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NIGERIA, ECOWAS AND REGIONAL ORDER: AN ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT TINUBU'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

This study explores Nigeria's foreign policy under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, including ECOWAS and West African regional order. A qualitative research design based exclusively on secondary sources illuminates Nigeria's multidimensional external relations using Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory, the Rational Actor Model, African Realism, Neoclassical Realism, and Linkage Theory. The analysis demonstrates that Tinubu's "4-D Doctrine" Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora aims to revitalise Nigeria's regional and global diplomacy after years of inactivity. This administration has obtained major investment commitments from global partners, enlarged Nigeria's involvement in the G20 and BRICS, and pragmatically managed regional tensions. The gap between investment announcements and actual disbursements, institutional weaknesses in Nigeria's diplomatic machinery, the fragmentation of West Africa by the exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS and the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), and profound domestic constraints like insecurity, economic volatility, and governance deficit have limited these gains. The analysis demonstrates that Tinubu's foreign policy restored access to global and regional forums but failed to deliver meaningful results. Nigeria's imperial ambitions and home vulnerabilities collide, showing that regional strength derives from domestic renewal, not diplomacy. West Africa's fragmentation into rival blocs, democratic decline, and new geopolitical actors necessitate a principled and pragmatic response. This study offers Nigerian policymakers, ECOWAS institutions, and international partners actionable advice. Nigeria must restructure diplomatic machinery, transform diaspora participation from rhetoric to action, promote flexible regional engagement, and base foreign policy on home regeneration. ECOWAS should aggressively change institutions, vote on governance issues instead of consensus, communicate with AES states, and mobilise a core group of reform champions. International partners need ECOWAS reform support and flexible, working cooperation with both blocs.

Keywords: Nigeria, Foreign Policy, Tinubu, ECOWAS, Regional Order.

Introduction

Upon taking office on 29 May 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural address marked a clear departure from a passive foreign policy stance, asserting that Nigeria would "more actively lead the regional and continental quest for collective prosperity" (Presidential Communications Team, 2023). This dedication was swiftly challenged. Shortly after his inauguration, the new administration faced its first significant foreign policy crisis when a military coup occurred in Niger Republic. This event was part of a series of takeovers that had established a "coup belt" throughout West Africa (International Crisis Group, 2023). In addition to the complexities, Tinubu was elected Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Authority of Heads of State and Government on 9 July 2023, a role that positioned him at the forefront of the regional response to the worsening security and political situation (ECOWAS, 2023).

This analysis explores the foreign policy of President Tinubu's administration, focusing on its complex and frequently turbulent relationship with ECOWAS and the quest for regional stability. Tinubu's foreign policy, known as the "4Ds Doctrine", Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora aims to establish a connection between Nigeria's external relations and the stability of the region, emphasising the importance of domestic prosperity (Federal Ministry of Information, 2024). At the heart of this vision lies the belief that democratic governance is of utmost importance, and that any unconstitutional changes in government pose a significant threat that must be addressed with unified determination (Tinubu, 2023).

Nonetheless, this strong defence of constitutional order has taken place amid significant regional fragmentation. The simultaneous withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS, along with the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), has significantly undermined the unity of the bloc and Nigeria's longstanding dominant position. The Tinubu era has been characterised by a range of contradictions and significant challenges. The situation has required a careful balance between the risk of military intervention in Niger and the necessity for dialogue, all while addressing domestic opposition and the strain on Nigeria's armed forces (Ewokor, 2023). The operationalisation of a regional standby force to combat terrorism has necessitated leadership, particularly as significant regional partners step back from the collaborative framework (Ogunleye, 2024).

In addition to security concerns, the administration has addressed the institutional weaknesses within ECOWAS, pushing for reforms aimed at ensuring the enforcement of community laws, like those of the ECOWAS Court to evolve the bloc from a mere "club of nations" into a cohesive legal community (Akinyemi, 2024). Moreover, the quest for regional influence has been intertwined with efforts for economic integration, as evidenced by bilateral agreements with Benin and initiatives to enhance the region's modest 15% share of intra-African trade (African Development Bank, 2023).

This analysis will delve into President Tinubu's foreign policy, which seeks to rejuvenate Nigeria's regional leadership amidst a backdrop of democratic decline and shifting geopolitical dynamics. This analysis evaluates the achievements and shortcomings of the "4Ds

Doctrine," the handling of the AES schism, the difficulties surrounding collective security, and the essential connection between Nigeria's internal revitalisation and its ability to serve as the "big brother" of West Africa (Campbell, 2024). Ultimately, Tinubu's foreign policy narrative extends beyond Nigeria's involvement in the region; it encompasses the future of the regional order that the country has long aimed to secure.

Understanding Nigeria as a Regional Power

Nigeria's regional role has been examined through numerous theoretical lenses, reflecting International Relations debates regarding power, hegemony, and leadership in Africa. Hulse (2016) proposes a nuanced framework for understanding regional power behaviour, arguing that powerful states like Nigeria vary their behaviour across time and policy sectors based on competing concerns like economic power, functional efficiency, international legitimacy, and neo-patrimonial networks (pp. 12-15). This theory helps explain Nigeria's foreign policy inconsistencies, such as its switching between ECOWAS trade integration and regional judicial institutions.

Awosusi and Ogunnubi (2025) propose the African realism framework, which focuses African experiences and viewpoints (pp. 8-12). This perspective questions whether mainstream International Relations theories can explain non-Western regional power behaviour. According to African realist conceptions of African internationalism, Nigeria uses its territoriality as a diplomatic tool to assert its regional goals (Awosusi & Ogunnubi, 2025, pp. 45-48). Nigeria's foreign policy combines Pan-African compassion with economic protectionism and national security, according to the framework.

Obono, Aliegba, and Baban'umma (2024) use regional leading power theory to assess ECOWAS's order-making techniques and member state relations (pp. 462-464). Their application of this theory to Nigeria's position in Côte d'Ivoire shows how regional power frameworks might explain Nigeria's diplomatic and military contributions to regional stability.

Anele and Ikegwuiro (2025) used the rational actor model to examine the Tinubu government, assuming that a reasonable leader establishes and pursues national goals for state benefits. This theory helps explain Tinubu's foreign policy calculations, especially the "4-D Doctrine."

Uvere and Onyendi (2025b) use neorealism to analyse Tinubu's ECOWAS leadership (pp. 3-5). Neorealism emphasises state actors' strategic actions to maintain regional stability and balance power among member states. Under Tinubu, the government has become more proactive and interventionist, responding quickly to unconstitutional changes (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025b, Pp. 12-14).

Nwangwu (2024) uses liberal internationalism to explain how Tinubu's foreign policy shift reflects liberal democracy's global supremacy in the context of West African military coups (pp. 756-758). The framework highlights Tinubu's ideational basis and its conflicts with regional integration imperatives.

Uvere and Onyendi (2025a) use regional hegemonic stability theory to argue that a dominant power in a regional system maintains order and stability (pp. 5-7). This theoretical approach is useful for comprehending Nigeria's ECOWAS leadership obligations and smaller member states' expectations.

Nigeria's Historical Role in ECOWAS and Regional Order

A large literature traces Nigeria's founding and continued leadership in ECOWAS and regional stability. According to Nwangwu (2024), Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) establishes foreign policy goals that promote African integration and unity, laying the groundwork for Nigeria's longstanding focus on Africa.

Nigeria has paid a high price for regional stability. Nigeria spent an estimated US$8 billion and lost at least 500 soldiers and hundreds more injured or missing during ECOWAS's seven-year peacekeeping effort in Liberia and Sierra Leone (The New Humanitarian, 1999, paras. 3-4 (Nwangwu, 2024, p. 757). Nigeria is ECOWAS's largest financier, contributing 40.9% of overall Community expenditure between 2003 and 2015 and approximately US$1.177 billion in Community levies over sixteen years.

Nigeria's backing for Southern African anti-apartheid movements shows its continental leadership. The anti-apartheid movement cost Nigeria US$61 billion by 1994 (Ngwenya, 2010, p. 112; referenced in Nwangwu, 2024, p. 757). The country pioneered the UN Special Committee against Apartheid in 1963 and led it for years. According to Okolo (2008, p. 96; quoted in Nwangwu, 2024, p. 757), the Nigerian High Commission in Botswana issued 300 Nigerian passports to black South Africans banned travel by apartheid.

The literature also addresses Nigeria's regional influence through border diplomacy. Nigeria exploits its land, air, sea, cyberspace, and outer space frontiers as soft and hard power tools, according to Awosusi and Ogunnubi (2025, pp. 67-72). However, President Muhammadu Buhari's unilateral border closure in August 2019 violated Nigeria's liberal border policy and ECOWAS's mobility protocol, harming regional integration (Omotuyi, 2025, pp. 156-158).

Nigeria's Afrocentric and good neighbourliness rhetoric resonated under Buhari. Under Niger Republic President Mohamed Bazoum, key Nigerian officials and moguls were honoured by the Nigerien government, and a boulevard was named after President Buhari (Nwangwu, 2024, p. 758). Financial donations from the Nigerian government, including ₦1.4 billion for vehicle purchases for high-ranking officials, were allowed by President Buhari (Nwangwu, 2024, p. 758).

Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS interventions differs across policy sectors, according to Hulse (2016) (pp. 22-25). Domestic opposition prevented Nigeria from leading ECOWAS trade integration, but a newly democratic Nigeria sought international legitimacy by establishing the ECOWAS Court of Justice (Hulse, 2016, pp. 28-30). Obono et al. (2024) found that Nigeria chose diplomacy, mediation, and electoral help over military involvement in Côte d'Ivoire, demonstrating a multifaceted approach to regional crisis management.

The Tinubu Doctrine: The 4-D Diplomacy

Under President Tinubu, Nigeria's foreign policy changed with the "4-D Doctrine". Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, described the 4-D framework as Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora, which promotes long-term regional stability by upholding democratic values and ensuring orderly transitions.

In Vanguard Newspaper, Adeoye (2025) claims that Tuggar has implemented Tinubu's 4-D vision globally. This view holds that Tuggar's pragmatic diplomacy, strong relationships, and human-centered engagement have repositioned Nigeria globally, achieving record successes in diplomacy, investment, cultural ties, and citizen welfare (Adeoye, 2025, paras. 5-8). Nwangwu (2024) gives the most extensive scholarly study of this policy shift, stating that it departs from Nigeria's historical pursuit of Afrocentricism and good neighbourliness as described by Section 19(b) of the 1999 Constitution (pp. 759-760). ECOWAS' Fundamental Principles, outlined in Article 4 of its Revised Treaty of 1975, emphasise equality and interdependence, solidarity and collective self-reliance, non-aggression, and good neighbourliness. The policy also deviates from these principles.

Anele and Ikegwuiro (2025) explore Tinubu's first two years of foreign policy and find that the 4-D framework affected the administration's international contacts (pp. 8-10). After taking office, Tinubu became ECOWAS Chairman, which allowed him to participate internationally, notably in West Africa (Anele & Ikegwuiro, 2025, p. 11). Importantly, Tinubu used soft power diplomacy instead of "power diplomacy" with military administrations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger (Anele & Ikegwuiro, 2025, pp. 14-15).

Uvere and Onyendi (2025b) evaluate Tinubu's mediation efforts and their effects on ECOWAS diplomacy (pp. 6-8). Tinubu's leadership has been more strong and interventionist, with fast responses to unconstitutional government reforms (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025b, p. 12). His focus on economic integration, regional security, and diplomatic weapons like sanctions and mediation differs from passive tactics (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025b, pp. 14-16).

The 4-D diplomacy has garnered significant scholarly attention. Nwangwu (2024) convincingly argues that Tinubu's liberal foreign policy has hampered regional integration (p. 762). Because Nigeria promotes liberal democracy across Africa, it is not in its national interest to be at odds with its neighbours (Nwangwu, 2024, p. 764). Tinubu's foreign policy challenge is democratic principles versus regional integration. Adeoye (2025) counters that Nigeria has reasserted its continental leadership under Tuggar, citing President Tinubu's re-election as ECOWAS Chair, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye's reappointment as AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, and Nigeria's continued membership in the AU Peace and Security Council.

ECOWAS, Regional Order, and the Use of Force

The literature extensively discusses ECOWAS's security role and use of force to restore constitutional order. Niyo (2025) rigorously analyses ECOWAS's military enforcement posture under international law, questioning the validity of ad hoc or treaty-based permission operations (pp. 4-7). Regional democratic imperatives and the universal restrictions of the international legal order are growing in conflict, generating questions about international law's coherence, hierarchy, and adaptability (Niyo, 2025, Pp. 28-30).

Niyo (2025) describes ECOWAS's transition from consensus-based diplomacy to "to more stick and a little less carrot" in dealing with peace and constitutional governance threats (p. 12). In 2023, ECOWAS threatened "the use of force" to restore constitutional order in the Niger problem (Niyo, 2025, p. 15). Niyo critically evaluates whether such "threat of force" threats under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter can be justified (Niyo, 2025, pp. 18-20).

The legal basis for ECOWAS intervention rests partly on treaty-based consent, particularly Article 25(e) of the 1999 Lomé Protocol, which allows military intervention in cases of unconstitutional changes of government (Niyo, 2025, p. 22). Niger consented to intervention by ratifying this protocol. Niyo argues that legal opinion is varied on whether anticipatory permission is acceptable without contemporaneous confirmation, implying that ECOWAS's reliance on this legal base is questionable (Niyo, 2025, pp. 24-25).

Mathebula (2025) questions the legitimacy of French colonial economic and security treaties and the multilateral objectives of ECOWAS, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Union Constitutive Act, including its threat to use force to restore democratic rule in Niger. The argument links the Niger conflict to post-colonial legal frameworks and regional autonomy (Mathebula, 2025, pp. 15-18). Tinubu has revitalised ECOWAS diplomacy, but military juntas, internal divides, and Nigeria's domestic limits pose substantial challenges (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025b, Pp. 18-20). To keep ECOWAS a credible force for regional stability, they advocate improving diplomatic cohesiveness, enforcement, and inclusive discourse (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025b, Pp. 22-23).

The AES Schism and Challenges to Regional Order

Recent scholarship highlights the challenge to regional order posed by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger's secession from ECOWAS and the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Sam (2025), in a Policy Center policy brief, discusses how these changes have left ECOWAS with a legitimacy issue and future worries (pp. 2-3). From a security alliance in 2023 to a confederation in 2024, AES prioritises collective defence and mutual support to achieve security self-reliance (Sam, 2025, p. 4). Its creation shows deep unhappiness with ECOWAS's political and security crisis response.

The Liptako-Gourma tri-border mutual defence pact, the Alliance of Sahel States in September 2023, the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS in January 2024, and the Confederation of Sahel States in July 2024 signal regional fragmentation, according to Nwangwu (2024, Pp. 761-762). These events indicate that Nigeria-ECOWAS' antagonistic and aggressive approach toward the new leaders of these three nations has failed (Nwangwu, 2024, p. 763).

Anele and Ikegwuiro (2025) include Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger's ECOWAS expulsion as a result of Tinubu's foreign policy (p. 16). This shows that the administration's Sahelian crisis response may have fragmented the region. Sam (2025) proposes three futures for West African regionalism: a hard break with opposing blocs and geopolitical rivalry, ad-hoc cooperation, or gradual reconciliation (pp. 6-8). The regional landscape is increasingly divided, with Sahelian interim governments introducing a shared biometric passport to strengthen a shared identity, while ECOWAS is criticised for its zero-tolerance policy for unconstitutional coups and inconsistent enforcement across member states (Sam, 2025, Pp. 5-6).

According to Chatham House's Lebovich (2025), the divide could worsen instability in the Sahel, which is already struggling with Islamist violence and inter-communal tensions. Lebovich (2025, Pp. 4-5) states that AES countries have abandoned many mechanisms for collaboration with neighbours and turned away from the West, demanding the evacuation of French, UN, and US forces and siding with Russia.

Crucially, Lebovich (2025) notes that regional institutions for food security, gas and electricity transfer, and economic and monetary affairs continue to operate despite the acrimonious division (p. 6). Nigeria's aid to Niger during a fuel scarcity shows the blocs' interdependence. Security coordination may be the first step to rebuilding mutual confidence, as none of the AES governments has considerably reduced violent instability and regional cooperation remains necessary (Lebovich, 2025, Pp. 7-8).

According to Uvere and Onyendi (2025a), Nigeria's diplomatic, economic, and security activities in the region have changed under Tinubu (Pp. 8-10). Tinubu has committed to democratic governance and regional mediation, but coup-led governments, economic constraints, and internal political pressures in Nigeria have hampered his administration (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025a, Pp. 15-17).

Geopolitical Dimensions and External Actors

Geographical fragmentation in West Africa is also discussed in the literature. Sam (2025) examines how AES countries support Russia, China, and Iran while ECOWAS receives support from the US, EU, and international financial institutions, resembling Cold War geopolitics. The EU's European Peace Facility committed approximately €600 million for Sahel military support, but most of it went to the Ukrainian conflict (Sam, 2025, p. 7).

Under Tinubu, Nigeria has received regular invitations to G20 summits, successfully campaigned for AU leadership roles, become a BRICS partner, and been chosen to host the African Energy Bank and African Central Bank (Adeoye, 2025, paras. 15-18). These changes indicate a transition from symbolic to strategic influence.

ECOWAS and AES countries are increasingly engaging with intermediate powers like Gulf states, India, and Türkiye (Sam, 2025, p. 8). The UAE has invested $19 billion in Niger's transport and energy projects and $500 million in Mali's mining, transport, and energy industries. These strategic investments show the Gulf states' expanding significance in regional economic development, independent of bloc loyalty.

Theoretical Framework

Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory

Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) helps explain Nigeria's role in West Africa and ECOWAS. Hegemonic stability theory, developed globally by Charles Kindleberger and Robert Gilpin, holds that an international system requires a dominant power, a hegemon that can establish and maintain the rules and institutions that promote cooperation and order. This theory suggests that dominant states lead geopolitical regions by using diplomatic, military, and economic instruments to maintain stability, shape regional norms, and advance their national interests.

Nigeria's role in West Africa is well-studied using hegemonic stability theory. Ahmad (2018) uses George Modelski's long cycle theory to explain West African hegemonic stability (Pp. 52-55). We use Kenneth Waltz's three levels of analysis, systems, domestic, and personality to analyse Nigeria's hegemonic ascent and decline between 1994 and 2015 (Ahmad, 2018, Pp. 58-62).

Hegemonic theory has been used to study Nigeria's regional role in recent studies. Musa Ahmed, Elijah, Kabir Kurfi, and Nuhu Babajo (2025) use hegemonic theory to analyse the security implications of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) withdrawal from ECOWAS for Nigeria's regional leadership (p. 3). In a similar vein, Sani, Abubakar, and Yunusa (2025) use Regional Hegemony Theory to evaluate Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy on peace and security in West Africa. They find that while Nigeria's policy has supported regional stability, legitimacy concerns among regional peers sometimes mitigate its effects.

Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory aids analysis in this investigation. This framework helps Nigeria comprehend the expectations of other West African governments and ECOWAS organisations. Nigeria finances 40.9% of ECOWAS expenditure (Nwangwu, 2024, p. 757) and is likely to lead regional order. Second, the idea shows how Nigeria's domestic capacity affects its exterior influence. Ahmad (2018) shows that internal issues like poor administration, chronic corruption, and internal security breakdown caused Nigeria's hegemonic power loss (Pp. 210-215). This is important for understanding Tinubu's foreign policy limits. Third, the AES schism challenges Nigeria's hegemonic leadership and the regional order it has long attempted to maintain (Musa Ahmed et al., 2025, Pp. 5-7).

The Rational Actor Model

The Rational Actor Model helps analyse President Tinubu and his foreign policy team's decisions. According to Graham Allison's rational choice theory, a leader establishes and pursues national goals for state gain as a rational actor (Anele & Ikegwuiro, 2025, p. 4). The model suggests that foreign policymakers choose the action that maximises expected utility given their goals and restrictions.

In assessing Nigeria's foreign policy during the first two years of the Tinubu administration, Anele and Ikegwuiro (2025) specifically use the rational actor model (pp. 4-5). Anele & Ikegwuiro (2025, p. 6) apply the approach to the "4Ds", Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora as domestic forces that affected Tinubu's foreign policy. The model allows them to examine how Tinubu's appointment as ECOWAS Chairman gave him international engagement opportunities and how his preference for soft power diplomacy in dealing with military governments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger reflected rational calculations about the costs and benefits of alternative approaches.

Piate, Sunday, and Kia (2025) use the decision-making model as one of three theoretical frameworks to evaluate Nigeria's foreign policy from 1960 to 2023 (p. 4). They say the decision-making model is useful because it can reveal the motivations and values that drive decision-makers' preferences. This perspective helps explain why Tinubu initially opposed the Niger Republic military coup but later supported diplomatic pressure and sanctions.

The rational actor model aids analysis in this investigation. It lets us view Tinubu's foreign policy initiatives as deliberate choices that advance Nigerian interests rather than reactive ones. The model helps analyse the "4-D Doctrine" as a consistent framework for decision-making across issues. It also helps assess foreign policy trade-offs like the Niger coup response's conflict between democratic principles and regional cohesion (Nwangwu, 2024, Pp. 762-764). Note that the rational actor model assumes perfect information and struggles to account for non-rational aspects like ideology, emotion, and misinterpretation.

Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical Realism explains foreign policy behaviour at the systemic and domestic levels. Neoclassical realism explains why governments with comparable structural situations often conduct diverse foreign policies, unlike classical realism, which highlights human nature, or structural realism (neorealism), which emphasises international power distribution. It mediates systemic pressures and foreign policy choices by including domestic variables including leader perceptions, state-society relations, and domestic political institutions.

Neoclassical realism is one of two complimentary theories used by Onyetube (2025) to examine Nigeria's BRICS observer position and South-South cooperation (p. 48). Neoclassical realism helps explain Nigeria's delicate balance between aspiration and practicality in a multipolar world from the Global South's perspective, according to the study. This paradigm shows how home factors, policy coherence, bureaucratic capacity, and political will influence foreign policy goals.

Neoclassical realism helps this study understand how Nigeria's domestic factors, such as the Tinubu administration's policy priorities, Nigeria's economic constraints, and domestic political considerations mediate systemic pressures like the resurgence of military coups in West Africa and the geopolitical competition between Western powers and Russia in the Sahel. The framework explains Nigeria's reaction to regional crises and the "4-D Doctrine's implementation. Given domestic restrictions and institutional capacities, it also shows how difficult it is to implement foreign policy.

Methodology

This qualitative study uses descriptive and analytical case studies. The case study design allows for a deep, multi-dimensional analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy under Tinubu in its real-world environment (Obono et al., 2024, p. 462). The case study method allows for the examination of intricate relationships between local political issues, regional dynamics, and international influences that affect Nigeria's foreign policy. The descriptive design allows systematic documentation of Nigeria's foreign policy announcements, diplomatic endeavours, and regional involvement since Tinubu took office in May 2023. Beyond description, the analytical dimension critically examines the dynamics, causal mechanisms, and ramifications of these foreign policy choices for West African regional order. This qualitative case study design has worked well in recent Nigerian foreign policy and ECOWAS research. Obono, Aliegba, and Baban'umma (2024) used a "descriptive qualitative case study design" to explore Nigeria's leadership and ECOWAS actions in Côte d'Ivoire using in-depth oral interviews and rich documentary materials (p. 462). Ihechiluru, Ezenkwa, and Nomeh (2025) used a "exploratory research design" to assess Nigeria's foreign policy in Tinubu's first two years (p. 2).

Conclusion

President Tinubu's foreign policy aims to revive Nigeria's regional leadership in a time of unparalleled difficulty. A consistent framework, the 4-D Doctrine has helped the government improve economic diplomacy and global participation. However, converting access into influence, pronouncements into performance, and regional leadership into Nigerian advantages remains the key difficulty.

The division of West Africa into competing blocs, the loss of democratic standards, and the advent of new geopolitical actors require a principled and pragmatic response. Nigeria must maintain its commitment to democratic governance, but influence in a contentious region needs flexibility, patience, and practical cooperation where political consensus is missing.

Nigeria's regional strength will depend less on its diplomatic efforts abroad than on its internal achievements. A Nigeria that provides reliable energy, produces jobs for its youth, secures its territory, and rebuilds trust in public institutions would be sought after. According to Peterside (2025), "A prosperous, well-governed Nigeria is far more persuasive than a struggling Nigeria that flies jets over its neighbours".

The following years of Tinubu's administration will determine whether West Africa continues its cycle of coups and fragmentation or progressively moves toward a more stable, democratic system. Knowing Nigeria's importance and weaknesses, those decisions must be taken with clarity. Instead of projecting power overseas while ignoring local issues, domestic regeneration and regional leadership should be pursued as always.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to Nigerian policymakers, ECOWAS institutions, and international partners. They are organised thematically to address the key challenges identified in this analysis.

1. To maintain credibility, Nigeria's economic diplomacy must translate investment pledges into concrete results. The Presidency should create an Investment Delivery Unit co-chaired by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Power to fast-track a few priority projects.
2. Consensus-based decision-making in democracy and governance has led to inaction and inconsistency. Such topics should be voted on by the Authority with public reservations for transparency and accountability.
3. ECOWAS reforms need resources beyond member states' capabilities. Since investing in ECOWAS strengthens democracy, curbs migration and insecurity, protects economic interests, and preserves geopolitical influence against rising Russian and Chinese engagement, European partners should provide financial and technical support for institutional strengthening.
4. International partners should endorse flexible cooperation between ECOWAS and AES governments on counter-terrorism, food security, and energy transmission, despite political differences. Without punishing civilians, conditionality should pressure governance changes.
5. Invest in improving national resilience and intelligence institutions in West African governments to better respond security threats and protect civilian populations.

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