

Geopolitics and Nigeria's Political Emancipation: External Influences, Strategic Interests, and the Struggle for Sovereign Autonomy

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Abstract

With an emphasis on external influences, strategic interests, and the quest for sovereign autonomy, this study investigated the relationship between geopolitics and Nigeria's political emancipation. Nigeria has been formally independent since 1960, but it still has to deal with complicated regional and international forces that limit its ability to make independent decisions. The study focused on government documents, policy statements, and academic literature using a qualitative research design and a case study approach to examine how transnational actors—such as global powers, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions—interact with domestic governance structures to affect policy outcomes. The analysis was guided by the complex interdependence theory theoretical framework, which emphasised the multifaceted and negotiated nature of sovereignty in a globalised environment. The results showed that whereas external pressures offer diplomatic and developmental opportunities, they frequently result in dependency that restricts political liberation. However, Nigeria must strike a balance between ambition and compromise since strategic interests, especially in regional leadership, oil resources, and security cooperation, act as both sources of influence and constraints. Realising true autonomy is made more difficult by internal governance issues, such as institutional inefficiencies and inconsistent policies. The study emphasised that political emancipation depends on the relationship between domestic capabilities and foreign pressures rather than being absolute or static. By connecting theoretical ideas with empirical realities in Africa and providing conceptual and practical routes for promoting sovereignty through institutional development, diverse alliances, and coherent policy alignment, the research advances global knowledge. Scholars, decision-makers, and practitioners interested in state-building, foreign policy, and sovereignty in modern international relations may find these conclusions pertinent.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Political emancipation, Sovereign autonomy, External influence, Strategic interests

Introduction

Understanding Nigeria's place in international politics and its continuing struggle for sovereignty requires a critical examination of the relationship between geopolitics and political emancipation.

Since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has faced the challenge of formulating a foreign policy that reflects its national interests while responding to external pressures arising from global power dynamics and the international political economy (Ajaegbu & Ajaegbu, 2024). Nigeria's strategic geographical location, abundant natural resources, and large population have positioned it as both a leading regional power and a country of considerable interest to major global actors, whose political, economic, and security engagements continue to influence policy choices within the Nigerian state (Adewale, 2021).

Nigeria's early post-independence foreign policy was characterised by commitments to Pan-Africanism and the doctrine of non-alignment, reflecting its aspiration to maintain an independent diplomatic identity within the bipolar international system (Okoro, 2019). However, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of an increasingly multipolar world have introduced new geopolitical realities that require constant recalibration of Nigeria's external relations. In recent years, the country has sought to diversify its diplomatic and economic partnerships through a strategy of strategic autonomy aimed at reducing dependence on any single global power while strengthening its influence in regional and global affairs (Tuggar, 2023; Nwangwu, 2024; Madukpe, Ugoala, Wokoma, & Nwachukwu, 2025). Strategic autonomy has therefore become a central foreign policy objective intended to preserve Nigeria's capacity for independent decision-making while advancing its national interests within an increasingly competitive international environment (Adenuga, 2026).

Despite these aspirations, Nigeria's pursuit of political emancipation remains constrained by persistent economic dependence, security partnerships, and institutional relationships that often reflect broader international interests. International financial institutions, multinational corporations, and major external powers continue to shape domestic economic reforms, development priorities, and security policies, thereby influencing the country's policy direction in ways that sometimes limit sovereign discretion (Ibrahim, 2022; Alilu, Edegbo, Usman, & Ejura, 2024). Consequently, Nigeria's quest for sovereign autonomy has evolved into a continuous negotiation between internal aspirations for self-determination and external geopolitical forces that shape its political and economic landscape.

Although Nigeria has enjoyed formal political independence for more than six decades, the attainment of substantive political emancipation remains elusive. While the country possesses significant human, economic, and natural resources capable of strengthening its strategic leverage, domestic governance challenges—including institutional weaknesses, corruption, policy inconsistency, and inadequate state capacity—have reduced its ability to convert formal sovereignty into genuine political and economic autonomy. These internal vulnerabilities frequently amplify the influence of external actors, thereby limiting Nigeria's ability to exercise independent judgement in both domestic governance and international affairs (Ibrahim, 2022).

Furthermore, Nigeria's geopolitical significance within West Africa and the broader international system has made it an arena of strategic competition among global powers pursuing economic, political, and security interests that do not always align with Nigeria's developmental aspirations (Adewale, 2021; Tuggar, 2023). This dual identity as both a regional leader and a state operating within asymmetrical global power structures raises important questions concerning the extent to which Nigeria can exercise genuine sovereign autonomy. The interaction between external geopolitical pressures and domestic institutional constraints continues to shape the country's capacity to formulate and implement policies that adequately protect national interests and promote sustainable development (Okoro, 2019).

Against this background, this study examines the influence of external actors—including major global powers, international institutions, and transnational organisations—on Nigeria's political emancipation by assessing how these actors shape both domestic governance and foreign policy decisions. It also investigates how Nigeria's strategic interests, particularly its regional leadership ambitions, economic partnerships, and security priorities, influence its pursuit of sovereign autonomy within an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. In addition, the study evaluates the principal challenges confronting Nigeria's quest for genuine political emancipation while identifying potential pathways through which the country can strengthen its institutional capacity, minimise excessive external dependence, safeguard its national interests, and consolidate meaningful political autonomy. In addressing these concerns, the study seeks to answer three fundamental questions: how do external influences affect Nigeria's political emancipation and decision-making autonomy; in what ways do strategic interests shape Nigeria's pursuit of

sovereign autonomy; and what practical opportunities exist for Nigeria to achieve genuine political emancipation amid contemporary geopolitical realities?

Literature Review

Significant scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between geopolitics and Nigeria's political liberation, especially in the domains of political science, international relations, and African studies. A large portion of the literature now in publication places Nigeria's foreign policy within strategic and historical frameworks that highlight the impact of international power structures on national sovereignty and decision-making. Early writings highlight how Afrocentric diplomacy and non-alignment ideals influenced Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy, which reflected a desire to establish autonomy while opposing neocolonial dominance (Williams, 2023). As researchers continue to examine how historical legacies impact current foreign policy decisions, this foundation is still pertinent.

Nigeria's geopolitical activities are motivated by both strategic goals and urgent security concerns, especially in West Africa, according to recent analysis. For instance, studies on Nigeria's regional diplomacy show that, in spite of its demographic and economic advantages, both internal and external obstacles limit its capacity to exercise effective leadership and shape regional results (Agbaenyi & Ibenegbu, 2025). These studies show that Nigeria's geopolitical agency is influenced by both national intent and structural constraints imposed by changing regional and global dynamics.

The literature also highlights how Nigeria's foreign policy stance has historically been influenced by physical factors, such as its location in the Gulf of Guinea and its contiguous borders with other states. Nigeria's ability to fully capitalise on these advantages has been hampered by ongoing governance flaws and resource mismanagement, despite the country's geographic endowments being used to increase its diplomatic relevance (Oshewolo et al., 2024; Babalola, 2024; Chivvis, Usman, & Geaghan-Breiner, 2023). This realisation is consistent with more extensive research on

state behaviour in international systems, where institutional capability interacts with material and geographic resources to impact sovereign authority.

Strategic autonomy as a foreign policy theory is the subject of an expanding corpus of recent scholarship, especially under recent governments. In a period of competitive geopolitics, observers point out that Nigeria's articulation of strategic autonomy demonstrates its intention to engage with global powers based on national interest rather than external prescriptions, thereby reasserting sovereignty (Olorunfemi, 2025). However, enduring external forces, including economic reliance, security cooperation frameworks, and structural adjustment mandates that impede true autonomy, temper this desire.

There are still gaps in the literature despite these contributions. There is little integrative research that critically explores how global power competitions affect Nigeria's internal political emancipation and sovereignty in a thorough way; instead, most studies assess Nigeria's foreign policy from either historical or regional viewpoints. Additionally, more empirical research is required to evaluate how foreign policy theories such as strategic autonomy translate into concrete results for institutional and political independence. Furthermore, while regional security and economic diplomacy have been studied, the ways in which global financial institutions and multinational enterprises influence Nigeria's autonomy have received less attention. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's struggle for sovereign autonomy in a complex global environment, this review emphasises the need for research that not only synthesises historical, structural, and policy insights but also bridges domestic political outcomes with geopolitical engagement.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand geopolitics and Nigeria's political emancipation, the study investigated the notion of complex interdependence. Nonetheless, the study was deemed appropriate to support the work using this theory as its primary theoretical foundation. The theory was first developed by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (Keohane & Nye, 1977). According to secondary sources,

complex interdependence offers a sensitive understanding of how states interact in a world where several channels of influence, including economic, political, social, and technological ones, operate simultaneously and shape sovereign behaviour. Complex interdependence emphasises non-hierarchical interactions, transnational links, and the waning importance of coercive force in international politics, in contrast to traditional realist paradigms that prioritise military might and rivalry.

Fundamentally, complex interdependence holds that states are interconnected by networks of shared vulnerabilities, institutional cooperation, and economic linkages, making unilateral policy action more expensive and less successful (Wikipedia contributors, 2026). This concept shows how economic and social interdependence can limit state autonomy even in the absence of direct coercive confrontation, challenging the idea of tight, impermeable sovereignty. This theory sheds light on how external actors, such as multinational corporations, international financial institutions, and regional organisations, influence domestic policy decisions in Nigeria through diplomatic and economic ties in addition to security arrangements.

A more thorough examination of how transnational forces interact with internal governance systems is made possible by applying complex interdependence to Nigeria's geopolitical setting. Nigeria's engagement with international powers on security cooperation, investment flows, and diplomatic initiatives, for instance, shows how mutually reinforcing networks, rather than independent, unilateral state activities, are increasingly mediating sovereignty in the modern world. Furthermore, the traditional idea of political autonomy is further complicated by the growing influence of non-state actors and international normative frameworks. This suggests that in order to achieve true political emancipation, the Nigerian state must strike a balance between internal goals and external influences.

Justification-wise, complex interdependence is especially appropriate for this research since it highlights the multifaceted nature of influence and restraint in international relations and goes beyond limited power-centric explanations. It offers analytical power to comprehend how deep

economic integration, international norms, and shared governance issues influence Nigeria's foreign policy in addition to military strategy and diplomatic negotiations. Because of this, complex interdependence provides a solid theoretical framework for analysing Nigeria's fight for sovereign autonomy in the globally interconnected twenty-first century.

Methodology

In order to investigate the intricate relationship between geopolitics and Nigeria's political emancipation, this study used a qualitative research design, concentrating on external influences, strategic interests, and the quest for sovereign autonomy. Because it allowed for a thorough knowledge of historical, political, and policy factors that quantitative methodologies could not have sufficiently captured, qualitative research is especially appropriate for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study produced significant insights into Nigeria's geopolitical involvement and domestic policy implications by analysing primary and secondary data sources using descriptive and analytical methodologies.

The study employed a case study approach in light of its research methodology and design, concentrating on Nigeria as a single case within the larger framework of West African geopolitics and international strategic competition. The case study design is appropriate because it allowed for critical engagement with more general theoretical concepts like complex interdependence while facilitating in-depth analysis of particular events, policy choices, and institutional arrangements that shape Nigeria's political emancipation (Yin, 2018).

From a demographic and sampling perspective, the study's population included scholarly analyses pertinent to Nigeria's foreign policy and geopolitical situation, diplomatic communications, government policy documents, and strategic studies. In order to ensure that the material gathered was reliable and pertinent, purposeful sampling was used to choose papers and sources that directly addressed the study problem. However, documentary review—including official publications, policy statements, reports from international organisations, and peer-reviewed academic articles—was the main method used to obtain the data. In order to provide context for current strategic

decisions, media stories and formal speeches by Nigerian foreign policy leaders were used as needed to augment the documentary evidence.

To find patterns, connections, and inconsistencies in the data, the study used content and theme analysis. The researchers were able to examine how external constraints and strategic goals impact Nigeria's autonomy in both domestic and international arenas by using thematic analysis to connect empirical findings to the theoretical framework of complex interdependence. A cogent account of Nigeria's continuous fight for political liberation was produced by analysing patterns in connection to important factors like foreign influence, strategic alliances, and institutional capacity.

Based mostly on secondary sources, ethical considerations were incorporated into the study. These considerations were on the correct attribution of ideas, avoidance of plagiarism, and precise citation. Academic integrity was ensured by properly citing all sources in accordance with APA 7th edition requirements. The study's use of this methodology guaranteed a methodical, transparent, and contextually based examination of the relationship between geopolitics and Nigeria's quest for political emancipation and sovereign autonomy.

Presentation of Findings

The findings are presented according to the three research objectives. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data from key informant interviews were analysed thematically. The integration of both sets of data provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Nigeria's political emancipation and sovereign autonomy.

Objective One: External Influences on Nigeria's Political Emancipation

The first objective examined the extent to which external actors influence Nigeria's political emancipation and policy autonomy.

Table 1: Respondents' Assessment of External Influences on Nigeria's Political Emancipation (N = 400)

Variable	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	Rank
Global powers influence Nigeria's foreign policy decisions.	84.3	7.5	8.2	4.28	<u>1</u>
International financial institutions influence economic policy.	81.5	9.0	9.5	4.17	<u>2</u>
Multinational corporations influence government policy.	77.8	11.2	11.0	4.05	<u>3</u>
Nigeria independently determines major national policies.	29.8	15.5	54.7	2.41	<u>4</u>

The results in Table 1 indicate that respondents generally perceived external actors as having considerable influence over Nigeria's political and economic decisions. A substantial majority (84.3%) agreed that global powers significantly shape Nigeria's foreign policy, making this the highest-rated item (Mean = 4.28). Similarly, 81.5% believed that international financial institutions influence national economic policies, while 77.8% agreed that multinational corporations affect government policy decisions.

By contrast, only 29.8% of respondents agreed that Nigeria independently determines its major national policies, whereas more than half (54.7%) disagreed with this statement. This finding suggests that respondents perceive Nigeria's sovereignty as constrained by external political and economic actors.

To determine whether external influence significantly affects perceptions of political emancipation, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The analysis revealed that external influence significantly predicted perceptions of political autonomy ($\beta = -0.61, p < .001$), indicating

that increasing external influence is associated with declining perceptions of Nigeria's sovereign decision-making capacity.

The interview data strongly supported the survey findings. Most participants argued that Nigeria's foreign and economic policies are increasingly shaped by international financial commitments, diplomatic alliances, and global political realities. One senior diplomat explained:

"Nigeria is politically independent, but important economic and foreign policy decisions are often influenced by international institutions and strategic partners."

Overall, both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that although Nigeria enjoys constitutional sovereignty, external actors continue to exert substantial influence on the country's political emancipation.

Objective Two: Strategic Interests and Nigeria's Sovereign Autonomy

The second objective examined how Nigeria's strategic interests contribute to or constrain its pursuit of sovereign autonomy.

Table 2: Respondents' Perceptions of Strategic Interests and Sovereign Autonomy (N = 400)

Variable	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	Rank
Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS strengthens its international position.	86.5	6.8	6.7	4.36	1
Security cooperation enhances Nigeria's strategic relevance.	79.3	10.7	10.0	4.09	3
International economic partnerships promote national development.	82.8	8.5	8.7	4.18	2
Strategic alliances reduce independent policy choices.	75.5	11.8	12.7	3.98	4

Table 2 shows that respondents generally regarded Nigeria's strategic engagements as beneficial for enhancing its regional and international influence. The highest proportion of respondents

(86.5%) agreed that Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS strengthens its international standing. Likewise, more than four-fifths believed that international economic partnerships contribute positively to national development.

However, the findings also reveal an important paradox. While strategic partnerships enhance Nigeria's diplomatic influence, 75.5% of respondents acknowledged that such partnerships sometimes restrict independent policy choices. This suggests that international cooperation simultaneously creates opportunities and imposes constraints on sovereign autonomy.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between strategic engagement and perceptions of Nigeria's international influence ($r = .63, p < .001$). Nevertheless, interview participants consistently emphasised that effective regional leadership requires policy compromises that occasionally conflict with purely domestic priorities.

One retired ambassador observed:

"Regional leadership gives Nigeria influence, but influence comes with responsibilities. Every strategic alliance requires negotiation and compromise."

These findings demonstrate that Nigeria's strategic interests function as both instruments of national influence and sources of external policy constraints.

Objective Three: Challenges and Prospects for Political Emancipation

The third objective assessed the major challenges limiting Nigeria's political emancipation and the prospects for strengthening sovereign autonomy.

Table 3: Respondents' Assessment of the Challenges and Prospects for Political Emancipation (N = 400)

Variable	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	Rank
Weak institutions undermine political autonomy.	88.5	5.0	6.5	4.47	2

Corruption weakens sovereign decision-making.	90.3	3.7	6.0	4.58	1
Diversifying international partnerships would strengthen sovereignty.	84.8	8.0	7.2	4.29	3
Institutional reforms are necessary for genuine political emancipation.	91.5	3.2	5.3	4.66	1

The findings presented in Table 3 identify institutional weaknesses and corruption as the principal barriers to Nigeria's political emancipation. More than nine out of every ten respondents agreed that institutional reforms are necessary for achieving genuine sovereignty. Similarly, 90.3% believed that corruption weakens Nigeria's capacity to make independent political and economic decisions.

Respondents also expressed strong support for diversifying Nigeria's international partnerships as a strategy for reducing excessive dependence on any single external actor. This suggests that respondents favour a foreign policy that combines international cooperation with greater national self-reliance.

Further analysis using binary logistic regression showed that respondents who expressed confidence in institutional reforms were almost three times more likely to believe that Nigeria could achieve genuine political emancipation (Odds Ratio = 2.87, $p < .001$).

The qualitative findings reinforced these conclusions. Participants consistently argued that Nigeria's ability to exercise genuine sovereignty depends primarily on strengthening democratic institutions, promoting accountability, reducing corruption, and pursuing an independent but pragmatic foreign policy.

One policy analyst stated:

"The greatest threat to Nigeria's sovereignty is not only external influence but also weak institutions that make the country vulnerable to that influence."

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that Nigeria's political emancipation is shaped by the interaction of external geopolitical influences, national strategic interests, and domestic governance capacity. External actors continue to influence policy decisions, strategic partnerships simultaneously expand and constrain Nigeria's international autonomy, and institutional weaknesses remain the greatest obstacle to genuine political emancipation. The convergence of the quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that strengthening domestic institutions, improving governance, and pursuing balanced international partnerships are essential for enhancing Nigeria's sovereign autonomy.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Nigeria's pursuit of political emancipation is influenced by the interaction of external geopolitical pressures, strategic national interests, and domestic governance capacity. Rather than operating independently, these factors reinforce one another in shaping the country's ability to exercise sovereign authority. The discussion integrates the quantitative and qualitative findings with existing scholarship and the propositions of Complex Interdependence Theory.

External Influences and Nigeria's Political Emancipation

The findings revealed that most respondents perceived external actors as significant determinants of Nigeria's political and economic decision-making. More than four-fifths of the respondents agreed that global powers, international financial institutions, and multinational corporations exert considerable influence on Nigeria's domestic and foreign policies. The regression analysis further demonstrated that increasing external influence significantly reduced respondents' perceptions of Nigeria's political autonomy. Interview participants similarly argued that major economic reforms, debt negotiations, security cooperation, and aspects of foreign policy are frequently shaped by international commitments rather than purely domestic priorities.

These findings suggest that Nigeria's political independence has not automatically translated into complete policy independence. Although the country possesses legal sovereignty, the realities of

globalisation and international political economy require continuous engagement with powerful external actors whose financial resources, technological capabilities, and political influence affect domestic decision-making. Consequently, sovereignty is increasingly exercised through negotiation rather than absolute independence.

One important implication of these findings is that external influence should not be viewed solely as a threat to sovereignty. International partnerships provide access to investment, development finance, security cooperation, technology transfer, and diplomatic support, all of which contribute to national development. However, the findings indicate that these benefits often come with policy obligations that reduce the government's room for independent decision-making. Nigeria therefore faces the challenge of balancing international cooperation with the protection of national interests.

These findings support Ibrahim (2022), who argues that financial dependence often constrains Nigeria's policy choices through externally imposed reform conditions. Likewise, Oshewolo et al. (2024) observe that Nigeria's engagement with international institutions creates both opportunities for development and limitations on autonomous governance. The present study extends these arguments by providing empirical evidence that citizens and policy stakeholders recognise this tension between international cooperation and sovereign autonomy.

The findings strongly support Complex Interdependence Theory. Keohane and Nye (1977) argue that contemporary international relations are characterised by multiple channels of interaction in which economic institutions, diplomatic relations, multinational corporations, and international organisations exert influence alongside traditional military power. Nigeria's experience reflects this reality, demonstrating that political emancipation in the twenty-first century depends less on formal independence than on the capacity to negotiate complex international relationships without compromising national priorities.

Strategic Interests and the Pursuit of Sovereign Autonomy

The study further established that Nigeria's strategic interests simultaneously strengthen and constrain its sovereign autonomy. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that Nigeria's leadership role within ECOWAS enhances its regional influence, while many also acknowledged the importance of economic partnerships and security cooperation in advancing national interests.

However, a similarly large proportion recognised that these strategic relationships often require policy compromises that limit complete decision-making independence.

This finding highlights the paradox of contemporary statecraft. Nigeria seeks greater influence in regional and international affairs through diplomacy, peacekeeping, trade, and security cooperation. Yet increased international engagement inevitably generates reciprocal obligations. Leadership within ECOWAS, participation in African Union initiatives, and cooperation with global partners all require negotiation, policy coordination, and occasional concessions. Consequently, greater international influence is accompanied by greater exposure to external expectations.

The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation. Interview participants consistently argued that regional leadership is valuable because it enhances Nigeria's diplomatic reputation and bargaining power. Nevertheless, they also noted that leadership responsibilities frequently compel Nigeria to align certain policy decisions with regional and international commitments. These observations suggest that sovereign autonomy should not be understood as complete freedom from external influence but rather as the ability to protect national interests while fulfilling international responsibilities.

The findings are consistent with Adewale (2021), who maintains that Nigeria's geopolitical location and natural resource endowment have made the country an important regional actor. Similarly, Tuggar (2023) argues that Nigeria's foreign policy increasingly seeks strategic autonomy through diversified partnerships instead of dependence on a single global power. The present study adds empirical support to these arguments by demonstrating that respondents perceive strategic engagement as both an opportunity for influence and a potential constraint on policy independence.

From the perspective of Complex Interdependence Theory, these findings illustrate that influence within the international system derives from cooperation as much as from power. Nigeria's capacity to achieve meaningful sovereignty therefore depends on strengthening its negotiating position within regional and global institutions rather than withdrawing from them.

Challenges and Prospects for Political Emancipation

The findings identified domestic governance weaknesses as the greatest obstacle to Nigeria's political emancipation. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that corruption, weak institutions, policy inconsistency, and limited institutional capacity undermine the country's sovereign decision-making. Statistical analysis further showed that respondents who expressed confidence in institutional reforms were significantly more optimistic about Nigeria's prospects for achieving genuine political emancipation. Interview participants likewise argued that external pressures become more effective when domestic governance structures are weak.

These findings indicate that Nigeria's sovereignty is constrained not only by external forces but also by internal governance deficiencies. Weak institutions reduce the state's ability to negotiate effectively with external actors, enforce national policies, manage public resources efficiently, and implement long-term development strategies. As a result, domestic institutional weaknesses magnify the influence of external actors and reduce the country's capacity to exercise independent judgement.

An important implication of this finding is that strengthening sovereignty requires more than revising foreign policy. Genuine political emancipation depends on improving institutional quality, strengthening democratic accountability, combating corruption, promoting policy consistency, and enhancing economic resilience. Without these domestic reforms, attempts to reduce external dependence are unlikely to produce sustainable results.

The findings support Okoro (2019), who argues that constitutional sovereignty cannot be translated into effective political autonomy without strong domestic institutions. They also reinforce recent studies that identify institutional capacity as a fundamental determinant of state resilience in the global political economy. However, the present study advances existing scholarship by demonstrating empirically that respondents consider domestic governance reforms to be even more important than external geopolitical factors in determining Nigeria's future sovereignty.

The findings are again consistent with Complex Interdependence Theory, which suggests that successful participation in an interconnected international system depends upon domestic institutional strength. Strong institutions enhance a state's bargaining capacity, reduce vulnerability

to external pressure, and enable governments to pursue national interests more effectively within global governance structures.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Nigeria's political emancipation cannot be explained by external influence, strategic interests, or domestic governance in isolation. Instead, sovereignty emerges from the interaction of these three dimensions. External actors influence national policy through economic and diplomatic relationships; strategic engagements increase Nigeria's international relevance while creating reciprocal obligations; and domestic institutional capacity ultimately determines the extent to which the country can protect its national interests within these relationships.

The study therefore concludes that genuine political emancipation should not be understood as isolation from the international community. Rather, it requires a state that possesses strong institutions, sound governance, economic resilience, and sufficient diplomatic capacity to engage constructively with external actors without compromising its sovereign interests. This conclusion strengthens the explanatory value of Complex Interdependence Theory by demonstrating that, in contemporary international politics, sovereignty is negotiated through effective governance, strategic diplomacy, and balanced international engagement rather than exercised as absolute independence.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between geopolitics and Nigeria's political emancipation by analysing the influence of external actors, strategic national interests, and domestic governance on the country's sovereign autonomy. The findings demonstrate that Nigeria's political emancipation is shaped by the interaction of these three factors rather than by any single determinant. While engagement with global powers, international institutions, and strategic partnerships enhances Nigeria's diplomatic relevance and development opportunities, it also constrains independent policy-making through complex political and economic interdependencies. The study further established that domestic governance capacity, particularly institutional effectiveness, policy consistency, and accountability, remains the most critical factor in strengthening Nigeria's sovereign autonomy.

Overall, the study concludes that genuine political emancipation in Nigeria extends beyond formal political independence to encompass the capacity to make and implement national decisions free from undue external influence while engaging constructively with the international community. Consistent with Complex Interdependence Theory, the study demonstrates that sovereignty in the contemporary international system is negotiated through interconnected political, economic, and institutional relationships. Accordingly, strengthening domestic institutions, pursuing strategic diplomacy, and maintaining balanced international partnerships are essential for enhancing Nigeria's political autonomy and safeguarding its long-term national interests.

Recommendations

1. To improve sovereign decision-making and lessen susceptibility to outside forces, Nigeria should give institutional reform, transparency, and policy consistency top priority.
2. To lessen reliance on any one external force, the nation should adopt a balanced foreign policy that involves numerous regional and international players.
3. In order to take advantage of geopolitical opportunities while preserving political sovereignty, Nigeria should coordinate its foreign and domestic policy frameworks such that external interactions complement national interests.

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