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## Leveraging Parliamentary Friendship Groups to Strengthen Nigeria's Strategic Alliances: A Foreign Policy Perspective

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Chinasa Agatha OHIRI<sup>1</sup>  
Uche NWALI<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This paper interrogates the underutilisation of Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFGs) in advancing Nigeria's strategic alliances in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. Despite their growing global relevance as informal diplomatic channels, PFGs have had limited impact in the foreign policy space of African countries. In Nigeria, the full potential of PFGs for strategic partnerships is not being maximised. Extant literature identifies challenges limiting the impact of PFGs to include; underfunding, overlapping mandates, lack of continuity and insufficient integration of PFGs into the broader foreign policy framework. Beyond these, there are other challenges which have not received adequate scholarly attention. Amid the growing proliferation of PFGs, there is a dearth of national interest-driven PFGs and absence of tact in their inter-parliamentary engagements. The objective of this paper is to explore how these challenges are undermining the potential of Nigeria's PFGs for strategic alliances. The study employed qualitative-descriptive method, relying on secondary data sources, including policy documents and scholarly literature. It adopted the soft power theory, which emphasises attraction, persuasion and informal influence over hard power in inter-state relations. It argues that PFGs, as a soft power instrument, could offer Nigeria a flexible and relational approach to international diplomacy, complementing formal channels and fostering mutual understanding in inter-state engagements. It recommends leveraging Nigeria's PFGs as a deliberate tool of soft power diplomacy – aligned with national interest and embedded within foreign policy strategy. Additionally, there is a need for tact in the operations of Nigeria's PFGs and capacity-building for legislators in inter-parliamentary diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Informal diplomacy, parliamentary friendship groups, Nigeria, soft power, strategic alliances

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<sup>1</sup>Chinasa Agatha OHIRI, PhD is an Associate Professor in the Research Department at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos, Nigeria. She is currently the Head of the Division of International Economic Relations. Her areas of research interest include but not limited to international economic relations, climate change, food security, and development studies. She has academic publications in reputable journals and books.

<sup>2</sup>Uche NWALI is a Research Fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs. He is also a visiting lecturer at Trinity University, Lagos, and the Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos. His research focuses on Nigerian politics, international political economy, conflicts, climate change, and the blue economy. He has published widely in local and international journals.. ORCID iD: 0009-0002-8209-6474

## Introduction

Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFGs) are playing an increasingly vital role in strengthening diplomatic ties between parliaments and among sovereign states around the world (Sitali, 2025; Kalu, 2025; Majidi, 2021). Despite this growing significance, the contributions of PFGs to informal diplomacy and potential for strategic alliances remain underexplored in diplomatic discourse. This is understandable, given that countries around the world find it difficult to measure the impact of parliamentary diplomacy on foreign policy. This difficulty, in part, emanates from the predominance of formal diplomatic channels – such as foreign ministries, embassies, ambassadors, and government representatives – which tend to overshadow the role of PFGs. These groups serve as an informal but essential diplomatic channel, fostering dialogue and cooperation beyond traditional executive-led engagements. By facilitating exchanges among legislators around the world, they contribute to relationship-building, cultural understanding, policy coordination and diplomacy between countries (Maddah, 2025; NGO Report, 2025; Leibbrandt-Loxton, 2020).

Diplomacy – a foreign policy instrument – is the “the established practice of managing international relations through dialogue, negotiation, and other measures short of war or violence” (Institute for Cultural Relations Policy, n.d., para. 1). It involves the use of tact by a country and its government to advance national interest while influencing the behaviour and decisions of other countries and their governments (Marks & Freeman, 2025). Diplomacy serves as a crucial instrument in forging strategic alliances among nations. PFGs hold immense potential in fostering these alliances – not only for global superpowers but also for middle powers and emerging economies like Nigeria. Strategic alliances are not a new phenomenon. They have long been a key aspect of international relations. From ancient dynasties to modern nation-states, societies have relied on alliances to advance their national interests (Mearshiemer, 2001; Hussain, 1979). The formation of strategic alliances can take various forms – formal agreements, informal collaborations, or a combination of both. In recent decades, many countries have increasingly turned to PFGs as an informal diplomatic channel to strengthen interstate partnerships and promote national interests. These groups provide a platform for dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding, allowing nations to navigate the complexities of the contemporary international system. A case in point is Nigeria, which has established several PFGs with different countries to foster bilateral relations (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre – PLAC, 2025; Ibrahim, 2024).

To illustrate the growing importance of PFGs and its incorporation into Nigeria’s legislative process with significance for alliance diplomacy, as at 2024, the 10th National Assembly – in particular, the lower chamber – House of Representatives had established over 70 PFGs with the aim of promoting global legislative cooperation (Rotimi, 2024). It has become more or less a tradition in the National Assembly to, after its inauguration, create new Committees in the special category, among which are Friendship Groups/ PFGs (PLAC, 2025). These groups are expected to deepen the Nigeria’s inter-parliamentary diplomacy. They are

also expected to help Nigeria complement and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations with partner states and/or institutions through regular exchange visits of members of both parliaments, especially parliamentarians handling related issues. Such exchange visits and the follow-up engagements can help in building better links at a working level, thus facilitate legislations and policy formulation that are mutually beneficial to Nigeria and partner states.

Furthermore, as the imperative of strategic alliances to state survival in a fast-changing world increases and states are compelled to search for ways to build and/or strengthen their international partnerships, greater policy and academic attention is needed to examine the potential of PFGs in this regard. Efforts towards building global strategic alliances by African states in pursuit of their foreign policies have always revolved around traditional executive-led foreign policy channels. Yet, such formal channels are usually rigid and shaped by asymmetrical power relations in the international system which put weak states at disadvantage position. While Africa has witnessed the proliferation of PFGs which are informal channels of diplomacy, not much efforts are geared towards integrating them into the foreign policy architecture to complement formal diplomacy, thus their soft power potential is not being maximised.

In light of the foregoing, this paper explores the role of PFGs in building strategic alliances, with a focus on Nigeria. It brings to the fore emerging challenges hindering optimal utilisation of the potential of PFGs and what must be done to optimally maximise their flexibility and soft power advantage to advance Nigeria's foreign policy objectives.

### **Understanding Strategic Alliances and Parliamentary Friendship Groups**

Strategic alliances are not a new phenomenon. Whether it is the ancient dynasties or modern nation-states, societies have always forged strategic alliances to achieve their national interests. Strategic Alliance, by definition, is “a fundamental feature of international relations, representing formal or informal agreements between states to collaborate in pursuit of shared objectives” (Tahir & Afridi, 2024). It is a purposive agreement and relationship between sovereign states which involves exchange of resources, sharing of risks, and appropriation of rewards from joint cooperation and action. Strategic alliance can also be described as a form of cross-border alignment between two or more states who agreed to collaborate for mutual benefits while maintaining their independence. It is an instrument of foreign policy used for tactical co-operation and competition in the international system.

Strategic alliances are usually “formed in response to geopolitical, economic, or security challenges, offer states the opportunity to enhance their capabilities, strengthen their positions, and maximise their influence on the global stage” (Tahir & Afridi, 2024). In other words, alliances help positioning countries to protect/access valuable resources and advance their important interests. Strategic alliances enable sovereign states to strengthen their national security, promote economic growth and development, and build competitive edge for their businesses and goods at global, regional and sub-regional levels. Strategic alliances enhance states' capabilities, enabling them to survive in the international system. Strategic alliances may take various forms, ranging from domestic collaborations to cross-border partnerships, and are

established through intentional, tactical negotiations (Saner, 2019; Kang & Sakai, 2000). Both strong and weak states need strategic alliances. While weak states could form alliance to balance power and deter aggression/threat posed by a hegemon, the superpowers (strong states) form alliances to either preserve or “increase their share of world capabilities expressed in form of power” (Mearshiemer, 2001, p.21). Power is an important element of politics among states (Morgenthau, 1973). It is the life wire of any strategic alliances as it determines their success and the influence of ally states.

Strategic alliances undergo constant reconfiguration and are influenced by power play and international cooperation in which states bring to bear their power capabilities and negotiation skills (Mohammad, 2023). Although origins of alliance date back to ancient times, much of the alliance diplomacy could be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century international relations in Europe which was underpinned by “a fragile balance of power and network of changing alliances” (Hussain, 1979, p.51). The nature, pattern and objectives of alliances have changed in recent decades. Some alliances are now designed to be strategic, and the objectives extend beyond national security to include trade security, economic cooperation, and research and technological development collaboration. Security issues are often at the centre of strategic alliances (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019). But beyond its security significance with respect to balance of power and deterrence, strategic alliances serve other purposes that could advance national interests, including promotion of trade and facilitation of economic development. Whether it is quest for raw materials and critical minerals and market for finished goods, or the need to secure trade routes and access to military logistics and arms supply, or the desire for more global visibility and voice in international affairs, or the quest to leapfrog economic development, among the most tested and trusted strategies that states employ is strategic alliances. Ideally, any strategic alliance is expected to generate the potential to add value to all partners involved (Jeive & Saner, 2019). But in reality, powerful states tend to benefit more from their alliances with weak states.

As the use of strategic alliances to advance national interest is growing rapidly, many countries are in search of diplomatic avenues that would facilitate and enable full realisation of their benefits. However, a common challenge is what channel(s) to employ to unleash the full benefits. The success of strategic alliances can be enhanced through dialogue and negotiations, which can vary from one country to another (Saner, 2019). Recent trends in international strategic alliances have seen increase in bilateral alignment. Many countries, in attempt to deepen inter-state economic and socio-political cooperation for mutual benefits now have a binational commission. But beyond this, there is also increase adoption of Parliamentary Friendship Groups to deepen bilateral and multilateral relations. Amiot (1985, p.111) conceptualised Parliamentary Friendship Group as “a group of members of parliament whose purpose is to establish exchanges with parliamentarians from another country”. Parliamentary Friendship Group can also be defined as an informal association established by members of a parliament to promote parliamentary relations between their own parliament and another country’s parliament, and to discuss issues of shared interest. It is formed on a cross-party basis; hence members are drawn from different political parties in the parliament though members have

to share similar concerns and interests (Christian, 2016). In some countries, it has no official status within the parliament. Unlike formal parliamentary bodies where there is “public debate shaped by formal rules and procedures, and participants have sovereign equality and decisions are made by vote” (Friedheim, 1976, pp.3-5), Parliamentary Friendship Groups do not have statutes and formal rules – they are among the informal channels for parliamentary diplomacy. De Boer and Weisglas (2007, pp.93-94) viewed parliamentary diplomacy as “the full range of international activities undertaken by parliamentarians in order to increase mutual understanding between countries, to assist each other in improving the control of governments and the representation of a people and to increase the democratic legitimacy of inter-governmental institutions”.

Parliaments are involved in international relations at two levels – domestic and global. Domestically, they make “input in decision-making and oversight of foreign policy by the executive; and globally, they are actors or agents of foreign policy in international forums” (Masters, 2015, p.74). Parliamentary Friendship Groups participate indirectly at both levels. Usually, these groups exchange visits, information and ideas which ultimately enhances understanding, deepens existing relations and fosters bilateral relations between partner countries. They organize meetings and also engage with policymakers and pressure groups, including representatives of government and civil societies. During such meetings, issues that are of mutual importance are discussed and recommendations on the way forward are made (Christian, 2016).

In the past, “some [national] parliaments were more restrained about setting up friendship groups for three major reasons: (1) duplication with other international bodies, (2) the difficulty of controlling expenses, and (3) a drift towards “parliamentary tourism” (Amiot, 1985, p.14). While these apprehensions still linger today, Parliamentary Friendship Groups have gained increased acceptance and traction around the world. This is driven largely by the increased awareness about the interdependence of humankind and transnational nature of some of the major world problems. Whether it is climate change, terrorism, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, or COVID, there is a growing realisation that with committed inter-state collaboration and actions much of these international problems with consequences for national security and development could be tackled more effectively. Accordingly, the Ghana Parliamentary Friendship Association Management Committee Report (2014, p.2) revealed that:

Parliamentary Friendship Associations create an elaborate network of friendship among legislatures of countries which sought to create them, [and such] network facilitate the aggregation of support for those countries at international fora, promoting the implantation of foreign policies of countries and generally, enabling the deepening of the processes of parliamentary diplomacy with the view of sharing best practices through effective exchanges while helping to identify and implement solutions to many problems which transcend national frontiers within the international system.

Globalization, “by multiplying awareness through greater ease of communication, even within formerly closed or remote societies”, has since reinforced this reality of an interdependent world and the need for mutual cooperation between countries (Kinsman & Bassuener, 2013, p.5). Inter-parliamentary diplomacy plays important role in international commitments. Through Parliamentary Friendship Groups, parliaments can initiate legislative actions to help translate international commitments into action at the country level.

Another major advantage that Parliamentary Friendship Groups offer is that unlike the executive-led that are expected to be always diplomatically correct in international engagements, “members of Parliamentary Friendship Groups do not have to pay as much attention to the niceties of international diplomacy as government representative”. They can express their world-views, even in difficult contexts without much diplomatic and international repercussions for their parliaments and states (Christian, 2016). It offers flexibility in place of rigidity that tends to characterise official diplomatic channels of bilateral and multilateral engagements. Members of parliaments from different parts of the world engage in international relations not only through formal channels, but also through informal transnational networks. Some of their activities have shifted from formal legislative duties to less conventional roles, including complementary diplomatic efforts commonly referred to as parliamentary diplomacy (Majidi, 2021).

In recent times, there have been some encouraging trends in inter-parliamentary friendship groups. In the case of Nigeria, the most visibly is the use of such groups to facilitate trade and promote foreign investments and economic development. Beyond this, PFGs could also be leveraged to build strategic alliances.

### **A Soft Power Tool**

Being perhaps the most commonly referenced informal diplomacy, Parliamentary Friendship Groups can be leveraged as a soft power tool to cultivate strategic alliances. Whether as a theoretical lens or a diplomatic tool, soft power is taking on increasing importance and relevance in explaining and deepening inter-state relations. Joseph Nye is associated with soft power theory (Nye, 2017; 2011; 2008; 2007; 2004; 2003; 2002; 1990). Nye (2017, p.1) described soft power as “the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion”. It involves influencing others by “framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes”.

The rise and growth of international organisation in the post-world war era has entrenched firmly the networks of cooperation which themselves constitute fundamental components of soft power. As international organisation regime and culture of multilateralism evolved, so too has the soft power of norms and laws they represent progressed (Gallarotti, 2011; Krasner, 1983; Keohane & Nye, 1989). Many countries have since recognised the import of using soft power tools to engage in inter-state politics of “attraction, legitimacy, and credibility” as opposed to the use of hard power which involves coercion of other countries through threats and inducements to act contrary to their preferences. Evidence has shown that the use of soft power in pursuit of national interests can be as efficacious, if not more efficacious, as hard power (Lee, 2011; Nye,

2011, p.11). States, both the strong and the weak, have soft power resources of attraction which they can employ in the conduct of their foreign policies. Soft power can be used alone to advance national interests. It can also “be utilised in various ways, not only to supplement hard power resources but also to achieve different national objectives” (Lee, 2011, p.12)

Nigeria’s soft power resources of attraction as could be deciphered from its global and regional perception include its democratic ideals and institutions, dedication to multilateralism and collective good, respect for international law and institutions, commitment to global peace and security, liberal legislations and economic policies, technical aid scheme, and big brother clout in Africa, as well as presence of Parliamentary Friendship Groups. Middle powers such as Nigeria and weak countries generally, are usually unable to maximise their soft power resources because of certain challenges.

Writing on South Africa, Masters (2015) and Leibrandt-Loxton (2020, pp.123-140) presented “evidence of parliament’s soft power of attraction among foreign legislative and executive actors” while also identifying challenges hindering strategic soft power successes of the country’s bilateral parliamentary relations to include the failure of the Parliament to optimally utilise bilateral parliamentary diplomacy to deepen relations after initial discussions, disparate approaches to finalising formal agreements, which limits Parliament’s capacity to fully act on such agreements, and Members of Parliament (MPs) limited awareness about Parliament’s bilateral relations. The same holds true for most countries in Africa. For example, Nigeria has several PFGs, yet the country has not been able to unlock the inherent soft power potential of these groups to elicit positive attraction and advance its national interest and aspirations. Building effective strategies that successfully optimise soft power resources could be difficult and challenging though (Gallarotti, 2011).

### **The Nigerian Experience**

Parliamentary diplomacy is an integral part of Nigeria’s legislative tradition, and PFGs are its key component. This is largely why immediately after the return to civilian rule in 1999 and the inauguration of the Fourth Republic National Assembly – the country’s parliament, steps were taken to re-connect Nigeria back to the global parliamentary circle and also renew its membership of international parliamentary organisations and institutions. Thus, formal applications were made for membership and/or re-affiliation to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), African Parliamentary Union (APU), West African Parliamentary Union (WAPU), and African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP)/European Union (EU) Joint Assembly. Most of these applications were granted as Nigeria was re-admitted into IPU and CPA in late 1999 (Ngara, 2016). Nigeria also joined other global parliamentary organisations, including Afro-Arab Parliamentary Association (AAPA) and Association of Senates, Shoora and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World (ASSECA), as well as the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and ECOWAS-Parliament, which the National Assembly played pivotal roles in their establishment in 2004 and 2006, respectively (Ngara, 2016).



Besides multilateral parliamentary channels, Nigeria has also established bilateral PFGs with individual foreign countries (see the table below). As at 2024, the House of Representatives had established 71 Parliamentary Friendship Groups with the aim of promoting global legislative cooperation (Rotimi, 2024).

**Table 1: Parliamentary Friendship Groups in the House of Representatives**

1	Name of Parliamentary Friendship Group
2	Nigeria – China Parliamentary Friendship Group
3	Nigeria – United Kingdom Parliamentary Friendship Group
4	Nigeria – United Arab Emirates Parliamentary Friendship Group
5	Nigeria – Russia Parliamentary Friendship Group
6	Nigeria – Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group
6	Nigeria – South-Korea Parliamentary Friendship Group
7	Nigeria – Saudi Arabia Parliamentary Friendship Group
9	Nigeria – Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group
10	Nigeria – South Africa Parliamentary Friendship Group
11	Nigeria – Belize Parliamentary Friendship Group
12	Nigeria – Turkey Parliamentary Friendship Group
13	Nigeria – Bulgaria Parliamentary Friendship Group
14	Nigeria – France Parliamentary Friendship Group
15	Nigeria – Hungary Parliamentary Friendship Group
16	Nigeria – Thailand Parliamentary Friendship Group
17	Nigeria – Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group
18	Nigeria – Venezuela Parliamentary Friendship Group
19	Nigeria – Netherlands Parliamentary Friendship Group
20	Nigeria – Philippines Parliamentary Friendship Group
21	Nigeria – Finland Parliamentary Friendship Group
22	Nigeria – Tunisia Parliamentary Friendship Group
23	Nigeria – Romania Parliamentary Friendship Group
24	Nigeria – Lebanon Parliamentary Friendship Group
25	Nigeria – Libya Parliamentary Friendship Group
26	Nigeria – European Union Parliamentary Friendship Group
27	Nigeria – Bangladesh Parliamentary Friendship Group
28	Nigeria – Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Group
29	Nigeria – Spain Parliamentary Friendship Group
30	Nigeria – Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group
31	Nigeria – Italy Parliamentary Friendship Group
32	Nigeria – Mexico Parliamentary Friendship Group
33	Nigeria – Brazil Parliamentary Friendship Group
34	Nigeria – Singapore Parliamentary Friendship Group
35	Nigeria – Ireland Parliamentary Friendship Group
36	Nigeria – Switzerland Parliamentary Friendship Group
37	Nigeria – Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Group



38	Nigeria – Qatar Parliamentary Friendship Group
39	Nigeria – Portugal Parliamentary Friendship Group
40	Nigeria – Sweden Parliamentary Friendship Group
41	Nigeria – Belgium Parliamentary Friendship Group
42	Nigeria – Austria Parliamentary Friendship Group
43	Nigeria – Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group
44	Nigeria – Malaysia Parliamentary Friendship Group
45	Nigeria – Greece Parliamentary Friendship Group
46	Nigeria – Indonesia Parliamentary Friendship Group
47	Nigeria – Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group
48	Nigeria – Bulgaria Parliamentary Friendship Group
49	Nigeria – New Zealand Parliamentary Friendship Group
50	Nigeria – Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship Group
51	Nigeria – Cuba Parliamentary Friendship Group
52	Nigeria – Malta Parliamentary Friendship Group
53	Nigeria – Ghana Parliamentary Friendship Group
54	Nigeria – Algeria Parliamentary Friendship Group
55	Nigeria – Kenya Parliamentary Friendship Group
56	Nigeria – Rwanda Parliamentary Friendship Group
57	Nigeria – Caribbean Parliamentary Friendship Group
58	Nigeria – West Africa Parliamentary Friendship Group
59	Nigeria – East Africa Parliamentary Friendship Group
60	Nigeria – Central Africa Parliamentary Friendship Group
61	Nigeria – North Africa Parliamentary Friendship Group

**Sources:** Adapted from PLAC (2025); Nigeria Embassy, Algiers (2022)

As part of the country’s foreign policy objectives, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), provides, among other things, for the “promotion of international cooperation for universal peace, respect for international law and treaty obligations, and the promotion of a just world economic order.” The Nigerian parliament – the National Assembly which is also a creation of the Constitution has a role to play towards achieving these objectives. While Sections 47, 48 and 49 of the Constitution established the National Assembly to comprise the Senate and House of Representatives, Section 62 empowered both chambers to “appoint a committee of its members for special or general purpose.” PFGs are among the committees created for a special purpose of inter-parliamentary diplomacy.

From the foregoing, it evident that Nigeria operates PFGs at both multilateral and bilateral levels. At both levels, the country has engaged in global politics and international economic relations. For example, the National Assembly sent a Delegation led by the President of the Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio, and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Benjamin Kalu to the 2024 IPU Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. The Nigerian Delegation made a presentation, calling for global action to address the humanitarian crisis in

Gaza. This action of Nigeria at the global stage demonstrated the country's commitment to global peace and security (Rotimi, 2024).

Nigeria, like many countries around the world, employs PFGs in its bilateral relations. For instance, in 2016, The Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Parliamentary Friendship Group was established with the aim of strengthening the bilateral ties and cooperation between both countries. This was followed by exchange of visits of Members of Parliament from both countries during which they discussed a number of issues, ranging from religio-cultural collaboration to counter-terrorism (see figure 1 below).

**Figure 1**

**Pictorial: Visit of the House of Representatives Committee on Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Parliamentary Friendship Group to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**



Source: Focus on Faith: The Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Parliamentary Friendship Group

In an attempt to deepen Nigeria-Saudi Arabia legislative partnership and diplomatic ties, on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016, members of Nigeria's National Assembly/House Committee on Nigeria-Saudi Arabia Parliamentary Friendship Group visited Saudi-Arabia and had audience with the then the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, His Excellency, Sheikh Fahad Abdullah Sefyan.

In Africa, Nigeria maintains PFGs at both bilateral and multilateral levels as can be extrapolated from Table 1 above. In 2021, Nigeria and Ghana established a Parliamentary Friendship Group. This was part of the Parliamentary Diplomacy embarked by the Parliaments of both countries which was aimed at finding solution to the lingering economic and diplomatic issues between the two countries. This culminated in the enactment of "Ghana-Nigeria Friendship Act". Besides preventing the Ghanaian Authorities who had in many instances in the past closed down Nigerian businesses in Ghana, forcing many Nigerians trading in the country to return home, the Act was expected to further result in the creation of "Ghana-Nigeria Business

Council”, to provide both legal and institutional frameworks that would help sustain the continued friendship and business interests of citizens of both countries (Hamidu, 2021).

In order to boost cooperation and exchange between the Parliaments and people of Nigeria and Algeria, the two countries inaugurated the Nigeria-Algeria Parliamentary Friendship Group at Algiers on 9th March, 2022 (See Figure 2 below).

**Figure 2**

**Pictorial: Inauguration of Nigeria-Algeria Parliamentary Friendship Group at Algiers**



**Source:** Nigeria Embassy, Algiers (2022)

The inauguration was held at the headquarters of the People’s National Assembly (Algeria’s lower House of Parliament). The Nigeria Embassy was represented by Mr. Adamu Idris Mohammed (Nigeria Embassy, Algiers, 2022).

In North America, Canada is one of the countries that Nigeria maintains a parliamentary friendship with. The Nigeria–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Initiative is a platform that aims to foster stronger legislative ties and promote economic development and cultural exchange between both countries through strategic partnerships, exchange programs, and collaborative summits and policies. The Nigeria-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Initiative is spearheaded by members of the Federal House of Representatives of Nigeria and the House of Commons of Canada. The Group occasionally organises trade and investment summits aimed at opening new frontiers to promote economic cooperation, investment and sustainable growth and development by facilitating high-level engagements and actionable trade agreements (Nigeria-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Inc., 2025).

Nigeria is a partner state to several inter-parliamentary friendship groups. It is expected that such inter-parliamentary engagements should be encouraged and that the Nigerian Parliament must continue to build mutual and stronger friendships with the parliaments of other countries and take up new roles aimed at safeguarding our democracy, protecting our national sovereignty and fundamental human rights, and providing physical and economic security for the teeming population. While Nigeria’s PFGs are believed to have contributed to the restoration of

Nigeria's image abroad and confidence in the country's democracy; enhancement of bargaining power in the campaign for external debt relief; and laudable regional and sub-regional peace initiatives (Ngara, 2016), skepticism remains about the worth of their overall impact on foreign policy objectives. Their impact further pales into insignificance when the issue of strategic alliances is brought into the equation.

In the evolving landscape of international diplomacy, PFGs have emerged as informal yet influential instruments for fostering bilateral and multilateral cooperation. These groups, embedded within legislative frameworks, offer nation-states a unique platform to advance strategic alliances, promote soft power, and deepen interstate relations. In Nigeria, PFGs are increasingly recognised for their potential to complement formal diplomatic channels. However, their optimal utilisation remains significantly constrained by a range of structural and operational challenges. One of the foremost impediments is the duplication and overlapping of responsibilities between PFGs and existing standing committees within the National Assembly. According to the 2025 report by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), the creation of special category committees and PFGs often results in functional redundancies, particularly with committees that oversee diaspora affairs and foreign policy. Historically, committees in the National Assembly were aligned with the structure of relevant Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), thereby ensuring clarity of mandate and preventing jurisdictional conflicts (PLAC, 2025). The current proliferation of PFGs without strategic alignment has disrupted this balance, leading to inefficiencies and diluted impact. Another critical issue is the lack of continuity in the operation of PFGs. These groups are often subject to political cycles and leadership changes, which undermine long-term planning and sustained engagement. Without institutional memory or mechanisms for transition, PFGs struggle to maintain momentum across legislative sessions. This discontinuity hampers the development of enduring relationships with foreign counterparts and weakens Nigeria's strategic positioning in global parliamentary diplomacy.

Furthermore, there is a failure to elevate PFGs as informal pillars of Nigeria's foreign policy. Despite their potential to influence international relations through soft power and legislative diplomacy, PFGs are rarely integrated into the broader foreign policy architecture. They operate in silos, disconnected from the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other diplomatic institutions. This disconnect limits their effectiveness and reduces their visibility in Nigeria's foreign policy discourse (Ngara, 2016).

The absence of tact in inter-parliamentary engagements of PFGs also poses a significant challenge. Diplomacy, whether formal or informal, requires a nuanced understanding of international norms, and tactical negotiations. Nigerian PFGs often lack the training and orientation necessary to navigate these complexities. As a result, engagements with foreign parliaments may lack the subtlety and strategic intent required to build trust and influence outcomes. Lastly, there is a dearth of national interest-driven PFGs. Many existing groups are formed based on personal or political affiliations rather than strategic national priorities. This

misalignment leads to fragmented efforts and missed opportunities for leveraging parliamentary diplomacy to advance Nigeria's geopolitical and economic interests. A national interest-driven approach would entail the deliberate formation of PFGs with countries that align with Nigeria's foreign policy goals, trade ambitions, and security concerns.

To address these challenges, Nigeria must undertake a comprehensive restructuring of its PFG framework. This includes aligning PFGs with national strategic interests, streamlining their mandates to avoid duplication, institutionalising continuity mechanisms, and integrating them into the foreign policy ecosystem. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives should be introduced to equip members with diplomatic skills and strategic orientation. By doing so, Nigeria can harness the full potential of PFGs as flexible, informal instruments of foreign policy capable of advancing strategic alliances that align with national interests in an increasingly complex global arena.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Although PFGs are fostering bilateral ties between Nigeria and other nations, their optimal use in advancing Nigeria's strategic alliances remains constrained by several challenges. This study has explored two of these challenges – absence of national interest-driven PFGs and lack of diplomatic tact in their inter-parliamentary engagements, which hitherto has not received adequate academic and policy attention. These challenges, together with others (such as underfunding, lack of continuity, duplication and overlap of responsibilities, no integration of PFGs into Nigeria's foreign policy architecture) that have been identified by previous literature undermine the soft power and strategic potential of Nigeria's PFGs. If these challenges are adequately addressed, PFGs can help Nigeria to forge strategic alliances by facilitating tactical but subtle pursuit of national interests while liaising and collaborating with partner parliaments of other countries via visits, discussions and diplomatic exchanges. Nigeria and other countries in Africa that are searching for ways to shore up their strategic alliances can leverage the informal opportunities inherent in PFGs to build new partnerships with other countries and establish more bilateral relations as well as deepen existing relations, thereby securing more strategic friendships for mutual social, political and economic benefits.

To fully harness the soft power potential of PFGs to strengthen Nigeria's strategic alliances, it is recommended that there should be infusion of tact into their activities and international engagements. These groups, by design, offer a flexible and informal avenue for international engagement, yet their effectiveness depends on deliberate and strategic deployment. Nigeria must therefore curate and align its PFGs with its core foreign policy objectives, ensuring that each group reflects national priorities and geostrategic interests. By leveraging the mutuality and flexibility inherent in PFGs, Nigeria can foster deeper partnerships through intentional collaboration with the national parliaments of other countries. Such approach would enable Nigeria to advance its national interests via informal, parliament-driven alliances, while navigating the power dynamics and institutional rigidity that often define executive-led formal diplomatic channels.

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