeria amicably.

Demographic factor: Population constitutes an important indicator of a country's power potential and thus influences its foreign policy. The question of human resources in a country affect in one way or the other, the foreign policy of the country. The quality of the population is even more significant. The articulate nature of the citizenry for instance influences the kind of foreign policy decisions that are taken in certain sensitive issues. The more enlightened the citizens are, the higher their level of understanding of foreign issues and the greater their willingness to influence government decisions on those issues. For instance, majority of Nigerians kicked against gay marriage in 2014 which led the "same-sex marriage prohibition Act, 2014", signed into law by president Goodluck Jonathan in January 2014.

Public opinion: public opinion is very vital to foreign policy formulation, there is no government that will ignore the wishes of the majority of the people, for example, the abrogation of the Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact of 1962 and the government stand on gay marriage in 2014 are few examples of influence of public opinion on Nigeria's foreign relations.

Domestic Political situation: Domestic Political situation is another important determinant of a country's foreign policy. A stable political system is imperative for pursuing a dynamic and coherent foreign policy. During the 1960s, Nigeria was in a state of political instability and could not play any active role in global Politics, the same experience was witnessed

between 1993 and 1999, when the freest and fairest democratic election ever conducted in the country was annulled by the military government.

Personality factors: The foreign policy of a country is also influenced by the personality of the leaders. As pointed out by Idang (1973), "the growing personalization of political power in most post-colonial states means that the motivations and personality characteristics of the key leadership groups are important domestic determinants of foreign policy".

External Environment

International law: International laws like, aviation law, maritime law, etc., have implications for external behaviour of countries. There are laid down rules and regulations that guide interaction between and among countries in the international arena, and sanctions can be applied to erring states.

Foreign aid: The developed nations use economic aid, especially to influence the foreign policy of African states. Thus, African countries dilute their foreign policy in such a way that will enable them to get foreign aid and since foreign aid essentially comes from the west, often, foreign policy of most African states tends to be Pro-west, Nigeria is not an exception.

International organisations: international organisations are also playing vital role in determining country's foreign policy, the agreements reached by these international organisations are binding on every member of that organisation, e.g. being a

member of OIC will affect the country's posture to issue between Israel and Palestine.

Non state actors: non- state actors in International relations are entities that participate in global affairs but are not sovereign states, e.g., Non- governmental Organisations(NGOs) like Amnesty International, Multinational Corporations, religious Institutions(The Vatican, World Council of Churches, Islamic groups etc.), Media Organisations, like CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera etc, Terrorist and Insurgent groups e.g.: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram etc. these non-state actors play vital roles in shaping International outcomes, they often cooperating with or challenging state power in areas like security, development, human rights, and diplomacy.

FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Foreign policy decision making refers to the process through which a state determines its external goals, chooses strategies to pursue them, and engages with other international actors to protect or advance its national interests. It involves a combination of political, Institutional, economic, ideological, and sometimes personal factors that shape how a country interacts with the rest of the World.

MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED IN FOREIGN POLICY MAKING

The Head of state/ Government
e.g. president or prime-minister
– President is the key decision-maker in foreign policy,

especially presidential system like Nigeria. He or she is the chief architect of foreign policy. He approves treaties, appoints ambassadors, and direct foreign relations.

Ministry of foreign Affairs – The ministry coordinates and implements Nigeria's foreign policy. The ministry gives advise to the president and prepares briefing notes, drafts policy, and strategic analysis. The ministry manages Nigeria's embassies and mission abroad.

National Assembly – It ratifies International treaties and agreements, section 12 of the 1999 constitution empowered national Assembly on the matter. The national Assembly also has the constitutional power to screen and confirm the ambassadorial list sent to it by the head of government.

National Security Council/ Foreign policy Advisory bodies: These bodies composed of top security, intelligence, and diplomatic officials, these people are experts on their fields, they study issues at international level and they provide strategic input, especially on sensitive regional and security matters.

Ministry of finance/ Economy is engaged when foreign policy

involves trade, investment, or loans, also collaborates in economic diplomacy and regional economic integration e.g. ECOWAS.

SCHOLARS ON FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Several scholars have extensively analysed the foreign policy decision-making process in Nigeria, offering diverse perspectives on its evolution, institutional dynamics, and external influences. Below are the overviews of notable scholars and their contributions;

Professor Ibrahim Gambari (1980), in his work, Gambari explores the gap between foreign policy theory and practical decision-making in Nigeria, particularly in the post military era. He analysis the role of key actor such as the president, ministry of external affairs, civil service, and political elites, noting how personal interests, ideology, and weak institutions often shape outcomes more than strategic planning. He emphasises the executive dominated nature of Nigeria's foreign policy and the need for better coordination, democratic input, and national interest alignment.

Dr. Eze-Michael Ezedikachi (2022), contributed to the discourse on Nigeria's foreign policy decision making process through his collaborative work with Nwadiuto Franca Nwakanma, in their study, they examined the extent to which international organisations influence the foreign policy processes of sovereign states, with a particular focus on Nigeria.

They analyse the interactions between Nigeria and various international bodies, assessing how these relationships impact policy formulation and implementation. The work highlights the complexities and nuances of external influences on national decision-making, emphasising the need for a balanced approach that safeguards national interests while engaging with global entities. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between domestic policy-making structures and international pressures, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Nigeria in the global arena.

Prof. sheriff Folarin (2024), has also made remarkable contributions to the study of Nigeria's foreign policy decision making processes. His works examine the interplay between domestic factors and international relations, offering insights into the evolution and challenges of Nigeria's foreign policy. His works are instrumental for scholars and policy makers interested in understanding the complexities of Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and the factors influencing its international engagements.

Prof. Femi Otubanjo (1989), a respected Nigerian scholar in International relations and foreign policy. His works have significantly contributed to understanding Nigeria's foreign policy decision making process, especially in relation to political leadership, ideology, and national interest. According to him, Nigeria's foreign policy is largely centralized and personalised with the president playing a dominant role, he observed that institutions like the ministry of foreign

Affairs and the national Assembly have had limited influence, often playing a reactive rather than proactive role. He analysed how individual leaders' backgrounds, ideologies and perceptions significantly shape foreign policy directions, for example, comparing president Olusegun Obasanjo 1999-2007 with Muhammad Buhari 2015-2023. He noted Nigeria's ideological shifts from non-alignment to Afrocentric foreign policy, often based more on regime interest rather than consistent national ideology.

Arowosegbe and Akomolafe(2016), in his article titled "The foreign relations power of the Nigerian National Assembly", delves into the constitutional roles and powers of the Nigerian legislature in foreign policy matters, highlighting the interplay between the executive and legislative branches in foreign relations. This work contributes to a broader understanding of the complexities and dynamics of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making processes. According to them, the articulation and execution of foreign relations policies are no doubt responsibilities that fall squarely within the legal and constitutional competence of the executive in most democratic societies. Nevertheless, the place of the legislature in ensuring success can never be glossed over. Their article examines the nature and means of legislative powers on the foreign plane. It focuses on an articulation of these powers using the Nigerian National Assembly as a case study. They discovered that the powers exercisable are derived from the basic legislative powers granted by the

constitution and that they are quite extensive. Nonetheless, the Nigerian National Assembly is yet to attain the "transformative" status as envisaged by the Nigerian presidential constitution.

RELIGION

In all ages, religion has come to grips with the existence of all human endeavours. Religion at all times, plays significant role in shaping the thought, perception, approach, feeling and history of humankind. No doubt, religion is expressed by a group of people united by a common interest. In other words, religion is expressed by a community of people who share a common belief, ethnic origin, culture and tradition in a defined territory as couched in nationhood. Therefore, religion and statehood are anchored on man just as religion and politics converge on man. It is worth asserting that religion and politics meet on the same subject, man living, man acting and interacting, man behaving in organic consensus. Therefore, man is a religious and political animal.

Religion as a phenomenon means different things to different people. However, the root of religion is derived from Latin word '*RELIGARE*' which means to 'bind', to bring together, to come together, to exist side by side, and to fuse together. Some authorities have observed that religion is a binding force in human society. In fact, religion embraces all aspects of life and it represents wholeness of all existence and as well is life itself. Without equivocation, religion has been defined

by gamut of scholars. However, the definition seems to defy the satisfactory quest for a universally acceptable definition. Yet, new and universally definition is not offered either. It is proper to examining some of the definitions as given by the authority:

Alamu (2012), describes Religion “as any system which relates men to ultimate values, whether God or something else and which embodies a creed, a code and a cult”.

He distinguished three basic features of religion as belief, feeling and action. It is imperative to note that what is pivotal to religion is belief in God or gods, the nature and destiny of the meaning of history and the end. On the basis of this, it is imperative to note that religion does not only command loyalty, but also gives its adherents something they are glad to live for and if need be, die for.

Ejiofor (1974), also attests to the fact that: Religion is the complex of beliefs and behaviour of men in the supernatural sphere and realities and in the dynamic linkage of super-natural sphere and realities and in the dynamic linkage of supernatural with the natural... religion is one major drive behind human behaviour. Religion has had an important disciplinary effect on the whole social order in any given civilization.

The above shows that religion is a very deep factor in the lives of men. Religion identifies itself with the first instinct for self-preservation. Men take off from religion, men march along with religion

and they arrive at religion with a minute-to-minute phenomenon.

According to Britannica (2025), Religion is human-beings' relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of special reverence. It is also commonly regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death.

According to Gaitanos (2019), The term “Religion” can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices that relate to supernatural beings and are intended to organize and define the environment in which the religious community operates.

Emile Durkheim sees religion as a system around sanctuary, that is, a system of beliefs, practices and social behaviours that unites individuals in a moral community.

RELIGION AS A MEANS OF SEGREGATION

It is characteristic that the term ‘religion’ was used as a means of separating and classifying people to serve the political interests of the western world (colonialism, Christianity, missionary activity), for example, Christianity was used through missionary action as the ultimate model of religion by which the other religions were compared, judged and classified.

Nigeria is one of the most ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse countries in the world. As oyeneye and Adenuga (2015) aver, while there are three major religions in Nigeria including

Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions, these three religions have different seats with differing belief systems. Since every sect considers itself as the custodian of the eternal truth, the tendency to view other religions and sects in the same religion with suspicion, mistrust and hostility has been a major cause of worry, not only in Nigeria but in every human society. Religious and sectarian conflicts have been and amongst peoples.

The 'religionisation' of politics and the politicisation of religion have negative implications for national unity in the sense that religious affiliation have become a necessary criterion for the occupation of public offices leading to increased religious pretension (Afolabi 2015).

THEORETICAL APPROACHES FOR ANALYSING RELIGION AND FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING

CONSTRUCTIVISM THEORY

Constructivism is a theory in International relations, and political science that emphasizes the social construction of reality. It argues that the key elements of international politics, such as power, interests, state identity, and norms- are not fixed or given but are socially created through interaction, shared ideas, culture, and beliefs. Constructivists believe that the international system is not solely determined by material factors like military power, but is also shaped by shared understandings, norms and

identities. The constructivist theory was first introduced to international relations through Nicholas G. Onuf's 1989 book "World of our making". Onuf and other early scholars who built the theoretical foundations of Constructivism in International relations first established that norms matter in the context. Norms are shared social beliefs about ideas, people, and concepts. This theory was popularised and expanded upon by the American Political Scientist, Alexander Wendt (1999). The key principle of constructivism in International Relations is primarily concerned with three things. First, states are the core units of analysis. Secondly, that the structures of states are inter subjective and, relatedly, that state identities and interests are similarly socially constructed.

Constructivism is relevant to the study of Nigeria's foreign policy, because religion forms a major part of Nigeria's National identity and influences how leaders perceive global actors and issues e.g. Organisation of Islamic cooperation membership, Israel-Palestine stance.

TWO-LEVEL GAME THEORY

This theory illustrates how domestic and international politics interact during diplomatic negotiations. It states that foreign policy decisions are made by balancing domestic pressures and International demands. The theory states that religions or expectations at home may constrain or shape Nigeria's international actions e.g. reactions to crises in Muslim or Christian countries. It analyse how internal religious dynamics influence foreign relations. Some of the

scholars who contributed to this theory is Robert D. Putnam, in his seminar (1988) titled “Diplomacy and domestic Politics: The logic of Two-level Games”. He noted that International agreements are not solely determined by negotiations between states but are also influenced by domestic political considerations.

He conceptualised International negotiations as a two-level game: at level one, national governments negotiate with each other; at level two, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies. Other scholars, Eugenia da Conceicao-Heldt and Patrick A. Mello have further explored the two-level game theory in foreign policy analysis. In their 2017 article, “Two-level Games in foreign policy Analysis”, published in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, they examine how domestic political institutions, interest groups and public opinion can constrain or empower national leaders in international negotiations. They emphasise that executives act as “Chief negotiators” who must simultaneously satisfy international counterparts and domestic constituencies.

RELIGION AND FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING IN NIGERIA (2015-2019)

In Nigeria between 2015 and 2019, religion significantly influenced foreign policy decision-making, particularly in areas related to the Middle East and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). While national interest remained a primary driver, the religious affiliation of

the Nigerian populations, with a roughly even split between Muslims and Christians, created domestic pressure on foreign policy selection

Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country and one of its most religiously plural societies, with Islam and Christianity commanding roughly equal influence. Since independence, religion has played a significant role in shaping not only domestic politics, but also aspects of Nigeria’s foreign relations.

Buhari’s election in 2015, as a northern Muslim, revived debates about religious representation in government. Christian groups such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) often criticized the administration for perceived Islamic bias, while Muslim organisations saw Buhari’s presidency as an opportunity to deepen ties with Islamic countries. This environment created religious expectations that inevitably affect foreign policy choices. Despite constitutional secularism, Nigeria maintained active membership in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Christian groups viewed this as alignment with Islamic states, yet the Buhari administration insisted it was for economic and diplomatic cooperation. In Israel- Palestine relations, Nigeria’s voting record at the UN leaned toward Palestinian support, often abstaining from votes critical of Israel. This reflected northern Muslim solidarity with the broader Islamic World, while southern Christians expressed discomfort with this diplomatic trend.

Religious violence and international image: Incidents of Boko Haram attacks, and Fulani herdsmen violence led to accusations of Christian persecution. This drew International pressure, particularly from Western governments, influencing Nigeria's diplomatic priorities and human rights commitments.

Nigeria sought to strengthen economic ties with Muslim- majority countries, particularly in the Middle East, to boost trade and investment. Nigeria embarked on economic diplomacy with Muslim countries between 2015 and 2019 for the following reasons:

- I. Diversification of economy- Nigeria sought to diversify its economy beyond oil and gas, and Muslim Countries in the Middle East and North Africa offered opportunities for trade and investment in various sectors.
- II. Investment and trade: Countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar offered significant investment opportunities, and Nigeria aimed to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to boost its economy.
- III. Energy cooperation: Nigeria, as an oil producing country, had opportunities for cooperation with Muslim countries that are also major oil producers or have significant energy interest.
- IV. Infrastructure development: Muslim countries with

significant financial resources, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were potential partners for Nigeria's infrastructure developmental projects.

To achieve these, Nigeria established Joint Commissions with countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran to promote economic cooperation.

Nigeria also participated in Investment forums and conferences in Muslim countries to attract investment and promote trade

Aside the economic diplomacy, Nigeria established diplomatic Relations with Muslim countries e.g. Libya; Despite tension over Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's suggestion that Nigeria should separate into a Muslim Northern states and a Christian southern state, Nigeria and Libya maintain diplomatic relations.

Nigeria established and maintained strong diplomatic and economic relations Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Indonesia and Iran.

CONCLUSION

Between 2015 and 2019, religion played a subtle yet influential role in Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making under President Buhari. While Nigeria officially maintains a secular stance in governance, religious affiliations- especially the Christian – Muslim divide, significantly shaped perceptions,

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diplomatic alignments and policy choices. Issues such as Nigeria's relations with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, its voting behaviour on Israel- Palestine at the UN, and international reactions to religious violence highlighted how internal religious dynamics influenced external engagement. The period also showed how religious groups though not formal decision-makers acted as domestic pressure blocs that shaped the foreign policy agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. Strengthen secularism in Foreign policy decision making: Nigeria government should ensure that religious beliefs do not dominate or influence the formulation and execution of its external relations.
- II. Promote inclusive policy consultation: The government must allow the national Assembly to actively participate in foreign policy formulation through debates, hearings and treaty ratification, engage in multi-stakeholder advisory councils, also, use periodic foreign policy roundtables to gather inputs before major diplomatic decisions are made.
- III. Religious sensitivity training for diplomats: Nigerian diplomats should be given proper and adequate training of the secularity of Nigeria, they should not be biased when representing Nigeria in any International engagement. Nigeria is a multi-religion state, where constitution allows freedom of religion.
- IV. Use religion as a tool for peace diplomacy: Religion should be used as an instrument of cohesion and not divisible instrument, and give value judgement without being biased against any religion.
- V. Enhance transparency and public awareness: There must be openness on the process of making decision on either domestic or external policies.
- VI. The national Assembly and oversight bodies should play a stronger role in scrutinizing foreign policy decisions to prevent religious favouritism or exclusion.

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