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Navigating Dual Realities: Negotiating Identities of Migration, Gender, and Belonging among Nigerian Women in Cincinnati, United States of America

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Abstract

The United States is a nation of immigrants, yet the narratives of immigrants have been selectively told due to a lopsided focus. This paper examines the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati, Ohio. It sheds light on how migration reshapes identity, gender roles, and notions of belonging at the intersection of race, class, and motherhood. Drawing on feminist migration theory, intersectionality, and feminist poststructuralism, this study investigates how these women negotiate dual realities, navigating systemic exclusion in the U.S. while maintaining cultural identities rooted in Nigerian norms. Through semi-structured interviews with eight first-generation Nigerian immigrant mothers, the research uncovers recurring themes of emotional labour, shifting gender dynamics, and racialised silencing. Participants confront marginalisation within U.S. institutions, often facing devaluation due to their accents, skin colour, or foreignness. Yet, they respond with strategic adaptations, forming support networks through churches, social groups, and sisterhood alliances. This study challenges dominant migration narratives by centring the voices of African women, often rendered invisible in both scholarly and policy discourse. It argues that Nigerian immigrant mothers are not passive recipients of migration's pressures, but active agents engaged in ongoing processes of identity reconfiguration and cultural negotiation. By amplifying these underrepresented perspectives, this paper contributes to decolonial feminist scholarship and urges a reconceptualisation of migration that honours the complexity, resilience, and agency of Black immigrant women.

Keywords: Nigeria, immigrant mothers, gendered migration, identity negotiation, intersectionality, racialization, feminist migration theory

Introduction

Migration is widely acknowledged as a transformative process that reshapes identities, family dynamics, and sociocultural expectations (Wu, 2024). Yet, it is not a neutral or uniform experience. As migrants navigate new terrains, they confront institutional structures, racial hierarchies, and cultural contradictions that profoundly affect their sense of self and belonging. The United States continues to position itself as a nation of immigrants, but its migration discourse remains uneven and racialised, frequently centring on European or Latin American experiences while overlooking the rapidly growing population of African migrants (Khokholkova, 2022). Within this rising demographic, African women, especially those who are mothers, remain critically understudied. Even though they play important roles in initiating and sustaining life across countries, they are often seen as mere followers or dependents of men who lead migration. This framing thereby reflects a broader intellectual bias in African migration scholarship, which has long privileged economic and labour models that foreground male mobility and minimise the social, emotional, and reproductive labour of women (Setrana & Kleist, 2022; Ette, 2012). The result is what Mlotshwa (2024) describes as a "gendered erasure," in which African women's autonomous migration stories and identity negotiations remain hidden beneath reductive narratives. These women face dual invisibility, excluded from dominant academic discourses and rendered peripheral in policy spaces that fail to capture the complex realities of racialised, gendered migration.

This study focuses on Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati, Ohio, a group navigating the compounded forces of racialization, gendered expectations, cultural loss, and social exclusion. These women's stories reveal that migration is not simply a relocation, but a radical disruption and an ongoing negotiation between inherited norms and emerging demands. As mothers, professionals, and community members, they must continuously recalibrate their identities while contending with occupational deskilling, isolation from extended kin networks, and the cultural differences between Nigerian community-focused values and American ideas of independence, womanhood, and success.

In examining the lived experiences of eight Nigerian immigrant mothers through semi-structured interviews, this study contributes to a growing feminist and decolonial body of literature that seeks to re-centre African women's voices in migration studies. As scholars such as Ossome (2023) and Beoku-Betts and Adomako Ampofo (2021) have argued, knowledge production in the Global South must be grounded in the realities of those living at the intersections of race, gender, class, and colonial legacies. This work also echoes recent calls to decolonise migration theory by decentering Eurocentric assumptions and recognising how Black African women navigate transnational life not as passive subjects but as strategic agents of social and cultural negotiation (Zerbe Enns *et al.*, 2021; Bakhshalizadeh, 2025).

By sharing the voices and stories of these women, this research challenges the one-size-fits-all stories often told about immigrants and Africans. It shows that Nigerian immigrant mothers are not just trying to get by; they are actively shaping what it means to be a woman, a mother, a worker, a caregiver, and a Black immigrant in America. Their experiences help us understand how migration can both limit and empower, breaking apart old ideas while creating new ways of belonging, resisting, and becoming.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were designed to elicit in-depth reflections on participants' understanding of their roles as women, mothers, migrants, and workers. Specifically, this study explored:

1. How do Nigerian immigrant mothers reconstruct their gender and professional identities in the U.S.?
2. In what ways do they negotiate belonging in a racialised society?
3. How does migration reshape family dynamics and motherhood?

These questions enabled the researcher to explore how participants balance American ideals of independence and productivity with Nigerian cultural values of collectivism, how they respond to structural barriers such as occupational deskilling and racism, and how they construct a sense of belonging in a society that often marginalises them. The study approaches identity not as a fixed trait, but as relational and continually reshaped through context, power, and lived experience.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on feminist migration theory, poststructuralist theory, and intersectionality, which together frame women as active agents navigating transnational structures of opportunity and constraint. Feminist migration theory highlights how systemic forces such as labour markets, immigration laws, and family responsibilities impact women's mobility and adaptation (Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021). It challenges male-centred migration narratives by foregrounding how women's migratory experiences are shaped by caregiving roles, reproductive labour, and emotional work, often overlooked in traditional migration models. It also emphasises the non-linear nature of migratory trajectories for women, where household responsibilities, visa limitations, and structural discrimination intersect to shape possibilities for employment, education, and personal fulfilment. Feminist migration scholarship resists the oversimplified portrayal of women migrants as either victims or heroines, instead emphasising their agency within constraints. For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) argued that immigrant women are not merely pulled into migration by familial decisions, but often make strategic decisions regarding when, where, and how to migrate. Their participation in migration is often deeply informed by gendered expectations and aspirations for generational mobility and legacy, which are core to many African family value systems (Ojong, 2020).

Building on this, intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and extended by scholars such as Amoako et al. (2023), emphasises that immigrant women's identities are not defined by a single axis, such as gender or race, but by the convergence of multiple interlocking systems of power and marginalisation. Intersectionality enables a sharper focus on how Nigerian immigrant mothers experience oppression differently from both white women and African American women, due to their unique positioning as Black, African, immigrant, and female. Nigerian immigrant women may be subject to anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and gendered stereotypes simultaneously, affecting their access to resources, employment, and social belonging (Collins & Bilge, 2020). This study provides scaffolding for interpreting how participants' experiences of motherhood, work, and belonging are mediated by their simultaneous status as racial minorities, cultural outsiders, and women expected to conform to gendered norms both at home and abroad.

To further examine the identity shifts that Nigerian immigrant mothers undergo, this study incorporates feminist poststructuralist theory, which views identity as fluid, discursively constructed, and situated within power relations. Rooted in the works of scholars like Weedon (1987), feminist poststructuralism challenges essentialist understandings of subjectivity and instead emphasises the role of discourse, culture, and institutional norms in shaping how individuals come to understand themselves. Poststructuralist feminism interrogates how dominant societal narratives about womanhood, success, and domesticity regulate which roles are deemed legitimate for women and how individuals adopt, resist, or transform those narratives in daily life. This

perspective is particularly relevant to migration, where women must constantly negotiate who they are in relation to the shifting norms around labour, parenting, and womanhood. Nigerian immigrant mothers may find themselves caught between Nigerian constructions of motherhood, which often emphasise submission, nurturing, and family loyalty (Adisa et al., 2021), and American discourses that prioritise independence, assertiveness, and capitalist productivity. This tension is further complicated by the racialised assumptions in the U.S. that frame Black mothers, particularly immigrants, as either burdens or superwomen, with little space for nuance or vulnerability (Collins, 2000).

The Nigerian Immigrant Experience in the United States

Scholarly interest in African migration to the United States has grown in recent years, but many studies have focused on broad patterns without deeply addressing the gendered and maternal dimensions of that experience. Research by Ibe-Lamberts *et al. (2025), Bamgbose et al. (2022), and Saasa et al.* (2022) sheds light on the trajectories of African immigrants, and the distinct realities faced by African women, particularly mothers, remain underexplored. Bamgbose *et al* (2022), for example, provide valuable insights into the motivations and adaptation strategies of African immigrants, but do not fully capture the intersections of gender, care, and identity. Similarly, Nicolle (2022) explores African diaspora identities and transnational networks, emphasising educational aspirations and economic goals as drivers of migration. However, such analyses often overlook how these aspirations are refracted through the lens of gendered labour and motherhood while living abroad.

Nigerian immigrants form a diverse and heterogeneous population across the U.S., with a range of professional, cultural, and generational identities. However, women, and specifically mothers, face a unique set of challenges that are often overlooked in broader migration discourses. Many are responsible not only for sustaining their households economically but also for preserving cultural traditions, managing transnational family obligations, and raising children in racially stratified environments. These women must reconcile traditional Nigerian gender roles with the demands of single or dual parenting in a Western context that often lacks communal or extended-kin support (Onwujuba, 2015).

Youth raised in the United States still maintain strong connections to their African heritage, even as they navigate racial isolation in predominantly White communities (Kiramba *et al.,* 2021). These youths frequently encounter moments of exclusion where their identities as both African and Black intersect in ways that expose them to overt and covert racism (Jack-Vickers, 2024). This dual positioning reflects the broader negotiation faced by Nigerian immigrant mothers, who are tasked not only with surviving the structural inequalities of the U.S. but also with raising children to develop resilience in the face of racialised belonging (Jack-Vickers, 2024). While many Nigerian mothers distinguish their cultural identities from African American norms, they do not reject the political reality of Blackness in America. Instead, they often teach their children to claim both their ethnic and racial identities, embracing a shared Black struggle while maintaining cultural specificity. Their everyday experiences reveal how race, immigration status, motherhood, and nationality intersect to shape belonging in America not as a fixed identity, but as an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation (Showers, 2015).

African Immigrant Mothers' Voices in Migration Studies

Migration research on Africa has traditionally been shaped by macroeconomic models that foreground male labour migration, portraying men as the primary agents of mobility and women as passive dependents or caregivers (Setrana & Kleist, 2022). This has led to a systematic erasure of African women's autonomous migration experiences and a disregard for the gendered restructuring that occurs during and after migration (Mlotshwa, 2024). Women are often labelled "secondary migrants," despite evidence that many migrate independently or as central actors in household migration strategies (Ette, 2012). Kitonsa (2025) has increasingly challenged these framings, arguing for a reconceptualisation of migration to include domestic labour, caregiving, and the invisible emotional labour women perform in transnational spaces. Moreover, the migration process itself often catalyses a redefinition of women's roles within the household and broader society (Adekoya *et al.,* 2024).

African immigrant mothers often find themselves becoming co-providers or the main earners in their families.

This is a significant change from the norms in many African communities, where women are usually expected to stay at home, care for children, and manage the household, while men are seen as the primary providers (Msangaambe, 2024). In some cases, migration prompts men to take on childcare responsibilities that were formerly designated as "women's work," challenging cultural norms (Krieger & Salikutluk, 2023). Yet, for many women, the lack of support systems such as extended family and domestic help, which has an exorbitant price in the U.S., known as childcare, which immigrants might not be able to afford, as was common in Nigeria, can intensify their burden, making the caregiving role more isolating and complex (Okah *et al.*, 2024). These dynamics signal a transition from perceived dependency to visible agency in navigating household resilience and identity reconstruction (Okeke-Ihejirika *et al.,* 2022).

Migration significantly reshapes the experience of motherhood and caregiving, presenting a range of challenges. Immigrant mothers often have to adjust to unfamiliar environments and develop alternative sources of support, whether through forming close networks, relying on childcare services, or navigating the demands of parenting alone. Personal narratives shed light on the specific struggles Nigerian immigrant mothers face in juggling employment, caregiving, and parental duties abroad. For instance, a conversation with a Nigerian graduate student revealed the hardship of managing her toddler's care on her own while pursuing her degree in the U.S., She shared how emotionally taxing it was to care for her child without the familial support she had back in Nigeria. Her story, among others, illustrates the real-life difficulties Nigerian immigrant mothers face as they balance their roles in the absence of extended family, especially grandmothers. Additionally, many African mothers encounter cultural dissonance as they shift from communal caregiving norms to more individualistic approaches to childcare, as is common in countries such as the United States (Amarapurkar & Hogan, 2009; Coe, 2013).

In host countries like the United States, immigrant mothers often encounter institutionalised obstacles, such as poor childcare laws, workplace inflexibility, and systemic racism (Collins, 2019). According to Manolova (2019), immigrants may have an envisioned way of life in the United States, where preconceived ideals of living abroad collide with the realities of structural and cultural hurdles. For example, immigrants often envision abundant job opportunities, quality education, affordable healthcare, and supportive social environments upon immigration. However, they often face structural hurdles such as labour market scarcity, high childcare costs, restrictive policies, language barriers, and social isolation (Manolova, 2019). The caregiving process becomes more complex due to immigrants' expectations, as mothers navigate unfamiliar social and institutional environments while maintaining their cultural identities (Okeke-Ihejirika *et al.,* 2022). The above examples describe various effects and challenges of immigration on immigrant mothers residing abroad.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in feminist inquiry to capture the nuanced lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers as they navigate motherhood, migration, and identity formation in Cincinnati, Ohio. A phenomenological perspective was employed to centre participants' interpretations of their everyday realities, particularly as they relate to gender roles, racialization, caregiving, and cultural belonging. This approach was most appropriate for exploring how these women make meaning of their migratory journeys and how they negotiate identity across private and public domains in a racially stratified society. Consistent with feminist methodological traditions, this study employed semi-structured interviews to prioritise the perspectives of women, especially those from historically underrepresented and structurally marginalised groups (Harding, 1987; Mohanty, 1988). Feminist methodology foregrounds the importance of listening to women's stories as valid forms of knowledge production, rather than treating them as secondary data. This aligns with the central focus of the study: to understand how Nigerian immigrant mothers, as both caregivers and migrants, interpret and navigate intersecting systems of gender, race, class, and migration (Collins, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method because they offer rich, flexible, and detailed accounts of lived experience, particularly useful in uncovering the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of caregiving and identity reconstruction (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; DeVault & Gross, 2012). Unlike surveys or strictly quantitative tools, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to describe not only their migration and professional trajectories but also the deeply personal and often invisible labour involved in parenting,

adapting to cultural norms, and responding to systemic exclusions. These interviews were instrumental in allowing the women to speak on their own terms and offer counter-narratives to dominant representations of immigrant motherhood.

Sampling Procedure

Participants in this study consisted of eight Nigerian immigrant mothers currently residing in Cincinnati, Ohio. I assigned code names to all participants to protect their identities in this study. All participants were first-generation migrants, aged between 30 and 58, with diverse educational and professional backgrounds. The sampling strategy for this study was purposive, aiming to select participants who were both Nigerian-born mothers and actively engaged in diaspora life. Given the specificity of the target population, snowball sampling was also employed to expand recruitment. This method, proposed by Woodley and Lockard (2016), is particularly effective for accessing hard-to-reach or marginalised groups, such as immigrant women who may not be part of formal organisations but are connected through churches, WhatsApp groups, and social networks. Snowball sampling involves identifying initial participants who then refer others from their social circles, facilitating trust-based recruitment in communities where formal outreach may not yield results.While the sample size of eight participants is relatively small, it was selected intentionally to allow for in-depth, qualitative exploration of the themes under study. This reflects the phenomenological and feminist orientation of the research, which prioritises depth over breadth and centres the complexity of individual lived experiences over generalizability. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected over an eight-week period from June to July 2024 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, depending on participant availability and depth of engagement. While two interviews were conducted in person at neutral public locations (such as community centres, centres, and quiet cafés), the remaining six were held virtually via WhatsApp or Zoom due to participants' preferences and scheduling constraints. This flexibility was essential for accommodating participants' family and work responsibilities and circumstances that themselves reflected the daily negotiations explored in the study. Each interview followed a loosely structured guide that explored four central domains: (1) migration experiences and motivations; (2) work and professional identity before and after migration; (3) family dynamics and motherhood in the diaspora; and (4) personal reflections on belonging, race, and gender roles.

Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

This research was grounded in feminist principles that reject the illusion of objectivity in qualitative inquiry and emphasise the importance of reflexivity, emotional labour, and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Collins, 1990). Throughout the research process, I engaged in systematic reflexivity to critically examine how my positionality, as a Nigerian-born woman with lived experience of migration, shaped methodological choices, interactions with participants, and interpretation of data. My cultural proximity to the participant community conferred strong insider status, fostering trust, rapport, and open dialogue during interviews. However, I remained aware that this closeness also carried the risk of unspoken assumptions or shared silences that could obscure critical reflection.

Feminist scholarship emphasises that the researcher's body, emotions, and social location are present in the field and cannot be bracketed out of the research encounter. Drawing on Adjepong's (2021) concept of *"invading ethnography,"* I embraced my dual positionality: both as an insider shaped by shared cultural norms and an outsider situated in academic knowledge production. To navigate this tension, I practised intentional detachment at different stages of the research process—not to create distance, but to sustain emotional presence without over-identification. This approach allowed for mutual knowledge production while preserving critical analytical distance. I also maintained reflexive journals, documenting moments of discomfort, resonance, and emotional entanglement that emerged during both data collection and analysis.

From an ethical standpoint, the research was conducted in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Participants received full information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Informed consent was obtained both verbally and in writing. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to

ensure anonymity, and all interviews were audio-recorded only with permission and stored securely. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, without consequence.

Data Presentation

This study explored the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers residing in Cincinnati, Ohio. Several recurring themes emerged, illustrating how migration transforms motherhood, identity, family roles, and belonging. These findings reflect the challenges and strategies for adaptation that Nigerian women adopt as they navigate the intersections of race, gender, class, and cultural expectations.

Redefining Gender Roles through Migration

One of the most powerful shifts recounted by participants was the transformation in household gender dynamics. Migration often disrupted traditional roles, particularly encouraging men's involvement in domestic responsibilities. Participant 1 said, "Because of my shift schedule, my husband now prepares the kids for school and sometimes even cooks. Back home, that would have been unheard of". These transformations were frequently linked to structural necessity, such as work shifts and a lack of extended-family support, rather than to ideological change, yet participants acknowledged that these practical adaptations gradually reshaped family expectations.

Emotional Labor and Isolation

Participants emphasised the emotional toll of parenting in the diaspora, compounded by the absence of extended family and the demands of work and study. Participant 2 reflected thus, "I barely have time for myself. I go from work to cooking to homework. No rest. No grandma to help. It's just me". Participant 3 added to this assertion, saying, "In Nigeria, I had my mother and sisters. Here, it's just my husband and me. And he works long hours". These narratives underscore how emotional labour becomes intensified in the absence of cultural support systems.

Migration as a Catalyst for Identity Reconfiguration

Migration acted as a site of identity negotiation. The participants reported both continuity and rupture in their understanding of womanhood, parenting, and cultural expectations. Participant 4 reflected on the dual burden of being a mother and a professional. "In Nigeria, you are respected for just being a good wife and mother. Here, if you are not doing something with your life, work, or education, you are not seen". Others spoke of juggling both Nigerian and American expectations. For example, Participant 2 said, "In Nigeria, I was raised to see motherhood as a sacrifice. But here, people talk about self-care and independence. It's a different world". Participant 5 expanded on this contradiction, "Sometimes I wonder who I am becoming. I am not the woman my mother raised, but I am also not an American; I am in between". These reflections show how migration challenges fixed ideas of motherhood. Participants found themselves constantly adjusting, blending cultural values from home with new expectations in the U.S. to redefine who they are.

Dual Identity Awareness

Several participants demonstrated an emerging awareness of how their identities were being reshaped by their racial categorisation in the U.S. While they identified strongly as Nigerians and maintained their cultural values, they also expressed an understanding that in America, they were perceived primarily as Black, and that this perception came with social burdens and assumptions they had not encountered in Nigeria. Participant 4 reflected on this shift, thus, "In Nigeria, I was just a woman. Here, I am Black, and it comes with a label: aggressive and unqualified. You have to constantly prove otherwise". In a similar manner, Participant 6 explained, "I am a Nigerian, but here I am Black first. That is how they see you. It took me years to understand that".

Participants described how this imposed racial identity influenced how they were treated at work, in school settings, and in public interactions. Some shared that they had tried to explain to their children that being an African and an African-American are not the same, yet they also acknowledged that these distinctions did not

shield them from the broader realities of anti-Black racism. This dual awareness, being Nigerian by origin but Black in the eyes of American society, compelled participants to constantly manage how they presented themselves. For some, this meant downplaying accents or cultural behaviours in public; for others, it meant having difficult conversations with their children about race, belonging, and perception.

Discussions of Findings

The narratives of Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati reveal the profound and multidimensional ways in which migration transforms identity, gender roles, and belonging. Their experiences reflect both resistance and adaptation within a transnational context shaped by race, class, and gender. Through the lenses of feminist migration theory, intersectionality, and feminist poststructuralism, we can better understand how these women reconfigure their sense of self, motherhood, and purpose amid competing discourses and systemic exclusions.

Gender Role Reconfiguration as Feminist Resistance and Necessity

Migration was described by many participants as a catalyst for the redefinition of gender roles. Men who once held exclusive authority in the home were now sharing or relinquishing domestic responsibilities, not necessarily due to an ideological shift but out of necessity. This shift echoes findings from Msangaambe (2024) that migration destabilises patriarchal norms, particularly in households where women become co-breadwinners or primary earners.

From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, this transformation is not linear or uniform. Participants did not completely abandon traditional Nigerian gender roles. Instead, they balanced old expectations with their new situations, taking on both caregiving and financial responsibilities. This confirms Weedon's (1987) view of subjectivity as discursively constructed, emerging through negotiation with multiple, often conflicting cultural scripts. Participant 1's experience of her husband cooking and helping with the children shows how institutional pressures from work shifts and lack of childcare produce new domestic configurations, challenging hegemonic masculinity in quiet, practical ways. These shifts are often not framed by the participants themselves as resistance, yet they nonetheless reshape the gender order.

The Emotional Landscape of Migration and the Invisible Labour of Motherhood

The emotional toll of immigration featured prominently in participants' accounts, echoing the concept of emotional labour as unpaid, often invisible work central to women's caregiving roles. Participants described feelings of exhaustion, guilt, and isolation, a reality exacerbated by the absence of extended family and communal childcare systems typical in Nigeria. Feminist migration theory demands attention to such reproductive labour, which includes not only caregiving but also the management of children's educational and cultural adaptation. Participants frequently described themselves as the emotional backbone of their families, responsible for transmitting values, preserving language, and buffering their children from both cultural dislocation and racial discrimination.

Drawing on Riach (2023), subjectivity here is not only about how these women see themselves but also about how they are produced by institutions and expectations. They are expected to be emotionally strong, culturally grounded, economically productive, and racially resilient, all at once. The pressure to embody this "ideal immigrant mother" narrative results in chronic emotional overload and the need for discrete acts of self-care, such as shopping, spiritual retreats, and small indulgences, offered as fleeting moments of self-reclamation.

Identity as an Ongoing Negotiation

Ultimately, this study affirms feminist poststructuralism's claim that identity is not fixed; it is an evolving response to power, discourse, and context. Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati are constantly rearticulating their sense of self in response to multiple demands: from their home culture, American institutions, their children, and themselves.

Whether through redefining gender roles, resisting workplace exclusion, or maintaining cultural pride in hostile environments, these women demonstrate what Weedon (1987) calls "the politics of everyday life." Their

decisions, however small, represent powerful acts of meaning-making in a world that frequently denies them full recognition. This discussion reaffirms that Nigerian immigrant mothers are not merely victims of migration or subjects of loss. They are cultural workers, care strategists, and identity architects whose lives challenge and enrich dominant narratives of migration, motherhood, and belonging.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the deeply textured lives of Nigerian immigrant mothers in Cincinnati, revealing the emotional, structural, and cultural labour they perform as they navigate the shifting terrains of migration, gender, and identity. Far from being passive subjects of displacement or economic necessity, these women emerge as active negotiators of complex realities, interrogating patriarchal expectations, resisting racialised hierarchies, and reclaiming space within institutions and narratives that often seek to silence or erase them. By centring their voices, this research reframes migration not simply as a movement across geography, but as a profound reworking of self, kinship, and belonging. Through themes such as renegotiated gender roles, emotional burden, and the cultivation of sisterhood and solitude, participants challenged normative assumptions about immigrant motherhood, femininity, and labour.

Theoretically, this paper contributes to scholarship at the intersection of gendered migration and diasporic identity by showing how Nigerian women, once labelled "secondary migrants," subvert that marginalisation through everyday practices of resistance, care, and reinvention. These stories compel us to rethink migration discourse itself. What these women seek is not merely integration into the American fabric but the freedom to narrate their lives on their terms. Their experiences demand that migration policies, academic frameworks, and community structures move beyond deficit models that pathologise immigrant mothers and instead honour their complexity, intelligence, and transformative power.

Beyond structural and material realities, this study foregrounds the emotional and epistemic labour Nigerian immigrant mothers perform daily, those quiet acts of meaning-making and care that unfold in kitchens, WhatsApp groups, and school hallways. These women do not merely move across borders; they live across them, juggling time zones, expectations, and obligations that span continents. They bear the emotional weight of transnational kinship and cultural continuity, even as they confront new and often harsh racialised norms in the U.S. Their lives resist simple categorisation. They are at once traditional and modern, vulnerable and powerful, rooted and in flux. In these interstitial spaces between languages, roles, and identities, they forge a dynamic and evolving womanhood that defies dominant frameworks of assimilation, success, or cultural preservation. In remapping the emotional geographies of home, family, and labour, Nigerian immigrant mothers are not merely adapting to life in America. They are remaking what it means to belong. Their journeys are not footnotes in the story of migration. They are the story.

Ethical Clearance Statement

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Cincinnati, where the research was conducted (IRB Number: 2024-0347). All procedures involving human participants were carried out in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, and identifying details were removed from all transcripts and reports. Data was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Given the potential sensitivities surrounding immigration status, racial identity, and personal experiences, particular care was taken to create a respectful, safe, and non-coercive interview environment.

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Media Engagement and Public Communication as Tools for Shaping Voting Decisions and Strategic Value Orientation

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role that media engagement and public communication play in shaping strategic value orientations and voting decisions in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It is observed that both conventional media (television, radio, newspapers) and non-conventional platforms (social media) play crucial roles in shaping public discourse and influencing electoral behaviour. Opinions formed by media users, political actors, and their supporters have shaped the nature and outcomes of elections in Nigeria. Through a qualitative method, the study explores how media platforms, both conventional and unconventional, shape voter engagement and public communication within Nigeria's democratic space. Adopting the Agenda-Setting Theory as its analytical framework, the study finds that media coverage of key issues such as economic recovery, fiscal policy, security, and governance directly influenced strategic voting behaviour during the 2023 elections. Social media amplified youth mobilisation, while traditional media remained influential in rural areas. However, misinformation, particularly on social media, significantly distorts voters' strategic value orientations, influences voting patterns and outcomes. The paper concludes that media must go beyond reporting to promote democratic values, and recommends content-specific media literacy programmes and stronger regulatory frameworks to address misconceptions in Nigeria's democratic process.

Keywords: Keywords: Democracy; Political Communication; Voting Decision; Mass Media

Introduction

The role of media platforms in shaping political engagements and public discourse in contemporary democracies cannot be overemphasised. Media platforms have come to assume an indispensable role across democracies. Delivering on the responsibility of political education, election management agents and other actors, in collaboration with media platforms, determine the process and outcomes of elections (Casero-Ripollés, 2023). This process is evident in developing democracies such as Nigeria, where conventional and non-conventional media platforms serve as the primary means of political communication and public discourse. The role of the media in disseminating information and shaping election narratives, processes, and outcomes significantly affects public opinion and voting behaviour, serving as a strategic actor in democratic governance (Okechwuku, 2023). The media, often described as the 'fourth estate of the realm' in democracies, is responsible for holding government accountable and informing the populace to support informed political engagement and decision-making (Kahl, 2025; Adanlawo & Rugbeer, 2021). Across liberal democracies, a free, multicultural and neutral media environment is important for ensuring transparency, political participation and education, and the protection of civil liberties (Olayinka, 2024). The important role played by media outlets as watchdogs is fundamental during election periods. Through the release of and serving as an information source, where factual and balanced perspectives promote the integrity of the election process and outcome. According to Ullah, Salim, and Khan (2025), the indispensable roles played by media outlets, whether conventional or non-conventional, ensure continued public engagement in democracies worldwide.

The political landscape in Nigeria presents exceptional challenges and opportunities for media engagement within the scope of democratic practices and citizens' expectations. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the processes and outcomes of elections have been characterised by intense political competition, a volatile political atmosphere of ethnic and religious tensions, and anti-democratic actions (Yusuf et al., 2025). Media involvement in Nigeria's electioneering process has evolved significantly, shaping value orientation and manifesting in robust political discourse, public engagement, and media penetration across the country (Agho, 2025). Conversely, according to Mbagwu (2024), media outlets in Nigeria have shown a tendency toward disinformation. Challenges such as bias, misinformation, and political manipulation have often complicated the media's role in Nigeria's democratic process (Inobemhe et al., 2020). Voters'

decisions in Nigeria are determined by critical considerations influenced by media narratives and aired political messages (Omidiora, Ajiboye, & Abioye, 2020). Strategic value orientation, a critical factor in contemporary analysis of voting decisions, is described as the process through which intending voters and voters align their political choices and interests. Within the context of perceived benefits, ideological orientations, commitments and prevailing socio-political and economic contexts. Media platforms, both conventional and non-conventional, play significant roles in shaping orientations by framing political debates, scrutinising candidates, and dissecting party manifestos (Adegbola, Gearhart, & Zhang, 2022).

Relying on media outlets as important actors in elections provides a useful framework for understanding voter trust in the media for information dissemination and political education (Dada, 2023). During electioneering periods, citizens are often confronted with uncertainty; therefore, reliance on media platforms for guidance on voting decisions is high, especially for informed voting. This reliance increases the power of media platforms to shape value orientation by influencing perceptions, beliefs, followership, political discourses and voting behaviour (Okechukwu, 2023).

The proliferation and increased roles of social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp have revolutionised political communication in Nigeria (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). Social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of political and non-political content, grassroots political mobilisation, and real-time public engagement and discourse (Nyambiya, 2025; Chami, 2025; Kharel, 2024). Given the nature of social media platforms as promoters of citizen engagement (Sher, 2025), they also pose challenges, such as misinformation and the spread of fake and unverified news, which create tension in the political system. These challenges have the capacity to undermine public engagement and the fairness of the electoral process and outcomes (Abah et al., 2025; Khan, 2024).

While conventional media platforms still dominate traditional political communication, non-conventional media strategically impact the younger and urban demographics (Pratama, 2024). The dual-media atmosphere provides a multifaceted system in which voters have access to multiple, sometimes conflicting, information and messages that shape their beliefs, political affiliations, and voting decisions (Salawu & Olutayo, 2019). During the electioneering process, political parties and candidates strategically use media platforms to communicate party programmes, manifestos, mobilise support, reach prospective voters and even counter opponents (McNair, 2017). Media framing of political narratives, agenda-setting, and selective emphasis can manipulate public perceptions and voter emotions (Hassan & Javed, 2025).

Despite its potential, the media in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including ownership concentration, regulatory weaknesses, and political interference. The rise of partisan media outlets often polarises public discourse and undermines journalistic objectivity (Nwabueze, 2022). Misinformation and inflammatory content on social media threaten democratic stability and can incite violence during elections (Okoro & Nwosu, 2022). For democracy to thrive, media engagement must go beyond mere reporting to actively fostering democratic values such as tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for the rule of law.

Several recent studies have examined the media's role in Nigerian electoral politics. Arijeniwa (2023) demonstrated the capacity of social media to set agendas for public discourse and political participation among Nigerian youths. Similarly, Ejiroghene and Chuks (2026), Inobemhe, Obaje, and Asemah (2025), and Okon et al. (2025) confirmed that social media significantly influences voting decisions, while Adedoyin and Bakare (2024) documented the growing role of digital platforms in shaping political communication during elections. Nonetheless, there is a significant gap in understanding how the intersection of conventional and non-conventional media shapes strategic value orientations and long-term voting behaviour in the contemporary Nigerian context, particularly after the highly contested 2023 general

elections. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the relationship between media communication, political behaviour, and democratic sustainability.

Statement of the Problem

The role of media, both conventional and non-conventional, in shaping strategic value orientation and voting decisions has received considerable scholarly attention. However, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on how social media influences different voter segments and the voting outcome (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). There is insufficient attention to how engagement with conventional and non-conventional media shapes voters' strategic value orientations. That profound reasoning and evaluative processes through which voters place priorities on democracy, accountability, and economic development when taking informed electoral choices.

This study addresses this issue by exploring how conventional and non-conventional media shape voters' interest and decision-making in a politically divided environment such as Nigeria. Unlike previous studies that primarily address immediate voting behaviour, this research emphasises the cognitive processes involved in voters' decision-making and the long-term impact on democratic alignment with political actors.

In addition, the spread of misinformation across conventional and non-conventional platforms complicated the media's role in ensuring informed voting decisions. The media is traditionally tasked with promoting democratic values through information dissemination and political education. However, the spread of fake news and political manipulation distorts voters' understanding, undermines strategic value orientation, and leads to poor voting decisions based on misleading information. This study examines how misinformation during the 2023 Nigerian elections exacerbated political polarisation and undermined electoral integrity.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the agenda-setting theory as advanced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) as its framework of analysis. The theory has been applied in recent works of Almakaty (2025), Mohammed, Mojaye, and Adelakun (2022), and Perloff (2022). The theory posits that while the media may not expressly tell people what to think and do, it has a significant influence on what they think and do. When emphasis is placed on a specific issue, media platforms, whether conventional or non-conventional, influence the interest of the public and shape the public agenda, guiding what issue, event, or policy is discussed at a material time and considered important by the public and policymakers (McCombs, Holbert, Kiousis & Wanta, 2011).

This process of agenda-setting occurs as media outlets place significant emphasis on certain topics over others, framing them as most urgent or relevant, which in turn guides public discourse and shapes public opinions. The more frequently and prominently an issue is aired or displayed by media outlets, the more it becomes a focal point of public concern and repeated engagement. In Nigerian elections, Agenda-Setting Theory becomes especially relevant, as the media platforms play critical roles in shaping public attention to specific political issues that can influence voting behaviour. For instance, in the 2023 Nigerian elections, Nwaoboli (2025) notes that the media's focus on key issues such as religion (Muslim-Muslim ticket), security concerns, economic challenges, corruption, and political stability influenced the issues that voters prioritised when making their decisions. a crucial role in framing the electorate's perception of what was at stake and which factors were most important for supporting a candidate or political party.

Furthermore, political actors and media platforms use agenda-setting strategically to influence voter perceptions and influence election outcomes. Political campaigns, through media consultants, often work to push issues that favour their position while downplaying topics that may harm their candidacy. During the 2023 Nigerian elections, both traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) and non-conventional platforms (social media) were utilised by political actors to highlight their successes and frame opposition

candidates negatively. In this way, agenda-setting became a tool of strategic framing, in which media coverage of certain issues helped shape voters' perceptions of candidates and parties.

Social media's role in agenda-setting has grown exponentially in the digital era. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp have enabled citizens and political actors to advance their agendas, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. Social media users, through viral content, hashtags, and trending topics, can directly impact which issues rise to the forefront of political discourse. In Nigeria, social media platforms have become key spaces where issues like electoral fraud, insecurity, and youth unemployment are heavily debated. The viral nature of these platforms can rapidly shift the focus of the election agenda, democratise the agenda-setting process and allow for more direct public participation.

One of the major implications of Agenda-Setting Theory, particularly in the Nigerian context, is the media's ability to influence electoral outcomes by creating a sense of urgency around certain issues. Voters may base their decisions not just on candidate platforms, but also on which issues are seen as most pressing or in urgent need of resolution. This phenomenon has particular resonance in developing democracies like Nigeria, where media coverage can significantly shape voter perceptions in regions affected by particular issues, such as conflict zones in the North-East due to insurgency or economic distress in southern Nigeria.

Moreover, Agenda-Setting Theory can be enriched by considering the interactions between the media and public opinion during election periods. As issues rise on the public agenda, media coverage can generate feedback loops in which public concern over specific issues forces media outlets to cover them even more extensively, reinforcing their prominence in the electoral process. This agenda-building process leads to a feedback cycle in which media, public opinion, and political actors continuously shape and reshape the issues that define the election, influencing not just immediate voting behaviour but long-term political discourse as well.

In summary, Agenda-Setting Theory offers a valuable lens for understanding how media coverage of key issues influences public perceptions and strategic voting decisions in Nigerian elections. This effect is further amplified in the context of social media, which allows for more direct and dynamic engagement with the public agenda. Understanding how the media prioritises issues during election periods provides crucial insights into voters' strategic alignment, enabling a deeper analysis of how the media shapes strategic value orientations that guide voting behaviour in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring how media engagement shapes strategic value orientations and voting decisions in the 2023 general election. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding media and electoral behaviour (Hirose, M., & Creswell, 2023).

Data were collected through multiple qualitative sources. First, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with purposively selected stakeholders, including representatives from major political parties (the All-Progressives Congress, the Peoples Democratic Party, and the Labour Party), journalists, media practitioners, and civil society actors. Participants were selected on the basis of their direct involvement in, or extensive knowledge of, the 2023 Nigerian elections and political communication processes.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to media framing, agenda-setting, misinformation, and voter responses. Secondary data from existing literature were also incorporated to contextualise primary findings within the broader scholarly discourse.

Conceptual Analysis

Media engagement is described as the degree and manner in which individuals or groups interact with media platforms to access, share, and respond to information of public interest. In the electoral context, media engagement involves consuming political news, participating in political discussions, sharing campaign materials, and engaging in political debates, both online and offline (McNair, 2017). Media engagement is not a passive activity; it involves selective exposure, attention, and interpretation shaped by individual predispositions toward the subject of discourse and social contexts (Chaffee & Metzger, 2021).

In Nigeria, media engagement has advanced rapidly with the advent of the internet and social media platforms, allowing for a more decentralised and participatory media landscape (Ofei et al, 2024). Importantly, the increase in media engagement has also introduced complexities, including the spread of fake news, misinformation, and political propaganda, as well as the challenge of verifying information credibility in real time. Public communication involves the dissemination of reliable information from political actors, media organisations, and civil society to the public. It includes speeches, press releases, debates, advertisements, and social media posts that are intended to inform, persuade, or mobilise the electorate (Lecheler & Egelhofer, 2022). Public communication in democratic settings is fundamental for ensuring transparency, political education, and improved citizen participation in the political process. Within Nigeria's electoral space, public communication often reflects long-standing political divisions and can either contribute to issue-based campaigns or perpetuate ethnic and religious tensions (Idike & Ezeah, 2025). The quality of public communication via clarity of information, fairness to candidates, and factual basis of arguments is important for shaping voter perceptions and strategic choices.

In Nigeria, voting decisions have been shaped by ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations. Due to increased media penetration and political awareness, there is a shift towards more issue-based and strategic voting behaviour among urban and younger populations (Okereke, 2025). Strategic value orientation is described as the prioritisation of political values that guide people's voting decisions and political engagement (Etzel, 2023). These factors that inform strategic decisions include the status of democracy, accountability, good governance, security, economic development, and social justice (Harrison et al., 2023). Strategic value orientation refers to the rational evaluation of political choices based on their alignment with voters' prioritised values and interests (Vrat & Gutpa, 2026). In Nigeria, strategic value orientations are an important requirement for improving electoral processes and outcomes, as voters navigate a politically tense and information-rich environment (Omoniyi, 2026). The contents and information released by the media significantly shape public orientations by framing political debates, highlighting policy issues, and scrutinising candidates' platforms

The Interplay Between Media and Voting Behaviour

The relationship between media engagement and voting behaviour is both complex and multidimensional in nature and outcome. Media platforms, in all their forms, do not merely serve as a passive means of disseminating information; they shape how information is conveyed to the public and consumed, ultimately influencing how people form opinions, perceive political actors, and make electoral decisions. Through agenda-setting, the media determines which issues are considered most important and relevant during election periods, aligning people's attention toward these subjects and invariably influencing what voters deem relevant when making voting decisions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

For instance, during the 2023 Nigerian elections, the traditional media's focus on security and economic recovery guided voter perception, shaping candidates' platforms around these issues. While social media served as the ground for intense youth engagement and all manner of misinformation through #tags. (Bakare, 2025; Ezeigbo, 2024). When media platforms framed these issues as important and critical to

national well-being, they determined which candidates were considered best positioned to address them (Olaolu & Adeola, 2025; Ayeni, 2024). R1 noted

> The media does not convert voters; it only amplifies voices and opinions. According to him, in the 2023 election, the Obidient movement used social media to sell their candidate. With limited resources compared to the other candidates, they were able to sell him to the electorate as the best.

In addition to agenda-setting, the media also operates through priming effects, which subtly influence public opinion by repeatedly highlighting certain characteristics of political figures or issues (Buturoiu, Corbu, & Boţan, 2023). Through repeated exposure to specific narratives, such as framing a candidate as a 'strong leader' on security or a 'progressive reformer' on economic policies, the media primes voters to focus on those qualities when making their voting decisions (Entman, 2022). The evolution of media engagement with the rise of social media has dramatically altered the dynamics of political communication. Political actors, campaigns, and parties now have direct access to voters through platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This has democratised the communication process, allowing candidates to present their messages directly, engage with the electorate, and mobilise supporters without the filtering or framing of traditional media.

However, while social media's democratising effect has allowed for broader participation, it has also introduced significant challenges, particularly in the form of misinformation and 'fake news', (Waza, 2026). The unregulated nature of social media platforms enables the spread of false or misleading information, which can distort strategic voting decisions and influence public opinion in ways not grounded in factual accuracy (Abdulazeez, Omale, & Florence, 2025). For example, during the 2023 Nigerian elections, false narratives about the integrity of electoral processes or candidates' backgrounds often circulated through WhatsApp groups and Facebook posts, leading to confusion, mistrust, and polarisation among voters (Okunnu, 2026).

Furthermore, social media's ability to spread misinformation is amplified by echo chambers, in which individuals are exposed predominantly to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs and biases (Abdulazeez, Omale, & Florence, 2025; Garaschuk, 2024). Algorithms on platforms like Facebook and X tend to amplify content that generates strong emotional reactions, reinforcing partisan divides and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives (Omachi & Okoh, 2025). Through media platforms, especially social media, candidates like Peter Obi of the Labour Party became the talking point of the period, posing a significant challenge to the presumed popular candidates of the All Progressives Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party (Amaza, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the relationship between the media and voting behaviour remains a powerful force in shaping democratic outcomes in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. The increasing influence of social media requires a deeper understanding of how digital platforms alter traditional media effects and influence voting behaviour. Both traditional and non-traditional media contribute to the formation of strategic value orientations and the priming of voters' decisions. This dual function of media as both an informational resource and a potential vehicle for manipulation underscores the need for careful analysis of how content and information released by media platforms are framed, shared, and consumed in contemporary elections.

Media Influence on Strategic Voting

One important issue in this study is the role that media engagement played in shaping strategic voting decisions during the 2023 Nigerian elections. R4, who is familiar with political conversation during the 2023 election, noted,

> Both social media and traditional media played a role in shaping public opinion, especially regarding the presidential candidates. I got different information about each candidate, and in some cases, I read about scandals and some unprintable words, all because of the election and power.

Voters, particularly those who felt uncertain about the political landscape, relied on media platforms for information and guidance about which candidates or parties aligned with their priorities. On this note, R5, a social media enthusiast, noted

> During the campaign period, social media, especially X (formerly Twitter), served our movement's purpose. Any information or news I read from the movement, I reshared, and you will see how many people reshared those messages. We were getting traction, which helped our candidate make a significant impact in the election.

Security concerns, economic policies, and electoral integrity were major topics heavily covered by both conventional and non-conventional media. These issues became the primary focus for many voters, with candidates perceived to offer clear, credible solutions being favoured. R6 also noted, "I stopped visiting social media platforms because the messages you will read were too toxic for me*"*. R3 noted, "With the use of #tags such as #Obident and #Atikulate, the social media space became the ground for intense political debates and discussion. It was an interesting and engaging period".

Strategic voting was evident in how voters prioritised certain issues amplified by the media. In regions severely impacted by insecurity, such as the North-East, voters were heavily influenced by media discussions about national security and candidates' credibility in addressing terrorism and insurgency. Commenting on the issue of insecurity as discussed across media platforms, R8 noted,

> During the campaign period, the subject of interest was the Politics Today conversation on Channels Television. I stayed glued to my device and took my voting decision on the failure of the government to address insecurity and hardship in the North and across the country.

Similarly, voters in urban centres, where economic hardship was a significant concern, favoured candidates whose media messages emphasised economic development and job creation. On the issue of the economy and the hardship experienced by the masses, R7 noted emphatically that, "the change of currency and scarcity of PMS under the previous administration was a major deciding point. When opposition parties supported that action, I was surprised and made up my mind who to support. It is important to note that the media's role in framing these critical issues during the 2023 electioneering process led voters to make rational, issue-based decisions and, in some cases, emotion-based ones. Supporting and voting for the candidate whose platform appeared to offer the most substantial and achievable solutions based on the prevailing subject of conversation.

Conventional vs. Non-Conventional Media Impact

The impact of conventional media (television, radio, newspapers) versus non-conventional media (social media platforms such as X, Facebook, and WhatsApp) on voters' strategic decisions varied significantly across demographics and geographies. Conventional media had the internet. R11 noted thus.

> Given the nature of our supporters and our understanding of them, we decided to reach them using the platform that was most convenient for them. In rural areas, we used radio stations; in urban centres, new TV stations served as the primary platform, and amongst the Youth, social media was the primary platform.

On the subject of social media as a means of voter engagement during the 2023 general election, R 5 noted

> On my phone, I have different groups where we discuss political issues. Most of the information is forwarded, and we make it a subject of debate. We have groups for different subjects on the 2023 election. Our focus was on the Presidential election (R5).

It was also reported by another respondent that "older voters tended to get information through national TV stations or radio broadcasts, which offered news framed by professional journalists or political analysts". The traditional media outlets' influence on these groups was largely through top-down communication, in which political candidates and parties could strategically frame their messages via structured debates, interviews, and news coverage (Idowu & Odeyemi, 2021). These outlets have continued to provide information to the people, especially through constructive political discourse and candidates' engagement.

Non-conventional media had a more pronounced effect on younger, urban voters and those who were socially and politically active online. Social media platforms enabled a more interactive and dynamic exchange of ideas, allowing voters to engage directly with political messages, comment on posts, and share their opinions (Ofei et al., 2024). Social media influencers, digital activists, and youth-based movements were instrumental in shaping political discourse in the 2023 general elections. Platforms like X and Facebook, where #tag and viral content often took centre stage, allowed candidates such as #Obidents and #Atikulate, as well as parties, to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly influence voters (Adebayo, 2025).

Geographically, urban centres such as Lagos and Abuja experienced a greater impact of non-conventional media, especially among younger voters, who are accustomed to political debates on social media. Rural regions continued to rely on conventional media, with political campaigns conveyed through broadcast channels. This difference revealed a digital divide in how information was received, with non-conventional media driving engagement in urban areas while conventional media continued to play a pivotal role in rural areas.

Misinformation and Its Effects

A significant finding from this study was the prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, and media bias in shaping voting behaviour during the 2023 Nigerian elections. As media platforms increasingly became the primary sources of political information, the spread of false or misleading information had a profound impact on voter perceptions and electoral decisions. Social media facilitated the rapid dissemination of unverified political claims, including fake news stories, manipulated images, and false narratives about candidates, parties, and electoral processes.

The effects of misinformation were felt particularly among young voters and urban populations, who were more active on social media but often lacked the media literacy skills to critically evaluate information. This led to the polarisation of public opinion, as voters were exposed to biased information that reinforced their pre-existing beliefs, rather than providing a balanced and comprehensive view of candidates or issues. The role of political actors in spreading disinformation also contributed to the polarisation of the media landscape, in which partisan outlets and social media influencers aligned with particular political parties, further deepening divisions within the electorate.

Traditional media outlets also faced criticism for bias and sensationalism, with some accused of favouring specific political candidates or parties. This bias further undermined voters' ability to make informed, objective decisions, as they were often exposed to one-sided narratives rather than balanced, fact-based reporting. Overall, the impact of misinformation and media bias in both conventional and non-conventional media created significant challenges for the democratic process, distorting public understanding and influencing voting behaviour in ways that undermined electoral fairness and integrity.

Social Media in the 2023 Nigerian Elections

Social media was a significant force during the 2023 Nigerian elections, especially in terms of youth mobilisation and political discourse. A notable example is the Labour Party and its presidential candidate, Peter Obi, whose campaign leveraged social media to build a strong and engaged voter base. The *#Obidient movement*, which emerged organically on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp, exemplifies the power of social media in the modern electoral process. The movement focused on advocating for change and was particularly influential among younger Nigerians, a demographic that felt disconnected from the traditional political elites.

Hashtags such as *#ObiDatti2023* and *#1MillionMarch4PeterObi* went viral, facilitating grassroots mobilisation, organising marches, online discussions, and political rallies. A survey conducted during the elections indicated that 70% of young voters cited social media as their primary source of political information and campaign updates. Obi's online presence allowed him to communicate directly with his supporters, bypassing traditional media filters and engaging in real-time dialogue.

Despite these successes, social media also became a breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation. False rumours, including allegations of vote-rigging and smears against candidates, were widely shared, leading to confusion and distrust among voters. This highlights the dual-edged nature of social media in electoral campaigns: while it can empower voters and mobilise communities, it can also facilitate the spread of false narratives that distort public perception. A study conducted by Okon et al. (2025) confirmed the impact of social media on voter behaviour, revealing that 63% of respondents stated that information shared on social media significantly influenced their voting decisions. Furthermore, 77% acknowledged the spread of misinformation during the election period, noting how false claims spread quickly through platforms like WhatsApp, contributing to voter confusion. Despite the positive mobilising role of social media, the political manipulation of online spaces posed a challenge to democratic integrity and required urgent attention to digital literacy and regulation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of media platforms towards ensuring strategic voter orientation and informed voting behaviour in the 2023 Nigerian elections. The paper noted that media platforms, both conventional and non-conventional, had a significant impact on shaping voter perceptions, value orientation, voting decisions, and overall electoral outcomes. Social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp, played central roles in mobilising younger voters, especially through grassroots movements like the #Obidient campaign, which significantly contributed to the Labour Party's Presidential Candidate's growing follower base and voter turnout.

In contrast, traditional media outlets like the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) remained influential among older, rural voters who relied on television and radio as their primary sources of political information. Also, private TV stations like Channels Television, Arise TV and TVC played a significant role through their political programmes such as Politics Today, Early Morning Show and Journalist Hangout. Through these programmes, the outlets framed political discussions around key issues such as security, economic recovery, and governance, thereby directly influencing strategic voting decisions. However, despite the important role traditional media play in voter education, a significant portion of the electorate perceived them as biased, raising concerns about media objectivity and impartiality.

The study also shows that misinformation and the use of abusive language on perceived opponents, particularly through social media, significantly distorted voters' strategic value orientations, contributing to a divided and confused electorate. This distortion undermines the democratic process by pushing voters towards an emotionally charged, tense political atmosphere rather than objective electoral choices.

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Reconfiguring the Economic–Security Nexus: Global Spillovers of the Russia–Ukraine War

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Abstract

This article explores how the Russia–Ukraine conflict has reshaped the relationship between economic stability and security, with global impacts that extend far beyond the immediate conflict zone. Rather than emphasising military confrontation alone, the analysis suggests that the most significant security implications arise from economic interdependence, particularly through disruptions to food systems, energy markets, trade networks, and financial conditions. Drawing onUsing complex interdependence theory, the study views these disruptions as mechanisms through which economic shocks can translate into security risks on regional and global scales. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study combines peer-reviewed academic research, institutional reports, and reputable datasets published between 2022 and 2025 to illustrate how the conflict's economic repercussions spread across interconnected economies. The results indicate that weaponising energy resources, disruptions to grain and fertiliser exports, inflationary trends, and tighter global financial conditions have created uneven vulnerabilities across different regions. These vulnerabilities are particularly severe in the Global South, where reliance on imported food and energy, limited fiscal capacity, and high debt levels increase susceptibility to external shocks. These economic disruptions threaten livelihoods, challenge government capacity, and raise the risk of social instability and increased human mobility, including displacement and forced migration.

Keywords: Economic–security nexus; Russia–Ukraine war; Global spillovers; Economic interdependence; Global South.

Introduction

The Russia–Ukraine conflict, which escalated into a full-scale invasion in February 2022, has evolved from a regional military confrontation into a significant geopolitical event of the 21st century. The ongoing war has reshaped security dynamics in Eastern Europe and has highlighted the critical relationship between economic conditions and national and international security. Central to this relationship is the understanding that economic disruptions, such as fluctuations in energy prices, trade interruptions, and the extent to which food insecurity precipitates security challenges, undermine global stability (Benton & Froggatt, 2022). Russia and Ukraine are key players in global markets, with Russia a major exporter of energy and fertilisers and Ukraine a significant supplier of grains and agricultural products. Evidently, the ongoing conflict has disrupted these supply chains and prompted unprecedented economic responses, including comprehensive sanctions, supply restrictions, and retaliatory trade measures. These disruptions have contributed to sharp increases in energy and food prices worldwide, fuelling inflation and endangering human security, particularly among low-income populations (Chatham House, 2022; Ben Hassen & El Bilali, 2022).

Based on the above trajectory, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is no longer a regional dispute but has metamorphosed into a geopolitical and economic crisis that has posed severe and damaging consequences both to immediate and far-reaching subjects. As a result of the conflict, among other direct implications, were global insecurity, trade imbalances, unstable energy markets, and financial instability. Following the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the threats of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) expansion, the conflict has become a catalyst for instability globally, leading to heavy regional and international sanctions on Russia. One impact of the war is a rapid increase in gas prices, driven by Russia's strategic position as Europe's largest gas producer; the inflation rate is pegged at 10.6 per cent (Eurostat, 2023). Also, the crisis affected global wheat exports, thereby worsening food insecurity. According to the World Food Programme (WFP, 2022), about 47 million people were pushed into acute hunger due to the crisis. On the financial front, as revealed by Reuters (2025), the brutal invasion of Ukraine has led to several economic sanctions and more than $300 billion was frozen in Russia's reserves. These sanctions have more destabilising effects on emerging markets worldwide. The crisis has shown how the economic-security nexus of a geopolitical area can intertwine with geopolitical security and financial stability.

Thus, discourses on the economic-security nexus have taken centre stage since Russia's full invasion of Ukraine; scholars have been eager to examine the interdependent relationship between regional national security threats and global economic stability. The most disturbing reports of trade-route imbalances and disruptions, such as the blockage of grain shipments in the Black Sea, further exacerbated food insecurity and global hunger. In 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that Western sanctions on Russia disrupted the country's economy but also triggered global inflation. However, the International Energy Agency (2003) also outlined ways to reduce gas imports from Russia due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including "turning more to other suppliers, drawing on other energy sources and accelerating efforts to provide consumers, businesses and industry with the means to use clean and efficient alternatives to natural gas." In this study, the term economic-security nexus will be used to refer to the ways in which economic factors such as trade, financial systems, and energy access can directly influence security dynamics, including geopolitical uprisings, military conflicts, and other politically related instabilities. With this understanding, the paper seeks to unravel the global economic implications of the crisis, interrogate the security dimension of the conflict, examine its consequences for the Global South and Africa in particular, and assess the rise in geopolitical tensions and global instability orchestrated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflagration. Hence, the study divulged how economic warfare and military aggression are interwoven.

Literature Review

Several empirical studies have identified the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontations on energy markets and global supply chains, revealing price volatility and structural vulnerabilities. Contextually, security refers to the state's capacity to protect and sustain itself beyond popularly known military concerns and into broader economic dimensions, especially when the state is threatened externally. In essence, security is the state's ability to withstand global economic shocks and supply disruptions across the financial and energy sectors. Sarwar and Rye (2025) underscore that disruptions to Russian energy exports and logistical networks have weakened supply chain resilience and heightened geopolitical risk, particularly in Europe and parts of Asia. Similarly, Shafique and Tariq (2025) document that limitations on Russian oil and gas exports not only elevated energy prices but also forced central banks worldwide to tighten monetary policy conditions, further compounding inflationary pressures and reducing economic growth prospects. These disruptions illustrate how economic shocks contribute to security risks, including social unrest and fiscal instability.

The conflict's ramifications for food security have also attracted significant scholarly attention. Russia and Ukraine are pivotal exporters of staple commodities such as wheat, maize, and fertilisers (Zhang, Li & Zhou, 2024). Interruptions to these exports have thus distorted global Agrifood trade networks, leading to price spikes and shortages in regions already grappling with food insecurity, especially in West Africa and parts of the Middle East (Perga, 2025). These trends demonstrate the conflict's ability to convert regional events into global humanitarian and economic crises, linking economic vulnerabilities to social and political insecurity. The imposition of sanctions and counter-sanctions further complicates the economic-security nexus. Scholars note that Western sanctions aimed at constraining Russia's financial and energy sectors have had unintended effects, including economic deglobalisation and reduced foreign investment flows (Basuki, 2023). While these measures are intended to degrade Russia's war-waging capabilities, they have also incentivised alternative trading arrangements and realignments, such as stronger economic ties between Russia and China (Basuki, 2023). Such realignments can undermine existing security architectures and challenge Western economic influence, illustrating how economic policy tools shape global security landscapes.

Research focusing on Europe finds that trade disruptions, energy insecurity, and the refugee crisis induced by the conflict have strained economic systems and social welfare capacities (Williams, Ade-Ibijola & Opeyeoluwa, 2024). These pressures reinforce how the conflict's economic dimensions directly shape regional security priorities and policy responses. Also, the literature emphasises that the conflict's economic impacts are enduring and unpredictable. Tian (2024) argues that sustained instability in global markets and financial systems could undermine long-term economic growth, increase sovereign debt burdens, and elevate political security risks for states reliant on volatile commodity revenues and external financing. Therefore, the economic-security nexus

in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war is not a short-term phenomenon but a structural challenge with ongoing implications for global stability. This is the onus of this paper.

Methodological Statement

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate how the Russia–Ukraine conflict has transformed the global economic-security relationship. A qualitative approach is suitable for this study, as it focuses on identifying mechanisms, interpreting structural relationships, and integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical developments, rather than conducting statistical causal tests. The analysis is based on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed academic literature, policy reports from international organisations, and authoritative datasets and publications produced between 2022 and 2025, reflecting the period of significant global impacts resulting from the conflict.

Data sources were selected for relevance, credibility, and depth of analysis, with priority given to publications from international financial institutions, multilateral organisations, and reputable academic journals. These sources were examined through thematic qualitative analysis, guided by the framework of complex interdependence. Specifically, the study identified, and coded evidence related to three key dimensions: (i) economic transmission mechanisms (such as energy, food, trade, and finance), (ii) regional disparities in vulnerability, particularly between advanced economies and the Global South, and (iii) institutional and geopolitical realignments resulting from economic disruptions, within the regional and global perspectives to the economic-security reconfigurations of the skirmishes. By systematically linking empirical patterns to theoretically grounded categories, the methodology enables a comprehensive evaluation of how economic interdependence serves as a conduit for security spill-overs during geopolitical conflicts. This approach improves analytical consistency while ensuring transparency and ease of replication.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of complex interdependence, originally developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in 1977. It challenges the traditional realist assumptions that military power and interstate conflict are the primary drivers of international security. Instead, complex interdependence suggests that modern international relations are characterised by multiple avenues of interaction, a lack of a clear hierarchy among issues, and a decreasing effectiveness of military force in addressing many transnational challenges (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Nye, 2004). The theory holds that relationships among states are deep and complex, making nations vulnerable to the actions of others in an increasingly interconnected world, driven by interstate relations, trans-governmental interactions and transnational actors. It explains how international politics are increasingly changing due to the interdependence and interactions among state actors, with less emphasis on power and military security. However, the recent United States military invasion of Venezuela challenged this postulation.

Keohane and Nye (1977) opine that interdependence involves a situation characterised by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries. In the same vein, Rana (2015:290) explains that complex interdependence "stresses the complex ways in which, as a result of growing ties, the transnational actors become mutually dependent, vulnerable to each other's actions and sensitive to each other's needs". Also, Genest (1996), cited in Rana (2015:291), observed: "that states are not the only important actors, social welfare issues share centre stage with security issues on the global agenda, and cooperation is as dominant a characteristic of international politics as conflict." In situations characterised by complex interdependence, countries are interconnected through extensive networks of economic, financial, and institutional relationships that promote mutual reliance, though with varying degrees of vulnerability. Security outcomes are influenced not only by military strength but also by exposure to economic shocks transmitted through trade, energy systems, financial markets, and global supply chains. In this context, economic structures play a vital role in both national and international security, particularly when disruptions in one sector cascade into other areas. A core analytical contribution of complex interdependence theory lies in its distinction between sensitivity and vulnerability (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Sensitivity refers to the degree to which states are immediately affected by external economic changes, while vulnerability captures the extent to which states

can adjust to these shocks without incurring high long-term costs. These concepts are central to understanding the Russia–Ukraine war's global repercussions.

The conflict has generated sharp asymmetries in terms of the impact across regions. Energy-importing economies across Europe were highly sensitive to disruptions in Russian gas supplies, while low- and middle-income countries in the Global South were more vulnerable due to limited fiscal space, food import dependence, and constrained access to alternative suppliers (Shahbaz & Muzaffar, 2025). This uneven exposure demonstrates how interdependence can amplify insecurity rather than mitigate conflict, particularly when economic linkages are weaponised through sanctions, export controls, and financial restrictions. Complex interdependence highlights that security threats are often conveyed through non-military channels, particularly within the context of economic globalisation. In the Russia–Ukraine conflict, energy markets, food supply chains, trade routes, and financial networks have acted as pathways through which a regional dispute impacts global security. Disruptions to grain exports, fertiliser supplies, and energy flows have led to inflation, food insecurity, and increased debt burdens, thereby amplifying the potential for social unrest, political instability, and humanitarian challenges. From this viewpoint, the conflict demonstrates how economic measures such as sanctions, trade restrictions, and asset freezes serve as tools of security policy with cross-border impacts. While these actions are intended to limit the targeted nation's military capabilities, complex interdependence theory suggests that their effects ripple through interconnected economies, often resulting in disproportionate challenges for third-party countries with limited capacity to adapt (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

Also, available reports indicate that prolonged violence and political upheaval often lead to long-term economic decline, uncontrollable inflation, rising commodity prices, and widespread poverty, thereby posing a severe threat to the global community. The Russia-Ukraine war was projected to push at least 40 million people into extreme poverty due to the increasing hike in the price of food and energy prices (Centre for Global Development, 2022). Thus, the complex interdependence established three interconnected mechanisms: the economic transmission mechanism, asymmetric vulnerability, and institutional and geopolitical realignment in trade partnerships, which reflect strategic responses to global interdependence amid conflict. The link among these mechanisms clearly shows that the war constitutes not only military hostility but also a systemic challenge to global stability.

Findings and Discussion

Global Economic Implications of the Conflict

The impacts of the war have been profound and far-reaching globally; they have extended beyond the immediate crisis region, affecting trade, financial markets, energy security, food affordability, and the stability of the global economy. With many countries still struggling to recover from the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war pushed them back deeper into an economic quagmire. At the European region, Guénette, Kenworthy and Wheeler (2022) observe that despite significant reductions in human capital and ongoing support for the global economy amid an uneven recovery marked by persistent supply chain disruptions, the withdrawal of policy support, and rising inflation, including increases in food and energy prices; the conflict has already contributed to an immediate adverse impact on the global stage, particularly through commodity markets. Also, Guénette *et al.* (2022) note that, due to direct trade and interconnections with Russia, other neighbouring European, South Caucasus, and Central Asian countries are suffering significant damage and will continue to be severely affected as their reliance on Russian gas commodities persists. In the energy space, Sun *et al.* (2024) observe that energy prices have increased across several regions, with adverse repercussions for residents in countries such as Russia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle Eastern non-oil-producing countries, and the European Union. Most of the prominent economic implications of the ongoing war are identified below:

Macroeconomic slowdown and regional disparities

The Russia-Ukraine war has significantly triggered contractions in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in both Ukraine and Russia. While Russia is facing an 11.2 per cent decline in real GDP (Reuters, 2022), Ukraine is

confronting a staggering 30.4 per cent drop (Mayadeen, 2024). Meanwhile, the entire European Union saw a GDP decline of about 0.8 per cent, with Eastern European countries suffering most due to their reliance on Russian energy products. Globally, it has been observed that the conflict has contributed to a 0.7 – 1.5 per cent decline in the world GDP and a 1.0-2.5 per cent rise in inflation in the first year of the war (Auer *et al.*, 2025). Another microeconomic implication of the war is that while some Western independent economies have greatly benefited from replacing Russia-Ukraine exports, countries like South Africa, Turkey, and several other import-dependent countries are facing severe economic strain due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

Energy markets disruption and price volatility

Due to Russia's prominent role in the energy sector, sanctions and restrictions have led to a global increase in oil and gas prices. Auer *et al.* (2025) observe that, especially in Europe, fossil fuel companies saw a 54 per cent surge in equity value, while other firms with deep exposure experienced at least a 6 per cent loss. The European Union's significant reliance on Russian gas has led to energy shortages and inflationary pressures as the region seeks to diversify and secure alternative energy sources. Regarding the actual oil price, Khudaykulova, Khudaykulov and Obrenovic (2022) explain that geopolitical risks and activities could negatively affect the oil price, for example, by raising it. Their study further revealed that oil and gas prices rose in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, leading to higher global gasoline prices. Globally, financial markets have been reacting unevenly and unpredictably to the crisis's dimensions. While the European Union is experiencing a major decline in equities, the United States is experiencing milder losses with commodity futures markets seeing extreme volatility, metals, oil and grain prices fluctuating unpredictably, while cryptocurrencies and the Russian Ruble are experiencing erratic upward shifts in their values due to the Russia policy and trading with their products in Ruble (Auer *et al.*, 2025).

Food insecurity and long-term structural shift in global trade

Russia and Ukraine are both major exporters of agricultural products, including wheat, barley, and fertilisers. Since the start of the war, food supplies have been disrupted, leading to a continuing spike in food prices, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Auer *et al.* (2025) argue that around 8 to 47 million people have been pushed into absolute hunger, with low-income countries facing greater shortages. Particularly, the ban on Russia's fertilisers has further strained agricultural production. Guénette *et al.* (2022) observe that the reduced global availability of grain (particularly wheat) could further raise food prices across emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs), triggering a rise in food insecurity. Countries with a high share of imported grains and oilseeds in their consumption basket are particularly at risk. The crisis has necessitated a realignment of trade relations among countries. For instance, Boashash (2023) notes that the war prompted countries to diversify energy sources and explore alternative suppliers, thereby reshaping trade partnerships and economic alliances, and that these geopolitical changes carry long-term ramifications for global economic stability and security. At the peak of the war, Europe shifted away from Russian energy supplies towards greater reliance on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and other renewable energy sources. Also, there was a record of increased food stockpiling across vulnerable nations to help them mitigate potential future shortages. Critical minerals and the technology supply chain were also diversified. All these changes pointed towards a fragmented global economy orchestrated by the war.

Global Security Dimensions and Geopolitical Security Alliance

The war, which is yet to cease, has opened several security dimensions that extend far beyond the immediate battlefield, including global military alliances, geopolitical tensions, humanitarian and diplomatic aspects, and the redefinition of the global security architecture. NATO member countries have continually pledged their support for Ukraine, both in cash and military aid. The United Kingdom provides 3 billion pounds of financial aid to Ukraine each year and, in January 2024, announced that 30,000 drones would be sent to Ukraine to further support its military defence against Russia's invasion (UK Government, 2025). The United States under the Joe Biden administration pledged $500 military support for Ukraine in his last days in office to enhance the country's military strength against Russia. Since the war, NATO and countries across the West have continued to intensify efforts in response to Russian aggression. Zahid (2024) points to several NATO summits aimed at

addressing different aspects of the security landscape, including identifying emerging threats and reaffirming its core values and objectives. According to Zahid (2024), these summits have led to significant budgetary allocations and policy decisions. Prior to that, the 2022 NATO 32nd summit opted for new force models towards re-strategising its collective defence and deterrence across land, sea and air.

As of March 2025, Russia has captured only 143 square kilometres from Ukraine despite its military capabilities in comparison to those of Ukraine. The number of Russian forces in Ukraine is said to have reached 623,000 troops (Al Jazeera, 2025). The deceleration in Russia's territorial gains shows a slowdown in Russia's advances in the ongoing war. In terms of casualties, Ukraine has claimed that at least 430,000 soldiers have been lost by Russia since the beginning of the war, with major losses recorded in 2025. In January 2025 alone, AI Jazeera reported that Russia lost 38,0000 soldiers in Kursk. Both Russia and Ukraine have heavily relied on long-range missiles and drones to conduct their targeted strikes. While Ukraine has successfully attacked and destroyed Russian oil depots, defence factories, and airfields, including the TU-22M3 Bomber, Russia has recorded huge success in the conduct of mass drone and long-range missile attacks on Ukrainian cities and territories (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been avoiding apportioning blame to Russia, and this has drawn major criticism from the European Union member countries, who are insisting that Ukraine should uphold its sovereignty. Despite the commencement of US-mediated negotiations on January 18, 2025, following President Donald Trump's assumption of office, Russian missile strikes increased by 50 per cent (Al Jazeera, 2025). Over the last four years, since the invasion of Ukraine started, the most condemnable part of the war has been the continued attacks on civilians. Russia's strikes have been seen destroying the lives and properties of unarmed civilians across Ukrainian cities, with Ukraine also destroying Russian energy structures, causing human casualties as well. Until now, millions of people continue to be displaced while attacks keep taking place, thereby exacerbating energy insecurity.

The continued invasion of Ukraine by Russia keeps increasing the erosion of international norms and moral decency. It has been pointed out (United Nations Press, 2025) that Russia has repeatedly challenged the United Nations Charter's principle of territorial integrity, which could set precedents for future wars and aggression by a belligerent state. The war has also become a medium for experimentation, particularly for Russia. Russia has seized the opportunity of the war to test ground-breaking military and technological weapons specifically designed to wage war and destroy human societies. The Russia-Ukraine war has been used to test run newly designed drones, electric warfare, and several other Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted tactics. Regional instability has also entered a new wave, specifically the Russian operation near Kharkiv and Sumy, which risks expanding the conflict zones. As the war continues, the activities of both Russia and Ukraine reveal a high level of military attrition and geopolitical alliance and military support. While Russia's momentum and prolonged capacity continue in the war, the resilience of Ukraine and its national defence, coupled with the support of the West, indicates no near-term or permanent ceasefire resolution anytime soon. Sadly, the United Nations' inability to enforce measures to cushion the risk of this prolonged war underscores a critical threat to global security and the toothless bulldog label applied to the United Nations itself.

Implications for the Global South and Africa in particular

No doubt, the world's import-dependent countries have been the most affected by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The Global South, particularly Africa, remains on the receiving end of the crisis on several fronts. Based on the findings, the following areas suffered the most in the region.

Food Security

The implications of the Russia-Ukraine war have been increasingly severe in the Global South, affecting food security, energy markets, debt sustainability, and even alignments across geopolitical zones. Food insecurity due to wheat supply shortages since the outbreak of the war has been devastating. For instance, according to the MO Ibrahim Foundation (2025), Benin imports 99.8 per cent of its wheat from Russia, Tunisia imports 48.6 per cent from Ukraine, and Africa imports 40.4 per cent, largely from Russia and Ukraine. Unfortunately, Africa

has been the hardest hit by the global wheat supply deficit due to the war, with wheat prices skyrocketing by 50 per cent, thereby threatening food security. Rose *et al.* (2022) submit that, for Ukraine, the war prevented the harvesting of winter crops such as sunflower oil, maize, and wheat, as well as the transport of these crops to markets, between 2021 and 2022. As for Russia, it remains the world's largest wheat exporter. However, the continuous invasion of each other's territories attracted economic and financial sanctions only for Russia from the international community. This shows the global players' dimension of the crisis. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (2022) reports that international food and feed prices are rising by 8–22 per cent across regions worldwide, with significant impacts on countries in the Global South. In addition, the war has also led to a shortage of fertiliser for African farmers from Russia. The war has driven up fertiliser prices, and African countries that depend on fertiliser to boost farming have borne the brunt of the disruption. Even the World Food Programme (2022) reports that the ripple effect of the war in Ukraine has caused severe food insecurity, with up to 345 million people at high risk across 82 countries globally in 2022.

Disruptions in energy supply in Africa (oil and gas)

The most critical impact of the war has been the imbalance in oil and gas prices, resulting in significant cost increases. At the outbreak of war in 2022, the cost of Petrol Motor Spirit (PMS) skyrocketed to $140.73/barrel, making it the highest since 2008. The crisis also made fuel import costs unbearable for net importers such as Ghana and Kenya (Aysha, 2023). While exporting countries like Nigeria, Angola, and Libya accrued significant profits, the increase in fuel exports necessitated the government taking on the additional burden of subsidising refined petroleum products to ease citizens' costs. A country like Nigeria, Aysha (2023) reveals, spends $500 million per month on subsidies until the government took the bold step of removing fuel subsidy in May 2023. Although micro-economies, with reference to citizens' welfare, remain at the lowest level, thereby fuelling social unrest, political delegitimisation of the ruling political party (All Progressives Congress-APC), poverty, and inflation. These price hikes have had a pronounced impact on inflation and economic activity across various sectors (Aysha, 2023). Moreover, gas reserves in Africa assumed a strategic position as an alternative to those of the war-ravaged Ukraine and Russia, thereby attracting market demand, though it faced infrastructural limitations at the time. This necessitates the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline project jointly sponsored by Nigeria, Niger and Algeria. The project can transmit 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually across West and North Africa, with the aim of linking to European markets upon completion.

Debt crises

Distress was also felt among Global South countries despite their grappling with the debt costs of the global Covid'19 pandemic. ODI Global (2025) reports that the Russia-Ukraine war is tightening financial conditions and increasing borrowing costs, raising debt sustainability risks in low-income countries. The report further reveals that the risk and debt distress of these low-income countries have doubled, from 27-54 per cent between 2015 and 2024, respectively, leading more developing countries to spend more on debt financing than on critical sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure. The economy is also more strained by higher borrowing costs and a rising import bill, especially for countries such as Egypt and Zambia.

Shifting diplomatic alignments and the rise of BRICS

The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA, 2025), in its publication on the UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions of 24th of February 2025, discloses that many Global South nations, informed by their histories, voted in support of sovereignty while balancing their commitment to diplomatic mediation. This is a deviation from the long-standing non-alignment policy pursued by most of these countries. For instance, South Africa and India resisted pressure from the Western powers to isolate Russia for invading Ukraine. Ultimately, the expansion of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) regional bloc reflects a shift in alliances. The Russia-Ukraine war has significantly accelerated the expansion of BRICS as a regional and economic alliance capable of reshaping global power dynamics. Between 2022, when the war started, and August 2024, the bloc expanded from its initial 5 membership to 10, admitting Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Indonesia and the UAE as full members (Tahnal, 2025). The bloc currently has 10 full members and 10 partner members, including Nigeria, one of Africa's largest economies. Turkey and Algeria are also on the queue

to join the bloc. The expansion of BRICS from its 5 founding members in 2010 to over 20 in 2025 revealed the effect of the Russia-Ukraine war in shifting the regional balance. Available evidence suggests that BRICS is working towards disarming dollarisation of the global market as a threat to US involvement in the Russia-Ukraine crises and the NATO expansion movement, and thus, launched the BRICS PAY, a cross-border payment method that advances the increased use of local currencies like the Chinese Yuan and Russian Ruble for international trade and marketing. China and Russia now settle 80 per cent of bilateral trade in Yuan and Rubles, respectively (The Daily Economy, 2025).

Rise in geopolitical tensions and global instability

Beyond the counterfactual, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has influenced geopolitical reconfigurations, realignments, strategies, and operations. A few of these are explored in this section.

NATO and the EU combined their unity and strategic positioning

As the war persists, NATO has further solidified its role as the cornerstone of the Euro-Atlantic security apparatus, championing several unprecedented, coordinated military operations among its member countries. NATO has intensified its membership expansion across the EU region following the Russia-Ukraine war. Finland's full membership, a country located 1,340km (830 miles) from Russia, was confirmed on the 4th of April 2023. This is perceived to have further weakened Russia's aggression against the expansion of NATO near its territories. Also, on the 7th of March 2024, NATO ratified Sweden's full membership according to the press release from the government of Sweden. The membership of Finland and Sweden reflected a broader European realignment towards collective security and defence. Additionally, the European Union has sought to reduce its reliance on Russia's energy resources. This tension has also created internal divisions within the EU, with some member states advocating a negotiated settlement, while others are seeking to maintain continued military support for Ukraine against Russia. This ideological difference underscores the challenges of maintaining regional unity amidst the conflict.

China's calculated and strategic opportunism

Since the war broke out, China has maintained a nuanced stance to signal its no-limits economic partnership with any country willing to trade with it. Though Beijing has not openly supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it has, however, continued to amplify anti-West rhetoric, labelling the expansion of NATO as a destabilising force to non-interested nations (Beijing AP News, July 2024). In July 2024, following NATO's labelling of China as a "decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine", China responded by accusing NATO of seeking security at the expense of others and warned that such chaos should not be brought close to Asia (Beijing AP News, July 2024).

Economically, China has further deepened its energy ties with Russia. Due to the abandonment of Russian energy products amid several trade and economic sanctions over the war, Russia has offered discounts to buyers. China has since jumped on this discounted opportunity, further strengthening its position with Russia as a good alternative to Western counterparts. Also, China has sought to position itself as a good mediator between Russia and the Global South by appealing to and advocating for a polarised yet multipolar world power system against Western domination and US hegemony.

Global South divergent priorities and resistance to Western hegemony

In his article "Global Divide Over the Ukraine War", Chellaney (2025) argues that the Russia-Ukraine war has widened the global divide between the West and the Global South, pitting Ukraine and the rest of the West against Russia. Many of these Global South nations now view the war through the lens of colonial hegemony and unequal power dynamics. Most of the countries in Africa and Latin America have been resisting Western sanctions against Russia, maintaining their national sovereignty to enter into trade with either Russia or any nation they so wish. They choose to maintain economic stability and a non-interventionist ideology. The Global South's decision to resist sanctions and a trade war with Russia reveals broader dissatisfaction with Western-

dominated institutions. This global trend, brought about by the Russia-Ukraine war, signalled a sudden shift towards a more fragmented international order.

Increased defence spending and arms proliferation

Budgets for arms and defence spending have increased in nations that seem concerned about the war. This dramatic surge in military spending globally and the continued proliferation of arms, including light weapons and sophisticated ballistic war missiles, keep shaping the global defence and exacerbating the regional tension as earlier pointed out. Also, while these increases in arms spending have been unprecedented across the European Union and NATO member states, other parts of the world have seen massive arms production and transfers (Defence News, 2025). Linus Holler (Defence News, 2025) reported that the largest upward shift in global military spending occurred in 2024, during the peak of the Russia-Ukraine war. Holler (2025) has argued that global military spending rose to 2.7 trillion dollars in 2024, marking the largest increase since the end of the Cold War. Similarly, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) April 2025 report reveals that about 2.5 per cent of the world's combined economic power was allocated to military spending. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2025) report also indicated that more than 100 countries globally have raised their military spending as at the end of 2024, highlighting that United States of America retained its position as the dominant military spender at the sum of $997 billion followed by China at $314 billion, Russia at $149 billion, Germany at $88 billion and India at $86 billion, constituting the top five highest spenders. Ukraine, on the other hand, has claimed the position of the highest military burden bearer in 2024 by spending 34 per cent of its total GDP on military and defence against Russia, amounting to $64.7 billion, as it allocates all tax revenue to the military budget (SIPRI, 2025)

Collectively, NATO members are also said to have spent $1.51 trillion on strengthening their militaries, accounting for more than half of global expenditure at 55 per cent. Holler (2025) reports that an additional seven member states, bringing the total to 18 of 32 members that make up the alliance, have increased their military commitment to 2 per cent of their GDP, as agreed by NATO leadership (Defence News, 2025). Russia's $149 billion spending constitutes 7.1 per cent of the country's GDP and 19 per cent of the total government expenditure (Defence News, 2025). Other notable members, such as Poland, Sweden, and Israel, had significantly increased their military spending.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in April (2025) indicated that Ukraine had, since 2022, embarked on arms importation over 100 times more than in previous years, and the arms importation of the whole of Europe also rose by 155 per cent in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As the war continues, it shifts political leaders' mindset toward a "security first" ideology at the expense of social and economic spending, threatening the global community. For instance, Russia has cut the education budget by 14 per cent and the health budget by 16 per cent (SIPRI, 2023). In a related development, the US Congress had previously approved a defence budget increase of between $37 and $ 45 billion, citing strategic competition with Russia and China (Arms Control Association, 2022).

Conclusion

The Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly reshaped the global economic-security nexus, especially by exposing the fragility of global interconnectedness and the fact that the world is more linked, such that a problem in a region can cause global instability. The war has shown that global security is inseparable from economic stability, especially in vulnerable regions like the Global South, where crises of debt servicing, inflation, food security, resource scarcity and energy diversification have eaten deep. As this study points out, developing countries with struggling economies must swiftly adopt economic policies to mitigate the effects of the war in their regions. Although some regions remained neutral rather than taking sides in the crisis through mediation, this further revealed the geopolitical divides that have triggered the rise of other regional blocs, such as BRICS, as a counterweight to existing traditional power structures. The war also accelerates the concept of deglobalisation and the militarisation of economic policy, and the accumulation of conflicts and food security as a threat to the livelihood of people across the war zones, which increases the pressure for the demand for

coordinated actions to enhance a resilient food system, equitable energy transitions and a stable global governance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this article, the following recommendations are offered to address the global consequences of the Russia-Ukraine confrontations.

Strategies for mitigating economic shocks: The Russia-Ukraine war has created disproportionate economic shocks affecting vulnerable economies, particularly low- and middle-income countries. To enhance economic stability and security, financial measures are not negotiable. Inflation control and monetary policy adjustment are crucial steps. The central or national bank in the most affected regions must adopt a data-dependent monetary policy to curb inflation without excessive rate hikes that could trigger a recession. IMF (2025) notes that prolonged high inflation risks stemming from the Russia-Ukraine war could destabilise economies, and aggressive monetary policy tightening could destabilise debt dynamics in leveraged economies. Targeted liquidity support should be directed to sectors most affected by the crises, such as energy, manufacturing, and agriculture. Temporary and targeted subsidies, such as for fuel and food items, should be introduced to replace broad-based price controls and avoid market distortions. Debt relief and restructuring are also critical to addressing the economic shock of the war, especially in low-income countries where debt-servicing costs have exceeded health and education spending. Massive expansion of renewable energy, including wind, solar, and hydrogen, across the globe will greatly reduce reliance on Russian energy.

Strengthening international security frameworks: Expanding representation in the UN Security Council to include voices from across the Global South will help consolidate security measures to address the security impacts of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Promoting mediation among regional blocs: Regional blocs and other alignment groups, such as the BRICS, African Union, and the Commonwealth, should also assume mediating roles rather than maintaining a non-alignment stance or presenting themselves as a formidable force against any party in the ongoing war. Strengthening South-South cooperation through regional blocs such as the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will further counterbalance perceived Western-led domination and influence in the war and mitigate subsequent unilateral actions. Mediation support should be encouraged to address the spillover effects of war.

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International Trade Alliances and the Nigerian Cocoa Export, 1910-2010

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Abstract

This paper examined Nigeria's participation in international trade since cocoa became a viable commodity for cultivation and trade. Cocoa exports initially received full financial support from the Nigerian government when large quantities were shipped to international markets before oil was discovered. Major historical epochs, such as the end of the World Wars, the crude oil boom, and the Structural Adjustment Programme, prompted countries around the world to pursue economic liberalisation, and the Nigerian government withdrew entirely from financing the agricultural sector. Cocoa export became privatised and was left under the control of private marketers who lacked the necessary infrastructure to properly handle exports to international markets. This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected using a questionnaire and unstructured interviews. 10 of the 29 functional cocoa-exporting companies in Nigeria were selected to administer the questionnaire because they have more workers. Focused Group Discussions were also conducted with 10 officials of the Cocoa Association of Nigeria (CAN), 2 senior members of the Cocoa Processor Association of Nigeria (COPAN), and 2 senior members of the Nigeria Institute of Internal Affairs (NIIA), to gain insights into the prospects and challenges of cocoa export in Nigeria. Data were also gathered from printed materials such as books, journals, bulletins, conference proceedings, and seminars, as well as from the Internet. The data collected were interpreted from a historical perspective. Findings showed that Nigerian cocoa exporters have been penalised by the World Trade Organisation for violating export rules. A new trade agreement was drafted, and Nigeria refused to sign. The refusal led to the imposition of another penalty, which attracted a 10 per cent tariff on cocoa exports from Nigeria. Nigeria, in turn, imposed a 10 per cent tax on its cocoa exporters. The paper concluded that cocoa exporters hope to retain their export position, and stakeholders were sensitised on the need for readjustment to maximise international trade benefits.

Keywords: International Trade Alliances, Nigeria, Cocoa export.

Introduction

Cocoa was the principal cash crop introduced by the British imperialists in the late nineteenth century and had become widely cultivated by 1900. It was considered a veritable source of revenue and of raw materials for export. Cocoa trade and marketing began in 1910, when 3,000 metric tonnes were exported to international markets. Also, tonnage exportation increased profitably for the marketers between 1920 and 1945 under the specifications of statutory marketing Boards of the central agency known as the West Africa Produce Marketing Board WAPMB). In the post-World War era, specifically in 1948, global communities were synchronised under a unilateral trade body to promote equity and fairness in trade relations and related matters. Subsequently, in 1949, there was a global call for the readjustment of domestic and overseas marketing, which necessitated the establishment of another marketing board to buy and set prices for cocoa and other commodities under the Trade Act of the Nigerian Produce Marketing Company in the United Kingdom. By 1954, the Nigerian government rose in full control of trade commodity production and export market, through the establishment of the Western Region Marketing Board to take up cocoa marketing in the Western Region as the West African Marketing Board was regionalised for export purposes.

However, immediately after crude oil was discovered in 1956, the Central Marketing Board and the Nigerian Produce Marketing Company in London began to collapse and were eventually dissolved between 1957 and 1958, consequent upon the gradual withdrawal of the federal government from agricultural produce to oil exploration. Between 1973 and 1977, the cocoa production sector suffered a major financial setback, and the regional marketing boards were scrapped and replaced by the New Nigeria Cocoa Board (NNCB), which bought and exported cocoa and other cash crops (coffee, tea, kola nuts, and cashew nuts). At this point, cocoa maintenance, including subsidisation, became the sole responsibility of the NNCB, through the regime of Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) to the London markets. The Central Bank of Nigeria continued to disburse funds to cocoa grading and export under the various state governments.

The global economic recession of the 1980s seriously dampened cocoa production and export, and the eventual collapse of the Board in 1986, when the Structural Adjustment Programme was adopted from the Bretton Woods institutions. The main objective of the institutions was to liberalise trade connections through the Liberalisation Act of 1986. Nigeria's cocoa trade, amid economic readjustment and trade deregulation, began to shift toward a handoff policy by the federal and state governments. This scenario

ushered in the interests of some wealthy private individuals who pursued the business for profit, as SAP's purpose and objectives were market- or capital-oriented. At the time, the Nigerian government struggled to stabilise the agricultural sector; its main attention was also diverted to maximising dividends from the oil business. The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes for economic adjustment significantly contributed to the collapse of Nigeria's strong trade connections with European markets.

Statement of the Problem

Dani (2003) and Akinwande (2007) posited that the major agricultural commodity that brought Nigeria into the limelight of international trade in the modern dispensation was cocoa. Nigeria's cocoa trade was bedevilled by internal and external challenges since the end of the Second World War. Aluko (2003) noted that the bifurcated menace persisted until the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was recommended as a cutthroat remedy for economic stabilisation. Olagbaju (2003) also clarified that the oil discovery in 1956 led to a labour shift from agriculture to oil work in cities and refineries in the 1970s, and to the full privatisation of the agrarian sector in 1986.

SAP, which was deliberately embraced as a panacea for economic stabilisation, ended up strangulating the very process it was meant to stabilise. In the wake of the SAP era, the Nigerian government withdrew funding from the agricultural sector, leaving it to private individuals who ran it in a "survival of the fittest" race (Darwin, 1859). Only wealthy private companies were able to build infrastructure to sell cocoa into the European Union markets. Adu-Peters (2010) affirmed that a more horrendous experience occurred in the first quarter of 2008, when the European Union stopped buying Nigerian cocoa because it was poorly handled by individuals who lacked the infrastructural capacity to produce and process high-standard cocoa seeds for the world market, consequent upon the liberalisation of the trade sector. Adu-Peters (2010) further clarified that poor private exporters took loans from commercial banks at high interest rates of between 20 and 25 per cent, thereby reducing their ability to maximise profits from the business. The business's strength waned due to the export of substandard seeds to global markets.

Sequel to the above, in 2008, the WTO, acting on behalf of the European Union, issued a trade threat against Nigeria's cocoa exports, resulting in a loss of a whopping $360,000 per week in trade balance. Hence, the exporters, through the Cocoa Processor Association of Nigeria (COPAN), sought a rescue from the Nigerian government to no avail, capitalising on the existing principle of economic deregulation and liberalisation governing the export business. Whereas governments of other cocoa-exporting West African countries, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, continued to diplomatically subsidise the business despite the regime of deregulation and liberalisation. As a result, Felix (2008) posited that Nigeria was dragged into a new trade agreement with stringent policies intended to frustrate Nigeria's cocoa exports in international markets. It was a bilateral agreement between the cocoa-exporting countries from West Africa. The home governments of Ghana, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire signed the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), while the Nigerian government refused to sign for exporters, despite EU warnings about the economic litigation consequences of WTO disputes.

Theoretical Analysis

There are laudable ideas propounded by fundamentalists in international studies whose thoughts have assisted in understanding how the international system works and how nations of the world come together to engage under a democratic political structure for the betterment of collective interests. Dependency theory was found suitable to analyse the relationship between the two opposing economic structures of the wealthy and poor states in global trade with emphasis on their trades commodities, the terms of trade and the trade benefits. The main ideas of dependency theory centre on two major aspects: core-periphery economic relations and unequal commodity exchange.

Core and Periphery economic relations

Scholars of dependency theory postulated that the globe was bifurcated into two seemingly parallel economic lines of the "periphery" and the "core". Thus, a critical interpretation of the scholarly works of Rodney (1972), James (1997) and Alvin (1990) pointed to an asymmetric economic interrelatedness in which the "periphery" overtly relies on the "core" for trade, investments and financial manipulations to settle balance-of-payments dues. Central Bank of Nigeria (2000) and Chemengich (2002) extensively argued that the collective ideas of dependency theory were intended to criticise the economic marginalisation created

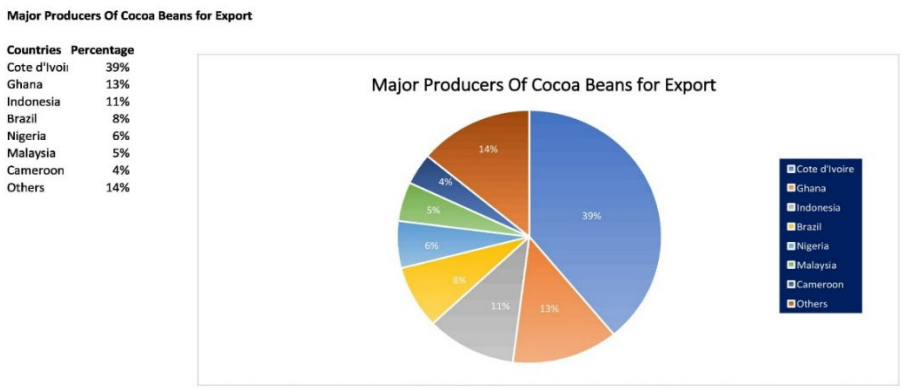
by the "core" countries, which either exchange their advanced products for agricultural commodities or offset the periphery's global financial indebtedness with their supposed trade profits.

Unequal Commodity Exchange

Dependency theory argues that a wide range of unequal levels of commodity exchange in the international markets was created. Trade was a major factor in international integration, bringing together both wealthy and poor states under a peaceful agreement known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). According to Esty (2003), the international system operates without physical violence against member states because it ensures peaceful coexistence, irrespective of the enormity of errors committed; boundaries are respected by complying with standing rules.

Hence, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was established to codify global agreements and set common principles and rules governing member countries under democratic governments, with the aim of reducing trade barriers and addressing other issues affecting member states. As lofty as the charter of GATT was, aimed at meeting the needs of member states, Jike (1998) observed that GATT lacks the ability to address challenges arising from evolving trade issues and is insufficiently capable of meeting members' demands. This scenario led to the re-envisioning of a legally empowered World Trade Organisation (WTO) on January 1, 1995, following the Uruguay Round from 1986 to 1994. The World Trade Organisation became a more efficient institution for tackling trade disputes among member states. In fulfilment of the above, Adu-Peters (2010) posited that Nigeria was dragged before the WTO for exporting substandard cocoa to the European Union (EU) markets and was penalised by the issuance of a new Export Processing Agreement (EPA) requiring tariff payments on cocoa exports. In addition, the peaceful operation of the international system, according to Finn (2001), implies that the WTO's operations since 1995, involving adjudication of trade-related issues, have been peaceful mediation and reconciliation without threatening the international system. However, the United Nations (1987) and Oladunjoye (2008), on the developing-nations consensus wing, postulated that trade liberalism is a weapon of the European Union against poor countries, whose trade commodities are agro-economic, with low labour wages and constant high indebtedness due to poverty-driven policies. Apparently, dependency theory criticised a relaxed economy of constantly high tariffs on cocoa exports from developing countries, especially Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, and Nigeria, among the remaining major cocoa-exporting countries worldwide.

Figure 1: Chart showing the world's cocoa-exporting countries



Source: **General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs 2001**

The above chart typified the position of Oyejide & Bankole (2001) on the developing states' view of WTO, which at Seattle in 1999, critical concerns about the imbalance accompanying cocoa export from West Africa and other parts of the world, and the need to correct the trade agreement were among their focal points. In the 1980s, for instance, Brazil lost its position as the second-largest exporting country due to a

price decline, becoming a low-quantity producer. It was a gloomy decade for world cocoa producers and exporters because many exporters' Gross Domestic Product depended on the agrarian sector. Invariably, there was a significant imbalance in the trade commodities between the two blocs. On this premise, scholars of dependency theory often argue that state actors, whether wealthy or poor, tend to use economic power to protect their national interests in the international system. Thus, there is a need for developing states to clearly identify the factors that determine their interest in entering trade relations with advanced states, which continue to dictate terms within the WTO. (Rugumanu 2001) observed that the opinions of developing countries were rarely considered in trade decisions made. For instance, Nigeria can only protect its trade interests "if and only if" it identifies them and has viable commodities (advanced) as solid grounds to accommodate its negotiations within the committee agenda. For instance, Aluko (2003) submitted that the WTO's 1996 annual report stated that the top 15 exporters of services from developed states accounted for 73 per cent of the world's total imports. The United States of America taking the lead in most cases and no African country has taken part in this exclusive league. It was observed by Robbins & Ferris (2009) that the quest for national interest, which was a dominant political factor in the hands of the wealthy states over the poor states, often degenerated into prolonged, heated phenomena and cold, diplomatic misunderstandings in the international arena. Conversely, the Western (modern) school of thought postulated that the nature of national politics in various African states remained a home-inflicted saga that hindered their growth and functionality in the international system. This is reflective of the position pushed forward by Esty (2003), a world Economist that

> Sub-Saharan Africa has what it takes to become a key player and beneficiary in the WTO; however, it has become the breeding ground for international terrorism. The continent has many oppressive governments. A sprinkling of chaotic failed states… it sounds as if Osama Bin Laden's platoons were furiously active in Africa, where a string of failed governments and sit-tight dictators have promoted unprecedented civil unrest in decades.

In view of the above, scholars of dependency theory such as Clemens (2011), Azizli (2013) and Ghosh (2019) believe that all member-states, irrespective of social or economic backgrounds, should have equal access to WTO meeting proceedings to encourage a better understanding of its works and possibly reduce some of the allegations directed at it by the aggrieved member-states. Hence, WTO remains an edge-cutting instrument for economic readjustment for equity in the international system.

Dependency theorists further argued that all nations admitted to international organisations have the primary motive of promoting their accrued political power, regardless of the negative implications for less powerful states. In this context, Jike (1998) posited that wealthy states relied on their trade commodities, such as automobiles and other technologies, to eclipse the bargaining power of member states with commodities from the agrarian economy. Such agrarian commodities were further subjected to a rigorous process of acceptance into EU markets or faced outright rejection. It remained widely believed that countries that became members of international organisations such as the WTO prioritised self-preservation to gain influence in pursuit of social, political and economic imperatives. A clear idea in this case is projected through understanding the concept of international trade itself and its mythos. International trade has overtime raised polemics in the academia and among other researchers where right and left critics viewed it differently, for instance, Khor (2003) and Stiglitz (2003) of the developing states school of thought posited that marginalisation or deterioration experience incurred by many countries continued to perpetuate them in endless indebtedness, low commodity pricing, lack of infrastructure and are unable to cope with problems of liberalisation and unable to benefit from export opportunities. Global trade extends the economic disparity between the North (wealthy) and the South (poor) as the gulf between the two hemispheres widens continually.

Stiglitz (2003) opines that the pontificated nudge of self-preservation from the developing countries' view of international or global trade also signalled leverage on a trajectory consideration of the essence of international trade from the developed countries' view. Thus, developed (wealthy) countries scholars, including Boone (1995), (GATT &Williamon, 2002) and (Soludo, 2008) believe that international trade necessitated foreign aid and assistance from the west to the developing countries, Bräutigam (2004) further claimed that international trade encouraged economic diversification, even though it involved agricultural commodities from Africa, the advanced countries possessed the technologies to processed them into finished goods. The above is not far removed from what is called self-preservation by both developed and

developing countries in the international system. The originality of this debate is premised on the truth that international membership and national interest are inseparable. The benevolence of dependency theory as an instrument for mitigating the economic scars inflicted on poor countries from the age of colonisation to the modern dispensation is drifting towards irrelevance. Thus, world affairs, with reference to trade and investments, are becoming extremely competitive, shifting self-preservation (national interest) from international affairs, making it unattainable because state ideas are vested and shrouded in contest, deceit, and subtle war to enforce national foreign policies by member-states.

Consequences of the International Trade Face-off on Nigeria

The manifestation of dependency theory in Nigeria's export trade was captured in Adu-Peters (2010) analysis, which stated that Nigeria's refusal to sign the Export Processing Agreement led to the imposition of a trade agreement penalty known as the Semi-Processed Tariff (SPT). This agreement was issued to Nigeria to regulate its cocoa exports, a further attestation to the trade imbalance between the wealthy states and Nigeria, as posited by Akinremi and Awolumate (2010), that the WTO's penalty was a deliberate threat to ostracise Nigeria from cocoa exports. The new penalty attracted a 10 per cent tariff payable on Nigeria's agricultural products. To avert permanent exclusion from the cocoa export trade with the EU, Nigeria immediately drafted a new trade charter with cocoa exporters, detailing a series of tax regimes to mitigate the effects of the EU's 10 per cent import tariffs.

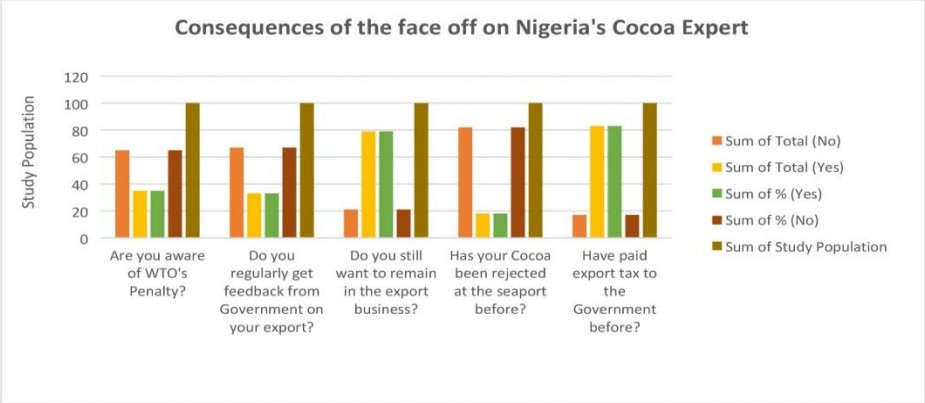


Figure 1 Field Survey 2010

Invocation of National Taxation

The above chart indicates that the major precipitating factors of the WTO's penalty were the unpredictability of terms and conditions of trade, which led Nigeria to constantly rely on the European Union for its commodity exports. The EU's arbitrary use of international market-negotiation powers automatically necessitated the government's unexpected imposition of a national tax directly on Nigerian exporters. In other words, Akinwale (2009) established that most cocoa exporters from Nigeria were unaware of the WTO's Export Processing Agreement issued against them. They reported that over 75 per cent of exporters in Nigeria were negatively affected by the new trade agreement. The above position was in tandem with James (1997) and Prebisch (1998), who maintained that poor countries exporting primary commodities, including cocoa, will continue to incur trade deficits due to volatile terms of trade, and high volumes of such commodities will constantly chase fewer of the processed items from the wealthy states. Iyama, (2009) reiterates that the exporters struggled to absorb the shock which suddenly hit their export

business alongside the regime of home tax paid at the seaports on certified seedlings for export. This tax was named the Nigerian Export Supervision Scheme (NESS), with a fixed amount of five dollars (US$5) imposed on each tonne of cocoa at the shipping point. (Akinwale 2009) buttressed that the frequency of tonnage determined the total amount of NESS paid per export. Free on Board (FOB) tax also emerged, attracting 0.5 per cent of the commodity's value, and its imposition depended on the frequency of landings. (Benade & Woodgate, 2009) explained that those taxes were paid to Nigerian Officers at the seaports, while clearances or export licences were issued to exporters as a seal of authority to ship their cocoa beans to international markets. Arguments of dependency theory and findings in this study are in tandem with the categorical submission of Oladunjoye (2009) that

> EPA was an agreement designed to satisfy international 'trade arbiters,' and it was unilaterally designed by the EU. It was commonly referred to as "an unclear and untested set of rules for a bilateral free trade agreement between the European Union and some of the world's poorest countries, which have no significant items for trade in the international markets.

It was further contested that the reason behind the invocation of EPA by the EU was to cunningly reintroduce the old tariff of 4.2 per cent and 6. 4 per cent, otherwise referred to as Standard Import Tariff (SIT), *ab initio* imposed on West African cocoa export, which was subsumed by the adoption of deregulation and liberalisation. This, in essence, confirmed that trade relations between Nigeria and the EU have never been free, despite recent trade deregulation and liberalisation. Unpredictable tax imposition resulted in capital flight and economic strangulation.

Change from Trade Balance to Payment by Discount

Terms of trade and agreements were determined and imposed on Nigeria by the European Union (Oladunjoye, 2009), buttressed by the fact that while other West African cocoa exporting countries continued to enjoy a balance of trade payment, in the case of Nigeria, trade negotiations changed from a balance of trade to payment by discount. Whereas payment by discount reduces the percentage of total export tonnage in favour of the European buyers, Nigeria continues to bear the cost. 72.67 per cent of cocoa exporters in Nigeria were afraid of losing their trade partnership with the EU, and their fear became heightened by the lack of national markets to buy their raw cocoa, except for a very few emerging confectioneries like the STANMARK processing industry in Ondo State. Nigeria depended on the European Union's technologies and infrastructure to purchase and consume cocoa bean products. On this premise, Iyama, Oladunjoye, Adhuze and Akinwale (2009) perceived international trade in agricultural commodities as inimical to national economic growth amid a series of volatile trade rules and regulations. More discouraging was the lack of adequate feedback on new trade policies conveyed to partners from developing countries, including Nigeria.

Conclusion

The major blueprint of the WTO was the privatisation of the national economies across the globe, with emphasis on the abrogation of subsidies. The idea sounded feasible for member states to comply with, but an adequate opportunity was not given to the developing countries, whose governance was seriously enmeshed in a series of national challenges and impoverishment. The major challenge for Nigeria was the error of adopting a total hands-off policy by its government, given the age-old colonial legacies of depleted infrastructure and low domestic output. Cocoa exporters in Nigeria soberly submitted that cocoa export's benefits remained overtly astonishing when viewed with the series of unpredictability that oftentimes rendered its workability questionable in the poor countries. Agricultural subsidy is a great harbinger of economic productivity, a factor that will continue to lubricate the agricultural sector of developed countries and was abruptly abrogated by Nigeria upon the endorsement and announcement of SAP. Switzerland and the United States of America still account for a significant share of subsidies in the agricultural sector; coming down home are Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon, which continue to receive government subsidies for their cocoa exports. Hence, to rescue Nigeria's agricultural sector from its looming death row, stakeholders should rise to face the challenges and shine a light at the end of the tunnel for sustainable development.

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Community Policing and Civil-Military Collaboration: A Path to Sustainable Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's security architecture faces unprecedented challenges, including insurgency, terrorism, farmer–herder conflicts, kidnapping, banditry, and other violent crimes. Conventional responses, dominated by militarised and centralised approaches, have proven inadequate, eroding public trust and creating operational vacuums exploited by violent non-state actors. This study examines the intersection of community policing and civil–military collaboration as pathways to sustainable security in Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative and theoretical research design, the study relies on document and content analysis of secondary sources, including scholarly and policy materials. These methods enable the identification of key themes such as trust deficits, accountability gaps, militarisation, and community engagement within Nigeria's security discourse. Drawing on Social Capital Theory, Security Governance Theory, and the Collaborative Governance Model, the study situates these approaches within broader debates on legitimacy, accountability, and multi-actor participation. Community policing, introduced in 2004, sought to decentralise policing and foster trust between law enforcement and communities. While pilot programmes recorded modest successes, implementation has been undermined by underfunding, inadequate training, political interference, and weak legislative backing. Civil–military collaboration has enhanced operational capacity but raised concerns about militarisation, human rights abuses, and accountability deficits. The study identifies weak institutional frameworks, fragmented implementation, and persistent trust deficits as major obstacles, while highlighting the potential of integrated, community-centred models. It proposes reforms anchored in training, measurable outcomes, and governance frameworks aligned with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Community Policing, Civil–Military Collaboration, Security Governance, Inclusive Security Architecture

Introduction

Nigeria's security landscape has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades, shifting from localised communal clashes into a complex web of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, militancy, and urban crime. The Boko Haram insurgency, which escalated in 2009, and the subsequent rise of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), destabilised vast areas of the North-East, displacing millions and overwhelming humanitarian systems (International Crisis Group, 2022). In parallel, the North-West has witnessed the emergence of banditry networks engaged in mass abductions, extortion, and arms trafficking (Onuoha, 2020), whilst the North-Central region continues to grapple with farmer–herder conflicts driven by land competition, climate-induced migration, and ethnic tensions (Akinola, 2021). The South faces its own challenges, including cult violence, armed robbery, and separatist agitations, further complicating Nigeria's fragile security environment (Chukwuma, 2020).

The trajectory of insecurity in Nigeria reflects both historical legacies and contemporary governance failures. Since the return to democracy in 1999, ethno-religious conflicts and communal clashes have exposed the fragility of Nigeria's social fabric. The Niger Delta militancy of the early 2000s highlighted grievances over resource control and environmental degradation, whilst the Boko Haram insurgency underscored the consequences of poverty, marginalisation, and weak state presence in the North-East (Alemika, 2013). Over time, insecurity has become more decentralised and adaptive, with criminal gangs, insurgents, and separatist groups exploiting governance vacuums and eroding state legitimacy (International Crisis Group, 2022). Successive governments have adopted a range of strategies to confront these threats. Military interventions reclaimed territory from insurgents but often failed to secure lasting peace due to limited community legitimacy (Alemika, 2013). Amnesty programmes in the Niger Delta temporarily reduced militancy but did not address structural grievances such as poverty and environmental degradation (Eke, 2021). Intelligence reforms sought to improve coordination but were undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor trust between agencies (Onuoha, 2020). Community policing initiatives, though promising, remain constrained by Nigeria's highly centralised police structure, which restricts state and local autonomy (Chukwuma, 2020). These efforts highlight a recurring pattern: whilst policies have achieved short-term gains, they have struggled to deliver sustainable security outcomes.

The persistence of insecurity despite heavy investment in defence and policing underscores that Nigeria's crisis is not merely one of capacity, but of structure and legitimacy. Citizens increasingly perceive security forces as distant, unaccountable, and sometimes complicit in abuses, deepening the trust deficit between the state and its people (Akinola, 2021). This disconnect has created operational vacuums that non-state actors exploit with impunity (Onuoha, 2020). In this context, the need for innovative, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to public safety is urgent. Models that prioritise community engagement, local intelligence, and collaborative governance offer a promising alternative to the status quo (Chukwuma, 2020). This paper contributes to the discourse on security sector reform by reframing Nigeria's insecurity as a problem of legitimacy and governance rather than capacity alone. It synthesises historical trends and policy responses, critically reviews their successes and failures, and advances the case for a paradigm shift towards community policing and civil–military collaboration (Eke, 2021). By integrating local knowledge, fostering civic participation, and enhancing accountability, these approaches can build a more resilient security architecture. The study therefore brings fresh insights to policymakers, scholars, and practitioners, offering practical recommendations for constructing a security framework that is inclusive, responsive, and trusted by the communities it seeks to protect.

Problem Statement

Nigeria's security architecture has become increasingly complex, characterised by insurgency, banditry, farmer–herder conflicts, kidnapping, militancy, and urban crime. Despite massive investments in defence and policing, over ₦6.57 trillion allocated to security-related spending in 2025, including ₦3.1 trillion for defence and ₦1.31 trillion for police affairs (BudgIT, 2025), and a 55% surge in military expenditure to $2.1 billion (SIPRI, 2026**)**, insecurity persists. Violent deaths remain alarmingly high, with more than 10,000 fatalities recorded in 2023 alone due to insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes (International Crisis Group, 2022). These figures underscore the paradox of heavy investment with limited impact, eroding public trust in state institutions and weakening the social fabric of affected communities. Conventional security responses remain largely reactive, militarised, and disconnected from local realities, resulting in slow response times, poor intelligence coordination, and limited citizen engagement.

The Nigeria Police Force, rooted in colonial legacies of centralised control, continues to prioritise regime security over community safety (Alemika, 2013), while military interventions in civilian spaces often exacerbate mistrust and human rights concerns (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020). This alienation between security providers and the communities they serve has created operational vacuums that violent non-state actors exploit with impunity. Furthermore, the absence of a coherent national framework that integrates civil society, traditional institutions, and local actors into security governance has hindered the development of inclusive and sustainable solutions. This paper examines the potential of community policing and civil–military collaboration as complementary strategies for advancing inclusive, accountable, and resilient security governance in Nigeria, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). It also examines the institutional, political, and socio-cultural constraints that impede the effective implementation of these approaches and proposes reform pathways that align with Nigeria's broader development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Theoretical Grounding

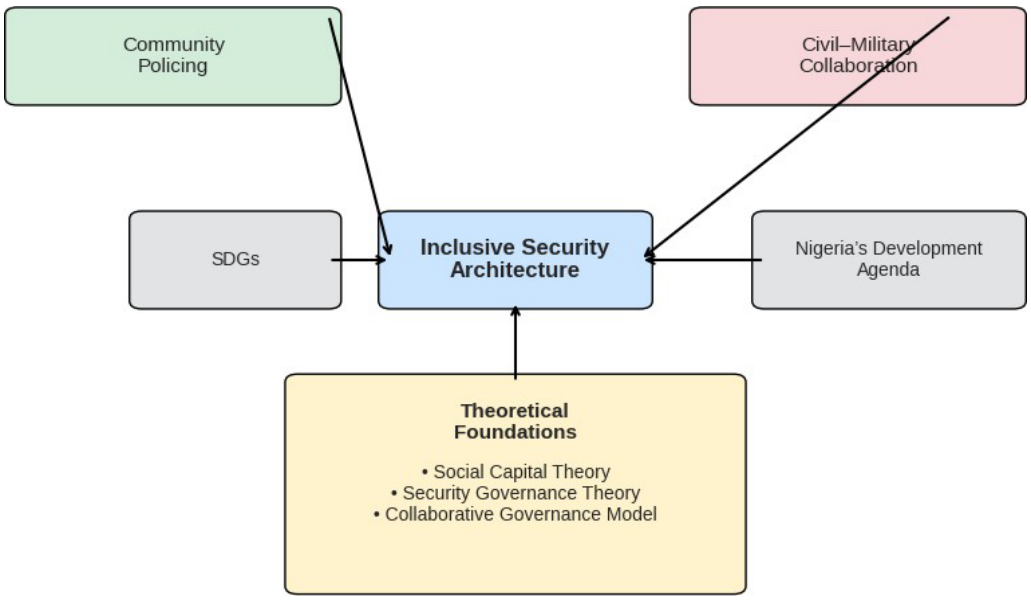
To critically examine the intersection of community policing and civil–military collaboration as a pathway to sustainable security in Nigeria, this study draws on three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Social Capital Theory, Security Governance Theory, and the Collaborative Governance Model**.** Together, these frameworks provide conceptual clarity and analytical depth, explaining why inclusive, trust-based, and multi-actor approaches are essential for addressing Nigeria's complex security challenges.

Collaborative Governance Model

The Collaborative Governance Model, developed by Ansell and Gash (2008), emphasises joint decision-making, shared accountability, and stakeholder inclusion in public policy and service delivery. Applied to the security sector, it provides a framework for analysing how diverse actors such as government agencies, civil society, traditional institutions, and community groups can work together to address complex security

challenges. Ansell and Gash (2008) describe collaborative governance *as* "a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative." Trust-building, power-sharing, and sustained dialogue are central to this model. These elements are essential for overcoming fragmented institutional practices and bureaucratic compartmentalisation**,** mitigating conflict, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility. In practice, collaborative governance enhances the legitimacy of security interventions, improves intelligence flow, and reduces duplication of efforts. It also provides a platform for marginalised voices to influence security policy, thereby strengthening democratic accountability and social cohesion (Adebayo & Ojo, 2023).

Applied to Nigeria's security sector, this model emphasises joint decision-making, stakeholder inclusion, and shared accountability among police, military, civil society, and local communities (Adebayo & Ojo, 2023). In Nigeria's fragmented security environment, collaborative governance encourages inter-agency coordination through mechanisms such as joint task forces, integrated command structures, and multi-stakeholder security committees. It also promotes community engagement via town hall meetings, liaison officers, and participatory planning processes. These mechanisms help bridge the gap between formal institutions and local populations, ensuring that security strategies are context-specific and responsive. Together, these three frameworks provide a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how community policing and civil–military collaboration can contribute to a more inclusive, accountable, and resilient security architecture in Nigeria.



Source: Adapted from Nwizu-Okoye (2023), International Crisis Group (2022), & Chukwuma (2020).

The framework presented above is adapted from the works of Nwizu-Okoye (2023), International Crisis Group (2022), and Chukwuma (2020), which originally emphasised the fragmented nature of Nigeria's security responses and the need for community-centred approaches. In this study, the construct has been adjusted to incorporate civil–military collaboration alongside community policing, recognising the central role of police and military in Nigeria's security landscape and the necessity of synergy rather than parallel interventions. Furthermore, the framework explicitly integrates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Nigeria's broader development agenda, situating security reform within both national priorities and global commitments. To strengthen analytical depth, the model also introduces theoretical foundations: Social Capital Theory, Security Governance Theory, and Collaborative Governance Models, which provide lenses for understanding trust-building, legitimacy, and multi-actor collaboration. These adjustments ensure

that the framework not only reflects Nigeria's unique security realities but also aligns with international development objectives, thereby offering a more holistic and policy-relevant approach to inclusive security governance.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, as articulated by Putnam (2000), posits that networks of trust, norms of reciprocity, and civic engagement are foundational to effective collective action. In the realm of security, social capital facilitates cooperation between citizens and law enforcement, enabling communities to co-produce safety through informal surveillance, early warning systems, and conflict mediation (Akinola, 2021). This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where formal security institutions often lack legitimacy in the eyes of local populations. Community policing thrives in environments rich in social capital. When citizens trust their local police and feel empowered to participate in security initiatives, they are more likely to report suspicious activity, mediate disputes, and support crime prevention efforts (Chukwuma, 2020). Conversely, in areas where social capital is weak due to ethnic divisions, political marginalisation, or historical abuses, community policing efforts may be met with scepticism or resistance. Social capital also plays a critical role in civil–military relations. In Nigeria, where the military is frequently deployed for internal security operations, building trust between soldiers and civilians is essential. Through joint community projects, transparent communication, and culturally sensitive engagement, military actors can foster reciprocal relationships that reduce hostility and enhance operational effectiveness (Eke, 2021). This relational infrastructure is vital for transforming security interventions from coercive to collaborative.

Security Governance Theory

Security Governance Theory challenges the traditional state-centric view of security provision and advocates a multi-actor approach that involves state institutions, non-state actors, civil society, and local communities (Krahmann, 2003). It recognises that in complex and fragile environments such as Nigeria, security cannot be monopolised by the state alone. Instead, it must be co-produced through decentralised, participatory models that reflect local realities and needs. This framework is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where state capacity is uneven and informal actors often fill security vacuums. Vigilante groups, traditional rulers, religious institutions, and community-based organisations frequently play critical roles in maintaining order and resolving conflicts. Security governance theory legitimises these actors as part of the broader security ecosystem, encouraging coordination rather than competition. Community policing aligns with this theory by empowering local actors to take ownership of safety initiatives, while civil–military collaboration reflects the need for integrated efforts across institutional boundaries. Importantly, security governance emphasises the principles of accountability, transparency, and legitimacy that are often lacking in Nigeria's current security architecture (International Crisis Group, 2022). Without clearly defined mandates, robust oversight mechanisms, and genuine community participation, security interventions risk deepening existing mistrust and exacerbating tensions rather than fostering stability and sustainable peace.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, relying exclusively on secondary sources to interrogate Nigeria's evolving security architecture. Document analysis and content analysis constitute the principal methodological approaches, enabling a systematic review of existing materials and the identification of recurring themes such as trust deficits, accountability gaps, militarisation, and community engagement. Data were sourced from reputable academic and policy databases, including Google Scholar**,** JSTOR**,** Scopus**,** Web of Science, and African Journals Online (AJOL), supplemented by government policy documents, international reports from organisations such as the International Crisis Group, SIPRI, and the Centre for Democracy and Development, as well as credible media publications including Premium Times, The Guardian Nigeria, and BBC Africa.

To ensure rigour, inclusion criteria focused on publications produced between 2010 and 2025 that explicitly addressed Nigeria's security architecture, community policing, civil–military relations, or governance legitimacy, while exclusion criteria ruled out non-scholarly blogs, opinion pieces, and sources lacking institutional credibility, as well as studies outside the timeframe unless historically significant. The search strategy employed systematic keyword combinations with Boolean operators, for example, "Nigeria and security architecture," "Community policing and Nigeria," "Civil–military collaboration and Nigeria," and

"Nigeria and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)", across multiple databases to minimise bias and capture diverse perspectives. Sources were initially screened for relevance through titles and abstracts, followed by full-text review, and subsequently coded thematically to highlight patterns, gaps, and contradictions in Nigeria's security discourse. This methodological approach ensures that the study is grounded in credible evidence, analytically rigorous, and aligned with its objectives of exploring community policing and civil–military collaboration as pathways to inclusive and resilient security governance.

Inclusive Security Architecture

This refers to a security framework that prioritises participation, accountability, and legitimacy by integrating multiple actors such as state institutions, civil society, traditional authorities, and local communities into the design and implementation of security strategies. Unlike conventional militarised approaches, inclusive security emphasises trust-building, shared responsibility, and responsiveness to local realities. It seeks to bridge the gap between security providers and citizens by decentralising decision-making and fostering collaboration across different levels of governance. Scholars argue that inclusive models are essential in fragile contexts such as Nigeria, where over-centralisation and reactive, force-driven strategies have eroded public trust and created operational vacuums that are exploited by non-state actors (Nwizu-Okoye, 2023; Jugo, 2025).

At its core, inclusive security architecture is anchored in principles of human security, social capital, and collaborative governance**,** ensuring that security interventions are not only effective but also legitimate and sustainable. This approach recognises that communities are not passive recipients of security but active stakeholders whose knowledge, networks, and resilience are critical to addressing complex threats. By expanding the security architecture to empower vulnerable groups and promote accountability, inclusive security strengthens the social contract between the state and its citizens, thereby reducing mistrust and enhancing long-term stability (International Crisis Group, 2022; The Cable, 2023). In the Nigerian context, inclusive security architecture offers a pathway to reconfigure existing structures toward models that align with broader development goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing in Nigeria emerged as a strategic response to the widening gap between formal law enforcement institutions and the communities they are mandated to protect. Historically, policing in Nigeria was rooted in colonial-era structures designed to enforce state authority rather than serve public interest. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), established in 1930, inherited this legacy of centralised control, operating under a rigid command system that prioritised regime security over citizen engagement (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). This model fostered alienation, distrust, and a lack of responsiveness to local security needs. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, Nigeria was grappling with rising urban crime, communal violence, and deteriorating public trust in the police. The inadequacy of the conventional policing model became increasingly evident, prompting calls from civil society, international partners, and reform-minded policymakers for a shift toward more inclusive and participatory policing strategies. In response, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) launched the Community Policing Initiative in 2004**,** with technical and financial support from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and local organisations such as the Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria (CLEEN Foundation, 2005).

The framework sought to decentralise policing by embedding officers within communities, encouraging collaborative problem-solving, and promoting proactive crime prevention. It emphasised partnership, accountability, and local intelligence gathering as key pillars of effective policing. Pilot programmes in states such as Enugu, Kaduna, and Lagos recorded initial successes in improving police–community relations and reducing petty crime (Odekunle, 2007). However, the broader institutionalisation of community policing across Nigeria has faced significant challenges. Political interference has frequently undermined neutrality and effectiveness, with local actors co-opted for partisan purposes. Adebayo and Ojo (2023) have noted that inconsistent policy support and the absence of legislative backing have resulted in fragmented implementation, with some states embracing the model while others remain resistant or indifferent.

Structural and operational weaknesses have further constrained the initiative. Chronic underfunding has left many communities' policing units without basic resources such as vehicles, communication tools, and operational allowances, limiting their reach and effectiveness (CLEEN Foundation, 2018). Training deficits also undermine professionalism and accountability. In the absence of standardised curricula, codified ethical guidelines, and sustained capacity-building initiatives, community policing risks being undermined by tendencies toward vigilantism or the misuse of authority, particularly in contexts where informal actors operate without adequate oversight or legally sanctioned mandates.

The 2020 nationwide #EndSARS protests marked a watershed in Nigeria's policing discourse. Sparked by widespread allegations of brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the protests revealed deep-rooted mistrust between citizens and law enforcement agencies. Although the government responded by disbanding SARS and reaffirming its commitment to police reform, the protests reignited public demand for genuine community-based policing models that prioritise human rights, transparency, and local accountability (Amnesty International, 2020). While community policing holds promise as a transformative approach to public safety in Nigeria, its success depends on sustained political will, institutional reform, and meaningful engagement with local stakeholders. Without these, the initiative risks becoming another well-intentioned but poorly executed policy experiment. The absence of a coherent national framework to harmonise community policing efforts across states exacerbates fragmentation and reduces the potential for scale and sustainability (Alemika, 2013). Ultimately, community policing in Nigeria remains a promising but fragile experiment, requiring stronger institutional support, adequate resources, and genuine commitment to democratic policing principles.

Community Policing and Civil-Military Collaboration Across the North-South Divide

In major urban centres across the Global North, community policing has played a pivotal role in rebuilding trust between law enforcement and marginalised populations. Cities such as New York, London, and Melbourne have implemented neighbourhood-based patrols, citizen advisory boards, and youth engagement programs to foster stronger relationships between police and the communities they serve. These initiatives have led to measurable reductions in crime and improved cooperation in investigations (Skogan, 2006). While civil-military collaboration is less prominent in routine policing, it becomes essential during national emergencies such as natural disasters, pandemics, or terrorist incidents, in which military units support civilian agencies with logistics, infrastructure protection, and crowd control. These coordinated efforts underscore the importance of inter-agency trust and preparedness in maintaining public safety and resilience. Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Denmark exemplify integrated public safety models that emphasise multi-agency collaboration and community engagement. In these societies, policing is embedded in local governance structures, enabling seamless coordination among law enforcement, social services, and municipal authorities. Programmes aimed at preventing radicalisation, domestic violence, and youth delinquency often involve joint efforts between police officers, educators, and social workers. Civil-military collaboration is institutionalised through national crisis management frameworks, where military support is activated during cyber threats, border control operations, and public health emergencies. These models are underpinned by democratic oversight, transparency, and a culture of civic participation, contributing to high levels of public trust and some of the lowest crime rates globally (Bayley, 2006).

In the Global South, countries such as Colombia and the Philippines have successfully leveraged community policing and civil-military collaboration to stabilise regions affected by insurgency and organised crime. In Medellín, Colombia, a combination of community policing, urban renewal, and civil-military coordination helped reclaim gang-controlled neighbourhoods. Police officers were trained to engage with local leaders, youth groups, and civil society organisations, thereby fostering trust and improving the flow of intelligence (Moncada, 2016). In the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, joint patrols and town hall meetings between military units and community representatives have been used to reduce tensions and build consensus around security operations. These approaches demonstrate that when communities are treated as partners rather than passive recipients of security, the outcomes are more sustainable and inclusive (Buendia, 2005). Several African countries outside Nigeria have also adopted community-based and collaborative security models with notable success.

In Kenya, the National Police Service has implemented community policing initiatives in urban and rural areas, supported by legal reforms and civil society partnerships. These efforts have improved police responsiveness, reduced violent crime, and enhanced public trust, particularly in informal settlements like Kibera (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003). In Sierra Leone, post-conflict security sector reform included the integration of community policing and civil-military coordination, with local security committees playing a key role in conflict resolution and early warning systems (Albrecht & Jackson, 2009). Similarly, in Rwanda, the government has institutionalised community policing through regular community meetings (umuganda), joint patrols, and civic education campaigns, contributing to high levels of social cohesion and public safety (Chemouni, 2014). Across the Global North and Global South, a consistent theme emerges: security interventions are most effective when they are locally legitimate, inclusive, and grounded in trust. Whether in the urban neighbourhoods of London, the post-conflict zones of Medellín, or the community forums of Kigali, sustainable security is achieved not through force alone but through collaboration, transparency, and community ownership. These examples underscore the importance of reimagining security as a shared responsibility, one that values citizens' voices, respects local contexts, and integrates diverse actors into a coherent governance framework.

Overview of Insecurity Trends in Nigeria (2020–2025)

Nigeria's security landscape between 2020 and 2025 was characterised by escalating violence, shifting hotspots, and the emergence of new threat actors, with banditry, terrorism, farmer–herder clashes, and kidnapping dominating conflict trends (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLE), 2025). Despite increased military deployments and policy interventions, insecurity remained pervasive, evolving in both complexity and geographic spread (International Crisis Group, 2022; Nwizu-Okoye, 2023; Chukwuma, 2020).

Table 1: Key Conflict Types and Trends

Year	Banditry	Terrorism	Farmer-Herder Clashes	Secessionist Violence	Politically Related	Kidnapping	Civil Unrest
2020	800	120	150	20	40	100	200
2021	950	100	170	25	45	110	180
2022	1100	90	200	30	50	115	160
2023	1200	70	220	32	55	118	140
2024	1306	43	240	35	50	120	80
2025	1250	50	260	38	52	125	100

Source: Nigeria Security Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations (2025); Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2025).

It is pertinent to note that Table 1 presents a year-by-year breakdown of seven major categories of violent conflict in Nigeria. These categories reflect the diversity and complexity of insecurity across the country.

Banditry

Trend: Sharp and consistent rise from 800 incidents in 2020 to a peak of 1,306 in 2024, followed by a slight dip to 1,250 in 2025.
Interpretation**:** Banditry has become the most dominant form of violence, particularly in the Northwest (Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina). The slight decline in 2025 may reflect intensified military operations or shifting tactics by armed groups.

Terrorism

Trend: Steady decline from 120 incidents in 2020 to 43 in 2024, with a modest uptick to 50 in 2025.
Interpretation: Boko Haram and ISWAP activities have reduced in frequency but remain lethal. The resurgence in 2025 suggests adaptive strategies or the emergence of new cells in the Northeast.

Farmer-Herder Clashes

Trend: Continuous increase from 150 incidents in 2020 to 260 in 2025.

Interpretation: These clashes are expanding geographically and now affecting Southern states such as Ondo and Delta. Climate change, land scarcity, and weak mediation mechanisms are key drivers.

Secessionist Violence

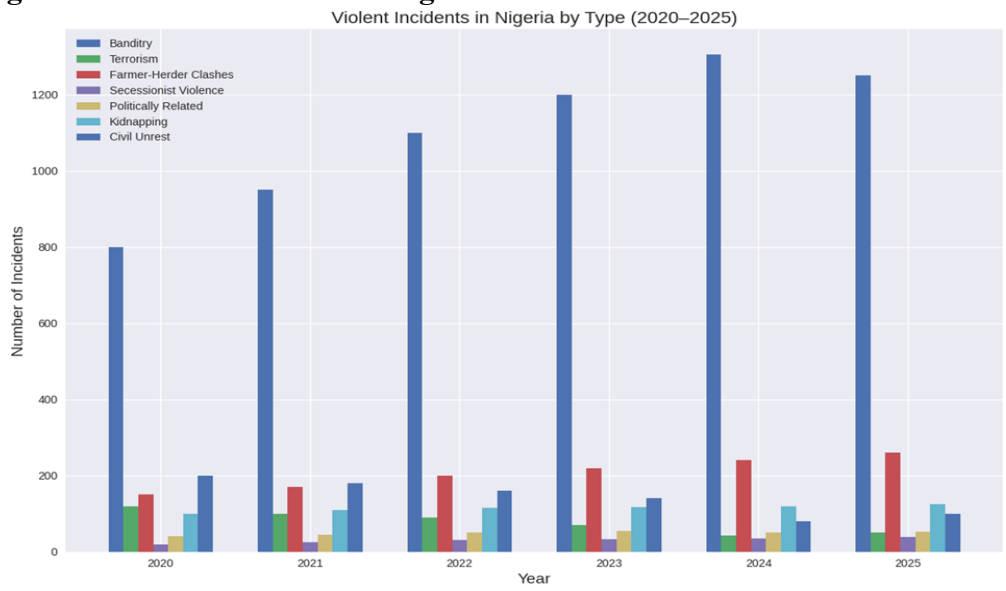
Trend**:** Gradual rise from 20 incidents in 2020 to 38 in 2025.
Interpretation**:** Mostly concentrated in the Southeast, linked to IPOB and other separatist movements. Attacks on police stations and electoral offices have intensified.

Politically Related Violence
Trend**:** Slight increase from 40 incidents in 2020 to 52 in 2025.
Interpretation: Election cycles, party rivalries, and governance disputes contribute to this category. The rise may reflect growing political polarisation.

Kidnapping
Trend: Steady growth from 100 incidents in 2020 to 125 in 2025.
Interpretation**:** Kidnapping for ransom has become a lucrative enterprise, affecting highways, schools, and urban centres. The increase reflects both opportunism and weak deterrence.

Civil Unrest
Trend**:** Decline from 200 incidents in 2020 to 80 in 2024, with a slight rebound to 100 in 2025.
Interpretation**:** The drop post-EndSARS protests suggests temporary suppression, but economic hardship and governance failures continue to fuel unrest.

Figure 1: Violent Incidents in Nigeria



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2025).

Figure 1 above illustrates the data in Table 1. It uses colour-coded bars to show the number of incidents for each conflict type across the years.

Key Visual Insights

Banditry dominates the chart, with the tallest bars each year, signalling its overwhelming prevalence. Farmer-Herder Clashes show a clear upward trajectory, becoming the second most frequent conflict type by 2025. Terrorism and Civil Unrest show declining trends, with shorter bars over time. Kidnapping and Secessionist Violence maintain moderate but steady growth. Politically Related Violence remains relatively stable, with minor fluctuations.

Figure 1 underscores the urgent need for region-specific security interventions tailored to Nigeria's diverse conflict landscape. For instance, counter-banditry operations are critical in the Northwest, where armed groups have entrenched themselves; conflict resolution mechanisms are essential in the North Central to address escalating farmer-herder clashes; and de-escalation strategies are increasingly necessary in the Southeast amid rising secessionist violence. These patterns reveal the limitations of Nigeria's centralised security architecture, which often fails to respond effectively to localised threats. Instead, the data advocates for a multi-actor approach, one that integrates formal security agencies with community-based structures, traditional institutions, and civil society actors to build a more responsive and inclusive security framework.

Why Nigeria Needs More Than Guns and Uniforms

Nigeria's persistent insecurity has evolved into a multidimensional crisis that defies conventional state-centric responses. The country faces a complex web of threats that exposes the limitations of relying solely on formal state security agencies. These threats are not only geographically widespread but also structurally embedded in Nigeria's socio-political fabric, making them resistant to purely militarised or centralised solutions.

Structural Limitations of Formal Security Agencies

The (NPF), military, and intelligence services are overstretched, under-resourced, and often reactive rather than preventive. Despite increased budgetary allocations such as the ₦2.2 trillion earmarked for defence and security in the 2024 national budget, the impact on ground-level security remains minimal due to systemic inefficiencies, corruption, and poor accountability mechanisms (BudgIT, 2024). Equipment shortages, inadequate training, and low morale among personnel further undermine operational effectiveness. The police-to-citizen ratio remains alarmingly low. While the United Nations recommends a ratio of 1:450, Nigeria's ratio hovers around 1:600 or worse, with significant disparities between urban and rural deployment (CDD, 2025). This shortage is compounded by the centralised nature of policing, where decisions are made in Abuja with little input from local communities. Officers posted to unfamiliar regions often lack the linguistic and cultural competence necessary for effective engagement, leading to poor intelligence gathering and strained relations with residents (Gaskiya, 2025).

Insecurity in Ungoverned and Under-Governed Spaces

Large swaths of Nigeria remain effectively ungoverned, particularly in rural and border regions where state presence is minimal or symbolic. In Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states, bandit groups have established quasi-administrative control, levying taxes, enforcing curfews, and negotiating ransoms. Despite repeated military operations such as Operation Hadarin Daji and Operation Forest Sanity, these groups continue to operate with impunity, exploiting difficult terrain, local grievances, and porous borders (Within Nigeria, 2025). The situation is equally dire in parts of Kwara and Plateau, where coordinated attacks have displaced thousands and disrupted farming and trade. These incidents reveal a troubling trend as insecurity is no longer confined to traditional hotspots but is metastasising into previously stable regions. The inability of federal forces to respond swiftly and decisively has eroded public confidence and emboldened non-state actors (Security Alert, 2025).

The Rise and Relevance of Informal Security Actors

In response to these gaps, communities have increasingly turned to informal security actors such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, and traditional rulers. While these actors operate outside formal legal frameworks, they possess deep local knowledge, cultural legitimacy, and the agility to respond to threats in real time. In many cases, they have succeeded where formal agencies have failed in rescuing abductees, repelling attacks, and mediating conflicts. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the North Eastern and North Western states is a prime example. Formed in response to banditry, Boko Haram and insurgency, the CJTF has worked alongside the military to identify insurgents, secure communities, and provide local intelligence. Their contributions have been recognised by both state and federal authorities, although concerns remain about oversight and accountability (International Crisis Group, 2022). Similarly, in parts of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kogi, Kwara, and Niger States, traditional rulers have played a crucial role in conflict resolution and early warning systems. Their ability to convene community dialogues and enforce

customary norms has helped prevent escalation in areas where formal institutions are absent or distrusted.

The Call for Multi-Actor Security Governance

Experts, civil society leaders, and policymakers increasingly advocate for a multi-actor approach to security, one that integrates formal agencies with community-based structures, civil society organisations, and local non-violent non-state actors. Jaye Gaskiya, Chair of the PCVE Development Management Team, argues that Nigeria's insecurity is not merely a policing failure, but a development crisis rooted in poor governance, inequality, and exclusion. He calls for a whole-of-society response that prioritises prevention, inclusion, and accountability (Leadership, 2025). Former House of Representatives Speaker Yakubu Dogara has echoed this sentiment, describing insecurity in Northern Nigeria as a national emergency. He urged governors to pool resources, coordinate regional strategies, and take ownership of security rather than relying solely on federal interventions (Daily Post, 2025). These calls reflect a growing consensus that sustainable security requires decentralisation, collaboration, and community empowerment.

Challenges of Civil-Military Collaboration in Nigeria

Civil-military collaboration in Nigeria, though increasingly adopted as a response to the country's multifaceted security crises, is constrained by structural, institutional, and normative challenges. These limitations not only weaken operational effectiveness but also undermine the legitimacy of security governance in the eyes of citizens. One of the most pressing concerns is the militarisation of civilian spaces. The Nigerian military, constitutionally mandated to defend against external aggression, has progressively assumed internal policing roles, particularly in counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram, anti-banditry campaigns in the Northwest, and interventions in communal clashes across the Middle Belt (Haruna, 2025). This expansion blurs the distinction between defence and law enforcement, embedding a culture of force-driven responses in contexts that require dialogue and trust-building. Scholars argue that such militarisation erodes democratic norms by normalising the presence of armed forces in everyday civic life, thereby diminishing the autonomy of civilian institutions (Alemika, 2017). Communities often interpret military deployment as coercive occupation rather than protection, which alienates citizens and obstructs intelligence-sharing, a critical component of community policing.

Closely tied to militarisation is the issue of accountability and human rights. Civil-military operations in Nigeria have been repeatedly marred by allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and excessive use of force. Amnesty International (2023) documents numerous cases where military interventions in civilian areas resulted in human rights violations, often without subsequent investigation or prosecution. Not only that, but police brutality has been an issue of serious concern, which impedes trust between the citizens and the Police. Weak oversight mechanisms and limited transparency exacerbate these abuses, fostering impunity and deepening the trust deficit between citizens and security institutions (Aja Elechi & Ohazuruike, 2024). Trust is not merely symbolic; it is a functional necessity for collaboration. Without confidence in security actors, communities are reluctant to share intelligence or cooperate, thereby weakening the effectiveness of joint operations.

Another significant limitation lies in legal and policy ambiguities. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution permits military involvement in internal security under "exceptional circumstances," yet the scope of such interventions remains poorly defined (Oyebode, 2025). This vagueness allows discretionary deployments that often bypass civilian authority, creating uncertainty about the legitimacy of military actions. Similarly, policing laws remain outdated, failing to embed community policing principles or clarify operational boundaries between police and military forces (Alemika, 2017). The absence of coherent legislation contributes to institutional overlap, operational inefficiency, and jurisdictional conflicts. For example, in joint operations against banditry, disputes frequently arise over command structures and responsibilities, leading to duplication of efforts and reduced effectiveness (Haruna, 2025).

Furthermore, civil-military collaboration in Nigeria is often ad hoc and reactive rather than institutionalised. Unlike South Africa, where community police forums are legally mandated to facilitate dialogue between citizens and security actors (Akpa, 2024), Nigeria's mechanisms for collaboration largely depend on executive discretion. This reactive approach limits sustainability and consistency, as initiatives are frequently

tied to specific crises or political directives rather than embedded within long-term security governance frameworks. The lack of institutionalisation means that lessons learned from past collaborations are rarely codified, leading to repeated mistakes and inefficiencies. Collectively, these challenges highlight the structural weaknesses that hinder civil–military collaboration in Nigeria. Militarisation alienates communities, accountability deficits foster distrust, legal ambiguities create uncertainty, and ad hoc mechanisms undermine sustainability. Together, they reveal that while collaboration is necessary in Nigeria's complex security landscape, its current practice is constrained by deep-seated institutional and normative limitations that must be acknowledged before meaningful reform can be pursued.

Conclusion

Nigeria's security challenges reveal the inadequacy of conventional, force-driven approaches in delivering sustainable peace. This study has demonstrated that community policing and civil-military collaboration, when grounded in trust, accountability, and inclusivity, offer a viable pathway toward a more resilient security architecture. By tracing the historical evolution of policing, examining comparative perspectives, and analysing the challenges and limitations of current practices, it becomes clear that Nigeria's security governance is constrained by legacies of militarisation, weak accountability, and legal ambiguities. Community policing provides a framework for strengthening local intelligence, civic participation, and trust between citizens and security actors, while civil-military collaboration, if properly structured, can bridge institutional divides and enhance operational effectiveness. However, absent reforms that enhance the professionalisation of security personnel, institutionalise accountability mechanisms, and establish clearly defined legal mandates, collaborative security arrangements risk entrenching coercive practices and exacerbating public distrust. Ultimately, sustainable security in Nigeria must be understood not only as the absence of violence but as the presence of resilient institutions, inclusive governance, and a strong social contract between the state and its citizens. By embracing community-centred strategies and institutional reforms, Nigeria can move beyond reactive responses and build a security architecture that is legitimate, effective, and responsive to the complexities of its diverse society. In doing so, the country will not only address immediate threats but also lay the foundation for long-term peace, stability, and national development.

Policy Recommendations

For Nigeria to achieve sustainable security, civil-military collaboration and community policing must be supported by deliberate reforms that strengthen institutions, professionalise personnel, and embed accountability within a broader governance framework. This study proposes three interrelated pillars, which are capacity building and training, metrics of success, and integrated security governance, as a roadmap for actionable policy interventions. They examined as follows:

Capacity Building and Training: The professionalisation of police, military personnel, and other security agencies is central to effective community engagement. Current practices often emphasise tactical responses while neglecting the interpersonal and trust-building dimensions of security governance. To address this imbalance, training curricula should incorporate modules on conflict sensitivity, human rights, and community liaison strategies, ensuring that personnel are equipped not only to enforce law but also to foster legitimacy and trust. Joint training exercises between police and military units are equally critical, as they help bridge institutional cultures, reduce operational friction, and promote coordinated responses to complex threats. It is important to stress that by embedding community engagement into professional standards, Nigeria can cultivate a security sector that is responsive, accountable, and trusted by the citizens it serves.

Metrics of Success and Evaluating Security Outcomes: Reforms must be accompanied by clear, measurable indicators to ensure they translate into tangible improvements. Traditional metrics such as crime reduction, arrest rates, and conflict resolution outcomes remain important, but they should be complemented by qualitative measures that capture citizens' lived experiences. These include community trust surveys, perceptions of safety, and levels of civic participation in security initiatives. Such metrics provide a holistic understanding of security outcomes, moving beyond narrow statistics to assess legitimacy

and effectiveness. Regular evaluation not only strengthens accountability but also enables adaptive learning, allowing institutions to refine strategies in response to evolving challenges and shifting security dynamics.

Integrated Security Governance: Looking ahead, Nigeria's security architecture must evolve toward a hybrid model of integrated governance that combines state institutions, local communities, and non-state actors. Sustainable security cannot be achieved by force alone; it requires inclusive participation and shared responsibility. Civil society organisations, traditional leaders, and community-based groups should be formally incorporated into security planning and implementation, thereby creating multi-actor platforms for dialogue, intelligence sharing, and collaborative problem-solving. This integrated approach aligns with Nigeria's broader development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by linking security to economic stability, social cohesion, and democratic governance. A resilient security system is not only about preventing violence but also about enabling development, fostering trust, and strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens.

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Child Trafficking in the Digital Age: The Role of the Dark Web and Cryptocurrencies in Facilitating E-Sexual Exploitation in West Africa

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Abstract

This study explores how the dark web, anonymous payment options, and technological advances aid in the spread of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), online grooming, and livestreamed abuse. It discusses how socioeconomic factors and COVID-19 restrictions have increased children's vulnerability, especially in West Africa. Using a qualitative approach, the research reviews documents, scholarly articles, and investigative media and employs snowball sampling to identify relevant sources on cyber-enabled child exploitation. Insights from Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory help explain how traffickers adopt new technologies in promoting child exploitation. The results show that the dark web's encryption, unindexed sites, real-time platforms, and anonymity tools provide a low-risk environment for traffickers to share CSAM, with transactions conducted using cryptocurrencies, which benefit from their pseudonymous features. The paper identifies structural issues, such as weak online safety policies, along with systemic impediments like socio-economic inequality, as significant factors that increase children's risk of falling prey to trafficking networks. The study concludes that fighting digital child trafficking effectively requires strong policies, such as strong digital governance and comprehensive educational programmes, to safeguard the innocent children from predators.

Keywords: *Child sexual abuse material; Diffusion of Innovation; Online grooming; Livestream abuse; Digital vulnerability.*

Introduction

Technological advancement has revolutionised all fields and disciplines, adversely affecting the world's sustainable development. The impact of technology has been felt both positively and negatively, particularly in the modus operandi of human trafficking, where individuals with criminal intent have deceived their potential underage children through the creation of online fake platforms for child exploitation. Research indicates that the unethical exposure of underage children to unregulated social media platforms makes them vulnerable to unscrupulous activities. This became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which took the world by surprise. The quarantine measures, coupled with work-from-home due to the COVID-19 outbreak, reduced household incomes and work hours, exposing families to social media activities and leaving children more vulnerable to online exploitation. UNODC reports that more than 50% of underage boys and girls are working remotely and unknowingly in trafficking den of criminal moguls, 38% are into sextortion and forced labour, 1.5% in pornography, and 1% in forced marriage, among others (UNODC Reports on TIPs, 2018). The report indicates that these children are the victims of circumstance, and criminal business moguls invest in their vulnerabilities and recruit them through online platforms and web advertisements for hook-ups. Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) (2022; 2024) also documents 1.6 million children as victims of online trafficking between 2020 and 2022, with 291,273 web pages that contained child sexual abuse material, with a striking pose of 91% of self-generated content. In 2023, the NCMEC also documented 36 million children for online sexual exploitation (NCMEC, 2024). While the reports indicate a startling rise in online child sexual abuse and exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic with the use of digital platform such as social media, messaging apps, and file-sharing sites, the study has it online child trafficking under the pretence of tackling poverty or elevating the family from the poverty shackle is not a COVID-19 phenomenon, the pandemic only exposed and change the narrative of online child trafficking coupled with the sales of sexual abused materials through onion layers with information security protection.

The virtual child right abuse practice is historically dated back to 2004 when criminal cartels utilised free-standing web pages to promote sexual services and connect potential victims with tourist activities, often without the victims' knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic merely exposed the strategies of engagement that criminally minded people used to adapt their modus operandi to cyberspace, with full protection for both potential victims and clients against societal stigmatisation (Glo Tips, 2020). The West African sub-region is not immune to the proliferation of online child sexual abuse material, coupled with the risks associated with it. Though the West African sub-region lacks the accurate data to evaluate the extent to which children have been trafficked, abused and molested, the NCMEC notes that between 2019 and 2022, 21000 cases were reported, with Côte d'Ivoire taking the lead, followed by Nigeria, Cape Verde and Ghana. While the UNODC country office in Nigeria also notes that more than 75% of trafficking victims that

were detected in West Africa are children (UNODC, 2021), with a high rate of abuse, which shows that West African countries remain the hub of child trafficking, the origin, transit and destination. Deane (2017) also explores the West African sub-region and opines that West African countries remain the region with the highest number of child trafficking, as UNODC (2020) and Gunther (2021) note countries like Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia with their prevalence of child trafficking for labour, prostitution, street begging and child pornography. Hoang & Wagner (2023) note a high rate of child trafficking for sexting in Ghana, sextortion and revenge pornography in Cape Verde, while Nigeria, Benin, and Togo are not left out in promoting child labour and child pornography, including nude pictures and pornographic materials.

In addition to this, the African Child Policy Forum, in one of their reports submitted to the African Union in 2019, called Africa "a new frontier of online sexual abuse" and explained further that the West African sub-region remains the landscape of vulnerabilities for child sexual exploitation and online child sexual abuse materials (CSEAM) (Hoang & Wagner, 2023). While the INTERPOL and FBI opine that the criminal networks based in the region are professionals in the use of sextortion schemes with a range of coercion techniques without being noticed (Hoang & Wagner, 2023). The high incidence of child trafficking in the West African sub-region is linked to economic hardship that creates a gap between needs and the lawful means to meet them (Asiyanbi, 2021). Some scholars highlight a significant level of violence against children, cultural practices such as giving underage girls in marriage, and superstitions like sex with underage virgin girls being seen as a remedy for HIV/AIDS. Additionally, growing global travel and tourism continue to fuel child trafficking in the region (Hoang & Wagner, 2023). The paper also notes that increased use of technology, coupled with its unregulated nature, exposes vulnerable children to unethical activities on social media platforms. This raises a critical question about the impact of technological progress on social security in West Africa: Does technology protect vulnerable youth from unfettered social media use, or does it also serve as a double-edged sword? Furthermore, how do the dark web and cryptocurrencies subtly facilitate child trafficking in the region?

The Concept of Child and Child Trafficking

Childhood is a relative concept with varying connotations. A child can be defined by age, developmental stage, and maturity. The labour acts see child as a young person above the age of twelve and below sixteen years of age (Garner, 2001), while the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child (1990), the United Nations Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Nigerian Contract Law define a child according to Child Right Act (2003) as any human being below 18 years. In general, all West African countries define a child under the Child Rights Act (CRA) (2003), except Côte d'Ivoire, which defines a child under its Minority Act (1970) as any person below 21 years of age. Therefore, a child is any human being who is still in the formative stage and less capable of making reasonable decisions about their life. In the West African sub-region, some countries, notably Nigeria, have sought to revise the age of maturity to 16 years. However, the paper considers 18 years as the standard benchmark for a child. Engaging any child below the age of 18 years in exploitative activities, whether virtual or physical, is therefore regarded as 'child rights abuse'. As Mohammed (2024) points out, the CRA (2003) provides that agreements involving individuals under this age are generally voidable because children are considered incapable of forming the necessary intent. Consequently, subjecting these young people to exploitative conditions is seen as a serious violation of their human rights.

Different schools of thought define child trafficking from their various perspectives. For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its associated Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the U.S. Department of State see child trafficking as an infringement on a child's inherent dignity and entitlement to protection. While the OPSC focuses on the sale of children. The African Union and ECOWAS align their definition of child trafficking with the United Nations Palermo Protocol (2000) and UNHCR (2006) and define child trafficking as an 'act' and 'purpose'. While explaining further, child trafficking is an act when the recruitment, transportation, transfers, harbouring or receipt of a person under 18 years old for exploitation purposes takes place. The exploitation purpose is a component of forced labour, sexual exploitation, such as the use of underage children for pornography, prostitution, sextainment, and forced begging, among others. The definition excluded the means since the victims are underage, and the act of deception and or

coercion could not be established. While the United Nations Supplementary Convention (1956), which frames contemporary trafficking as a reincarnation of slavery, see the child trafficking as an exploitation of minors. The UNODC reports also highlight how contemporary trafficking blends *physical* and *digital* spheres, with social media, messaging apps, and online advertisements and define it as an exploitation of minors through various means (UNODC, 2020; 2022).

Scholars like Bales (2007), Scarpa (2008), and Doezema (2010) define child trafficking as an act of exploitation and abuse of children's vulnerability for commercial sex work, pornography, forced labour, cyber-fraud, begging, and criminal exploitation, among others, by criminal business moguls for their business gains. Kara (2009) conceptualises child trafficking as a sexual act and posits that sex trafficking is a market system rooted in global inequalities, where vulnerable people from low-resource settings are drawn into exploitative roles to satisfy international demand for prostitution, pornography and sex entertainment. Rose (2022) describes child trafficking as the illegal procurement of vulnerable children under the disguise of promoting their welfare, upgrading their standard, and protecting their human dignity. The global demand for underage boys and girls to serve as sextertainment in various nightclubs, performers in tourist centres, or involvement in pornography production and pre-ordering sex even without physically being present leads to a high rise of child trafficking, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. The contemporary child trafficking explains the paradigm shift in the narration of child trafficking and how criminally minded people exploit underage girls and boys and objectify them to all sorts of exploitation in the digital age. This shows that the advent of technology has shifted the traditional trafficking networks to technologically enabled systems, which blurred the boundaries between physical transportation and virtual exploitation, creating new opportunities for traffickers to groom, manipulate and profit from children remotely, particularly in the West African sub-region.

In the West African context, child trafficking must be understood beyond the digital space. Many scholars draw parallels between current trafficking practices and past forms of slavery, such as "*iwofa*", where stricken poverty families pledged their children into servitude (Asiyanbi et al., 2025). Today, instead of physical bondage, traffickers rely on digital deception, emotional manipulation and fraudulent online accounts to gain victims' trust. The paper, therefore, conceptualises child trafficking as a reincarnation of old slavery *(iwofa)* through modern techniques aimed at the sustainable growth of eco-tourism and pornography via diplomatic online bargaining. Diplomatic online bargaining means an intersection where the predators have shifted away from the physical recruitment and direct coercion and adopt subtle negotiation and pacification methods to deceptively convince their potential victims of the need to evade poverty sooner through fraudulent online accounts.

Theoretical Clarification

The diffusion of innovation theory is a social science theory that highlights the importance of new techniques and showcases existing or new ideas to the world. Developed by Everett Rogers in 1962, diffusion of innovation theory is a mode of the diffusion of novel ideas to a broader community, regardless of location. It is a method of shifting away from traditional communication concepts toward new information-sharing techniques that do not depend on intermediaries before spreading beyond the four walls. The theory is grounded in the digital revolution and facilitates the dissemination of information through synchronous and asynchronous methods (Rogers, 2003). Synchronous and asynchronous communication encompasses social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok), podcasts, and websites (surface and deep webs), email, and search engines, among others, for information dissemination.

The significance of diffusion of innovation theory to this paper lies in its emphasis on synchronous and asynchronous communication, coupled with the broader scope for propagating existing or new ideas worldwide. The issue of child trafficking is as old as the issue itself, but the advent of technology has increased the rates of child vulnerabilities as the criminally minded moguls used search engines, among others, to advertise their illicit acts and at the same time, the use of the encrypted web, particularly the onion layer, to safeguard the information of both potential clients and victims. The traffickers and criminally minded alike have used technology to propagate and disseminate their deception beyond geographical boundaries through synchronous and asynchronous media of communication. Synchronous

is a virtual communication channel that enables immediate communication between the recruiter and potential buyer, showcases vulnerable victims through video conferencing and social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, podcasts, and Threads, among others, and validates business transactions in real time. Asynchronous communication uses the web (surface and deep), e-mail, and other search engines to promote illegal activities and coordinate online business transactions.

Advances in technology have conferred a relative advantage on potential buyers and recruiters by reducing physical risk, eliminating intermediaries in negotiations, and objectifying potential victims as potential clients. In addition, there is national identity protection through web layers, with cryptocurrencies as the medium of exchange. Although cryptocurrencies do not facilitate illicit business, the assurance of identity security made the channel comfortable for criminally minded individuals to conduct illicit transactions without leaving a significant trace.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how digital technologies, specifically the dark web, cryptocurrencies, and online platforms, facilitate not only child trafficking but also the sale of online sexual abuse materials. A qualitative approach was appropriate given the covert, sensitive, and illegal nature of the subject. Data collection involved reviewing reports from UNODC, OSCE, Europol, IWF, and NCMEC, along with scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and media sources on trafficking and cyber-exploitation, which provided contextual insights into actual trafficking cases. The study used a snowball sampling method, starting with key documents and following references and citations to identify additional relevant sources. This technique helped gather a broad and diverse set of literature on digital trafficking, incorporating multiple perspectives. Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns in online recruitment, anonymity tools, and technological exploitation. The interpretation was guided by Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory, which illustrates how traffickers adopt emerging technologies to expand their networks. No human subjects were involved, and all data handling complied with ethical research standards.

Discussion

Child Trafficking in the Digital Age

The dynamics of technology and globalisation have left an indelible mark on the field of human trafficking and child exploitation, fundamentally transforming the landscape of child trafficking and creating unprecedented opportunities for traffickers to recruit, exploit, and profit from vulnerable children. Advances in technology, globalisation, and widespread internet access enabled traffickers to embrace innovation during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting from traditional face-to-face recruitment to sophisticated, technology-driven operations. These shifts have blurred the boundaries between online and physical exploitation, making digital platforms central to the trafficking process (UNODC, 2020; OSCE, 2022). The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2020) views advances in technology as a new medium that traffickers and criminal business moguls use to canvass and engage potential victims through synchronous and asynchronous communication to reach their clients.

Research indicates that synchronous platforms like video calls, live-streaming apps, TikTok, Instagram Live, Twitter (X), Viber, Snapchat, and encrypted messaging remain vital tools for criminals. Instances were given on how traffickers often create fake profiles on the platforms mentioned above to befriend minors, send personalised messages to build trust, and manipulate children by offering online modelling jobs, money, or emotional support. They sometimes coerce minors into sharing nude images or engaging in sexual acts online and use these images as leverage for further exploitation (Human Trafficking Front, 2023; NSPCC, 2023). Additionally, traffickers increasingly monitor children's online activities through comments, posts, geo-tags, photos, and friendship patterns to refine their grooming strategies. The combination of high visibility and limited parental oversight makes social media a prime environment where potential buyers or viewers can request live sexual content or showcase victims' sexual talents during live sessions. Conversely, asynchronous platforms, including surface web, dark-web forums, hidden websites, and cloud storage, facilitate the distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), victim advertising, grooming, and planning future transactions. This digital transformation enables traffickers to operate with minimal physical contact,

lowering detection risks and broadening their reach to a global audience (Beech et al., 2008; Kloess et al., 2014). Their extensive use stems from unregulated content-sharing and algorithmic amplification, creating an environment where vulnerable children can easily become victims.

As globalisation transformed the world into a global village, where communication barriers have been reduced, the scope of illicit business continues to expand, leaving more children vulnerable in online markets, particularly in West Africa. According to reports from NCMEC and the Cyber Tipline, there has been an increase in OCSEA incidents across the West African Sub-region. The reports indicate that between 2019 and 2022, 21,000 cases were reported, with Cape Verde, Ghana, and Nigeria having the highest number of OCSEA. The NCMEC, Cyber Tipline bar chart further explains that Nigeria had the highest number of OCSEA in 2022, with over 120,000 cases, followed by Côte d'Ivoire with 30,000 and Ghana with 22,000, while Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, among others, have fewer than 20,000 cases (NCMEC, Cyber Tipline report for ECOWAS, 2020-2022). Additionally, in 2022, 347 children were rescued from sex trafficking dens, and 19% of them were recruited online via social media (Human Trafficking Front, 2023).

In contrast, the UNODC, together with NAPTIP, in a joint report, acknowledged the widespread issue of child trafficking in West Africa. They reported that out of 3336 trafficking victims in the region, 2553 were children forced into labour (UNODC Nigeria, 2021). The report also details the involvement of both girls and boys, estimating that 1,164 girls and 1,389 boys were involved. It specifically documents child trafficking related to forced labour in West Africa. Meanwhile, organisations like NCMEC, Cyber Tipline, and scholars such as Sita (2003), Gould (2011), Kreston (2014, 2017), Sowale (2018), and Mlambo & Ndebele (2021) emphasise the high prevalence of child trafficking for online abuse in the region. These researchers further explain that vulnerable children in West Africa largely dominate and control the region's online commercial sex industry. Additionally, the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies reports that 17% of online sexual abuse trafficking victims in East Africa and 7% in North Africa originate from West Africa.

Various arguments have been proposed regarding why the OCSEA and OCSAM data have not been effectively captured by NAPTIP and other human trafficking agencies in the sub-region, despite reports from NCMEC, Cyber Tipline on the prevalence of online child trafficking abuse. This paper attempts to explain why NAPTIP's data on the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children is limited, referencing Hoang and Wagner (2023). They argue and attribute the underreporting of online child sexual abuse victims to any regional anti-trafficking agencies to a lack of evidence due to victims' fear of stigmatisation. The online victims of sexual exploitation often refrain from reporting to anti-trafficking organisations because of the fear that their nude videos or pornographic images might be circulated, due to threats received from their traffickers, which may potentially cause further trauma. This lack of data, stemming from low awareness, has led to the misconception that OCSEA and OCSAM are rare issues, which in turn exacerbates their prevalence in the region.

Why are Children more Prone to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Trafficking?

Children are among the most vulnerable groups in trafficking networks because of their developmental stage, limited agency, and reliance on adults for protection. A lack of proper parental guardianship, combined with external factors like environmental pressures, forced displacement, socio-economic inequality, and family instability, increases their vulnerability and creates opportunities for traffickers. These factors have been repeatedly recognised beyond West African borders as fundamental causes of child exploitation in both physical and online settings, as outlined below.

1. **Environmental challenges are key drivers of child trafficking in affected areas**

The increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters like floods, droughts, and erosion greatly affect the livelihoods of many, especially those in vulnerable and marginalised communities. These circumstances create opportunities for traffickers to target these populations with subtle diplomacy. Vulnerable communities might see their exploiters as saviours, tempted by false promises of hope amid their struggles after losing crops, livestock, and fertile land to extreme weather.

2. **Inadequate Social Security Protection**

Children face higher risks of trafficking when combined with factors like poor education, limited healthcare, poverty, and social protection. Their vulnerability is even greater due to a lack of awareness of safe internet use and the dangers of social media, which can lead to online exploitation. Disaster survivors often urgently need essentials such as food, shelter, healthcare, and sustainable income. Predators exploit this desperation by offering false promises of accommodation, food, or jobs. As a result, children resort to survival sex of trading their bodies for basic needs. This coping mechanism is tied to high rates of human rights abuses, torture, and maltreatment.

3. Migrants and Forcibly Displaced Families

Children from migrant and forcibly displaced families affected by war, ethno-religious crises, insurgencies, and other conflicts are among the most vulnerable to sex trafficking. These children often undertake unaccompanied journeys in search of a better life due to the hardships their families face. Socio-economic deprivation, broken family and social structures, and overcrowding in refugee camps increase their dependence on others offering help. Such conditions often expose them to predators who make false promises of a brighter future. According to recent global displacement data on West Africa, more than 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced in 2022, with an estimated 47.2 million children, including millions living in overcrowded refugee camps where violence, food scarcity and weak protection systems heighten risks (UNHCR, 2023). In such environments, traffickers exploit vulnerable children by offering shelter, transport or "opportunities," sometimes using digital platforms in refugee settlements to groom minors or coerce them into producing sexual content in exchange for necessities

4. Out-of-School Children

When families cannot afford essentials, children might have to drop out of school and wander the streets seeking food and income. Many of these children are active online, which makes them vulnerable to predators aiming to exploit them for sexual abuse materials in exchange for food and shelter. This situation significantly increases the risk of online grooming for these children.

5. Socio-Economic Inequality and Poverty

Socio-economic inequality significantly predicts child vulnerability to trafficking. Disparities in income, education, food security, and access to essential services create structural barriers that traffickers often exploit (Asiyanbi, 2021). Evidence indicates that increasing educational inequality leads to unequal life opportunities, with children from low-income families more likely to face hazardous work, exploitation, and early sexualisation (Blanden et al., 2022). Additionally, research shows that poverty forces families to make survival decisions that increase children's risk of falling for false promises of work, such as modelling, domestic chores, or online "opportunities" that are often used as pretexts for sexual exploitation (IFS, 2021).

6. Single Parenting, Family Instability and Emotional Distress

Family instability, especially in single-parent households facing economic hardship, raises children's risk of exploitation. Single mothers, who often carry most caregiving and financial burdens, frequently encounter gender discrimination and limited job prospects, increasing danger for both them and their kids. Economic pressure, stress, and social stigma can impair parents' ability to supervise or spot online threats. Emotional distress, like loneliness or unmet needs, can make children more susceptible to traffickers who manipulate through affection, digital companionship, or financial incentives, leading to grooming (Kloess et al., 2014). All the factors outlined above have heightened children's vulnerability to predators seeking sexualised images, livestream interactions, or exploitative "jobs" (NSPCC, 2023; IWF, 2024). Children of single parents, especially those residing in urban slums, are the most vulnerable to pornographic content exposure, increasing their risk of online sexual exploitation. According to the INTERPOL (2020) report, 70.8% of victims are contacted via social media platforms like Facebook, Badoo, Gayda, and Afribaba. The report also notes that 2.8% of children surveyed who were involved in sexual abuse came from single-parent households in urban slums.

All the factors mentioned above increase children's susceptibility to predators seeking sexualised images, livestream interactions, or exploitative "jobs." Coupled with the rapid growth of digital technologies, these

systemic vulnerabilities create a highly favourable environment for traffickers. They exploit these conditions to force children into making pornography, carry out sextortion schemes, produce child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and engage in live-streamed sexual exploitation. This troubling overlap underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to protect children from such grave abuses in the digital realm.

Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Child Trafficking

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a resurgence period of child trafficking through various digital platforms. Children in various households became more vulnerable to online predators as they spent more time online for remote schooling, entertainment, or income-generating opportunities. International monitoring has shown that crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic tend to increase both the vulnerability of potential victims and the adaptability of traffickers, who quickly shift towards online environments (UNODC, 2022). The closure of bars, clubs, and massage parlours as a quarantine measure for the new normal COVID-19 pandemic made the criminally minded people shift attention from traditional means of recruiting their potential victims to technology-based recruitment (Illias & UNODC, 2021). Social media platforms became a channel where recruiters contacted vulnerable children for fake jobs or "online or remote work with heavy pay," and monitored them under the pretence of providing economic aid.

The COVID-19 pandemic digitalised traffickers' modus operandi, with the adequate use of social media platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook, encrypted messaging, and video calls. According to Polaris Project (2021) and UNODC (2022), the internet remains one of the primary venues for child trafficking and recruitment, with online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and live-streamed abuse increasing significantly. Child-protection organisations have identified numerous social media platforms as recruitment sites and various websites hosting child sexual abuse images and observed a rise in self-produced and coercively created content involving minors (IWF, 2024). The Human Trafficking Institute (2021) reports that 65% of underage victims involved in active criminal sex exploitation were recruited through Facebook, 14% via Instagram, and 8% through Snapchat.

The 2013 ECPAT report reveals that in Central, East, and West Africa, 54% of children have seen peers in online pornographic materials, and around 10% have been approached to share sexualized images. For instance, in West Africa, girls aged 14 to 17 are recruited for pornographic films and bestiality. The report indicates that online child sexual abuse and exploitation are longstanding issues in West Africa, predating the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the pandemic and associated stay-at-home measures have increased children's exposure to unmoderated social media, where criminal networks target teens using fake accounts to boost profits. According to the 2020 INTERPOL Global Crime Trend report, online child sexual abuse and exploitation rank among the top ten crimes perceived as very high risk, with a sharp rise in their trend.

Cryptocurrencies: A Virtual Medium for Security Identity Protection

In today's global finance sector, safeguarding sensitive identity data and ensuring privacy against theft and damage is essential. The virtual banking platform prioritises user identity and data security by leveraging blockchain technology and implementing measures to prevent unauthorised access. This example underscores the importance of the digital economy in securely managing and protecting customer information within a decentralised system, eliminating the need for intermediaries. The security features of this financial system allow the digital economy to conduct all transactions freely, whether licit or illicit, without dependence on traditional financial intermediaries.

Operating on decentralised blockchain networks, these virtual currencies enable users to safeguard their identities through encryption, pseudonymous peer-to-peer transactions, and distributed networks. Examples include using Tor and I2P as gateway browsers, which protect information and ensure data privacy. These mechanisms help individuals bypass censorship and maintain privacy, thereby protecting their users (Hayes et al., 2017). For instance, both legal and illegal markets often operate as hidden services on the Tor network; this protocol allows servers and clients to stay anonymous while communicating securely. Such platforms have been used for promoting and distributing products like child pornographic images, child abuse sexual material, sextortion, and other forms of sexual exploitation through cryptocurrencies (Cekerevevac, Dvorak & Cekerevevac, 2016).

Researchers and law enforcement officials argue that as cryptocurrencies promote legal services, they also promote illegal services, such as money laundering, cyber extortion, online scams, child pornography, sale of online sexual abuse materials and trafficking of children for online abuse (Naheem, 2021; Europol, 2022). The pseudo-anonymous nature of many crypto transactions allows traffickers and other criminals to accept payments for illegal goods and services, including child sexual abuse content and streamed exploitation. At the same time, the Tor browser continues to hide its true identities and information to avoid reputational damage. Reports from Europol and other organisations indicate that virtual currencies, such as cryptocurrencies, are deeply integrated into serious and organised crime, with offenders continually adapting their techniques to exploit regulatory weaknesses and technical challenges in tracking virtual assets (Europol, 2022).

Cryptocurrencies offer an "identity shield" in cases of child trafficking related to pornography, sexual exploitation and online sex abuse materials. They enable payments for livestreamed abuse, pay-per-view CSAM, or subscription services displaying such content, all without revealing personal details or linking directly to any bank accounts. Experts increasingly recognise cryptocurrencies as an agent in promoting modern slavery and child sexual abuse. The medium continues to shield the faces of illicit business moguls, promote illegal transactions and encourage the expansion of online trafficking markets. Anonymity reduces perceived risk for offenders, creating significant barriers to detection and prosecution (Naheem, 2021; Basel Institute on Governance, 2021).

Dark Web: A Comfort Zone for Promoting Cyber-Sex

The dark web is a deliberately concealed part of the internet that employs layered encryption, notably The Onion Router (Tor), to protect users' identities and locations. Unlike the surface web, accessible through standard search engines, dark web sites demand specialised software and addresses, rendering them nearly invisible to most users. This infrastructure provides strong anonymity for both providers and users, fostering various illegal activities such as the distribution of child image pornography, paedophiles, a privacy zealot, hit men for hire, display of online sexual abuse, and the distribution of child sexual abuse material (Beech et al., 2008; UNODC, 2020; Cole, 2016). The dark web acts as a "safe space" for offenders involved in child trafficking and pornography, hosting forums, marketplaces, and closed groups where images and videos of abused children are traded, circulated, or commissioned. Criminals utilise these platforms to solicit live shows with minors, coordinate cross-border exploitation, and share methods to avoid detection. Studies on online child sexual exploitation reveal how anonymity tools and encrypted communication have changed offenders' methods, allowing them to groom children, exchange CSAM, and organise abuse without physical contact (Kloess et al., 2014; Beech et al., 2008).

The dark web's obscurity has led some scholars to call it the 'seedy underbelly' of the internet, where illicit transactions occur (Cole, 2016). This nickname stems from its hosting of obscure websites that search engines like Google do not index and which are not easily accessed via standard browsers. According to IWF, there were 3266 URLs containing child porn images, along with 51 previously unknown hidden services distributing child sexual abuse content, and this is over 55% of those found in 2013 (IWF, 2015). The report notes that the rise in hidden services sharing child abuse material poses greater dangers than other illicit content, contributing to an increase in child sex abuse via the dark web. Dr Gareth Owen's research on hidden TOR sites revealed that 75% of dark web users visited child abuse sites and explained the tactics consumers use to avoid law enforcement detection (IWF, 2015). While explaining the tactics, consumers follow a logical approach to accessing dark websites, which are regularly relocated. Users need to contact the data host to obtain the current location of the real sites. Sometimes, users or data hosts create fake or scam sites, making it challenging for law enforcement to distinguish between genuine and dummy sites. These tactics have been used continuously to safeguard users' identities and evade detection for illegal activities on the dark web. Examples of such illegal online markets include Alphabay, Dream Market, and Hansa Market, among others.

Although the dark web is not exclusively used for criminal activities, it does host legitimate transactions such as communication and legal dealings. However, the widespread use of encryption and anonymising software to protect users and data makes it a convenient space for cybercrime, especially when it comes to exploiting vulnerable individuals' human rights. Not all harmful material is confined to the dark web; much of it can also be accessed via the open internet.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Child trafficking in the digital era is a complex, urgent problem requiring swift, effective responses from society and authorities. Advances in technology have increased the risk of young, innocent individuals being exposed to unfiltered, often predatory content. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter facilitate traffickers' ability to promote their services, making it easier to target victims. The interplay of technological progress, globalisation, and socioeconomic inequalities creates an environment where child trafficking, particularly for pornography and online sexual exploitation, flourishes. Protecting vulnerable children involves breaking down criminal networks and addressing systemic injustices that lead to online sexual exploitation and abuse. A comprehensive, coordinated, and child-centred strategy is crucial to their safety and includes, among other measures, the following.

1. Enhance Digital Governance and Regulatory Structures in West Africa; West African governments must update and enforce cybercrime laws that suit today's digital environment. Regulations should address issues such as online grooming, CSAM distribution, anonymous cryptocurrency transactions linked to exploitation, unregulated advertising platforms, and dark-web marketplaces. The establishment of mandatory report requirements for social media, internet service providers, and financial institutions aiding and abetting illicit activities. These organisations should promptly block harmful content, report suspected exploitation, and cooperate with law enforcement agencies. Moreover, there is a need to develop advanced cyber-forensic skills and law enforcement capabilities in West Africa.
2. Countries should invest in specialised anti-trafficking cyber units capable of tracking cryptocurrency transactions, monitoring dark web activities, conducting undercover digital investigations, identifying and removing CSAM, and collaborating with international policing networks. Cross-border cooperation is essential because online trafficking networks operate across jurisdictions and exploit legal differences between them.
3. Promote digital literacy among children, parents, and educators. Educationists should implement digital safety programmes that teach children to identify illegal activities and online grooming behaviours used for abuse. Parents, especially those without proper access to education, need to be informed about the dangers of unregulated social media platforms and guided on how to recognise early signs of online exploitation in their children. Schools should incorporate thorough sex education and online safety curricula to equip children with the knowledge needed to prevent manipulation and exploitation.
4. Governments should prioritise social security policies that will protect children from exploitation. Tackling social security issues such as chronic poverty, income inequality, food insecurity, limited access to education, gender discrimination, unemployment, informal labour insecurity, and weak child protection systems remains critical in minimising online child exploitation. Strengthening social protection programmes, increasing welfare support for single-parent households, and improving mental health services can significantly lessen children's vulnerability to traffickers.
5. Strengthening public–private partnerships continues to play a vital role in dismantling online trafficking networks. Strengthening community awareness and survivor support is essential, as communities need to learn how to identify trafficking signs and report concerns.
6. Survivor-informed programmes can strengthen prevention efforts by increasing community awareness of online risks, lowering stigma around victims, providing psychosocial and reintegration support, and preventing re-victimisation of vulnerable individuals through sustained care. Using a trauma-informed approach is especially vital because children exploited digitally endure continued harm when their images or videos remain online even after the abuse stops.

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US Reaction to Wars in Ukraine and Gaza in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

The article undertakes a comparative examination of how the United States has responded to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, situating these reactions within broader debates on international law, humanitarian principles, and the contested legitimacy of the "rules-based international order." Both conflicts are marked by occupation, widespread civilian suffering, and repeated breaches of humanitarian law, yet Washington's stance has diverged sharply. In Ukraine, Russia's invasion has been cast as a direct assault on global stability, prompting sweeping sanctions, unprecedented military aid, diplomatic mobilisation, and strong moral condemnation. In Gaza, however, U.S. policy has consistently shielded Israel from accountability, employing vetoes or dilutions of United Nations resolutions and sustaining arms transfers despite mounting evidence of humanitarian catastrophe. Drawing on realist, liberal internationalist, and constructivist perspectives, the study argues that these differences are not accidental but reveal a selective application of norms shaped by strategic interests, alliance commitments, identity narratives, and media framing. By foregrounding civilian suffering and ethical concerns while maintaining scholarly rigour through verifiable sources, the article highlights how such double standards undermine international law, erode trust in global institutions, and intensify the divide between Western states and the Global South.

Keywords: United States; Double Standards; Ukraine War; Gaza; Israel; U.S. Foreign Policy; International Law

Introduction

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza stand as two of the most consequential and morally charged conflicts of the early twenty-first century. Each has resulted in extensive civilian casualties, mass displacement, the destruction of critical infrastructure, and profound regional instability. Each has also placed international law and humanitarian norms under severe strain. Yet despite these similarities, the reactions of the United States, the most influential actor in the contemporary international system, have been strikingly divergent. In Ukraine, following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Washington rapidly positioned itself as the leader of a broad Western coalition. The conflict was framed as an existential struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, and as a clear violation of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This framing justified unprecedented economic sanctions, massive military aid, intelligence sharing, and sustained diplomatic pressure on Moscow. In Gaza, by contrast, the United States has adopted a posture characterised by diplomatic protection of Israel, repeated vetoes in the United Nations Security Council, and the continuation, and in some cases expansion of military aid, even as international organisations and humanitarian agencies warned of famine, mass displacement, and the collapse of civilian life.

As Benoît Bréville observed in *Le Monde diplomatique*: "In terms of international law, there's no ambiguity: Russia's occupation of its Ukrainian neighbour is illegal, just as Israel's occupation of its Palestinian neighbour is illegal. The United Nations has repeatedly condemned them. Both should elicit the same censure from the West, which defends a 'rules-based order'. But they don't. In one instance, the United States and the European Union stand with the country under attack; in the other, with the attacker" (Bréville, 2024). This stark observation captures the central puzzle of the present study. If international law and humanitarian norms are universal, why are they applied so unevenly? Why does the language of war crimes, sanctions, and accountability dominate US discourse on Ukraine, while restraint, silence, or justification characterise its approach to Gaza?

This article addresses these questions through a systematic comparative analysis of US responses to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Rather than treating each conflict in isolation, it examines how similar categories of policy sanctions, military aid, humanitarian responses, refugee policies, and media narratives are deployed differently across the two cases. The analysis builds on authoritative academic literature, policy reports, and journalistic

investigations, ensuring that all source-based claims are explicitly quoted and traceable. The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it integrates fragmented strands of literature into a single comparative framework. Second, it bridges theoretical debates in international relations with concrete policy practices. Third, it highlights the broader global consequences of selective humanitarianism, particularly for perceptions of legitimacy among states and societies outside the Western bloc. By doing so, the article seeks not only to explain US behaviour but also to reflect critically on the future of international law and moral authority in a deeply divided world.

Literature Review

This literature review is organised into five interrelated subsections to provide a systematic and comparative understanding of existing scholarship. Each subsection specifies its approximate length and focuses on a distinct analytical dimension while maintaining coherence with the overall research question.

Perspectives on War in Ukraine and U.S. Foreign Policy Responses

The academic literature on the war in Ukraine has expanded rapidly since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Much of this scholarship frames the conflict as a watershed moment for the post–Cold War international order, emphasising violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the prohibition on the use of force. Within this body of work, the United States is frequently portrayed as a principal defender of the so-called rules-based international system. Robin Luckham characterises the war in Ukraine as part of a broader transformation of global security politics, arguing that it marks "another stage in the evisceration of the post-Cold War peace dividend and its replacement by a warmakers dividend, in which security trumps all else" (Luckham, 2025). This interpretation situates US policy within a wider militarisation of international relations, where military assistance and alliance cohesion are prioritised over diplomatic de-escalation.

Other scholars emphasise the normative dimension of US responses. Thussu notes that Western governments and media have consistently framed the invasion as "the most serious threat to the liberal international system based on the inviolability of national sovereignty" (Thussu, 2024). This framing has justified extraordinary measures, including sweeping sanctions, large-scale arms transfers, and intelligence cooperation. The United States' actions are thus often presented in the literature as necessary and proportionate responses to a clear breach of international law. Sanctions policy occupies a central place in analyses of the war in Ukraine. Studies highlight the unprecedented scale of economic warfare waged against Russia, including asset freezes, exclusion from financial systems, and restrictions on technology transfers. As reported in the Persian edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*: "A few months ago, European leaders wanted to believe that they would easily prevail in the 'total economic and financial war' launched against Moscow... Six months after the implementation of the first series of Western sanctions, the Russian economy has been hit, but the sought-after collapse has not occurred" (Richard, 2022). This observation has generated debate over the effectiveness and long-term consequences of sanctions as a tool of coercive diplomacy. Overall, the literature on Ukraine tends to portray US policy as normatively justified, strategically necessary, and broadly consistent with international law. However, this literature often treats the case in isolation, rarely engaging in sustained comparisons with other conflicts in which similar legal principles are at stake.

Gaza, Israel–Palestine, and U.S. Diplomatic and Military Support

In contrast to the Ukraine-focused scholarship, the literature on Gaza and the broader Israel–Palestine conflict has long emphasised asymmetry, occupation, and humanitarian crisis. Academic studies, human rights reports, and critical journalism repeatedly document the disproportionate impact of Israeli military operations on Palestinian civilians and infrastructure. Rony Brauman underscores the centrality of occupation in shaping the conflict, arguing that "military occupation and the annexation of territories by force, features common to Russia and Israel in these two situations, elicit reactions from the West that are diametrically opposed to one another" (Brauman, 2024). This observation directly challenges claims of normative consistency in Western foreign policy.

A substantial body of literature focuses on the United States' role in shielding Israel from accountability. Analysts note repeated US vetoes of United Nations Security Council resolutions, as well as continued military

assistance despite allegations of violations of international humanitarian law. Torunlu reports that "although the number of civilian casualties in Israel's bombing of the Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist Hospital in northern Gaza was much greater than losses in Russia's targeting of the Maternity Hospital in Mariupol… the US administration did not show the same harsh reaction toward Tel Aviv, when compared to Russia" (Torunlu, 2023).

Financial and military aid form another major theme. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, "Israel, the US's strongest ally in the Middle East, is the biggest recipient of US military aid in history, taking in $251.2 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars since 1959" (Masters & Merrow, 2025). The extraordinary scale and durability of this assistance have been widely interpreted in the literature as evidence of a deeply institutionalised strategic relationship that operates with limited sensitivity to fluctuations in Israeli domestic politics or patterns of military conduct. Masters and Merrow further emphasise the intensity of recent support, noting that "since October 2023, the United States has delivered ninety thousand tons of arms and equipment on eight hundred transport planes and 140 ships. The extraordinary flow of aid has included tank and artillery ammunition, bombs, rockets, and small arms" (Masters & Merrow, 2025).

Critical scholarship argues that the absence of effective conditionality attached to such assistance undermines the enforcement of international humanitarian law, particularly when extensive civilian casualties and the destruction of protected sites are documented. Highlighting this normative dissonance, Mehr News Agency observes that "U.S. President Joe Biden called the bombing of the Mariupol hospital an 'outrage to the world,' yet he remained silent when Israeli bombings and sieges decimated many hospitals in Gaza" (Mehr News Agency, 2023). Similarly, Torunlu (2025) notes that "although the number of civilian casualties in Israel's bombing of the Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist Hospital in northern Gaza was much greater than losses in Russia's targeting of the Maternity Hospital in Mariupol, the US administration did not show the same harsh reaction toward Tel Aviv" (Torunlu, 2023). Together, these studies frame US military and financial assistance to Israel not as episodic crisis management but as a structurally embedded policy that contrasts sharply with the punitive and conditional logic applied to Russia in the Ukraine war.

Double Standards, Selective Humanitarianism, and Comparative Critiques

A growing body of comparative and critical literature explicitly addresses the issue of double standards in Western and particularly US foreign policy. Scholars in this tradition argue that violations of international law, such as military occupation, attacks on civilians, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, do not elicit uniform responses. Instead, reactions vary significantly depending on the political identity, alliance status, and strategic value of the actor involved. Benoît Bréville articulates this critique with particular clarity, stating: "In terms of international law, there's no ambiguity: Russia's occupation of its Ukrainian neighbour is illegal, just as Israel's occupation of its Palestinian neighbour is illegal… Both should elicit the same censure from the West, which defends a 'rules-based order'. But they don't" (Bréville, 2024). This observation has become a cornerstone in debates on selective norm enforcement and is frequently cited as evidence of moral inconsistency within Western policy frameworks.

Rony Brauman further emphasises the structural nature of these asymmetries, arguing that "military occupation and the annexation of territories by force, features common to Russia and Israel in these two situations, elicit reactions from the West that are diametrically opposed to one another" (Brauman, 2024). For Brauman, the issue is not simply hypocrisy but the institutionalisation of unequal treatment under international law. Saul and Seymour extend this critique by situating violence within its historical and political context. They argue: "Violence is not a context-independent abstraction… we tend to forget that we celebrate the resistance fighters who, during the Second World War, killed Nazi occupiers" (Saul & Seymour, 2024). This argument challenges analytical frameworks that criminalise Palestinian resistance while legitimising Ukrainian resistance, despite both being framed as responses to occupation. This literature also highlights the global consequences of selective humanitarianism. Many scholars contend that double standards erode the legitimacy of international norms by signalling that legality is contingent on power rather than principle. This perception is particularly pronounced in the Global South, where Western condemnation of Russia is widely contrasted with silence or justification

regarding Gaza. As a result, scepticism toward Western-led international institutions has intensified, reinforcing calls for multipolarity and alternative normative orders.

Media Narratives, Representation, and the Hierarchy of Victims

Media analysis constitutes a crucial strand of the literature examining divergent responses to Ukraine and Gaza. Scholars argue that media framing plays a decisive role in shaping public opinion, moral judgment, and policy legitimacy. Daya Thussu observes that "while the victims of Russian invasion were lionised and helped materially and militarily by Western governments and received a very sympathetic response from the mainstream media, the victims of the Israeli invasion of Gaza are, more often than not, presented as partly culpable" (Thussu, 2024). This asymmetry in representation contributes to what several scholars describe as a hierarchy of victims. Ukrainians are frequently depicted as heroic defenders of democracy and European values, whereas Palestinians are often framed through a security lens that associates them with extremism or collective responsibility. Such representations normalise radically different political and humanitarian responses.

Bréville highlights the cultural and racialised dimensions of refugee coverage. He notes: "From the start of the war in Ukraine, Europe flung its doors open to millions of Ukrainian exiles… There's been no such welcome for the hundreds of thousands of people wanting to flee Gaza" (Bréville, 2024). This contrast reveals how perceptions of cultural proximity and similarity influence humanitarian solidarity. The literature emphasises that media narratives are not neutral reflections of reality but actively constitute political meaning. By framing Ukrainians as "like us" and Palestinians as "others," mainstream Western media help legitimise sanctions, arms transfers, and diplomatic mobilisation in one case, while rationalising restraint, silence, or unconditional support for military action in the other. These discursive practices reinforce policy double standards and make them appear morally intuitive to domestic audiences.

Theoretical Approaches: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism

Existing scholarship interprets the divergent US responses to Ukraine and Gaza through competing theoretical lenses in international relations. Realist scholars emphasise strategic interests, power balances, and alliance commitments. From this perspective, US support for Ukraine is understood as part of a broader confrontation with Russia, while unwavering backing of Israel reflects its role as a long-standing strategic ally in the Middle East. Liberal internationalist approaches, by contrast, focus on norms, institutions, and the credibility of international law. Robin Luckham warns that selective enforcement "undermines the credibility of the 'rules-based order'" and weakens trust in institutions such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice (Luckham, 2025). For liberal scholars, the central danger lies in the erosion of universal norms through inconsistent application.

Constructivist analyses foreground identity, discourse, and social meaning. Thussu argues that representations of Ukrainians as culturally proximate and Palestinians as fundamentally "other" shape moral judgment and political behaviour (Thussu, 2024). These identity-based narratives help explain why similar acts, such as attacks on civilian infrastructure, are interpreted and judged differently across cases. Despite the richness of these theoretical insights, much of the literature remains fragmented. Studies often focus on a single conflict or privilege one theoretical tradition. There is limited work that integrates sanctions policy, military aid, humanitarian discourse, and media narratives into a single comparative framework. Addressing this gap provides the central rationale for the present study.

International relations research often emphasises the interplay between geopolitical competition and international norms in shaping state behaviour. As Akhtar and Niazi explain, "this review adopts a realist perspective, which asserts that states act primarily in their own self-interest and pursue power and security in international relations" (Akhtar & Niazi, 2024). Their analysis of the historical "Great Game" further illustrates how great powers compete for regional influence and control, reinforcing the enduring role of power politics in international relations. At the same time, other studies emphasise the importance of international norms in shaping diplomatic behaviour. Examining Kenya's participation in multilateral diplomacy, Mbaabu, Maluki, and Mutuma note that "the strategic alignment of Kenya's foreign policy with international norms and its conduct

within multilateral relations has significantly evolved, enhancing its global standing whilst promoting national interests" (Mbaabu et al., 2025). Such findings suggest that contemporary international politics often reflects a complex interplay between geopolitical interests and the normative expectations embedded in international institutions.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design to examine the United States' responses to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. A comparative methodology is particularly appropriate for this research because both conflicts involve prolonged military violence, large-scale civilian suffering, and repeated references to international law and humanitarian norms, yet they have generated markedly different political, legal, and moral reactions from the same external actor. By placing these two cases side by side, the study seeks to illuminate patterns of consistency and divergence that are not readily visible in single-case analyses.

Research Design and Comparative Logic

The article employs a structured, focused comparison, a method commonly used in qualitative international relations research to analyse a small number of cases across a shared set of analytical dimensions. Ukraine and Gaza were selected not because they are identical conflicts, but because they are frequently evaluated by Western governments using similar normative vocabularies—sovereignty, self-defence, civilian protection, war crimes, and the rules-based international order. This makes them analytically comparable despite differences in geography, actors, and historical context.

The comparative logic of the study is guided by the following principle: when similar categories of international behaviour, such as military occupation, attacks on civilian infrastructure, and mass displacement, produce systematically different responses, those differences require explanation. Rather than assuming inconsistency as a given, the methodology treats divergence as an empirical phenomenon to be analysed through policy behaviour, discourse, and institutional practice.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study relies exclusively on qualitative data drawn from primary and secondary sources that are verifiable, publicly accessible, and widely cited in academic and policy-oriented literature.

Primary sources include:

- Official statements and speeches by US presidents, secretaries of state, and senior government officials.
- US voting behaviour and statements in international institutions, particularly the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly.
- Legislative and budgetary documents related to sanctions regimes and military assistance.
- Secondary sources include:
- Peer-reviewed academic books and articles in international relations, political economy, and media studies.
- Policy analyses and data published by reputable institutions such as the Council on Foreign Relations.
- Investigative and analytical articles from internationally recognised media outlets (e.g., *Le Monde diplomatique*).
- Reports and commentaries by human rights organisations and international news agencies.

A strict selection criterion was applied: only sources that are traceable, publicly available, and suitable for academic verification were included. Furthermore, in line with methodological transparency, all claims derived from external sources are quoted verbatim rather than paraphrased ambiguously. This approach minimises interpretive distortion and allows readers to independently assess the evidentiary basis of the analysis.

Analytical Dimensions

To ensure systematic comparison, the analysis is organised around four core dimensions that recur throughout both conflicts:

Sanctions and Economic Measures

This dimension examines whether and how economic coercion—such as sanctions, asset freezes, and trade restrictions has been employed by the United States. The scope, intensity, and stated justifications of sanctions are compared across the two cases.

Military Assistance and Arms Transfers

This dimension focuses on the scale, type, and conditionality of US military aid. It includes analysis of financial allocations, arms deliveries, and the degree to which assistance is linked to compliance with international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian and Refugee Policies

This dimension assesses US and allied responses to civilian suffering, including humanitarian aid, evacuation policies, and attitudes toward refugees and displaced populations.

Political and Media Discourse

This dimension analyses official rhetoric and dominant media narratives, focusing on how victims, perpetrators, and acts of violence are framed and morally evaluated. By applying the same analytical lenses to both cases, the study avoids anecdotal comparison and enhances internal validity.

Theoretical Framework and Interpretive Strategy

The analysis is informed by a pluralistic theoretical framework drawing on realism, liberal internationalism, and constructivism. Rather than treating these approaches as mutually exclusive, the study uses them as complementary interpretive tools.

- Realism is employed to analyse strategic interests, alliance politics, and power considerations shaping US behaviour. From this perspective, differential responses are interpreted as rational outcomes of geopolitical competition and long-standing security partnerships.
- Liberal internationalism provides criteria for evaluating consistency with international law, institutional norms, and the principles of the rules-based order. This framework highlights tensions between declared commitments and actual practices.
- Constructivism is used to analyse identity, discourse, and representation. It helps explain how narratives of "us" and "them," cultural proximity, and moral framing influence policy choices and public legitimacy.

This triangulated theoretical approach allows the study to capture both material and ideational dimensions of US foreign policy.

Method of Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis to examine textual and discursive data. Official statements, media articles, and policy reports were analysed for recurring themes, language patterns, and normative justifications. Attention was paid to the use of legal terminology (e.g., "war crimes," "self-defence," "genocide"), moral descriptors, and emotional framing. Rather than coding data quantitatively, the analysis prioritises contextual interpretation. This is consistent with the study's objective: not to produce generalizable causal laws, but to offer an in-depth, interpretive explanation of policy divergence.

Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations. First, both conflicts are ongoing, and policy positions may evolve. Second, reliance on publicly available sources means that internal decision-making processes cannot be fully reconstructed. Third, qualitative interpretation inevitably involves analytical judgment. To mitigate these limitations, the study triangulates multiple sources and maintains strict transparency in sourcing.

Ethical Considerations

Finally, the methodology is guided by an ethical commitment to foreground civilian suffering and humanitarian impact without instrumentalising them for polemical purposes. The aim is not advocacy, but critical analysis grounded in evidence, consistency, and scholarly responsibility.

Comparative Analysis / Findings

This section presents the study's core findings through a structured comparison of US responses to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The analysis is organised around four analytical dimensions identified in the methodology: sanctions and economic measures, military assistance and arms transfers, humanitarian and refugee policies, and political and media discourse. Examining these dimensions side by side reveals a consistent pattern of selective norm enforcement and differentiated moral framing.

Sanctions and Economic Measures: Punitive Enforcement versus Strategic Immunity

One of the most striking contrasts between the two cases lies in the use or absence of economic sanctions. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the United States rapidly mobilised what has been widely described as an unprecedented sanctions regime. Russian state assets were frozen, major banks were excluded from the SWIFT financial messaging system, and wide-ranging export controls were imposed in coordination with European allies. As *Le Monde diplomatique* observed: "European leaders wanted to believe that they would easily prevail in the 'total economic and financial war' launched against Moscow" (Richard, 2022). The sanctions were explicitly framed as punishment for violations of international law and as a deterrent against further aggression. US officials repeatedly emphasised accountability, legality, and the defence of a rules-based international order.

In the case of Gaza, however, no comparable economic measures were taken against Israel, despite sustained military operations, mass civilian casualties, and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. This absence is particularly notable given that similar legal categories, occupation, collective punishment, and attacks on protected sites have been invoked by international organisations and legal experts. Rony Brauman highlights this asymmetry succinctly: "Military occupation and the annexation of territories by force, features common to Russia and Israel in these two situations, elicit reactions from the West that are diametrically opposed to one another" (Brauman, 2024). Rather than sanctions, Israel has continued to enjoy preferential trade relations, diplomatic protection, and financial support from the United States. This divergence suggests that sanctions are not applied as neutral tools of norm enforcement but as instruments conditioned by alliance structures and geopolitical priorities.

Military Assistance and Arms Transfers: Conditional Support versus Unconditional Backing

A second major finding concerns the scale, framing, and conditionality of US military assistance. In Ukraine, military aid has been justified as necessary support for a sovereign state exercising its right to self-defence. The United States and its European allies have provided advanced weaponry, intelligence support, and financial assistance on an extraordinary scale. Thussu notes that "the US spending more than $100 billion, while the EU pledged $96 billion, a windfall for defence companies" (Thussu, 2024). Despite concerns about escalation, US officials have consistently framed this aid as defensive and normatively legitimate. The conflict has even been acknowledged as a proxy war, as reflected in German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's statement that European nations were "fighting a war against Russia" (Thussu, 2024).

In Gaza, by contrast, US military assistance takes a fundamentally different form. Rather than supporting civilian protection or reconstruction, US aid has consisted primarily of direct arms transfers to Israel during ongoing military operations. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, "since October 2023, the United States has delivered ninety thousand tons of arms and equipment on eight hundred transport planes and 140 ships" (Masters & Merrow, 2025). This assistance includes "tank and artillery ammunition, bombs, rockets, and small arms." Crucially, this support has continued despite mounting allegations of violations of international humanitarian law. Unlike in the Ukraine case, where Russia is accused, sanctioned, and isolated, Israel faces no meaningful conditionality tied to civilian protection. This unconditional backing constitutes one of the clearest empirical indicators of double standards in US foreign policy.

Humanitarian Law and Civilian Protection: Vocal Condemnation versus Strategic Silence

The third-dimension concerns US responses to civilian suffering and alleged violations of international humanitarian law. In Ukraine, US leaders have repeatedly and publicly condemned Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure. President Joe Biden described the bombing of a maternity hospital in Mariupol as "an outrage to the world" (Mehr News, 2023). Such statements were accompanied by calls for investigations and accountability. In Gaza, however, similar or greater levels of civilian harm have not elicited comparable reactions. Mehr News Agency notes the contrast directly: "U.S. President Joe Biden called the bombing of the Mariupol hospital an 'outrage to the world,' yet he remained silent when Israeli bombings and sieges decimated many hospitals in Gaza" (Mehr News, 2023).

Torunlu further reports that "although the number of civilian casualties in Israel's bombing of the Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist Hospital in northern Gaza was much greater than losses in Russia's targeting of the Maternity Hospital in Mariupol… the US administration did not show the same harsh reaction toward Tel Aviv" (Torunlu, 2023). This pattern of selective outrage reveals that humanitarian law is invoked not as a universal standard but as a discretionary language deployed against adversaries while withheld from allies.

Refugees and Humanitarian Access: Inclusion versus Exclusion

US and European responses to refugees provide another revealing contrast. Millions of Ukrainians were rapidly granted temporary protection and access to housing, employment, and social services. As Bréville observed: "From the start of the war in Ukraine, Europe flung its doors open to millions of Ukrainian exiles" (Bréville, 2024). No comparable welcome has been extended to Palestinians fleeing Gaza. Bréville continues: "There's been no such welcome for the hundreds of thousands of people wanting to flee Gaza" (Bréville, 2024). Instead, borders have remained closed, evacuation routes have been restricted, and humanitarian access has been heavily constrained. These contrasting responses reinforce the perception of a hierarchy of victims, where empathy and solidarity are distributed unevenly along cultural and political lines.

Political and Media Discourse: Heroes, Villains, and Moral Framing

Finally, the analysis reveals profound differences in political rhetoric and media narratives. Ukrainians are consistently portrayed as heroic defenders of democracy. President Zelensky has been celebrated in Western parliaments and media, reinforcing a narrative of moral clarity. By contrast, Palestinians in Gaza are frequently framed as complicit or suspect. Thussu notes that "the victims of the Israeli invasion of Gaza are, more often than not, presented as partly culpable in their support for Hamas" (Thussu, 2024). This framing shifts moral responsibility away from state violence and toward civilian populations. Such discursive patterns legitimise policy choices. They make sanctions and military aid appear morally necessary in one case, while rendering silence and complicity acceptable in another.

Summary of Key Findings

Taken together, the comparative analysis reveals a consistent pattern:

- Sanctions are applied rigorously against adversaries but withheld from allies.
- Military aid is framed as defensive in Ukraine and unconditional in Gaza.

- Humanitarian law is invoked selectively.
- Refugees are welcomed selectively.
- Media narratives construct unequal moral categories of victims.

These findings confirm the central argument of the article: US responses to Ukraine and Gaza reflect not universal principles but a selective and power-conditioned application of norms.

Discussion

The comparative findings presented in the previous section raise fundamental questions about the nature of norm enforcement, moral authority, and power in contemporary international politics. This discussion interprets those findings through the theoretical lenses outlined earlier, realism, liberal internationalism, and constructivism, while also considering their broader implications for the legitimacy of international law and the evolving global order.

Double Standards as a Structural Feature of U.S. Foreign Policy

One of the central insights emerging from the analysis is that double standards in US responses to Ukraine and Gaza are not episodic inconsistencies but structural features of US foreign policy. From a realist perspective, this outcome is neither surprising nor anomalous. Realism holds that states prioritise survival, power, and strategic advantage over abstract norms. Ukraine represents a critical front in US and NATO competition with Russia, a rival great power whose influence Washington seeks to contain. Israel, by contrast, is a long-standing strategic ally that anchors US influence in the Middle East.

Within this framework, norms such as international law and humanitarian principles function instrumentally. They are invoked when they align with strategic objectives and sidelined when they threaten core alliances. The absence of sanctions on Israel, despite extensive civilian harm in Gaza, reflects this logic. As Brauman notes, "military occupation and the annexation of territories by force… elicit reactions from the West that are diametrically opposed to one another" (Brauman, 2024). From a realist standpoint, this divergence is not hypocrisy but rational behaviour within a system defined by power asymmetries. However, while realism explains *why* such double standards occur, it does not address their normative or systemic consequences. This is where liberal internationalist and constructivist perspectives become essential.

Liberal Internationalism and the Crisis of the Rules-Based Order

From a liberal internationalist perspective, the selective application of norms documented in this study poses a serious challenge to the credibility of the rules-based international order. Liberal institutionalism posits that the efficacy of international law, institutions, and norms is contingent upon their consistency and universality (e.g., Ikenberry, 2001, pp. 50–52; Keohane, 1984, pp. 88–92; Ruggie, 1982, p. 382)." When powerful states enforce rules selectively, they undermine the very institutions they claim to defend. The US response to Ukraine has been framed as a defence of sovereignty, civilian protection, and international legality. Yet the contrasting response to Gaza exposes a profound tension between rhetoric and practice. Luckham warns that such inconsistencies "undermine the credibility of the 'rules-based order'" and weaken trust in global governance institutions (Luckham, 2025). If international law applies only to adversaries and not to allies, its normative force is fundamentally eroded.

This erosion has tangible consequences. The United States' reluctance to engage seriously with rulings and provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice regarding Gaza signals to other states that compliance with international law is optional and politically contingent. Over time, this weakens institutional authority and encourages norm evasion by other actors. Moreover, liberal internationalism emphasises the role of legitimacy in sustaining order. Legitimacy cannot be imposed by power alone; it requires belief in fairness and impartiality. The findings of this study suggest that such a belief is increasingly absent, particularly outside the Western world.

Constructivism, Identity, and the Moral Geography of Suffering

Constructivist approaches offer critical insight into how moral judgments are socially constructed and politically mobilised. The analysis demonstrates that US responses are shaped not only by material interests but also by identity-based narratives and discursive practices. Thussu's observation that Ukrainians are portrayed as "like us," while Palestinians are framed as "others," captures a deeper moral geography of suffering (Thussu, 2024). In this geography, empathy is distributed unevenly, and some lives are rendered more grieved than others. These representations are reinforced by media narratives, political rhetoric, and cultural proximity.

Such discursive constructions help explain why similar acts, such as the bombing of hospitals, provoke outrage in one context and silence in another. When Palestinians are implicitly associated with terrorism or collective guilt, civilian suffering is normalised or relativised. Conversely, when Ukrainians are framed as defenders of democracy, their suffering demands immediate redress. Constructivism thus reveals that double standards are sustained not only through policy decisions but also through shared meanings and social expectations that render those decisions intelligible and acceptable to domestic audiences.

Global South Perspectives and the Erosion of Western Moral Authority

One of the most significant implications of selective norm enforcement is its impact on perceptions in the Global South. Many states and societies outside the Western bloc view US responses to Ukraine and Gaza as emblematic of long-standing Western hypocrisy. This perception has been articulated explicitly by scholars and commentators who argue that international law has become a tool of domination rather than justice. Saul and Seymour argue that "violence is not a context-independent abstraction" and warn against moral frameworks that ignore historical oppression (Saul & Seymour, 2024). Such arguments resonate strongly in postcolonial contexts, where experiences of occupation, intervention, and selective humanitarianism are deeply embedded in collective memory.

The growing reluctance of countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa to fully align with Western positions on Ukraine cannot be understood solely in terms of geopolitical interests. It is also a response to perceived moral inconsistency. The Gaza case, in particular, has reinforced scepticism toward Western claims of universal values and accelerated calls for a multipolar order in which normative authority is less concentrated.

Humanitarianism, Instrumentalisation, and Ethical Consequences

Another critical issue raised by the findings is the instrumentalisation of humanitarian discourse. In the case of Ukraine, humanitarian language is deployed to mobilise support, justify sanctions, and legitimise military aid. In Gaza, similar language is diluted, deferred, or replaced by security-centred narratives. This instrumentalisation carries ethical costs. When humanitarian principles are applied selectively, they lose their universality and risk becoming rhetorical tools rather than moral commitments. As Amnesty International's Agnes Callamard warned, "This standard double is a bigger threat to human rights in the current situation" (Mehr News, 2023). The normalisation of selective empathy also desensitises international audiences to suffering that falls outside dominant moral frames. Over time, this undermines the very idea of civilian protection as a universal obligation.

Implications for International Law and Future Conflicts

Finally, the findings of this study have important implications for the future of international law and conflict governance. If powerful states continue to apply norms selectively, weaker states and non-state actors may increasingly reject international legal frameworks as illegitimate. These risks are accelerating a shift toward power-based rather than rule-based international relations. The comparative analysis of Ukraine and Gaza thus reveals more than policy inconsistency; it exposes a deeper crisis of legitimacy in global governance. Whether this crisis leads to reform or fragmentation remains an open question. What is clear, however, is that the credibility of international law depends not on rhetoric but on consistent practice.

Conclusion

This article examines US responses to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza through a comparative analytical framework based on international relations theory. By systematically analysing sanctions policies, military aid, humanitarian responses, and political and media discourse, the study reveals a consistent pattern of selective enforcement of norms in US foreign policy. The findings reveal a clear divergence in policy practices. In the case of Ukraine, the US quickly mobilised broad economic sanctions, large-scale military aid, and diplomatic pressure against Russia, arguing that these actions were necessary to defend sovereignty, international law, and the rules-based international order. In the Gaza conflict, by contrast, Washington has avoided imposing sanctions on Israel, continued to provide significant military support, and repeatedly used diplomatic mechanisms to shield its ally from international accountability, despite widespread humanitarian concerns.

These differences suggest that the application of international norms is closely linked to strategic interests, alliance commitments, and geopolitical calculations. From a realist perspective, this pattern reflects the logic of power politics: Ukraine represents a vital front in the strategic competition with Russia, while Israel remains a key long-term ally in the Middle East. In such a framework, international norms often have an instrumental rather than universal function. However, the selective application of norms has broader implications for the legitimacy of international institutions and the credibility of the international rule-based order. Liberal internationalist views emphasise that international law derives much of its authority from stability and universality. When powerful states apply these norms unevenly, perceptions of fairness and legitimacy in structures of global governance are undermined.

Constructivist insights further highlight the role of discourse and identity in shaping international responses. Media narratives and political rhetoric often create moral hierarchies of victims, portraying some populations as deserving of immediate solidarity while marginalising others. These narratives influence public perceptions and help legitimise different political responses to similar humanitarian crises. Finally, the comparative analysis of Ukraine and Gaza highlights a broader tension between the universal language of international norms and the strategic realities of global politics. While international law and humanitarian principles remain central to diplomatic rhetoric, their practical application continues to be shaped by power, identity, and geopolitical interests. Addressing this gap between principle and practice remains essential to maintain the credibility of international institutions and strengthen the legitimacy of global governance in an increasingly fragmented international system.

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Book Review

Title: ***Impeachment in the Nigerian Presidential System: Challenges, Successes and the Way Forward***

Author: Omololu Fagbadebo

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Year: 2020

Pages: 515

Introduction

The book provides comprehensive insight and analysis into the impeachment process and the constitutional mechanisms that address accountability within the presidential system of government. The author draws on political science, constitutional law, public governance and comparative politics to justify his position on the impeachment process in Nigeria, its evolution, manipulation, and failure in the Fourth Republic. The work is timely, as impeachment cases have been surging in recent times. The author interrogated the political realities of impeachment in the Fourth Republic, reflecting on it as a force shaping Nigerian politics.

Fagbadebo's main argument in the book, from a constitutional perspective, is that impeachment in the Nigerian presidential system is an accountability mechanism to check the executive branch's excessive use of power, but it has been hijacked and used as a weapon of political vendetta by political gladiators. The political elite have explored the mechanism as an instrument of bargaining for power and pecuniary interests, especially by the various political godfathers. The author further noted that the failure of impeachment as an accountability mechanism in the presidential system results from dysfunctional institutions, godfatherism, money politics, and the concentration of power, which characterise the country's political culture.

Several case studies were used to strengthen the book, especially the episode in Osun State and other states of the federation in the Fourth Republic. The cases showed how power politics among political gladiators, as well as informal channels, structures, and institutions, shaped the outcome of impeachment in Nigeria. The author explored the role of the judiciary, which often holds contradictory or opposing views, slowing or preventing the impeachment process from seeing the light of day, or even sometimes manipulating the process depending on the money bags.

Context of the Book

The book has 10 chapters, each exploring the impeachment process with a theoretical foundation grounded in empirical data. The first chapter on power and politics in the corridors of the presidential system of government offers insights into the tension between constitutional power and the practical realities of politics. He also delved into the next by comparing the presidential systems of different democratic states to provide insights into the Nigerian situation, experiences, and peculiarities. The author discussed how the separation of powers and checks and balances are needed to check the excesses of the executive branch

and avoid wholesale concentrations of power. The executives enjoy prolonged tenure in power and autonomy; impeachment should be intended to ensure good governance and accountability in the system. These theoretical postulations set a standard for understanding Nigeria's challenges.

In Chapter Two, the author contextualised impeachments in other countries with a presidential system, noting that their impeachment processes include standard legislative oversight procedures, constitutional limits, and safeguards. Their impeachment process was more credible and well-coordinated, unlike the Nigerian one, which is characterised by institutional failure and elite involvement that often distort the process. These sections help readers understand comparative politics and the limitations of impeachment processes in Nigeria.

In Chapter Three, the author further contends that the success of impeachment in Nigeria is determined by actors such as the legislature at both the national and state levels, as well as political parties. The author acknowledges that there is more to impeachment processes, noting that the success depends on political actors rather than constitutional provisions. This behaviour shows how personal interest, party loyalties, and informal power networks shape legislative action. These inquiries provide evidence of the power tussle between formal constitutional provisions and the pervasive informal political influence.

Chapter Four presents cases of impeachment in Nigeria since 1999, most of which resulted from political party rivalries, godfatherism, executive-legislative conflict, and intra- and inter-party rivalries rather than alleged gross misconduct. This chapter presents empirical evidence supporting the claim that impeachment has become a weapon of political vendetta rather than a tool of accountability in Nigerian politics. This misuse of instruments undermines public trust in accountability and in democratic institutions, and weakens legislative due process.

Chapter Five analyses the impeachment episode in Osun State to consolidate the broader view of impeachment, in which local political elites use it to settle power scores. This chapter shows how constitutional rules can be manipulated, coerced, and ridiculed. This chapter uses a micro-level analysis to examine how weaknesses in Nigerian political culture manifest in a case study of a specific state. Chapter six examines the judicial architecture and its roles in the impeachment process. The author explains how conflicting judicial pronouncements, occasioned by external political pressure, undermined the institution's impartiality. These actions undermine the constitutional due process and weaken the rule of law regarding the impeachment process. The chapter calls for judicial independence and impartiality, noting that without judicial independence, the impeachment process will undermine the accountability it is meant to achieve.

In Chapter Seven, the author appraises the behavioural disposition of members of the legislature, shaped by personal interests rather than by constitutional duty and rules. The impeachment process serves as a tool for seeking favours, lobbying for positions, and punishing opponents. This chapter reveals how deeply ingrained the patron-client culture is, how it has distorted and eroded constitutional and democratic processes, and how it has weakened the legislature's institutional responsibility. Chapter Eight compares the impeachment episodes in the Parliamentary and presidential systems of government in the First and Second Republics, respectively. The account shows that both regimes share the same attribute: undermining the constitutional process designed for accountability. The author argues that weak institutions, elite interests, and political culture are not the only problems; the constitutional provisions also exacerbate these weaknesses.

Chapter Nine of the book presents the contradictions that characterise the application of the Constitution's impeachment provision. Described as the "Sacred Cows" phenomenon, the author presents the impeachment process as one that sees the light of day despite evidence of gross misconduct. The author admits that the selective enforcement of impeachment provisions undermines the democratic credentials of political systems and undermines the oversight purpose of constitutional checks and balances, thereby promoting impunity. Chapter Ten proposes measures to ensure the integrity of the impeachment process in Nigeria's presidential system. It reinforces the point that institutional reforms must be accompanied by a broader political culture, transparency, and transformation.

Across the 10 chapters, the book offers critical insights into the impeachment in Nigeria's Fourth Republic presidential system, highlighting the challenges posed by the country's political cultures, elite interference, and institutional failures. The book contributes to an understanding of Nigerian government and politics,

showing how informal networks and power dynamics hinder formal constitutional duties. The author offers a consoling proposal: institutions need to be strengthened, and there should be a shift in political norms and practices away from political vendetta. The book offers important, insightful contributions to the governance challenge in Nigeria's presidential system of the Fourth Republic impeachment, drawing on detailed empirical data from case studies.

Appraisal of the Book

Impeachment in the Nigerian Presidential System: Challenges, Successes and the Way Forward is a valuable and comprehensive book that presents detailed theoretical propositions and empirical case studies, providing a reference for researchers and readers and helping them understand impeachment in broader terms. The work contributes to the development of a democratic setting and accountability in Nigeria. The author's intuition not only addresses impeachment as a constitutional matter but is also shaped by factors such as the institutions, elites, and behavioural dispositions of the formal and informal political actors involved in controlling the constitutional mechanisms of accountability.

The book is rich in analysis, but there could be a deeper understanding of the phenomenon discussed. Although the author highlights the influence of political culture in Nigerian politics across both presidential and parliamentary systems, there is a need to expand the scope to deepen understanding of the historical context, evolution, legacies, socio-economic conditions, and party structures that enabled patronage politics. Similarly, the analysis of judicial involvement might be strengthened with a deeper analysis of the landmark court case and its long-term implications for misinterpretations of the Constitution. Claims of the judiciary's complicity would require more empirical evidence to substantiate the analysis. The author also failed to juxtapose the internal rivalries among judges in the judiciary, which may truncate judicial due process. The book references other presidential democracies, but for a more systemic one, perhaps the author could have considered the framework of institutional performance, which would have sharpened the contrast and clarified what Nigerians can realistically benefit from those systems.

The book presents opportunities for expansion, particularly regarding the roles of civil society organisations and the media in society. Their roles could be pivotal in shaping public opinion of the impeachment process and in holding elected officials accountable for their actions. The author did not consider the media as a tool for shaping public opinion on the impeachment process, thereby placing greater emphasis on elites and institutions while neglecting citizens' engagement and civil society activism. Understanding how citizens react to the impeachment process will provide greater insights and greater feasibility in the mechanism.

The work's strength paved the way for widespread acceptance, with a clear theoretical foundation in presidentialism, the separation of powers, and the purpose of impeachment. These details provided a strong foundation for the subsequent chapters. The rich empirical evidence from primary data lends the work relevance and credibility, especially by using Osun State and other cases as practical examples in the Fourth Republic impeachment. The insights gained from the authors' eye-witness accounts of impeachment cases strengthened the analysis therein. However, comparative eyewitness accounts from other climes will deepen understanding of the factors that shape the impeachment process in Nigeria. The use of Larry Diamond's (2008) work on the state of democracy in Africa might bolster the work and help show the contemporary implications of impeachment. The use of Robert Dahl's (2008) theories on democracy can further substantiate the discussion on accountability. Despite these weaknesses, the author's arguments are largely logical, well-structured, detailed, and supported by empirical evidence. The link between political culture and impeachment is greatly convincing.

Conclusion

Fagbadebo's book is a timely study of accountability in Nigeria's presidential impeachment process. The book successfully exposed the contradictions between constitutional duty and political realities in Nigeria, where impeachments have been used as a bargaining tool rather than a tool for good governance and democratic integrity. It combined different theories, comparative politics, analysis and empirical evidence to substantiate the work. It is a valuable and credible job for a researcher in the Nigerian government and politics, constitutional law, and democratic good governance. Although some areas need deeper exploration, the books' strengths outweigh their weaknesses. It provides insights into the failure of

impeachment in the Fourth Republic and offers recommendations for reform. Importantly, the work challenges researchers to look beyond and ask broader questions about how democratic government can function effectively in a place where political culture and elite interests mostly undermine constitutional norms and practices. Fagbadebo's work sits within broader discussions and ongoing debates on governance, accountability, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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