

## The Role of Public Opinion in Shaping Foreign Policy in A Democracy: A Focus on Nigeria from 2010 - 2025

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of civil society, public opinion, the media, and institutional actors on Nigeria's foreign policy in the Fourth Republic using liberal democratic theory as its analytical framework. Liberal democratic theory emphasizes citizen participation, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in public policy formulation, including foreign policy. The study investigates the extent to which Nigeria's foreign policy process reflects these democratic principles in practice. A qualitative research design was adopted, relying on secondary sources such as scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and policy documents. Data were analyzed through content analysis, focusing on themes of civil society engagement, media influence, legislative oversight, elite decision-making, and public participation in foreign policy. Findings reveal that despite Nigeria's democratic governance structure, foreign policy formulation remains largely executive-driven and elite-dominated, limiting broad public participation. However, democratic consolidation since 1999 has created opportunities for increased involvement by non-state actors. Civil society organizations have become more active in advocating for human rights, governance reforms, and peacebuilding initiatives, while traditional and digital media platforms have enhanced public awareness and discourse on foreign policy issues. Legislative institutions have also sought to exercise oversight, though their influence remains limited. The study further identifies persistent challenges, including weak mechanisms for incorporating public opinion, inadequate transparency, and the continued concentration of foreign policy authority within the executive branch. It concludes that Nigeria's foreign policy is gradually evolving toward a more participatory model but has yet to fully align with liberal democratic ideals. The study recommends, among others, strengthening public consultation mechanisms, enhancing legislative oversight, and promoting greater transparency in foreign policy decision-making.

**Keywords:** *Nigeria's Foreign Policy; Democracy; Civil Society; Public Opinion; Liberal Democratic Theory.*

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributed to the literature by applying liberal democratic theory to Nigeria's foreign policy in the Fourth Republic, highlighting the roles of civil society, public opinion, the media, and legislative institutions. Its originality lies in showing the gap between Nigeria's democratic framework and the continued executive and elite dominance of foreign policy-making. The study also demonstrates how the growth of civil society activism and digital media is creating new opportunities for broader public participation, transparency, and accountability in foreign policy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public opinion occupies a central place in democratic governance, serving as a critical link between citizens and the state. In democratic systems, the legitimacy of public policy is derived not only from constitutional authority and legal procedures but also from the extent to which government actions align with the preferences, values, and expectations of the populace. Democratic accountability presupposes that citizens are not merely passive recipients of policy outcomes but active participants whose views shape governmental priorities. This expectation extends beyond domestic policy to foreign policy, an area that increasingly affects citizens' economic welfare, security, and international standing. Traditionally, foreign policy was conceptualized as an elite-driven domain insulated from public influence. Early foreign policy analysis, influenced largely by realist assumptions, portrayed international politics as a realm of power struggles, security calculations, and strategic interests best handled by experienced political leaders and diplomats. Public opinion, within this framework, was often regarded as emotional, uninformed, and potentially dangerous if allowed to influence complex international decisions. Consequently, foreign policy decision-making was assumed to require secrecy, expertise, and autonomy from mass pressure.

However, this perspective has been increasingly challenged by empirical and theoretical scholarship. Studies in democratic foreign policy-making demonstrate that public opinion is neither inherently unstable nor irrational. Rather, citizens' views on foreign affairs are often structured by underlying values, partisan identities, elite cues, and information flows from the media (Baum & Potter, 2019; Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). In democracies where leaders depend on electoral support, public opinion can constrain policy options, shape agenda-setting, and influence both the timing and framing of foreign policy decisions. The growing body of literature suggests that leaders ignore public opinion at their own political risk, particularly when foreign policy issues become salient in domestic discourse.

The influence of public opinion on foreign policy has been further amplified by transformations in the global communication environment. Advances in mass media, the proliferation of opinion polling, and the rise of social media platforms have expanded citizens' access to international information and created new channels for expressing preferences on foreign policy matters. Digital communication has reduced the distance between foreign policy elites and the public, enabling rapid dissemination of information and immediate public reactions to international events. As a result, foreign policy is no longer confined to diplomatic circles but increasingly debated in public spaces, including news media, online platforms, and civil society forums (Soroka, Fournier, & Nir, 2019).

Globalization has also contributed to the growing domestic relevance of foreign policy. The distinction between domestic and international politics has become increasingly blurred as global economic integration, transnational security threats, migration flows, and international governance regimes directly affect citizens' daily lives. Decisions relating to trade agreements, border management, counter-terrorism cooperation, peacekeeping operations, and diplomatic alignments now have visible implications for employment, national security, inflation, and social cohesion. Consequently, citizens are more likely to form opinions on foreign policy and demand accountability from political leaders.

Within this broader democratic context, Nigeria provides a critical case for examining the role of public opinion in foreign policy. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has operated under a constitutional democracy that formally recognizes popular sovereignty, political participation, and representative governance. Nigeria's

democratic transition has coincided with its active engagement in regional and global affairs, positioning the country as a key actor in West Africa and on the African continent more broadly. Nigeria has played leading roles in peacekeeping missions, regional conflict management through ECOWAS, counter-terrorism cooperation, and multilateral diplomacy on issues such as development, climate change, and security (Efebeh & Ikenga, 2025).

These foreign policy engagements have often attracted significant public attention and debate within Nigeria. Issues such as Nigeria's military interventions in neighbouring states, responses to xenophobic attacks against Nigerians abroad, border closures, subsidy-related international negotiations, and diplomatic relations with major global powers have generated strong public reactions. Media coverage and civil society commentary on these issues suggest that Nigerians are becoming increasingly aware of and interested in the country's external relations. This growing public engagement raises important questions about whether and how public opinion influences foreign policy decisions in Nigeria's democratic setting.

Despite these developments, Nigeria's foreign policy process has remained highly centralized. Decision-making authority is largely concentrated in the executive arm of government, particularly the presidency and senior officials within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although the legislature constitutionally possesses oversight functions and civil society organizations actively comment on foreign policy issues, their influence on actual policy outcomes appears limited. This has led to persistent debates about the democratic nature of Nigeria's foreign policy and the extent to which it reflects popular preferences rather than elite interests (Adebajo & Landsberg, 2020).

This tension between democratic expectations and elite-dominated policy practice underscores the importance of systematically examining the role of public opinion in Nigeria's foreign policy. While democratic theory suggests that public opinion should shape policy outcomes, the Nigerian experience raises questions about the mechanisms through which citizens' views are aggregated, transmitted, and incorporated into foreign policy decisions. It also raises concerns about democratic accountability, transparency, and legitimacy in the conduct of Nigeria's external relations.

The need for this study is further reinforced by gaps in existing scholarship. Much of the literature on foreign policy and public opinion is centred on established Western democracies, with relatively limited empirical focus on African states. Studies on Nigeria's foreign policy have largely prioritized themes such as national interest, leadership, security challenges, and regional hegemony, often neglecting the role of public opinion as an analytical variable. As a result, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how public opinion operates within Nigeria's foreign policy process and whether democratic norms meaningfully shape external decision-making.

Therefore, this study addressed this gap by systematically analyzing the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy in Nigeria's democracy. By examining the interaction between citizens' preferences, media discourse, institutional structures, and elite decision-making, the study seeks to enhance understanding of democratic foreign policy-making in a developing context. Such analysis is crucial not only for evaluating Nigeria's democratic consolidation but also for informing policy reforms aimed at strengthening public participation, accountability, and legitimacy in foreign policy decision-making. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Analyze the mechanisms through which public opinion is expressed and transmitted on foreign policy issues in Nigeria.

- ii. Assess the responsiveness of Nigerian foreign policy decision-makers to public opinion.
- iii. Identify the constraints and enabling factors that influence the incorporation of public opinion into Nigeria's foreign policy process.
- iv. Evaluate the implications of public opinion for Nigeria's democratic consolidation and the legitimacy of its foreign policy decisions.

## **Literature Review**

Public opinion has increasingly been recognized as a central factor in the formulation and execution of foreign policy in democratic systems. At its core, democratic theory holds that governments should be responsive to the preferences of their citizens, not only in domestic policy but also in international affairs (Dahl, 1971). Public opinion may shape foreign policy by constraining leaders' strategic options, affecting the timing and content of decisions, and influencing policymakers' calculations about political support and electoral survival. However, the strength and direction of this influence vary significantly across contexts, issues, and institutional settings (Ntagu, Aguiyi & Umunnakwe-Okorie, 2024). Scholars have thus sought to unpack the mechanisms through which public sentiment is formed, transmitted, and factored into foreign policy decision-making.

Early scholarship in international relations often downplayed the relevance of mass opinion in foreign policy, suggesting that publics were uninformed, volatile, and largely indifferent to external affairs, a view encapsulated in the Almond–Lippmann consensus (Almond, 1950; Lippmann, 1955). According to this perspective, public opinion was seen as too incoherent or capricious to meaningfully influence the complex and specialized realm of foreign affairs (Almond, 1950; Lippmann, 1955). The consensus held that foreign policy was primarily the domain of political elites, who alone possessed sufficient information and expertise to make governance decisions.

Subsequent work has challenged this top-down view. Political psychologists and international relations scholars argue that individuals possess structured preferences and core belief systems that shape their views on international issues, even when specific knowledge is limited (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). The “bottom-up” approach posits that citizens are embedded in social networks and cognitive environments that help them form coherent attitudes about foreign policy issues, drawing on cues from peers, media, and personal values rather than only elite discourse. Experimental evidence suggests that social interactions and shared principles can be as strong a determinant of public opinion as elite messaging (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). This challenges simplistic portrayals of the public as passive recipients of elite cues and affirms the conditional capacity of ordinary citizens to generate stable policy preferences.

Public opinion influences foreign policy through multiple mechanisms. First, electoral accountability constrains leaders in democracies: policymakers may adjust their positions or decisions to align with public preferences to maintain political support and avoid electoral backlash (Tomz, Weeks, & Yarhi-Milo, 2020). Research shows that when public sentiment is strongly mobilized around a foreign policy issue, leaders are more likely to adjust their policy positions or rhetoric in response (Tomz et al., 2020). This responsiveness reflects a fundamental component of democratic legitimacy, wherein decision-makers factor public views into policy formulations to bolster their domestic support.

Second, media discourse and information channels shape both public opinion and the salience of issues. The media serve as intermediaries that can elevate attention

to international crises, frame narratives, and influence how citizens interpret events abroad. Media coverage of foreign policy not only informs public perceptions but also shapes the political environment in which leaders operate. For example, studies have shown that changes in media framing can alter citizens' support for military actions or diplomatic engagement (Baum & Potter, 2019). Moreover, evolving media ecosystems, including digital and social media platforms, have transformed how individuals encounter international news, making public opinion more dynamic and, at times, more polarized.

Third, civil society engagement, including advocacy groups, public forums, and organized protests, amplifies citizen voices and signals collective preferences to policymakers. In many democracies, civil society actors mobilize public sentiment on foreign policy issues such as international trade, environmental agreements, or humanitarian interventions, thereby shaping the political agenda and compelling leaders to respond (Tomz et al., 2020). These non-electoral forms of participation extend the influence of public opinion beyond traditional polling and electoral mechanisms.

Although public opinion can influence foreign policy, its impact is neither uniform nor unconditional. Institutional design and governance structures significantly shape the extent and nature of this influence. In parliamentary systems where governments depend on legislative support and coalition stability, foreign policy decisions may be more sensitive to public opinion, especially when issues become politically salient. In contrast, presidential systems with stronger executive authority may insulate leaders from immediate public pressure, particularly in the early stages of crises. Moreover, the degree of political competition, polarization, and institutional checks and balances affects how seriously leaders take public preferences (Akanke, 2014; Obiorah et al., 2024).

Issue salience is another critical determinant. Public opinion tends to exert greater influence on foreign policy areas that directly affect citizens' economic interests, societal values, or perceived well-being, such as trade policy, immigration, or humanitarian aid. Conversely, issues framed primarily as high-stakes national security concerns, such as covert military operations or complex diplomatic negotiations, often remain insulated from public pressures due to government claims of expertise and secrecy (Tomz et al., 2020). In such domains, leaders may argue that public engagement could compromise strategic interests, thereby limiting the weight of public sentiment in decision-making.

Institutional weaknesses in developing democracies further constrain the role of public opinion. Where transparency is limited and elites dominate political discourse, citizens may have fewer opportunities to express preferences or hold leaders accountable. Weak media ecosystems and low levels of civic engagement can compound this effect, resulting in foreign policy processes that are less responsive to public demands (Knecht, 2025). Conversely, well-institutionalized democracies with robust media, transparent governance, and active civil societies tend to exhibit more pronounced integration of public opinion into foreign policy-making.

In the United States, scholars have documented how public support or opposition has shaped presidential decisions on military interventions, trade negotiations, and treaty ratifications, albeit unevenly. For instance, public sentiment has at times constrained military engagements or influenced strategic shifts, particularly when sustained and visible in national polls. Similarly, Western European democracies have shown responsiveness to public opinion in areas such as European Union policy, economic sanctions, and development assistance (Knecht, 2025).

Therefore, when political elites are provided with information about public preferences, they adjust their positions to align more closely with those sentiments. Such responsiveness underscores the democratic logic that leaders are sensitive to the views of their constituencies, especially in highly salient policy areas. Nonetheless, the degree of elite responsiveness varies across policy communities and political contexts, suggesting that public opinion's influence is filtered through mediating institutional and strategic considerations. Public opinion is not monolithic across democracies; domestic structures such as electoral systems, party dynamics, and media freedom shape how public preferences are articulated, aggregated, and transmitted to foreign policy elites. Democracies with proportional representation and vibrant civic spaces often provide more structured channels for public influence than systems where media capture and elite dominance prevail (Obiorah et al., 2024).

Despite the accumulation of evidence supporting the influence of public opinion on foreign policy in democratic systems, several debates remain open. Classic research suggests that political elites heavily influence public opinion, particularly when citizens have low levels of informational awareness (Zaller, 1992). Contemporary scholars acknowledge that while elite cues remain important, ordinary citizens also generate substantive preferences through social interaction and personal values (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). Another debate focuses on the heterogeneity of public opinion itself. Citizens may hold diverse and sometimes conflicting views on foreign policy, making it difficult for policymakers to interpret and act upon aggregate preferences. Moreover, the salience of foreign policy issues fluctuates, and citizens may express preferences that are unstable over time. Nonetheless, sustained and intense public engagement on specific issues can compel political leaders to adjust policy positions or rhetoric to maintain legitimacy (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017).

Today, the emergence of new media technologies and information environments has transformed how public opinion is formed and expressed. Digital platforms facilitate rapid dissemination of information, mobilization of activist networks, and real-time polling, potentially amplifying the role of public sentiment in foreign policy debates. However, these same technologies can also fragment information environments and heighten polarization, posing challenges for coherent public engagement and policymaking.

### **Historical Evolution of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Since Independence**

Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved significantly since independence in 1960, reflecting the country's domestic political realities, economic priorities, and strategic interests within Africa and the wider international system. As the most populous country in Africa and one of the continent's largest economies, Nigeria has consistently sought to project itself as a regional leader and a key actor in African diplomacy (Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2016). From the early post-independence period to the contemporary democratic era, Nigeria's external relations have largely been guided by the doctrine that Africa should remain the centerpiece of its foreign policy. This guiding philosophy has shaped Nigeria's diplomatic engagements, peacekeeping activities, and leadership roles in continental institutions. Scholars argue that this Afrocentric orientation emerged from Nigeria's historical experience with colonialism and its desire to promote African unity, independence, and collective development (Akinboye & Ottoh, 2011).

At independence on October 1, 1960, under the leadership of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria adopted a moderate and conservative foreign policy posture. The new government emphasized principles such as non-alignment, respect for

sovereignty, peaceful coexistence, and international cooperation. These principles reflected the realities of the global ideological rivalry known as the Cold War, during which newly independent states sought to avoid being drawn into the conflict between the Western and Eastern blocs. Although Nigeria formally pursued a policy of non-alignment, its economic and diplomatic relations were more closely aligned with Western countries, particularly the United Kingdom, due to colonial legacies, trade relations, and administrative influence.

During this early period, Nigeria also demonstrated a strong commitment to African solidarity and anti-colonial struggles. The country played a key role in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity, which was created to promote unity, cooperation, and the liberation of African states still under colonial rule. Nigeria contributed diplomatic support, financial resources, and moral leadership to liberation movements across the continent. Scholars note that although Nigeria's early foreign policy was cautious and pragmatic, it remained firmly rooted in the broader goal of promoting African unity and decolonization (Adebajo, 2008; Saliu & Oyewole, 2015).

The political instability that followed the military coups of 1966 and the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War significantly shaped Nigeria's foreign policy orientation. The civil war, which resulted from the attempted secession of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra, posed a serious threat to the territorial integrity and international legitimacy of the Nigerian state. Consequently, the federal government prioritized diplomatic engagement aimed at securing international support for the preservation of Nigeria's unity. Nigeria actively sought recognition from major powers and international organizations to counter the diplomatic campaigns of the secessionist movement.

During the war, countries such as the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom provided diplomatic and military assistance to the Nigerian government, which proved critical in sustaining the federal war effort. The experience of the civil war reinforced Nigeria's commitment to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. These principles later became central elements of Nigeria's foreign policy and influenced its approach to conflict resolution and regional diplomacy (Fawole, 2003; Akinyemi, 2017).

In the 1970s, Nigeria's foreign policy became more assertive, dynamic, and influential, particularly under the military administrations of Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, and Olusegun Obasanjo. The oil boom of the decade dramatically transformed Nigeria's economic capacity and increased its diplomatic leverage within the international system. As a major oil producer and a prominent member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Nigeria gained significant financial resources that enabled it to pursue a more ambitious and activist foreign policy agenda.

During this period, Nigeria provided substantial financial and diplomatic support to liberation movements in Southern Africa. The country strongly opposed the racial segregation system known as Apartheid in South Africa and played a leading role in mobilizing international pressure against the apartheid regime. Nigeria also supported independence struggles in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe by providing financial aid, diplomatic backing, and logistical assistance to liberation movements. The government of Murtala Mohammed, in particular, adopted a bold and radical Afrocentric foreign policy that emphasized African self-determination, anti-imperialism, and continental solidarity. Many scholars consider this period to represent the height of Nigeria's diplomatic activism and continental leadership (Akinboye, 2013; Ogunnubi, 2018).

The return to civilian rule in 1979 under President Shehu Shagari did not significantly alter the fundamental principles of Nigeria's foreign policy. However, economic challenges and domestic political instability limited the country's ability to maintain its earlier level of diplomatic activism. The global economic recession of the early 1980s and declining oil revenues reduced Nigeria's financial capacity to support foreign policy initiatives across Africa. As a result, the country adopted a more cautious and pragmatic diplomatic approach during this period (Saliu, 2006).

Subsequent military regimes, particularly under Ibrahim Babangida, attempted to revive Nigeria's regional leadership through peacekeeping operations and conflict mediation. Nigeria played a central role in the creation of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, which intervened in regional conflicts, including the Liberian Civil War and the Sierra Leone Civil War. Nigeria contributed the majority of troops, funding, and logistical support to these peacekeeping missions, demonstrating its commitment to regional stability and collective security in West Africa. Scholars argue that these interventions reinforced Nigeria's reputation as a regional power and a leading contributor to peacekeeping operations in Africa (Adekeye, 2017; Ogunnubi & Amao, 2019).

Nigeria's foreign policy experienced a period of diplomatic isolation during the military regime of Sani Abacha. The regime faced widespread international criticism due to human rights violations, authoritarian governance, and the execution of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. Following this event, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations and faced sanctions from several Western countries. This period represented one of the lowest points in Nigeria's diplomatic history and demonstrated the strong connection between domestic governance and international legitimacy (Saliu & Oyewole, 2015).

The restoration of democratic governance in 1999 under President Olusegun Obasanjo marked a major turning point in Nigeria's foreign policy. The democratic government prioritized the rehabilitation of Nigeria's international image and the reintegration of the country into the global community. Nigeria resumed active participation in international institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States.

The Obasanjo administration also introduced the concept of economic diplomacy, which emphasized attracting foreign investment, promoting trade relations, and securing economic partnerships with major global powers. A major achievement of this period was Nigeria's successful negotiation of debt relief from the Paris Club in 2005. This agreement significantly reduced Nigeria's external debt burden and demonstrated the growing importance of economic considerations in the country's foreign policy agenda (Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2016).

In the contemporary democratic era, Nigeria's foreign policy continues to emphasize regional leadership, economic cooperation, and international peacekeeping. Successive administrations have maintained Nigeria's commitment to Africa-centered diplomacy while also expanding diplomatic and economic relations with emerging global powers such as China and India (Ogwu, 2009). Nigeria has also remained one of Africa's largest contributors to international peacekeeping operations under the United Nations, participating in missions across Africa and other parts of the world.

Thus, the historical evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy reveals a pattern of both continuity and adaptation shaped by domestic political developments, economic conditions, and changing international dynamics. While the principle of Africa as the centerpiece has remained constant, Nigeria's diplomatic strategies and priorities have

evolved to reflect shifting global realities. Understanding this historical trajectory provides important insights into how democratic governance, national interests, and public opinion influence Nigeria's foreign policy decisions in the contemporary international system.

### **Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Nigeria**

Nigeria's foreign policy has historically been dominated by elite-centred and state-centric perspectives, with primary emphasis placed on national interest, strategic calculations, and Nigeria's aspiration to regional leadership within Africa (Gambari, 2008; Adebajo, 2010). These scholars largely portray foreign policy formulation as the preserve of political elites, senior diplomats, and military actors, reflecting realist and bureaucratic approaches that privilege state capacity and executive authority over societal input. Consequently, public opinion is often treated as marginal to foreign policy outcomes, particularly when compared to domestic policy areas where citizen participation is more visible.

Within this tradition, Asobie (2012) and Ogwu (2015) underscore the dominance of institutional structures, especially the presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in shaping Nigeria's external relations. These studies emphasize executive centralization and weak institutional checks, arguing that foreign policy decisions are often insulated from legislative oversight and public scrutiny. The National Assembly's constitutional role in treaty ratification and oversight is frequently described as reactive and constrained, further limiting opportunities for systematic incorporation of public opinion into foreign policy processes (Asobie, 2012; Ogwu, 2015; Aremu, 2019).

Where public opinion is acknowledged in the literature, it is typically conceptualized as episodic, reactive, and event-driven. Nigerian citizens are most visible in foreign policy discourse during moments of heightened salience, such as military interventions in the West African sub-region, border disputes with neighbouring states, or Nigeria's engagement with major international institutions like the United Nations and ECOWAS. For instance, public reactions have been observed during debates over peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Nigeria's response to regional security crises, and controversies surrounding border closures and migration policies (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008; Folarin, 2016). In such cases, public opinion tends to emerge through media commentary, protests, or elite-mediated discourse rather than through formal policy consultation mechanisms.

However, recent studies suggest a gradual shift in this pattern. With increased access to information, expanded media coverage, and the growth of digital communication technologies, Nigerian citizens are becoming more aware of foreign policy issues and more engaged in debates surrounding Nigeria's international conduct (Umar, 2020; Oladipo & Olayinka, 2021). The proliferation of private broadcast media, online news platforms, and policy-oriented discussion forums has widened the scope of foreign policy discourse beyond official government narratives. Issues such as regional security, foreign investment, diaspora relations, and Nigeria's global image are now more frequently discussed in public spaces, indicating a growing intersection between foreign policy and domestic political consciousness (Arowosegbe, 2018; Adekeye, 2022).

Social media platforms have been particularly transformative in amplifying citizen voices and facilitating the expression of public opinion on foreign policy matters. Platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, and WhatsApp enable rapid dissemination of information and critiques, allowing citizens to respond in real time to diplomatic events and government actions abroad. Scholars argue that social media has lowered the

barriers to participation and enabled a more pluralistic public sphere, where citizens, journalists, activists, and diaspora communities interact and shape narratives around Nigeria's foreign engagements (Umar, 2020; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2021). Digital campaigns and hashtag activism have increasingly drawn attention to issues such as regional insecurity, international human rights concerns, and Nigeria's bilateral relations.

Civil society organizations and policy think tanks have also contributed to the growing visibility of public opinion in Nigeria's foreign policy discourse. Advocacy groups, professional associations, and research institutes frequently organize public dialogues, issue policy briefs, and engage the media on international issues. These actors often frame foreign policy debates in ways that link external commitments to domestic concerns such as governance, accountability, economic development, and national security. In doing so, they play an important intermediary role by translating complex diplomatic issues into language accessible to the broader public (Ebegbulem, 2020; Adeola & Fayomi, 2023).

Despite these developments, significant constraints persist. While public opinion in Nigeria is increasingly expressed, its translation into concrete policy influence remains limited. The institutional architecture of foreign policy-making continues to privilege executive discretion, with few formal mechanisms for incorporating citizen preferences into decision-making processes. Public expressions, whether through opinion polls, media debates, or social media activism- rarely result in direct policy changes, suggesting that public opinion often influences official rhetoric rather than substantive outcomes (Aremu, 2019; Adekeye, 2022).

Structural factors further complicate the role of public opinion. Unequal access to information, low levels of trust in political institutions, and socio-economic disparities affect who participates in foreign policy debates and whose voices are amplified. Urban, educated, and digitally connected populations tend to dominate public discourse, raising questions about representativeness and inclusivity. Moreover, misinformation and partisan framing on social media can distort public understanding of international issues, complicating the use of public opinion as a reliable guide for policy (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2021).

Thus, although Nigeria's foreign policy has historically been elite-driven, contemporary changes in media systems, civil society engagement, and digital communication suggest an evolving role for public opinion. However, the extent to which these developments have altered actual decision-making practices remains unclear. This gap underscores the need for systematic investigation into how public opinion is formed, expressed, and potentially integrated into Nigeria's foreign policy in a democratic context.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on Liberal democratic theory propounded by John Locke (1689), which emphasizes the role of citizen participation, interest aggregation, and accountability in shaping policy outcomes. In the context of foreign policy, this perspective highlights the potential for public opinion to influence elite decision-making, particularly in democracies where leaders are electorally accountable.

John Locke is widely regarded as the earliest and most influential foundational thinker of liberal democracy. In his *Second Treatise of Government* (published in 1689), Locke argued for natural rights (life, liberty, and property), popular consent, limited government, and the right of citizens to resist tyranny. These ideas form the core

principles of liberal democratic governance. Montesquieu expanded liberal democratic thought through his theory of the separation of powers. He argued that liberty could only be preserved when governmental powers are divided among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, an idea central to modern liberal democracies (Montesquieu, 1989). John Stuart Mill further developed liberal democratic theory. He emphasized individual freedom, freedom of expression, political participation, and representative government, reinforcing the democratic dimension of liberalism (Mill, 2003).

Dahl (2020) argues that Liberal Democratic Theory rests on the fusion of liberalism's commitment to individual liberty with democracy's emphasis on popular sovereignty. At its core, the theory holds that legitimate political authority emerges from the consent of free and equal citizens operating within a constitutional framework that protects rights and limits power. One of the central tenets is the protection of individual rights and civil liberties. Liberal democracy emphasizes freedoms such as speech, association, religion, and the press, viewing them as essential conditions for meaningful political participation and human dignity. These rights are not merely privileges granted by the state but fundamental entitlements that constrain governmental authority and safeguard citizens from arbitrary rule.

Another key principle is the rule of law and constitutionalism. Liberal democratic systems operate under established legal frameworks that bind both rulers and the ruled. The rule of law ensures equality before the law, legal certainty, and accountability, while constitutionalism provides institutional guarantees for rights protection and limits the concentration of political power. This legal foundation distinguishes liberal democracy from purely majoritarian systems where the will of the majority may override fundamental freedoms. Political pluralism and tolerance also constitute essential elements of liberal democratic theory. The theory recognizes society as composed of diverse interests, values, and identities, all of which must coexist within the political system. Pluralism encourages competition among ideas and groups, fosters compromise, and prevents political domination by a single faction. Tolerance of opposition and dissent is therefore viewed as a democratic virtue rather than a threat to political stability (Dahl, 2020).

Free, fair, and competitive elections are central to the democratic dimension of the theory. Elections serve as the primary mechanism through which citizens express consent, choose representatives, and hold leaders accountable. Liberal democratic theory insists that elections must be conducted under conditions of political freedom, transparency, and equal suffrage in order to confer legitimacy on governments and public policies (Mounk, 2022). According to Plattner (2023), closely linked to electoral democracy is the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances. Liberal democratic theory argues that political liberty can only be preserved when governmental powers are distributed among distinct institutions, typically the executive, legislature, and judiciary. This institutional arrangement prevents the abuse of power, promotes accountability, and protects individual rights from executive or legislative overreach.

Political equality is another foundational tenet. Liberal democracy affirms that all citizens possess equal political worth and should have equal opportunities to influence political decision-making. This principle is reflected in universal suffrage, equal representation, and nondiscriminatory access to political institutions. Political equality reinforces the normative claim that democratic authority derives from the collective will of citizens rather than elite privilege (Zakaria, 2024). Levitsky and Ziblatt (2023) note that citizen participation beyond elections further strengthens liberal democratic governance. Liberal democratic theory emphasizes the importance of active civic

engagement through public debate, civil society organizations, interest groups, and deliberative forums. Such participation enhances democratic responsiveness, improves policy outcomes, and deepens citizens' sense of political ownership and responsibility. The protection of minority rights represents a critical safeguard within liberal democracy. While democratic systems operate on the principle of majority rule, liberal democratic theory emphasizes that the rights and freedoms of minorities must be constitutionally protected. This commitment prevents the "tyranny of the majority" and ensures that democratic governance remains inclusive and just (Coppedge et al., 2022).

Thus, liberal democratic theory emphasizes the balance between liberty and democracy. It recognizes the inherent tension between popular rule and individual rights and seeks to reconcile them through institutional constraints and normative commitments. Democracy is thus legitimate only when it operates within liberal limits that protect freedom, dignity, and equality. In contemporary scholarship, this balance is increasingly linked to concerns about democratic backsliding and the resilience of liberal democratic institutions in the face of populism and authoritarian pressures. Liberal democratic theory stresses the importance of transparency, participation, and deliberation in governance, suggesting that foreign policy should reflect the preferences and interests of the public rather than being solely elite-driven (Held, 2006). The theory provides the analytical lens for examining the mechanisms through which citizen preferences, media discourse, institutional structures, and elite decision-making interact in Nigeria's foreign policy-making processes.

### **Application of Liberal Democratic Theory to the Study**

Liberal Democratic Theory provides a relevant framework for analyzing the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy within a democratic setting, particularly in the Nigerian context. The theory emphasizes popular sovereignty, individual rights, and institutional accountability, which together establish the normative expectation that citizens' preferences should influence public policy, including decisions in the foreign policy arena. Applied to this study, the theory helps explain how public opinion is expected to function as a source of legitimacy and guidance for foreign policy formulation in a democracy.

From the perspective of liberal democratic theory, citizens are not merely passive subjects of state policy but active participants whose views contribute to the direction of government action. In relation to Nigeria, the theory suggests that public opinion expressed through elections, media discourse, civil society engagement, and public debates should inform foreign policy priorities and diplomatic behavior. This study, therefore, uses the theory to assess the extent to which Nigerian foreign policy reflects the preferences, concerns, and values of the populace or whether it is shaped predominantly by executive and elite interests.

Liberal democratic theory also highlights the importance of political institutions in mediating the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes. In applying the theory to this study, attention is given to the roles of democratic institutions such as the legislature, political parties, and the judiciary in providing channels through which public opinion can influence foreign policy decisions. Where these institutions function effectively, they are expected to enhance transparency, debate, and accountability in foreign policy-making. Where they are weak or marginalized, public opinion may have only a limited or symbolic impact on foreign policy outcomes. The theory further emphasizes freedom of expression and access to information as prerequisites for meaningful public participation. In the context of this study, liberal democratic theory

provides a basis for examining how media freedom, public discourse, and civic engagement shape citizens' awareness of foreign policy issues in Nigeria. A well-informed public is essential for articulating opinions that can influence foreign policy, while restrictions on information or limited public debate may constrain the role of public opinion in this policy domain.

Additionally, liberal democratic theory draws attention to the tension between democratic ideals and elite dominance in policy-making. Applied to Nigeria's foreign policy, the theory helps explain why public opinion may be acknowledged rhetorically yet exert limited influence in practice, particularly in areas considered sensitive, such as national security, diplomacy, and international economic relations. This perspective allows the study to critically evaluate the gap between democratic expectations and the realities of foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria. Overall, the application of liberal democratic theory to this study provides a conceptual lens for understanding how public opinion is expected to shape foreign policy in a democratic system and why this influence may be constrained in practice. It enables the study to assess the degree to which Nigeria's foreign policy process aligns with liberal democratic principles of participation, accountability, and responsiveness, thereby offering insights into the strengths and limitations of democratic governance in the conduct of foreign relations.

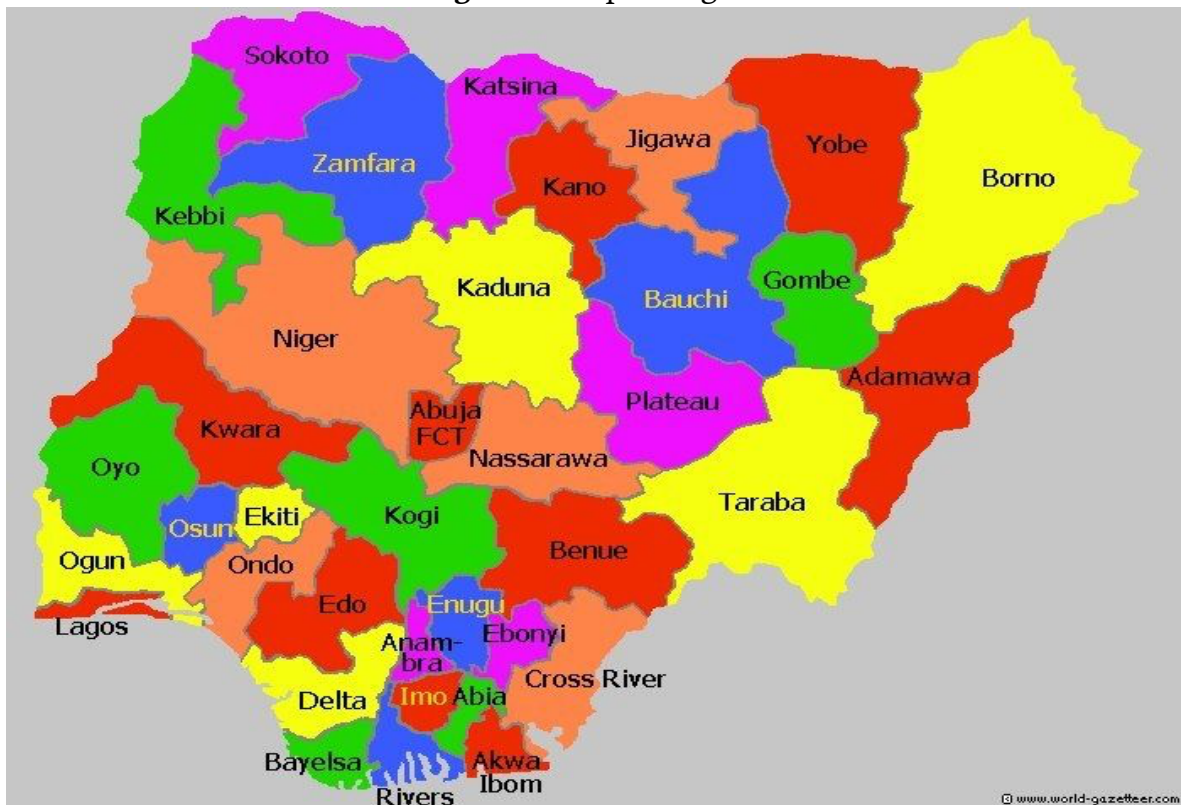
## **2. METHOD**

The study adopted a historical research design, which involves the systematic collection, evaluation, and interpretation of past events and documents to understand contemporary issues (Babbie, 2021). Historical research is particularly appropriate for this study because Nigeria's foreign policy decisions have evolved, influenced by both domestic public opinion and the country's political and institutional developments (Best & Kahn, 2021). This design enables the researcher to trace patterns, identify key events and decisions, and assess the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy across different political periods.

### **Study Area**

The study focuses on Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, with an estimated population exceeding 220 million people, and a federal republic operating a multi-party democratic system. Nigeria's foreign policy is of considerable importance, both regionally and globally, due to the country's strategic position, economic potential, and leadership roles in continental and regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) (Folarin, 2013). Historically, Nigeria has played a central role in mediating regional conflicts, contributing to peacekeeping missions, and participating in global diplomatic efforts, making its foreign policy decisions highly consequential for both domestic and international stakeholders. This study specifically examines the interaction between public opinion, media, civil society, and political elites in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy decisions. In a democratic system, public opinion is theoretically expected to influence government decision-making, but in Nigeria, foreign policy has traditionally been centralized in the executive branch, limiting the direct impact of mass sentiment (Akinola, 2019). Nevertheless, the role of media and civil society organizations has expanded in recent decades, providing platforms for citizens to express views, shape discourse, and indirectly influence foreign policy through public debate and advocacy (Oloruntoba & Faleti, 2021).

**Figure 1: Map of Nigeria**



**Source:** Adeleye (2018)

The choice of Nigeria as a study area is therefore justified by its complex political system, which combines a strong presidential executive, federal structures, and multi-party politics, creating a dynamic environment to study the interface between public opinion and policy-making (Lewis, 2019). Additionally, Nigeria's increasing reliance on media and public engagement in governance enhances the relevance of examining how citizen perspectives are communicated and potentially integrated into foreign policy processes. By focusing on Nigeria, the study provides an opportunity to understand how public opinion functions in a developing democracy with centralized foreign policy authority, bridging the gap between theoretical expectations of citizen influence and practical governance realities.

### **Sources of Data**

The study makes exclusive use of secondary data sources, in line with the historical research design. These sources encompass official government publications and policy documents, including speeches from government officials, and reports issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, media sources such as newspaper articles, editorials, press releases, and opinion polls will be examined to capture public discourse and the sentiments of Nigerian citizens regarding foreign policy matters. The study will also draw on academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses, and conference proceedings that focus on Nigerian foreign policy, public opinion, and democratic governance. Furthermore, international reports from organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union will be consulted to provide documented evidence of Nigeria's foreign policy actions and regional engagements.

## **Method of Data Analysis**

The study adopts content analysis as its primary method of data analysis. Content analysis is a systematic technique for examining textual materials to identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings that are relevant to the research questions (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). In this study, content analysis was applied to assess how public opinion has been expressed in media outlets and public discourse concerning Nigeria's foreign policy. It was also used to examine government documents and official statements to evaluate whether, and in what ways, public sentiment has influenced foreign policy decisions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Furthermore, content analysis will facilitate an assessment of the roles played by institutions, political elites, and intermediary actors, such as media and civil society, in incorporating public perspectives into policy-making processes. The method also allows for the identification of patterns over time, providing insights into continuity and change in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy outcomes. In practice, this approach involves coding documents into thematic categories, including public opinion, institutional responses, elite decision-making, and policy outcomes. This structured analysis enables the researcher to interpret the data systematically, highlight trends, and draw meaningful conclusions about the interaction between public sentiment and foreign policy within Nigeria's democratic context.

The combination of historical research design and content analysis is particularly suitable for this study because foreign policy is often shaped by complex historical, political, and social processes that cannot be captured through direct experimentation or surveys alone. Historical research provides the temporal perspective needed to understand the evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy, while content analysis offers a rigorous and replicable method for interpreting textual data. Together, they enable the study to provide both descriptive and analytical insights into how public opinion has influenced Nigeria's foreign policy over time.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study, which examined the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy in Nigeria's democratic context from 2010 - 2025, generated several significant findings through a trend analysis guided by its specific objectives and research questions. With respect to the first objective of this study, the findings revealed that public opinion on Nigeria's foreign policy is expressed through multiple interconnected channels, including the mass media, social media platforms, civil society organizations, public protests, academic institutions, religious and traditional institutions, and political actors. These channels collectively serve as platforms for articulating citizens' views on international relations and government diplomatic actions.

This finding is in line with Adeola and Fayomi (2023) and Akinola and Uche (2022), who emphasize that democratization and technological advancement have significantly expanded civic engagement in Nigeria's foreign policy discourse. They argue that the growth of digital communication and media pluralism has widened access to information and strengthened public participation in governance issues, including foreign policy. The finding also corroborates Akinola and Uche (2022), who assert that foreign policy is no longer exclusively an elite-driven domain but has become increasingly open to public influence through multiple communication platforms such as social media and civil society networks. In the same vein, it agrees with Akande (2014), who maintains that democratic governance enhances citizen involvement in

policymaking by creating both formal and informal avenues for participation in national and international decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the result aligns with Akinboye (2013), who observes that Nigeria's democratic transition has strengthened the relationship between foreign policy and public participation, particularly through the expansion of media influence and civil society activism. It also concurs with Udeala (2019), who highlights the mass media as a vital intermediary that shapes, channels, and communicates public opinion on foreign policy and international affairs to policymakers. Overall, the finding supports and reinforces the view that Nigeria's foreign policy environment has become increasingly participatory. It demonstrates that multiple institutional and non-institutional channels now exist through which citizens can express, mobilize, and communicate their perspectives on international relations, reflecting the growing democratization of foreign policy discourse in Nigeria.

With respect to the second objective of this study, the findings reveal that Nigerian foreign policy decision-makers respond to public opinion to a moderate but increasing extent, particularly since the return to democratic governance in 1999. Although foreign policy remains largely centralized within the executive and shaped by elite decision-making structures, public opinion has gradually become a relevant factor in diplomatic responses, especially on issues that attract strong domestic concern or international attention. In practice, this influence is often indirect, operating through electoral considerations, media pressure, civil society engagement, and digital activism. This finding is in line with Akande (2014), who argues that democratic governance strengthens governmental responsiveness to citizens' preferences due to the need for political legitimacy and accountability. It also corroborates Akinboye (2013), who maintains that Nigeria's democratic transition has expanded institutional openness and increased the role of public participation in foreign policy processes. These perspectives collectively suggest that democratic consolidation has created avenues through which public sentiment can indirectly shape foreign policy behaviour.

The result further agrees with Aldrich et al. (2006), who posit that in democratic systems, foreign policy is often influenced by electoral pressures and public approval, as political leaders adjust decisions to maintain legitimacy and political support. In Nigeria, this is reflected in government reactions to sensitive issues such as xenophobic attacks against Nigerians abroad, migration crises, and regional security interventions, where public outcry often triggers diplomatic action. Additionally, the finding aligns with Imam (2024), who emphasizes that social media and digital activism have significantly amplified the visibility and impact of public opinion on foreign policy decisions in Nigeria. Through online campaigns, hashtags, and rapid information sharing, citizens can mobilize pressure that compels government responsiveness. This also concurs with Akinola and Uche (2022), who note that media scrutiny and civil society advocacy have strengthened accountability mechanisms, compelling policymakers to justify or adjust foreign policy positions in response to public concerns. Overall, the findings indicate that although Nigeria's foreign policy remains predominantly elite-driven, public opinion is no longer marginal. Instead, it exerts a growing indirect influence through democratic institutions, media engagement, civil society activism, and digital platforms, particularly during periods of heightened national or international sensitivity.

With respect to the third objective of this study, the findings established that the influence of public opinion on Nigeria's foreign policy is shaped by a complex interaction of institutional, political, and socio-economic factors that either enable or constrain citizen participation. On the facilitating side, democratic governance has

created institutional openings that allow citizens to engage more actively in foreign policy discourse. The expansion of the media landscape, alongside globalization and advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs), has significantly improved access to information and strengthened public capacity to follow and respond to international developments. These developments collectively enhance transparency and broaden participation in foreign policy debates. This finding is in line with Akinola and Uche (2022), who emphasize that democratization and technological advancement have expanded civic engagement in governance, including foreign policy processes in Nigeria. It also corroborates Akinboye (2013), who argues that democratic institutions promote accountability and provide avenues for public participation in policy formulation. In the same vein, it aligns with Ngara (2025), who notes that despite institutional limitations, democratic frameworks and legislative structures offer some space for public influence in foreign policy matters.

However, the study equally reveals that several structural constraints significantly weaken the effectiveness of public opinion. Executive dominance remains a major limiting factor, as foreign policy decisions are still largely centralized within the presidency and key security institutions. Weak institutional capacity further reduces the ability of democratic structures such as the legislature and civil society to effectively influence policy outcomes. Additionally, elite control of political processes continues to marginalize broader public input, while socio-economic challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment restrict citizens' access to information and participation in informed debates. The spread of misinformation and fake news further distorts public understanding of foreign policy issues and weakens constructive engagement.

This aspect of the finding concurs with Ojieh (2015), who highlights the persistence of elite dominance in Nigeria's foreign policy process, particularly in the post-military era. It also agrees with Akande (2014), who observes that socio-economic inequalities and institutional weaknesses often limit the practical impact of public opinion in democratic governance. Furthermore, it aligns with Akinyemi (2017), who notes that weak institutional capacity and centralized decision-making structures continue to constrain meaningful citizen participation in foreign policy. Overall, the findings indicate that while democratic reforms and technological advancements have strengthened opportunities for public engagement in Nigeria's foreign policy, entrenched structural and socio-political constraints continue to limit the extent to which public opinion can effectively shape policy outcomes.

With respect to the fourth objective of this study, the findings show that public opinion plays a significant role in enhancing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy while also contributing to the broader process of democratic consolidation. In particular, public opinion strengthens accountability and transparency in foreign policy by compelling government officials to justify diplomatic decisions and align them more closely with national interests and citizen expectations. This process improves citizen engagement in governance and reinforces trust in public institutions, thereby enhancing the overall legitimacy of government actions both domestically and internationally. This finding is in line with Akinboye (2013), who argues that democratic governance strengthens the connection between foreign policy and public accountability by making political leaders more responsive to citizens' preferences. It also corroborates Akande (2014), who maintains that public opinion is central to democratic legitimacy, as governments derive authority not only from constitutional provisions but also from public acceptance. In the same vein, it aligns with Diamond (1999), who emphasizes

that democratic consolidation is sustained through active citizen participation, accountability mechanisms, and responsive governance structures.

The finding further agrees with Aldrich et al. (2006), who posit that public opinion enhances policy effectiveness in democratic systems by increasing domestic support for government decisions, which in turn strengthens the credibility and sustainability of foreign policy initiatives. In the Nigerian context, this is reflected in how public reactions to issues such as xenophobic attacks against Nigerians abroad, migration policies, and regional security interventions often shape diplomatic responses and government engagement at the international level. Additionally, the finding concurs with Udeala (2019), who highlights the role of the media in promoting transparency and public scrutiny of foreign policy decisions, thereby strengthening accountability mechanisms. It also aligns with Imam (2024), who emphasizes that digital activism and social media engagement have amplified citizens' voices in foreign policy discourse, making government more responsive to public pressure in critical situations.

However, despite these positive contributions, the study finds that several challenges continue to moderate the full impact of public opinion. Misinformation and fake news distort public understanding of foreign policy issues, sometimes leading to misinformed public reactions. Ethnic and regional divisions also shape how citizens interpret and respond to international issues, occasionally complicating policy consensus. Furthermore, executive dominance in foreign policy decision-making limits the extent to which public opinion is formally integrated into policy processes. This finding concurs with Oderinde et al. (2024), who note that misinformation and digital media distortions can weaken informed civic engagement in democratic systems. It also agrees with Ugwu et al. (2023), who argue that ethnic and religious diversity often influences public interpretation of national and international issues in Nigeria. Additionally, it aligns with Ojieh (2015), who emphasizes the continued dominance of the executive arm in Nigeria's foreign policy process despite democratic reforms. Overall, the findings suggest that while public opinion significantly strengthens the legitimacy, effectiveness, and democratic quality of Nigeria's foreign policy, its full impact is moderated by structural, political, and informational challenges within the country's governance system.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study examined the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy within a democratic context, with particular reference to Nigeria between 2010 and 2025. It found that public opinion has become an increasingly important component of Nigeria's foreign policy discourse. It is expressed through a wide range of institutional and non-institutional channels, including the mass media, social media platforms, civil society organizations, academic institutions, religious and traditional bodies, and political actors. This development has been largely driven by democratic consolidation, media liberalization, globalization, and advancements in information and communication technologies.

The study further reveals that although Nigeria's foreign policy remains largely centralized within the executive arm of government and predominantly elite-driven, public opinion now exerts a growing indirect influence on diplomatic decision-making. This influence is most visible during periods of national sensitivity or international controversy, where sustained media coverage, civil society advocacy, electoral pressures, and digital activism prompt government responsiveness and shape diplomatic engagement. It also shows that the relationship between public opinion and foreign

policy in Nigeria is shaped by a combination of enabling and constraining factors. While democratic institutions, expanded media space, globalization, and ICT development have widened opportunities for citizen participation in foreign policy debates, structural challenges such as executive dominance, weak institutional capacity, elite control of political processes, socio-economic constraints, and misinformation continue to limit the full integration of public opinion into formal policy formulation and implementation.

In conclusion, public opinion contributes meaningfully to strengthening the legitimacy, accountability, and democratic quality of Nigeria's foreign policy. However, its influence remains largely indirect, uneven, and moderated by enduring political, institutional, and socio-economic constraints within the Nigerian governance system. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The government should formalize and expand mechanisms that allow citizens' views to be systematically incorporated into foreign policy formulation. This can be achieved through regular public consultations, policy dialogues, and strengthened legislative oversight on foreign affairs to ensure that public opinion is not only expressed but also meaningfully considered in decision-making processes.
- ii. Foreign policy institutions, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and related executive bodies, should improve communication and feedback systems that explain policy decisions to the public. This will help reduce the gap between policymakers and citizens, strengthen trust, and ensure that growing public expectations are adequately managed through accountability-driven diplomacy.
- iii. Government, civil society, and educational institutions should collaborate to promote media literacy programs that equip citizens with the skills to critically assess information, especially on social media platforms. At the same time, regulatory and institutional frameworks should be strengthened to address misinformation and fake news that distort public understanding of foreign policy issues.
- iv. There is a need to reinforce the capacity of the legislature, civil society organizations, and policy think tanks in foreign policy processes. This includes empowering oversight institutions, supporting independent policy research, and encouraging broader stakeholder inclusion to reduce over-centralization of foreign policy in the executive arm and improve democratic balance.

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