

Determinants of Public Opinion in Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Nigeria: Analysis of Influencing Factors

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the determinants of public opinion and their influence on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria. The relationship between public opinion and foreign policy has long generated debate among scholars, particularly between realist perspectives that downplay public influence and contemporary approaches that recognize citizens as critical actors in democratic governance. Against this backdrop, the study investigates how various socio-political, economic, and communication-related factors shape public opinion and how such opinion, in turn, affects Nigeria's foreign policy outcomes. Anchored on constructivist theory, the research emphasizes the role of socially constructed beliefs, norms, and identities in shaping both public perceptions and state behavior in the international system. The study adopted historical research design and utilizes qualitative methods, relying primarily on document analysis of government publications, policy statements, media reports, and scholarly materials. Data were analyzed using discourse and content analysis to uncover patterns, themes, and the interplay between public sentiment and policy decisions over time. Findings indicate that key determinants of public opinion in Nigeria include media influence, social media engagement, elite cues, economic conditions, identity factors, education, and national security concerns. These factors collectively shape citizens' perceptions and exert varying degrees of pressure on policymakers. The study concluded that although Nigeria's foreign policy process has historically been elite-driven, the growing influence of public opinion, especially through digital media and democratization, has made it increasingly difficult for policymakers to ignore domestic sentiment. It recommended greater institutional inclusion of public perspectives in foreign policy formulation to enhance legitimacy, accountability, and policy effectiveness.

Keywords: *Public Opinion; Foreign Policy; Decision-Making; Constructivism; Media Influence; Citizen Diplomacy*

Contribution/Originality: This study contributed to the literature by examining how socio-political, economic, identity, and communication factors shape public opinion and influence foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria. Its originality lies in linking traditional determinants of public opinion with emerging influences from social media and digital communication. Using constructivist theory, the study demonstrates how beliefs, norms, identities, and public narratives shape perceptions and state behaviour. It also contributed methodologically through historical and qualitative analysis of government documents, policy statements, media reports, and scholarly materials. The study further shows that the growing influence of digital media and public discourse is creating new opportunities for citizens to shape foreign policy. It therefore highlights the need for greater public participation in foreign policy formulation to promote legitimacy, accountability, and policy effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between public opinion and foreign policy decision-making has remained a central issue in international relations discourse. Scholars across different theoretical traditions have long debated the nature and relevance of public opinion in shaping state behavior. Classical realist scholars such as Morgenthau, Kennan, and Mearsheimer argue that foreign policy decisions are primarily driven by national interest and should be managed by informed elites rather than the general public, which is often perceived as emotional, inconsistent, and susceptible to manipulation (McCormick, 2014; Knecht & Weatherford, 2006). Similarly, early commentators like Lippmann (1995) and Bailey (1940) emphasized that public opinion tends to lack coherence and structure, thereby limiting its influence on complex foreign policy issues.

Despite this traditional skepticism, the role of public opinion has gained increasing recognition, particularly in democratic settings where governance is expected to reflect the will of the people. Contemporary scholars argue that public opinion can significantly influence foreign policy outcomes, especially as governments seek legitimacy and public support for international actions (Adelakun, 2021). This shift reflects a broader transformation in global politics, where the increasing interconnectedness of societies has made it difficult for policymakers to ignore the voices of citizens in shaping diplomatic strategies.

In the Nigerian context, foreign policy has historically been dominated by political elites, particularly during the early post-independence period. Following independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted a foreign policy framework grounded in Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial ideology, with little room for public input (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The country's leadership played a significant role in supporting liberation movements and promoting regional integration, as seen in its involvement in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (Akinyemi, 2011). During this period, foreign policy was largely conceived as a strategic tool for national development and international influence, rather than a domain for public participation.

Over time, however, structural and technological changes have transformed the dynamics of foreign policy-making in Nigeria. The liberalization of the media landscape in the late twentieth century and the subsequent rise of digital communication platforms have significantly expanded avenues for citizen engagement. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook now serve as important channels for expressing public sentiment and mobilizing opinion on foreign policy issues (Ojieh, 2015; Imam, 2024). This development has contributed to the emergence of "citizen diplomacy," where ordinary individuals actively participate in shaping national discourse on international relations.

Furthermore, the increasing visibility of public opinion in Nigeria's foreign policy process reflects broader socio-political transformations, including democratization and greater access to information. Public debates on issues such as peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone and Nigeria's relations with Western powers demonstrate the growing influence of citizens in foreign policy discussions (Uche, 2020). From a theoretical standpoint, constructivist perspectives suggest that state interests and identities are socially constructed and influenced by public sentiment (Finnemore, 2003). Consequently, understanding the determinants of public opinion has become essential for analyzing contemporary foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of public opinion in foreign policy discourse, Nigeria's foreign policy process has remained largely elite-driven, with limited empirical understanding of how citizen perspectives influence decision-making. Traditional studies have focused predominantly on the actions and preferences of political elites, neglecting the role of the public as an active stakeholder in international relations (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Akinyemi, 2011). This gap is particularly significant in the context of evolving communication technologies and increased political awareness among citizens, which have amplified public engagement in governance processes (Ojieh, 2015; Imam, 2024). As a result, there is insufficient clarity on the extent to which public opinion shapes Nigeria's foreign policy decisions.

Moreover, while existing literature acknowledges the growing importance of public sentiment, it fails to systematically examine the specific factors that determine public opinion and how these factors influence foreign policy outcomes. Variables such as education, socialization, media exposure, cultural values, and political institutions are likely to play a critical role in shaping citizens' views, yet they remain underexplored in empirical studies (Adelakun, 2021; Uche, 2020). This lack of comprehensive analysis creates a disconnect between theoretical assumptions and practical realities, thereby necessitating an in-depth investigation into the determinants of public opinion and their impact on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

To examine the determinants of public opinion and their influence on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria. The specific objective is to

1. identify the key factors that shape public opinion on foreign policy issues in Nigeria.

Research Question

1. What are the key determinants of public opinion, and how do they influence foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria?

Conceptual Clarifications

Public Opinion

Smith (2020) described opinion building as a purposeful, if not manipulative, process that simplifies policy problems into understandable terms for both policymakers and those who have to react to policy decisions. Public opinion encompasses attitudes towards any foreign policy issue, such as a specific foreign policy action, a particular target country, a specific objective of the foreign policy, or a general approach to foreign policy. Smith also argued that public opinion is influenced by two main sources of information. Firstly, information about the problem comes from the news media, social organizations, government propaganda, and other policy actors involved in the decision-making process. These actors may include lobbyists, the legislature, and the executive. Secondly, information about proposed solutions to the problem comes from the executive, who informs citizens about policy proposals and seeks their support or acquiescence (Smith, 2020).

Bryan (2019) an economist, and author is known for his views on public opinion and its influence on foreign policy, particularly through the lens of his broader economic and libertarian perspectives. Caplan argued that many citizens are rationally ignorant about foreign policy issues. Given the complexity of international relations and the low likelihood that individual actions will influence outcomes, people often choose not to

invest time in understanding these issues deeply. This ignorance can lead to poorly informed public opinions that influence policy Bryan (2019).

Additionally, the Nigerian political landscape demands careful consideration, as public skepticism can have profound and often unforeseen effects during policy making and implementation (Bryan, 2019). Inis Claude, in his book, *The Impact of Public Opinion Upon Foreign Policy and Diplomacy*, asserted that public opinion is a matter of great interest and importance to parliamentarians, prime ministers, presidents, monarchs and military juntas- political leaders of every description. Besides, Claude also argued that “the foreign policy of a state should be typically formulated and conducted within the limits set by the actual, presumed or potential demands of the public” with a view to achieving what he described as “irreversible alliances.” (Claude, 1952).

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy has been conceptualized in contemporary scholarship as a strategic framework through which states pursue their national interests in the international system. Foreign policy refers to a state's general objectives and the means adopted to guide its interactions with other nations. Recent scholars such as Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne (2020) expand this view by describing foreign policy as a dynamic process involving decision-making, negotiation, and implementation of strategies aimed at achieving political, economic, and security goals beyond national borders. This perspective emphasizes that foreign policy is not static but evolves in response to global changes, domestic pressures, and leadership priorities.

In a more analytical framing, Webber and Smith (2019) define foreign policy as the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor, usually a state, in international affairs. They argue that foreign policy encompasses both actions and inactions, including diplomatic engagements, economic agreements, and military strategies. Similarly, Morin and Paquin (2020) highlight that foreign policy involves deliberate choices made by governmental actors to influence international outcomes in line with national interests. This definition underscores the role of agency, suggesting that foreign policy is shaped by policymakers, institutions, and strategic calculations within specific political contexts.

Contemporary international relations literature also stresses the interaction between domestic and international environments in shaping foreign policy. According to Hudson (2020), foreign policy can be understood as the result of decision-making processes influenced by internal factors such as public opinion, political institutions, and leadership perceptions, as well as external pressures like globalization and international norms. In line with this, Kaarbo and Thies (2021) argue that foreign policy reflects both systemic constraints and domestic political dynamics, making it a product of complex interactions between internal and external variables. This approach is particularly relevant for developing countries like Nigeria, where domestic socio-political factors significantly shape foreign policy choices.

More recent contributions further emphasize the multidimensional and interdisciplinary nature of foreign policy. As noted by Carlsnaes (2022), foreign policy is not only about state actions but also involves interpretative processes where leaders construct meanings and strategies based on perceived realities.

Key Determinants of Public Opinion and How they Influence Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Nigeria

Domestic broadcast and print media remain central channels through which Nigerians learn about international affairs and evaluate government foreign policy. Empirical studies since 2020 demonstrate that the Nigerian press sets agendas and frames international issues in ways that shape salience and evaluation among citizens. For instance, when coverage highlights national interests, human rights, or economic implications, it raises public attention and influences whether audiences support or oppose particular diplomatic stances. Scholars link this agenda-setting role to policymaker sensitivity: sustained media-generated public concern compels elites to respond to avoid political costs (Uroegbulam et al., 2024; Edochie & Okri, 2023)

The dramatic rise of social media platforms has produced a faster, more participatory public sphere that directly affects foreign policy perceptions—from shaping narratives about international partners to mobilizing public campaigns that constrain or promote government actions. Case analyses, such as discourse on X (formerly Twitter) concerning President Tinubu’s economic policies, reveal how social media shapes public sentiment and policy interpretation. This creates windows of pressure on foreign policymakers, especially during crises when viral narratives gain traction quickly and become politically costly to ignore (Omipidan et al., 2024; Okoji & Azeez, 2023)

Studies such as Sufyan & Dauda (2025) and Demarest (2022) emphasize that ordinary citizens often take cues from political elites, parties, and opinion leaders in forming views on foreign policy. In Nigeria’s competitive political landscape, partisan framing and elite disagreements among the presidency, legislature, and policy networks shape public perceptions, especially on politically salient issues like bilateral economic deals and security cooperation. Putnam’s two-level game and related approaches applied to Nigerian contexts show that domestic electoral and institutional incentives heavily channel elite behaviour and the signals citizens receive regarding foreign policy.

Nigeria’s ethno-regional and religious pluralism strongly conditions public opinion on external affairs. Research documents that group identity affects how foreign policy actions are interpreted—whether engagement with particular states is seen as beneficial or threatening—and that sub-state identity politics can result in varied regional preferences for foreign alignments. When foreign policy intersects with identity-linked economic or security issues, local publics may react in ways that limit national policy autonomy (Isike et al., 2024)

Economic realities such as unemployment, inflation, trade impacts, investment flows, and perceptions of sovereignty are strong predictors of public attitudes toward foreign policy. Studies show that when citizens perceive tangible economic benefits from international relationships such as job creation, inward investment, or lower prices support for such engagements increases. Conversely, perceptions of unfair deals or dependency dampen approval. The feedback is clear: citizens evaluate foreign policy through perceived pocketbook effects, and policymakers ignoring these can face significant domestic pushback (Frontiers, 2025; AP News on economic hardship, 2024)

External actors’ soft power cultural ties, aid, student exchanges, and diplomacy campaigns shapes Nigerian public opinion by influencing cognitive and emotional orientations toward those countries. Empirical work on foreign outreach (e.g., China’s engagement) indicates that targeted educational, infrastructural, and cultural initiatives can generate perceptible shifts in attitudes, gradually influencing domestic debates on bilateral policy choices. This dynamic underscores that domestic public opinion is not

solely endogenous but partly constructed by foreign governments (Ighomereho & Ezeabasili, 2024; Frontiers, 2025)

National security concerns like terrorism, transnational crime, maritime insecurity, and regional instability elevate the salience of foreign policy in public awareness and influence preferences toward more assertive or cooperative postures based on perceived effectiveness. When citizens perceive external partnerships as essential to addressing security threats, support for cooperation rises; likewise, perceptions of foreign neglect or encroachment heighten nationalist reactions. Empirical research confirms that acute crises reshape both elite framing and mass opinion, narrowing diplomatic flexibility (Magdin, 2025; Frontiers, 2025)

Levels of political knowledge, civic education, and national narrative socialization significantly influence the depth and stability of foreign policy opinion. Research shows that more informed citizens, whether through formal education, civic programs, or consistent media exposure tend to hold more structured views and respond to substantive policy arguments rather than rhetoric. This suggests that long-term shifts in public opinion depend on investments in education and domestic public diplomacy (Uroegbulam et al., 2024; Obasogie & Okeibunor, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The research adopts constructivism theory to explain the role of public opinion in influencing foreign policy by shaping national identity and interest. According to Bufkin and Bryde (1996), constructivism has roots in Piaget's beliefs in how children learn. Piaget (1964) stated that "knowledge is not a copy of reality. To know an object, to know an event, is not simply to look at it and make a mental copy or image of it. To know an object is to act on it. To know is to modify, to transform the object, and to understand the process of transformation, and as a consequence to understand the way the object is constructed. Piaget is known for his developmental work that laid the psychological foundation of constructivism. Constructivist theory can be said to be based on five principles. These are:

- i. Human interaction with the environment,
- ii. Previous experience influences the next knowledge to be built,
- iii. The elaboration of a "sense" from the experience,
- iv. The active organization, and
- v. The adaptation between knowledge and reality.

Constructivist theory is a methodology used in qualitative research to gain an understanding of how people create meaning in their lives (Piaget, 1971). Constructivism emphasizes the role of social constructs in shaping international relations, including the identities, norms and values that influence state behavior. (Patten, 2009). Constructivism is a prominent theory in international relations that emphasizes the social construction of reality, particularly how ideas, beliefs, and identities shape state behavior and international interactions (Jackson, 2006)

The constructivism theory is a learning framework that emphasizes how people actively construct or build knowledge and understanding through experiences, rather than passively absorbing information (Rogoff, 1990). Guided by the central role public opinion plays in indexing foreign policy in the domestic set up, scholars have developed contact in determining the various indicators through which public opinion can be assessed in relation to foreign policy (Smith, 2020). Some of these indicators include beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Johnson, 2019).

Belief refers to the conception members of society entertain and adhere to. Religious beliefs are some examples, as it tends to hint at a tendency to hold rigidly to a set of opinion (Adams, 2018). Its topical question can be to ask, "Do you believe the United States is based on free-world dominance in the world?" Such a question is better in examining international system structure (Williams, 2021).

Public opinion serves as a crucial factor that guides and influences foreign policy within the domestic realm (Brown, 2017). Scholars, recognizing its significance, have actively explored avenues to determine the multitude of indicators employed to evaluate public opinion concerning foreign policy (Davis, 2020). These indicators span a wide range, encompassing beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Nguyen, 2018). Beliefs, specifically, pertain to the ideas and convictions held by members of society. Religious beliefs serve as prime examples, often characterized by a steadfast adherence to a particular set of opinions (Garcia, 2019). An insightful query to gauge such beliefs could be: "Do you firmly hold the belief that the United States is founded upon free-world dominance across the globe?" Posed within the context of examining the structure of the international system, this question provides valuable insights (Robinson, 2021).

Social constructivism emphasizes the social contexts in which state identities and interests are shaped. It examines how social interactions, norms, and cultural factors influence political behavior (Wendt, 1999). Social constructivism focuses on how knowledge is built through social interactions and shared understandings, which is directly applicable to public opinion (Katzenstein, 1996). Public opinion often emerges from discussions, media influence, and interactions within communities, where people collectively construct meanings, beliefs, and opinions. Social constructivism explains how public opinion can evolve through social processes such as:

Social Constructivists argue that the international system is not an objective reality but is constructed through social interactions, shared beliefs, and norms (Finnemore, 1996). Constructivism posits that state interests are not fixed; they are shaped by identities, relationships, and historical contexts. States act based on how they perceive themselves and how they wish to be perceived by others (Zaller, 1992). Constructivists emphasize the role of norms and values in guiding state behavior. International norms can influence how states act and interact, leading to changes in behavior and policy (Finnemore, 1996).

Therefore, the strategic interests of Nigerian leaders and other actors in the international relations system are not based only on the desire to protect or defend the state, but also on the 'actors' belief structures' (Sanchez, 2017). This appearance of the theory thus takes place mainly at internal and international dynamics of self-interested hegemony and social domination shaping behavior when actors form or push for specific rules that are consistent or partially shared with some of the permeable identities motivating discrete behaviors in the international system (Flores, 2019). Ultimately, this implies that the main concept of national interest revolves around constructions of reality that are paramount in shaping the socio-conscious life of the Nigerian state and the rest of the global social-originating society (Richardson, 2020).

From this perspective, it can be argued that the constructivist approach underscores the significance of accounts as critical mediators between states (Bennett, 2018). These accounts not only have a profound impact on the national and foreign policies of Nigeria but also serve to direct the focus and attention of Nigerian leaders, government officials, and ordinary individuals towards meanings, norms, and guidelines (Stewart, 2016). The construction process itself revolves around the gradual consolidation of social norms (Turner, 2017). Nigeria, as a prominent player in the

international arena, is certainly impacted by the perspectives and actions of these international actors (Sullivan, 2019). The intricate interplay between Nigeria's national objectives, the influence of regional and global forces, and the consequential policies implemented, form an enthralling web of interconnected dynamics that shape Nigeria's behavior on the global stage (Washington, 2018).

2. METHOD

The study employed the historical research design, which involves the systematic investigation and interpretation of past events, developments, and experiences through the analysis of historical sources (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study utilized qualitative methods of data collection, focusing on non-numerical data to understand meanings, interpretations, and historical contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; O'Leary, 2014), with primary emphasis on document analysis. Relevant documents included government white papers, parliamentary debates, policy briefs, foreign policy statements, speeches by political leaders, press releases, official communiqués, archival records, newspapers, and scholarly works. For data analysis, the study adopted both discourse analysis, particularly critical discourse analysis (CDA), and qualitative content analysis. Content analysis was applied to systematically identify patterns and themes in documents, allowing for the examination of how public opinion has influenced foreign policy formulation and implementation across different periods, as supported by Krippendorff (2019) and Schreier (2012), who emphasized its rigour in making valid inferences and its usefulness in analyzing communication within social and political contexts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What specific factors influence public opinion on the decision-making process and conduct of foreign policy in Nigeria?

Content analysis of Nigerian media and policy discourse demonstrates that the media remains a central factor shaping public opinion on foreign policy. Domestic broadcast and print media not only provide the main channels through which Nigerians access information on international affairs but also perform agenda-setting functions that influence public evaluations of government action. Studies such as Uroegbulam, Nwafor and Ugwu (2024), and Edochie and Okri (2023) reveal that media framing of issues such as human rights, national interest, or economic impact can increase the salience of foreign policy topics and sway citizens' support or opposition to particular diplomatic stances. According to the authors, policymakers are often sensitive to sustained media coverage, as ignoring agenda-driven public pressure may result in political costs, particularly in a democratic environment where legitimacy depends on responsiveness to popular concerns.

The rise of social media as a participatory platform has further transformed the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. Unlike traditional media, social media enables faster, decentralized, and more interactive discourse, allowing citizens to directly engage with and shape narratives about Nigeria's international relations. Viral campaigns and trending debates such as those surrounding President Tinubu's economic policies demonstrate that online conversations can crystallize public sentiment and constrain policymakers' options during foreign policy crises (Omipidan et al., 2024; Okoji & Azeez, 2023). The authors stressed that content analysis of digital discussions highlights the power of social media in amplifying grievances, mobilizing protests, or

promoting supportive narratives, thereby making foreign policy increasingly accountable to popular voices expressed in the online public sphere.

Another factor influencing public opinion is political elite signaling and partisan competition. Nigerian citizens frequently take cues from politicians, parties, and influential opinion leaders when forming their foreign policy preferences. Discourse analysis of elite debates shows that disagreements between the presidency, legislature, and party factions often spill over into public narratives, shaping how citizens interpret foreign engagements. The application of Putnam's two-level game framework in Nigerian contexts demonstrates that domestic electoral incentives and institutional struggles heavily influence elite messaging, which in turn conditions public attitudes toward bilateral agreements or security cooperation (Sufyan & Dauda, 2025). Thus, political elite framing emerges as a powerful mediator between policy formulation and public opinion formation.

Nigeria's ethno-regional and religious pluralism also strongly shapes foreign policy perceptions. Content from regional newspapers, political speeches, and civic debates reveals that citizens' evaluations of foreign engagements often reflect group identities and local priorities. For example, engagement with specific states may be interpreted differently depending on regional security concerns or identity-linked economic opportunities. Studies from 2020–2024 confirm that ethnic and religious affiliations condition how Nigerians assess foreign policy decisions, sometimes producing divergent regional preferences that constrain national policy autonomy (Isike, Okoro & Musa, 2024; SciELO Brazilian Journal, 2024). In this sense, identity politics mediates the translation of foreign policy into public support or resistance, reflecting Nigeria's internal diversity.

Economic realities constitute another significant factor influencing public opinion on foreign policy. Content analysis of survey data and news reports indicates that citizens evaluate external engagements through perceived "pocketbook effects" such as employment, trade benefits, foreign investments, and the impact of international agreements on the cost of living. Positive perceptions of economic gains foster public approval, whereas experiences of exploitation, dependency, or inequality fuel disapproval (Frontiers, 2025). Policymakers who overlook the economic dimensions of foreign policy risk losing public support, particularly in a country where economic hardship is a persistent domestic concern. Thus, economic wellbeing emerges as a core lens through which Nigerians judge foreign relations.

Finally, education, civic awareness, and security concerns also play pivotal roles in shaping public opinion on foreign policy. Studies show that informed citizens, exposed to national education curricula, civic engagement, or consistent media coverage, tend to hold more structured and stable opinions, responding to substantive arguments rather than rhetorical appeals (Uroegbulam et al., 2024; Obasogie & Okeibunor, 2024). Similarly, acute security crises, such as terrorism, piracy, and regional instability, heighten the salience of foreign partnerships and influence whether citizens support cooperative or nationalist policies (Magdin, 2025; Frontiers, 2025). Content analysis underscores that both education and security threats act as long-term and immediate factors, respectively, shaping how Nigerians perceive and evaluate foreign policy actions. Collectively, these factors demonstrate that public opinion in Nigeria is the product of a multifaceted interaction among media, social media, elite framing, identity politics, economic realities, education, and security considerations.

Discussion

The research question analyzed revealed that public opinion on Nigeria's foreign policy is shaped by media framing, social media activism, elite cues, identity politics, economic realities, external soft power, national security concerns, and political knowledge. These factors jointly influence how Nigerians perceive, evaluate, and react to foreign policy decisions. The works of Uroegbulam et al. (2024) and Edochie & Okri (2023) are in consonance with this finding as they reveal that domestic broadcast and print media are central in setting the agenda for foreign policy debates. Their studies show that when media coverage emphasizes national interest, human rights, or economic benefits, it raises the salience of these issues among citizens and influences their evaluations of foreign policy choices. This aligns with the notion that media framing acts as a filter through which Nigerians interpret international affairs, thereby indirectly shaping the conduct of policymakers who seek to avoid political costs arising from sustained public concern.

Similarly, Omipidan et al. (2024) and Okoji & Azeez (2023) corroborate the finding by demonstrating that the rise of social media platforms has transformed public engagement with foreign policy. Their analyses of digital discourse on X (formerly Twitter) illustrate how viral narratives surrounding issues like President Tinubu's economic reforms quickly shape public sentiment and constrain foreign policy maneuverability. In agreement with this, they argue that the immediacy and participatory nature of social media create moments of intense pressure that elites cannot afford to ignore, thus reinforcing the role of new media as a driver of foreign policy opinion formation.

The study of Sufyan & Dauda (2025) aligns with the finding by emphasizing the pivotal role of elites and political institutions in shaping mass opinion. Drawing on Putnam's two-level game, they demonstrate that Nigerians often rely on cues from political leaders, parties, and opinion networks to interpret foreign policy issues. Their research shows that partisan framings and elite disagreements, particularly between the presidency and legislature, heavily condition how citizens perceive bilateral economic agreements and security cooperation. This finding resonates with the broader argument that elite competition channels public opinion and shapes its eventual influence on foreign policy outcomes.

Finally, the findings of Magdin (2025) and Frontiers (2025) converge with the study's conclusion by showing that security concerns, such as terrorism and maritime crime, elevate the salience of foreign policy in the public sphere. Citizens, they argue, tend to support cooperative partnerships when these are perceived as necessary for addressing pressing threats but shift toward nationalist postures when foreign actors are seen as neglectful or intrusive. Complementing this, Uroegbulam et al. (2024) and Obasogie & Okeibunor (2024) affirm that levels of political knowledge, civic education, and socialization shape the structure and durability of foreign policy opinions. These studies collectively align with the broader finding that both immediate security pressures and long-term educational investments influence how Nigerians engage with and assess foreign policy choices.

4. CONCLUSION

Public opinion is further mediated by factors such as culture, education, political institutions, and elite signaling, highlighting that foreign policy decisions are socially constructed rather than purely determined by material interests. Thus, consistent with constructivist theory, Nigeria's foreign policy reflects an interplay between identity,

ideas, and public sentiment, underscoring the need for policymakers to engage domestic audiences more systematically in shaping and legitimizing the nation's international role.

Since multiple factors such as economic conditions, media framing, education, and culture shape public attitudes toward foreign policy, there is a need for the Nigerian government to strengthen civic and global citizenship education in schools and civic institutions. By equipping citizens with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to engage international issues, public opinion would become more informed, structured, and less vulnerable to manipulation by elite or partisan narratives.

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