



Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the Major Geographical Drivers

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Abstract

The thinking in the literature is that states develop different foreign policy interests and priorities depending on their geographical endowments. That is, the foreign policy of a state is sensitive to its geography. This article examines the defining role that geographical descriptors have played in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. Relying on data generated from major ranking bodies/platforms and other secondary sources, this paper contends that geographical factors have always shaped Nigeria's foreign policy towards the coterminous or contiguous countries, Gulf of Guinea, ECOWAS region, and African continent. While Nigeria has leveraged its size, location, natural and human endowments to launch itself into global relevance, there are major constraints. These include the ineffective governance of Nigeria's land and borders and occasional border disputes with the adjoining states, poor demographics in terms of nutrition, health, education and work, and the mismanagement of the proceeds from the country's natural resource endowments. These problems must be addressed if Nigeria is to harness the full benefits of its geography.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Geography, Geographical Descriptors, Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria.

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Introduction

The role of geography in the design and delivery of foreign policy has long been recognised. The foreign policy decisions that nations make are inexorably linked to their geographical resources and descriptors. As explained by Griffiths and O’Callaghan (2002: 122), at the heart of geographical analysis is the belief that states’ economic and military capabilities, their position in the hierarchy of states, and how they relate with their neighbours are the consequences of geographical factors. Bhattarai (2022: 4) believes that geography is ‘the most vital factor influencing foreign policy’.

Nigeria has vast geographical resources that have historically shaped its interests and international engagements. The country’s foreign policy goals and strategies have been sensitive to its geography. The political map of Nigeria clearly calls attention to the contiguous countries of Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. The country’s territorial size and location in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and African continent are also clearly indicated. The other geographical markers include the presence of valuable natural and mineral resources and large population. Nigeria’s geographical descriptors have been the primary explanatory variables for its economic and military capabilities. These capabilities have always helped to motorise Nigeria’s external engagements at multiple levels.

As important as geographical elements are in explaining foreign policy, authors are yet to fully engage this dimension in the analysis of Nigeria’s foreign policy. This paper therefore examines the role that geography has played in the conduct of Nigeria’s foreign policy. The study is divided into six sections. While the first section is the introduction, the second section discusses the importance of geography in international relations theory. Section three describes Nigeria’s important geographical resources and section four presents the imprints of geography on Nigeria’s foreign policy. Whereas the fifth section covers the dividends and constraints, the last section is the conclusion. This study relies on descriptive statistics generated from Statista, Global Firepower, Worldometer, the World FactBook, the United Nations Development Programme human development reports, and Nigeria’s National Bureau of statistics. The other secondary sources of data include books, journals, and newspaper publications. The data generated are analyzed thematically.

Geography in International Relations Theory

International relations theory is an embodiment of diverse analytical frameworks and approaches that attempt to explain and interpret state behaviour. However, in this

piece, the focus is on the role that geographical descriptors play in explaining the foreign policy choices and calculations of a state. Griffiths and O'Callaghan (2002: 120) explain that

geography has always played an important role in human affairs. It has shaped the identity, character, and history of nation-states; it has helped and hindered their social, political, and economic development; and it has played an important role in their international relations. Geopolitics is the study of the influence of geographical factors on state behaviour – how location, climate, natural resources, population, and physical terrain determine a state's foreign policy options and its position in the hierarchy of states.

Scholars have maintained that the geographical size and location of a country influence its foreign policy (Blanton and Kegley, 2017; Hudson, 2014; Breuning, 2007; Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 2017). The thinking is that a large territorial size does not only shape foreign policy goals, it also confers distinct advantages in inter-state competition. Large states are usually associated with immense power potentials and are likely to be more active and assertive in foreign policy. In addition, the location of a country shapes its foreign policy interests, influence, and priorities. Access to the sea and control of ocean routes also confers foreign policy advantages. The benefits notwithstanding, a large geographical size with long borders may be expensive and problematic to defend and manage (Bhattarai, 2022; Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 2017; Hudson, 2014). Geographical size, borders and location do not only influence foreign policy, they also reveal the constraints that a state may face in its pursuit of foreign policy (Breuning, 2007).

More so, the geographical resources of a state can be aided or constrained by natural resources. In other words, the availability of important natural/mineral resources can serve as a major advantage. Without natural resource endowments, a large territorial size may not be a positive indicator of national power. In geographical analysis therefore, small states blessed with valuable natural resources could wield greater power in world politics than their territorial sizes may suggest. So, bigger countries that possess and control diverse natural resources usually have bigger potentials in world politics (Blanton and Kegley, 2017; Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 2017). Countries in possession of natural resources may use them to build indigenous technologies (including weapons) or may sell them and the proceeds can be used to acquire additional capabilities. The point must however be made that the absence of natural resources may not imply a lack of power potential if a country is able to harness other important elements of national power (Blanton and Kegley, 2017). The possession of natural resources may expose a country to environmental degradation and other security problems (Hudson, 2014).

The demography of a state has also been recognised as a major source of national power. Population is an important element in world affairs and the global configuration of power. A country with a large population and favourable demographics has a greater capacity to mobilise resources to support its foreign policy than a smaller country (Eberstadt, 1998). In fact, the size, capabilities and characteristics of national populations have a bearing on the long-term competition between great powers (Eberstadt, 2019). A large population is considered as a source of strength due to the availability of large markets for diverse goods and services, large labour force, rich cultural diversity, and military enrolment, among others. Although large population gives power potential to a state, it could be a liability if the vast majority of that population is very poor or socially deprived. The import is that countries with large but relatively poor populations may wield less power in world politics. Other problems associated with large population include competition for resources, a greater pressure on the environment and higher risk of ecological degradation, unemployment, and prevalence of conflicts, among others (Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 2017; Wesley and Peterson, 2017). In demographic analysis, Hudson (2014) explains that attention should be given to age distribution of the population, gender distribution, wealth distribution, ethno-linguistic and religious divisions, as well as the health and education of the population.

The theoretical literature has revealed that geography shapes foreign policy in specific ways. The location of a country determines the nature of foreign policy. For example, a large country that is surrounded by smaller and poorer countries may visualize and play a 'big-brother' role towards these countries. A 'big-brother' role will allow the bigger country to make sacrifices and provide resources for the purpose of promoting stability. Most of the time, the smaller and poorer neighbours are just free-riders (Saliu and Oshewolo, 2018). A country may also be surrounded by friendly or hostile countries. While an *entente cordiale* policy may be imperative for a country surrounded by friends, a policy built on survival may be compelling for a country surrounded by unfriendly or hostile peers. More so, key geographical descriptors such as favourable demographics and natural resource endowments shape a state's ambition and aspiration in world affairs. Bigger countries in terms of population and natural resource endowments are likely to be more ambitious and active in their international engagements. Such countries are conscious of their position in the hierarchy of states (Griffiths and O'Callaghan, 2002; Hudson, 2014; Eberstadt, 2019). Geographical realities may also propel cooperation among states (or the continuous reliance on multilateral frameworks) for the purpose of addressing major environmental concerns (von Hauff and Rubbelke, 2008). Finally, it is clear that geographical factors have their advantages but may also create problems if they are not well managed.

Nigeria's Geographical Descriptors

Nigeria has a number of core geographical descriptors. They include Nigeria's location, population/demography, and natural resource endowments.

Nigeria is located in the continent of Africa, where it has established itself as a regional leader. Africa is sub-divided into five regions: North Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, Western Africa, and Eastern Africa. Nigeria belongs to the Western part of Africa. It has land borders of 4,047 km and coastline of 853 km. The country is bordered by Niger (to the north), Chad and Cameroon (to the east), the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean (to the south), and Benin Republic (to the west) (see Figure 1). Nigeria covers an area of 923,768 km². In terms of geographical size, Nigeria is bigger than the combined size of Germany (357,114 km²), Italy (301,336 km²), United Kingdom (242,900 km²), Israel (20,770 km²), and Faeroe Islands (1.393 km²) (Kirk-Green, Falola, Udo, and Ade-Ajayi, 2023; The World FactBook, 2023; Worldometer, 2023a).

Nigeria is also located along the GoG. The GoG describes the part of the eastern tropical Atlantic Ocean off the western African coast and covers an area of 2.35 million km² (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023; World Atlas, 2023). In terms of coastline coverage, Nigeria ranks 69 among the 145 countries covered worldwide in 2023. Nigeria (853km) is among fifteen African countries with the biggest coastline coverage. Others include Madagascar, South Africa, Mozambique, Egypt, Eritrea, Morocco, Libya, Angola, Tanzania, Tunisia, Algeria, Gabon, Sudan, and Mauritania. In West Africa, Nigeria has the longest coastline. Liberia (579km) and Ghana (539km) are the other two leading West African countries in terms of coastline coverage (Global Firepower, 2023a). As would be demonstrated later, the imprints of these geographical descriptors on Nigeria's foreign policy are clear.

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria Showing the Border Countries and Gulf of Guinea

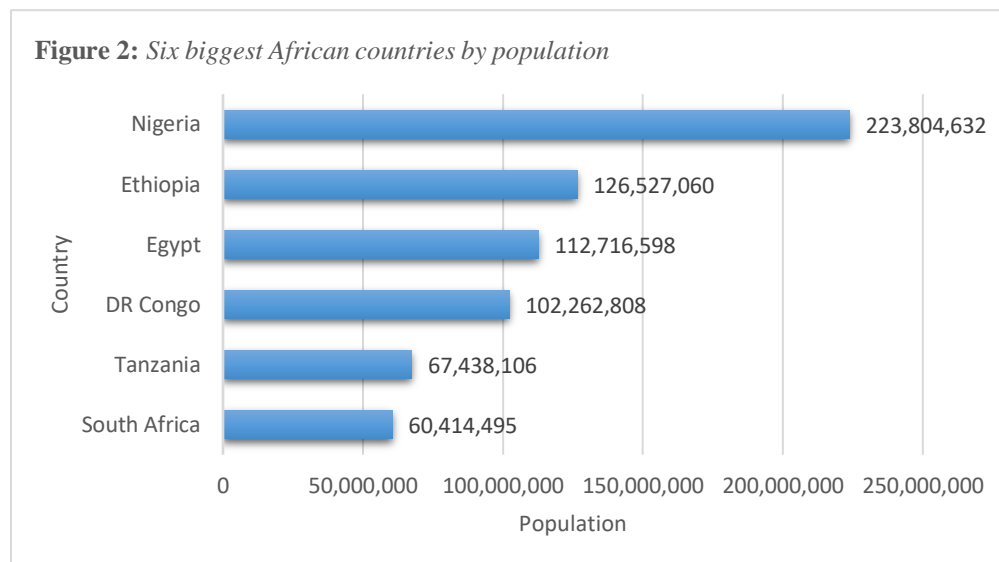


Source: **World Atlas (2023)**

Another important geographical descriptor of Nigeria is population. This particular geographical attribute is valuable because Nigeria is currently the sixth most populous country in the world. It has an estimated population of 223,804,632 and its share of world population is 2.78%. The only countries with bigger shares of world population are India (17.76%), China (17.72%), United States (4.23%), Indonesia (3.45%), and Pakistan (2.99%) (Worldometer, 2023b). One of Nigeria's major sources of strength in the continent of Africa and beyond is its standing as the most populous African country (see Figure 2). With 15.3% share of Africa's total population, Nigeria stands tall in Africa. The closest to Nigeria are Ethiopia, Egypt and DR Congo with Africa's population shares of 8.6%, 7.7% and 6.9, respectively. Nigeria's demographic dominance in West Africa is even more pronounced. Out of the sixteen West African countries (with an estimated total population of 442,013,385), Nigeria's population share is a whopping 50.6%. Coming far behind are Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, and Niger with population shares of 7.7%, 6.5%, and 6.1%, respectively (Worldometer, 2023c; 2023d).

A major advantage of Nigeria's large population is its diversity. With well over 200 ethnic groups speaking distinct languages, Nigeria is a plural and polyglot society. The three major ethnic groups are Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba. Other advantages include the availability of a large market, availability of personnel for recruitment into the armed forces, high number of professionals in diverse fields such as medicine and

other paramedics, finance and banking, education, information technology and telecommunication, among others.

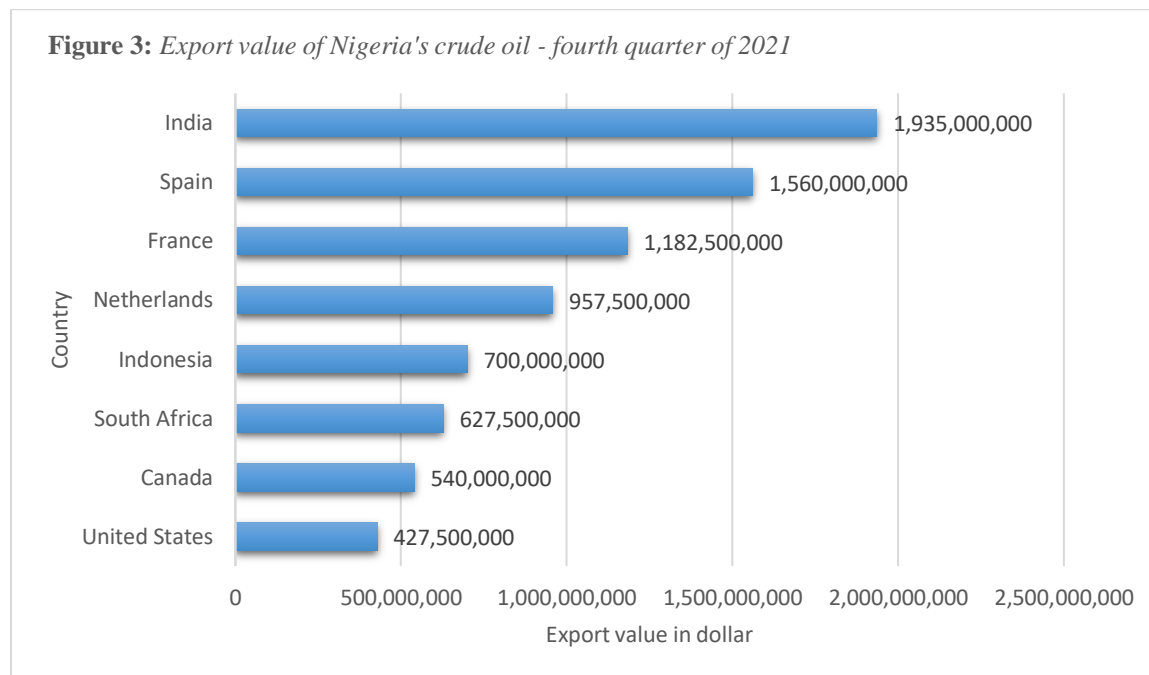


Figures generated from **Worldometer (2023c)**

Furthermore, Nigeria’s abundant natural resource endowments are core geographical descriptors. Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, Angola and Libya produce more than two-thirds of Africa’s mineral wealth. Underneath Nigeria’s surface lies a wealth of natural resources of immense variety (Aljazeera, 2022). Nigeria’s diverse solid mineral deposits include talc, gypsum, iron ore, lead/zinc, bentonite and baryte, gold, bitumen, coal, rock salt, gemstones, kaolin, and many more. There are massive opportunities for investments in the solid mineral sector. In fact, many of the mineral resources are yet to be fully exploited (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The point must be made that Nigeria is more notable for its oil production. While the country has proven oil reserves of about 23 billion barrels, the gas reserves are about 160 trillion cubic meters. With several operating pipelines and an average daily production of about 1.8 million barrels in 2020, Nigeria has become one of the major oil producing nations in the world, the largest producer in Africa, and a member of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Statista, 2023a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

The earnings from the above natural resources have aided Nigeria’s external engagements in Africa and beyond. The petroleum sector is responsible for 9% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and over 80% of the total export value (Statista, 2023a). The main destinations for Nigeria’s crude oil during the fourth quarter of 2021 were India, Spain, France, and Netherlands. The export values were \$1.9 billion, \$1.5 billion, \$1.1 billion, and \$957.5 million, respectively (see Figure 3). Many large oil companies also operate in Nigeria and remit millions of dollars to the

Nigerian government yearly. These multinational oil and gas giants include ExxonMobil, Chevron, Royal Dutch Shell, and Equinor, among others. For instance, in 2019, the Norwegian company, Equinor, remitted more than \$400 million to the Nigerian government as taxes and for extractive activities (Statista, 2023a; 2023b). Furthermore, in terms of the revenues generated yearly from other mineral deposits, only South Africa earns higher than Nigeria in the continent. While South Africa generates \$125 billion, Nigeria makes \$53 billion yearly. Other countries in the third, fourth and fifth positions are Algeria (\$39 billion), Angola (\$32 billion), and Libya (\$27 billion) (Aljazeera, 2022).



Figures generated from **Statista (2023b)**

The Imprints of Geography on Nigeria’s Foreign Policy

Nigeria’s critical geographical descriptors have shaped its national, security, and geopolitical interests. The geographical descriptors and power resources of Nigeria have made it a powerhouse in Africa and an important member of the international community. Nigeria’s demographic strength and enormous oil wealth (and their direct bearing on military strength) have imposed on the country tremendous international responsibilities. Nigeria is surrounded by countries that do not measure up to it in terms of demographic, economic, and military capabilities. This reality has shaped Nigeria’s ‘big-brother’ role conception towards these neighbouring countries. A major imprint of geography on Nigeria’s foreign policy is the cordial relations that it has always maintained with the border countries. Nigeria has always extended its goodwill and bigheartedness to these countries to support their internal political stability. This neighbourliness is desirable to protect Nigeria’s security and ward off threats that may

come from these border countries such as indiscriminate smuggling of weapons, smuggling of goods across borders leading to losses in unearned duties, human trafficking, and the devastating activities of transnational criminal elements and terrorists (Ejime, 2021). Nigeria also shares ethnic bonds and extended family connections with the neighbouring countries. Beyond Nigeria's geo-strategic foreign policy towards the geographically contiguous countries, its geographical descriptors have also shaped its interests in the GoG, ECOWAS region, and African continent.

Nigeria's Leading Role in the GoG

A major geographical determinant of Nigeria's foreign policy is its location along the GoG. The GoG refers to the 'geographical coastline of five and a half thousand kilometers that stretches from countries of West Africa through Central Africa to Angola' (Eze, 2010: 229). The sixteen coastal countries in the GoG include Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, and Togo (Ukeje and Ela, 2013; World Atlas, 2023). The GoG is estimated to hold up to 35% of the world's total oil reserve. There are also several mineral deposits in the region such as uranium, gold, copper, diamond, manganese, bitumen, tin, marble, and others. The exploration of oil, mining, fishing, and port operations are the main economic activities in the region. The GoG is a very important shipping route for oil exports from Nigeria and for consumer goods to and from other parts of Africa, particularly central and southern Africa. The vessels, tankers and cargo ships that navigate the waters of the GoG on a daily basis are well over 1,000 (World Atlas, 2023; Dryad, 2023; Tukur, 2010; Eze, 2010).

When all geographical descriptors are considered, Nigeria is the most influential member of the GoG. Nigeria's interest in the region can be explained. The GoG is known as the most baneful maritime area and navigational route globally in terms of violent attacks. In particular, the coasts of Benin Republic, Nigeria and Togo are adjudged as the most dangerous; and Nigeria is the nucleus of the GoG piracy. The country accounts for over 70 percent of the region's reported incidents of piracy. In fact, Nigerian pirates carry out most of the piratical acts and these attacks occur mainly off the country's coast (Anele, 2021; Kamal-Deen, 2015). In 2018, criminal attacks in the region increased astronomically, accounting for all hijackings globally, 72 percent of all ships fired upon, 92 percent of hostages taken globally, and 93 percent of seafarers kidnapped for ransom worldwide. Again, the economic and human costs of piracy in the GoG are huge and burdensome. Focusing specifically on Nigeria, apart from the killing of seafarers and security personnel, there have been regrettable economic loses. From 2014 to 2018, Nigeria lost an estimated \$2.74 billion to insurance and sundry charges and claims on the country's shipments due to

insecurity on the territorial waters (Dryad Global, 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023; Anele 2023). Unfortunately, the countries situated in the GoG have always demonstrated weak capacity in governing their coastal and offshore territories. The situation in the region is also made worse by internal security challenges in some of these countries (Ukeja and Ela, 2013). The need to stem the intractable security risks in the GoG and harness its abundant maritime opportunities has always stoked Nigeria's interest in the region.

Nigeria's geo-strategic interest in the GoG has influenced its foreign policy in a number of ways. First, Nigeria has developed different initiatives aimed at securing the GoG shipping route. A notable example is the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act signed into law in 2019, and intended to contribute to the prevention and suppression of piracy, armed robbery and other criminal maritime offences in Nigeria and the GoG. The thinking in official circles is that the implementation of SPOMO Act has rubbed off positively on Nigeria's international image, particularly among global maritime actors. More so, Nigeria's Deep Blue Project (DBP) - comprising land, sea and air assets - is designed to secure the country's waters up to the GoG. The DBP has been described as the first integrated maritime security framework in west and central Africa (Kyanet, 2021a; 2021b). Second, the persistence of piracy and other maritime crimes in the GoG has made it necessary for Nigeria to collaborate with the proximate countries and the relevant regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). Third, Nigeria has continued to work with other international bodies and agencies interested in maritime security in the GoG. These include the European Union (EU), United States' Africa Command (AFRICOM), International Maritime Organisation (IMO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Police (INTERPOL), among others (Kamal-Deen, 2015; Usman, 2022; Zabadi and Bot, 2023).

Nigeria and the ECOWAS Region

Nigeria's location in the ECOWAS region has conferred enormous international responsibilities on it. Nigeria has emerged as the undisputed leader in the ECOWAS region, principally due to geographical descriptors such as demographic strength and natural/economic endowments. The country's military strength has also been a major factor. The ECOWAS region is culturally and linguistically diverse, and made up of Anglophone or English-speaking, Francophone or French-speaking, and Lusophone or Portuguese-speaking West African countries. They include Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Cape Verde, and Guinea Bissau (Alli, 2012). Among the

countries situated in the ECOWAS region, Nigeria stands out in terms demographic and economic strength. Nigeria's huge population advantage in West Africa is such that one in every two citizens of ECOWAS is a Nigerian. More so, Nigeria has the biggest economy in the region. Although Nigeria and Ghana are the only oil producing countries in the region, the former is the biggest producer by a very wide margin. Again, no ECOWAS member comes close to Nigeria in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The four leading ECOWAS countries in terms of GDP are Nigeria (\$477.8 billion), Ghana (\$72.84 billion), Cote d'Ivoire (\$70.05 billion), and Senegal (\$27.46 billion) (Adetula, 2014; Oshewolo, Nwozor, Fayomi and Oluwatuyi, 2021; Statista, 2023c).

The foreign policy elites in Nigeria have consistently deployed the country's demographic, economic and military resources to promote the security of the ECOWAS region and accelerate its development. The efforts that led to the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975 - as West Africa's regional organisation - were championed by Nigeria. Since its establishment, Nigeria has made notable efforts to not only keep the organization afloat but also generously support the needy members. In concert with other countries in the ECOWAS region, Nigeria has always contributed to building frameworks for promoting security and stability in West Africa. Some of these frameworks include the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), ECOWAS Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (CPMRPS), ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), among others. Apart from the above institutional efforts, Nigeria has also helped in resolving or de-escalating conflicts in individual countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Togo, and others (George, 2012; Alli, 2012; Anyaoku, 2013). Nigeria's role in promoting democratic values in the ECOWAS region has also been noteworthy. Nigeria has provided financial, technical, and logistical assistance to many West African countries during elections. The countries that have benefitted from Nigeria's largesse include Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Togo, among others. Nigeria has equally been critical of military coups and unconstitutional change of government in the region (Akinterinwa, 2014; Akindele, 2013; George, 2012).

Furthermore, Nigeria has supported several initiatives aimed at promoting development in the ECOWAS region. These economic initiatives include common currency, common external tariffs, increasing agricultural production and industrialization, and the development of key infrastructure in important areas such as power, road, railway, and telecommunication. Nigeria has provided assistance (financial handouts, humanitarian and technical assistance, and medical interventions) targeting specific West African countries such as Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gambia, Liberia, Benin, and Cape Verde (Anyaoku, 2013; Alli, 2012). With respect

to funding, Nigeria has been the biggest financier of West Africa's regional organisation. Since the establishment of ECOWAS, the amount that Nigeria has paid to the organisation as Community Levy considerably outpaces what other member-countries have contributed. Over 70 percent of the paid up capital of the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) came from Nigeria. This capital is required to finance development programmes across West Africa (Dede, 2012; Ojeme, 2021). Nigeria's enormous petroleum resources and revenues have greatly supported its foreign policy in the ECOWAS region.

Nigeria as a Heavyweight in Africa

Beyond the ECOWAS region, Nigeria has a broader foreign policy that is directed towards the continent of Africa at large. This policy did not emerge out of the blue. Nigeria is not only situated in Africa, it is one of the most important countries in the continent in terms of geographical and demographic resources. Nigeria is the biggest African country with respect to population. As argued by Oshewolo et al (2021), Nigeria's demographic advantage has conferred on it the obligation to speak for and represent Africa when matters of great international importance are being discussed. The country is also the biggest oil producer in the continent of Africa and possesses many other mineral deposits from which it makes billions of dollars in foreign exchange annually (Statista, 2023a; Aljazeera, 2022). Nigeria has the biggest economy in Africa in terms of GDP. Nigeria's biggest economic competitors in Africa are Egypt and South Africa with GDP figures of \$475.23 billion and \$405.71 billion, respectively (Statista 2023c). Because of Nigeria's great demographics, it is one of the strongest African countries with respect to military capabilities. Egypt, Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria and Ethiopia are Africa's military powerhouses (Global Firepower, 2023b). Nigeria's geographical descriptors and power resources have made the country a prominent leader in Africa. Nigeria equally considers the continent as a platform for projecting its power capabilities to the world (Saliu and Oshewolo, 2018).

Nigeria has always galvanised efforts aimed at addressing the multiple problems confronting the continent of Africa. First, Nigeria played a prominent role in liberating Africa from colonialism and racism. The popular thinking among the Nigerian foreign policy elites was that the country's attainment of political independence may not produce the desired rewards until the whole of Africa is liberated from foreign domination (Saliu and Oshewolo, 2018). Nigeria therefore demonstrated leadership by deploying its diplomatic and economic resources to support the dismantling of colonialism and apartheid in many African countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa. Again, Nigeria has been at the centre of efforts aimed at promoting the stability and security of the African continent, and resolving conflicts in a number of countries. Nigeria has participated

actively in many peacekeeping operations in Africa led by the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU). These operations have taken place in Congo, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Chad, Somali, and others (Oshewolo, 2021).

It must also be pointed out that Nigeria has consistently promoted regional cooperation as a mechanism for solving Africa's problems, redressing its marginalisation in the global economic system, and accelerating its development. This explains Nigeria's superlative role in the process leading to the formation of Africa's continental organisation - the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) - in 1963. The final shape and structure of the OAU reflected considerably the opinions of Nigeria's foreign policy actors. While some African leaders belonging to the Casablanca group wanted a supranational African continental organisation or political union to be known as the United States of Africa, Nigeria and other leaders in the Monrovia group provided alternative ideas built on functionalism and gradualism. In line with Nigeria's predilection, the gradual approach to Africa's integration was eventually adopted (Oshewolo, 2019a; 2019b). More so, Nigeria's Dr. Taslim Elias played a crucial role in the development of the Charter of the OAU. Relying on the multilateral framework of the OAU, Nigeria campaigned aggressively against colonialism and racism, and contributed to the maintenance of peace and stability in Africa. Nigeria's leadership role was also evident during the transformation of the OAU to AU in 2002. Since the establishment of the AU, Nigeria has been one of the biggest financiers of the activities of the organisation (Oshewolo, 2019a).

The Dividends and Constraints

Without a doubt, Nigeria's geographical descriptors and the attendant power resources have yielded notable foreign policy dividends. On account of Nigeria's large size, population, and natural resource endowments, the country has been recognised globally as Africa's trusted voice and has been able to cooperate with other countries in resolving global challenges and concerns, particularly through the instrumentality of multilateral institutions and organisations (Amuwo, 2016). Nigeria has been an active member of the UN and is among the world's largest contributors of troops to the organisation for the purpose of peacekeeping. The country has been involved in more than 25 peacekeeping missions of the UN across the world and contributed immensely to the maintenance of global peace and security. It has even been suggested that Nigeria's impressive role in this regard would aid the country's emergence as a permanent member of a reformed and expanded UN Security Council (UNSC) in the future (Adebajo, 2017; Oshewolo, 2018; Anyaoku, 2013). Many eminent Nigerians have also been given the opportunity to serve in the different UN administrative organs and bodies such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), UN General Assembly (UNGA), UNSC, UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping

Operations, and many others (Oshewolo et al, 2021). Nigeria has equally been able to play a leadership role in the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). Member-countries have always benefitted from Nigeria's Technical Aid Corps scheme. Moreover, Nigeria's leadership role in Africa (across its different levels of engagement) has continued to receive global acclamation. For instance, the Secretary General of the IMO, Kitack Lim, has given applause to Nigeria for its pivotal role in fighting piracy and armed robbery in the GoG and in contributing to international maritime security cooperation (Kyanet, 2021c).

The dividends notwithstanding, Nigeria's geographical descriptors have also created some troubles for the country. First, there is the problem of how to effectively manage and control Nigeria's land area and territorial waters, including its borders with the neighbouring countries. These borders have constituted a major source of security threat. These borders are porous and some of them are disputed, particularly to the east where Nigeria is bordered by Chad and Cameroon resulting in occasional border clashes. Nigeria's immediate past Chief of Defense Staff, General Lucky Irabor, maintained very frankly that majority of the country's international border points were unmanned by security agencies leading to easy penetration by criminal elements. Through these porous and unmanned borders, terrorists affiliated to Boko Haram, Islamic States of West African Province, and other networks are able to operate freely and recruit adherents from Nigeria and neighboring countries (Editorial, 2023).

Second, despite the advantages of Nigeria's demographics, there are major problems associated with the country's large population. A study by the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) found that more than half of the population are multi-dimensionally poor, buttressing the problem of widespread poverty in the country. According to the report, multidimensional poverty (living standards, health, education, and work and shocks) is higher in rural areas (72 percent) than urban areas (42 percent). In addition, Nigeria has continued to perform woefully on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI covers important areas of human development such as health, education, and standard of living measured by gross national income (GNI) per capita. Of the 191 countries and territories that were covered worldwide in 2021/2022, Nigeria was ranked as number 163 with HDI value of 0.535. This is similar to the HDI values of other poor countries such as Haiti (0.535), Rwanda (0.534), and Benin (0.525) (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Among the regional powers in the world listed in Table 1, Nigeria has consistently been the worst performer in terms of HDI. While Brazil, South Africa and Egypt were classified as countries with high human development between 2018 and 2021, Nigeria was classified among countries with low human development in the same period (United Nations Development Programme,

2022; 2020; 2019). More so, although the ethno-cultural and religious diversity of Nigeria’s demography has been an advantage, there is the problem of forging a cohesive national identity that could drive a progressive foreign policy agenda for the country. There are sharp divisions along primordial fault lines leading to inter-ethnic and inter-religious squabbles. These challenges have negative effects on how Nigeria is perceived by the other members of the international system.

Table 1: HDI of selected regional powers in the world

Country	2018		2019		2021	
	Rank	HDI Value	Rank	HDI Value	Rank	HDI Value
Brazil	79	0.761	84	0.765	87	0.754
South Africa	113	0.705	114	0.709	109	0.713
Egypt	116	0.700	116	0.707	97	0.731
Nigeria	158	0.534	161	0.539	163	0.535

Source: (UNDP, 2019; 2020; 2022)

Third, there has been the problem of under-exploitation and underutilization of Nigeria’s many natural/mineral resources. It is estimated that the federal government and subnational entities lose about \$125 billion annually because of untapped mineral deposits. These revenues should have gone to the federation account as royalties, taxes, and other charges from individual and institutional actors operating in the solid minerals sector (Yekeen, 2016). Closely related to this is the problem of elite corruption in terms of the mismanagement and misapplication of the earnings from the country’s natural resources. The exploitation of Nigeria’s natural resources has also led to environmental degradation and national security concerns.

Conclusion

This study has discussed the influence of geography on Nigeria’s foreign policy. It has been established that geographical variables/factors are important in foreign policy analysis. These geographical factors include territorial size and location, natural resource endowments, and population. Without a doubt, Nigeria possesses relevant geographical resources that have made it an important player in world politics. Nigeria’s territorial size and location have not only been an advantage, its natural and human endowments have also created wide foreign policy opportunities. The core geographical descriptors of Nigeria have shaped its foreign policy goals towards the border countries, GoG, ECOWAS region, and African continent. While carrying out its international engagements across the above multiple levels, Nigeria has made a name for itself in the world of diplomacy.

The advantages associated with Nigeria’s geographical resources notwithstanding, there are several contradictions. These contradictions include the poor governance of Nigeria’s land and borders, problems relating to natural resource exploitation and utilization, and poor demographics in terms of nutrition, health,

education, and work. Efforts must be made to address these problems. First, Nigeria must enhance its capabilities in governing and managing its territory and borders through high-level intelligence gathering, training of relevant security agencies, increase in enrolment of military and security personnel, and adequate military/security financing. The Ministries of Interior and Defense must be willing to deploy all resources to make Nigeria's borders impenetrable by criminals, smugglers and illegal immigrants. Second, it is important to strengthen Nigeria's demographics through sincere investments in food security, health, education, and job creation. Finally, the country should commit resources to ensuring that its diverse natural and mineral endowments are fully tapped and utilised. Mechanisms must also be put in place to address effectively the pilfering and mismanagement of the earnings from these resources.

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