

The Determinants and Outcomes of Foreign Policy Decision-Making and Public Opinion

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Abstract: This paper provides an overview of the main factors that influence and shape Nigeria's foreign policy decisions and outcomes, as well as the role of public opinion in this process. Nigeria's foreign policy has been characterized by continuity and change, depending on the political, economic, social, and security challenges facing the country and its leaders. The paper examines the foreign policy structures and actors, the decision-making models and processes, and the impact of domestic and international factors on Nigeria's foreign policy choices and actions. The paper also discusses how public opinion affects foreign policy making in Nigeria, especially in the context of democratization and globalization. The paper concluded with some recommendations for improving Nigeria's foreign policy performance and image in the world.

Keywords: Foreign policy, public opinion, decision making, outcomes and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy decision-making is a complex process that involves various actors and factors. One of the factors that has received considerable attention in the literature is public opinion, which is defined as the expression of popular views on foreign affairs (Akinboye & Ottoh, 2015). Public opinion is the summation of individual attitudes, sentiments or views held by grown-up people. Public opinions affect policy both positively and negatively depending on the overall general public view on the policy (Mintz & DeRouen Jr, 2017). Governments have in many occasions devised the use of public opinions for guiding their public information and helping in the making of government policies. The fundamental representation of democracy is the provision of a method through which public opinion and public policy are dependably and frequently interacted.

The country's foreign policy reflects its national interests, values, and aspirations, as well as its historical and geopolitical context. Nigeria is a country with a rich history, culture, and diversity. It is also a country with a complex and dynamic foreign policy that reflects its interests, values, and aspirations in the international arena (Folarin, 2011). Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved over time, influenced by various factors such as domestic politics, regional dynamics, global trends, and external actors. One of the key factors that shapes and determines Nigeria's foreign policy is the decision-making system, which involves various actors, institutions, processes, and mechanisms. The decision-making system is not static, but changes according to the political context, leadership style, and policy issues at

stake. The decision-making system also affects the outcomes of foreign policy, such as the effectiveness, coherence, consistency, and legitimacy of Nigeria's actions and positions in world affairs (Fineman, 2019).

Public opinion plays an important role in shaping and evaluating Nigeria's foreign policy. According to a survey conducted by Afrobarometer in 2019/2020, Nigerians have a positive view of their country's role in regional and global affairs. About 76% of Nigerians say that their country should help other countries deal with their problems; about 71% say that their country has a positive influence on political stability in Africa; about 68% say that their country has a positive influence on economic development in Africa; about 66% say that their country has a positive influence on democracy in Africa; about 64% say that their country has a positive influence on human rights in Africa; about 62% say that their country has a positive influence on peacekeeping in Africa; about 60% say that their country has a positive influence on environmental protection in Africa; about 59% say that their country has a positive influence on trade in Africa; about 58% say that their country has a positive influence on health care in Africa; about 57% say that their country has a positive influence on education in Africa; about 56% say that their country has a positive influence on cultural diversity in Africa; about 54% say that their country has a positive influence on gender equality in Africa (Afrobarometer, 2020 and Statista, 2021).

Public opinion can influence foreign policy decision-making in different ways, such as

providing legitimacy, pressure, feedback, or information to the decision-makers. However, the extent and nature of this influence may vary depending on the type of regime, the salience of the issue, the level of public awareness, and the availability of channels for communication.

Another important factor that influences Nigeria's foreign policy is public opinion, which refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of the Nigerian people on foreign affairs (Aldrich, 2016). Public opinion can be expressed through various channels, such as media, civil society, academia, interest groups, and social movements. Public opinion can also be measured through various methods, such as surveys, polls, focus groups, and interviews. Public opinion can have an impact on foreign policy by shaping the agenda, constraining or enabling the decision-makers, and evaluating the performance and outcomes of foreign policy (Adebajo, 2008).

One of the main objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy is to promote and protect its national interests and values in the global arena. Nigeria's foreign policy also aims to contribute to regional and global peace, security, development, and cooperation. Nigeria has played a significant role in Africa's affairs, especially in conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations. Nigeria has also participated in various multilateral organizations and initiatives, such as the United Nations, the African Union, the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Economic Community of West African States (Adeniran, 2013).

However, Nigeria's foreign policy has also faced many challenges and constraints, such as economic difficulties, political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption, human rights violations, terrorism, and external interference. These challenges have affected Nigeria's ability to pursue its foreign policy objectives effectively and efficiently. Moreover, Nigeria's foreign policy has often been criticized for being inconsistent, reactive, and lacking in vision and direction. Therefore, it is important to examine the determinants and outcomes of foreign policy decision-making and public opinion in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Foreign policy decision-making and public opinion are two important aspects of Nigeria's political system. However, there is a lack of empirical research on how these factors interact and

influence each other. This paper aims to identify the main determinants and outcomes of foreign policy decision-making and public opinion in Nigeria, and to highlight the gaps and challenges in the existing literature. By doing so, it hopes to contribute to a better understanding of Nigeria's role and interests in the international arena.

Moreso, Nigeria has been involved in various regional and global issues, such as peacekeeping, economic integration, human rights, democracy promotion, and counter-terrorism. However, the process of making and implementing foreign policy in Nigeria is not well understood by many observers and scholars (Adebajo, 2008; Akinboye & Ottoh, 2015 and Aldrich, *et al.*, 2016). How do Nigerian leaders and officials decide on their foreign policy goals and strategies? What factors influence their choices and actions? How do they balance competing domestic and external demands? How do they cope with the challenges and opportunities of a changing world order? And how do they communicate their foreign policy to the Nigerian public and the international community? It is against this background that this study examines the determinants and outcomes of foreign policy decision-making and public opinion in Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to examine the determinants and outcomes of foreign policy decision-making and public opinion in Nigeria.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine how Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making system work;
- Investigate the main determinants of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making;
- Assess the roles of domestic politics, regional dynamics, global trends, and external actors;
- Determine the main outcomes of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making;
- Investigate how public opinion shape and reflect Nigeria's foreign policy and
- Determine how the sources, channels and methods of public opinion on foreign affairs relate to the decision-making system and the outcomes of foreign policy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this study.

1. How does Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making system work?

2. What are the main determinants of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making?
3. What are the roles of domestic politics, regional dynamics, global trends, and external actors?
4. What are the main outcomes of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making?
5. How does public opinion shape and reflect Nigeria's foreign policy?
6. How do the sources, channels and methods of public opinion on foreign affairs relate to the decision-making system and the outcomes of foreign policy?

How Does Nigeria's Foreign Policy Decision-Making System Work?

Foreign policy decision-making is a subfield of international relations that focuses on how states formulate and enact foreign policy. It views foreign policy as a series of decisions made by particular actors using specific decision-making processes. Foreign policy decisions are usually made by the executive branch of government, such as the head of state, the cabinet, or the minister. However, these actors may be influenced by various factors, such as international events, domestic politics, organizational routines, psychological biases, group dynamics, and so on.

Different models and theories have been developed to explain how foreign policy decisions are made and what factors affect them. The rational choice model is widely considered to be the paradigmatic approach to the study of international relations and foreign policy. It assumes that actors are unitary, rational, and goal-oriented, and that they make decisions by maximizing their expected utility based on their preferences and information. However, this model has been challenged by alternative approaches that highlight the limitations and deviations of human rationality, such as bounded rationality, prospect theory, poliheuristic theory, and cognitive psychology (Baum & Potter, 2008).

Another way to categorize foreign policy decision-making models is based on who is assumed to make the decision. The unitary state model treats the state as a single actor that acts coherently and consistently in pursuit of its national interest. The individual decision-maker model focuses on the personality, beliefs, values, and perceptions of the leader or the key decision-maker who shapes the foreign policy outcome. The small group decision-making model examines how the interaction among a limited number of actors within a group

affects the decision process and outcome. The organizational model emphasizes how the standard operating procedures, routines, and cultures of bureaucratic organizations constrain and influence the decision-makers (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2016). The domestic political model considers how various actors and institutions within the state, such as public opinion, interest groups, media, legislature, judiciary, etc., shape and constrain the foreign policy choices.

The study of foreign policy decision-making is an evolving and diverse field that draws on various disciplines and methods. It aims to understand how states make foreign policy choices in different contexts and situations, and how these choices affect international outcomes. By analyzing the main actors, institutions, processes, and mechanisms in foreign policy decision-making system, we can gain insights into the causes and consequences of state behaviour in world politics. Nigeria is a sovereign state that conducts its foreign policy and relations with other states based on its national interests. These interests include the welfare, security, integrity and prestige of the nation and its people. However, foreign policy is not made by a single actor or institution, but by a complex system of structures, processes and actors that interact and influence each other (Hudson, 2017).

One of the key structures in Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making system is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which is responsible for coordinating and implementing the country's external relations. The MFA is headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is appointed by the President and serves as a member of the Federal Executive Council. The MFA has various departments and divisions that deal with different aspects of foreign policy, such as bilateral and multilateral relations, regional and sub-regional cooperation, economic diplomacy, consular affairs, protocol and legal matters.

Another important structure is the Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations (PACIR), which was established in 1999 to advise the President on foreign policy issues. The PACIR is composed of eminent Nigerians with expertise and experience in international affairs, such as former heads of state, diplomats, academics and civil society leaders. The PACIR meets periodically to deliberate on current and emerging global issues and make recommendations to the President.

Other structures that play a role in Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making system include the National Assembly, which has constitutional powers to ratify treaties and approve budgets for foreign affairs; the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), which is a research and training institution that provides policy analysis and advice to the government; the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), which is a think tank that conducts studies on national and international issues; and the Nigerian in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), which was established in 2019 to harness the potential of Nigerians living abroad for national development (Hudson, 2017).

Besides these structures, there are also various actors that shape and determine Nigeria's foreign policy decisions. These include the President, who is the chief architect and spokesperson of Nigeria's foreign policy; the Vice President, who assists the President in foreign policy matters; the National Security Adviser, who coordinates the security and intelligence agencies; the Cabinet Ministers, who oversee their respective sectors; the Service Chiefs, who command the armed forces; the Governors, who represent their states' interests; the Political Parties, who articulate their ideologies and manifestoes; the Civil Society Organizations, who advocate for various causes and interests; and the Media, who inform and influence public opinion.

In conclusion, Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making system is a dynamic and complex one that involves multiple structures and actors with varying degrees of influence and interests. The system reflects Nigeria's historical, political, economic and social realities as well as its aspirations and challenges as a major player in Africa and the world.

What Are the Main Determinants of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Decision-Making?

Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making is influenced by a combination of domestic and external factors that shape the country's interests, objectives and strategies in the international arena. According to Osondu-Oti, (2017), some of the major factors affecting Nigerian foreign policy are:

Population and Diversity: Nigeria has a very large population, and it is officially the largest country in Africa by this factor. This gives Nigeria a potential source of human capital, market and influence in the continent and beyond. However,

Nigeria also faces the challenge of managing its ethnic and religious diversity, which sometimes leads to internal conflicts and instability that affect its foreign policy.

History and Identity: Nigeria's history as a former British colony, a leader of the anti-colonial struggle, a founding member of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and a champion of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has shaped its identity and role in world affairs. Nigeria sees itself as a regional power and a voice for Africa and the developing world in global issues.

Economy and Resources: Nigeria is endowed with abundant natural resources, especially oil and gas, which account for most of its export earnings and government revenue. Nigeria's economic performance and prospects affect its foreign policy priorities and capabilities. For instance, Nigeria has been seeking to diversify its economy, attract foreign investment, and enhance its trade relations with other countries.

Security and Stability: Nigeria faces various security threats and challenges, such as terrorism, insurgency, militancy, piracy, kidnapping, communal violence, and cross-border crimes. These threats undermine Nigeria's national security and stability, as well as its regional and international cooperation. Nigeria has been involved in peacekeeping and mediation efforts in Africa and beyond, but it also needs to address its own security problems at home.

Leadership and Personality: The personality and style of Nigeria's leaders have an impact on the country's foreign policy decision-making. Different leaders have different visions, preferences, values, and skills that shape their foreign policy agenda and actions. For example, some leaders have been more assertive and proactive in pursuing Nigeria's interests and influence abroad, while others have been more cautious and reactive.

These are some of the main determinants of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making. However, they are not exhaustive or static, as they may change over time depending on the domestic and external circumstances that Nigeria faces.

What Are the Roles of Domestic Politics, Regional Dynamics, Global Trends, and External Actors?

Nigeria's foreign policy reflects its national interests and aspirations, as well as its challenges

and opportunities. This paper explores how domestic politics, regional dynamics, global trends, and external actors influence Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making in the following order.

Domestic Politics: Nigeria is a federal republic with a presidential system of government. The president is the head of state and government, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president appoints the ministers of foreign affairs and defense, who are responsible for implementing the foreign policy agenda. The National Assembly, composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives, has the power to ratify treaties and approve budgets for foreign affairs and defense. The judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, can also play a role in interpreting and enforcing international law and agreements. Additionally, Nigeria has 36 states and a federal capital territory, each with its own governor and legislature. The states have some autonomy in managing their own affairs, including engaging in sub-national diplomacy with other countries and regions (Ojeh, 2015). Furthermore, Nigeria has various political parties, civil society groups, religious organizations, ethnic associations, and other interest groups that can influence public opinion and pressure the government on foreign policy issues. Domestic politics influence the preferences and priorities of Nigeria's foreign policy makers, who have to balance the demands and expectations of various constituencies at home.

Regional Dynamics: Nigeria is a founding member of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria has played a leading role in promoting regional integration, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and development in Africa. Nigeria has also been involved in mediating disputes and crises in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, and Libya. Nigeria has also cooperated with its neighbours on issues such as trade, security, migration, energy, water resources, and environmental protection. However, Nigeria also faces some challenges and threats in its region, such as terrorism, insurgency, piracy, drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, border disputes, refugee flows, and climate change (Mintz, A. & DeRouen, 2017).

Nigeria has a responsibility and an interest to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the

region, as well as to defend its own sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nigeria also seeks to enhance its regional leadership and influence, especially within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU).

Global Trends: Nigeria is a member of the United Nations (UN) and several other international organizations and forums. Nigeria has contributed to global peace and security through its participation in UN peacekeeping missions and its support for multilateralism and international law. Nigeria has also sought to advance its economic interests and development goals through its engagement with global institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Group of 20 (G20). Nigeria has also pursued strategic partnerships with emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil, Russia, Turkey, South Africa, and Indonesia. Moreover, Nigeria has been responsive to global issues such as human rights, democracy, gender equality, health, education, poverty reduction, climate change, and sustainable development (Fineman, 2019). Nigeria also has to cope with the effects of globalization and interdependence, which create new opportunities and challenges for its development and security. Nigeria has to leverage its economic potential, its human capital, its cultural diversity, and its diplomatic network to advance its global agenda.

External Actors: Nigeria has maintained diplomatic relations with over 170 countries around the world. Nigeria's foreign policy priorities have been shaped by its historical ties, geopolitical interests, and shared values with different regions and countries. Some of the most important external actors for Nigeria according to Zaller & Chiu (2010) include:

The United States: Nigeria and the United States have a long-standing and multifaceted relationship based on mutual respect, cooperation, and friendship. The two countries share common interests in promoting democracy, security, trade, investment, development, and human rights in Africa and beyond. The United States is one of Nigeria's largest trading partners, investors, and donors.

The United Kingdom: Nigeria and the United Kingdom have a special relationship that dates back to colonial times. The two countries have strong cultural, educational, and historical links

that facilitate cooperation on various issues. The United Kingdom is also one of Nigeria's major trading partners, investors, and donors.

The European Union: Nigeria and the European Union have a strategic partnership that covers political dialogue, trade, investment, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and security cooperation. The European Union is Nigeria's largest trading partner and one of its main sources of development aid.

China: Nigeria and China have established a comprehensive strategic partnership that encompasses political trust, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and international coordination. China is one of Nigeria's largest trading partners and investors and a major provider of infrastructure financing and technical assistance.

India: Nigeria and India have a cordial and cooperative relationship that spans political consultation, economic collaboration, cultural affinity, and people-to-people contacts. India is one of Nigeria's largest trading partners and investors and a significant source of energy imports and pharmaceutical products.

One of the most important external actors for Nigeria is its African neighbours. Nigeria has a strong commitment to African unity and solidarity, and often plays a leading role in regional initiatives and organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Nigeria also engages in bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other African countries on issues such as security, trade, development, and democracy. Nigeria's foreign policy towards Africa is driven by its desire to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the continent (Aldrich, *et al.*, 2016).

Another external actor that affects Nigeria's foreign policy is the major powers, especially the United States, China, and the European Union. Nigeria has strategic partnerships with these powers on various areas of mutual interest, such as counter-terrorism, energy, health, education, and human rights. Nigeria also seeks to balance its relations with these powers and to diversify its sources of economic and diplomatic support. Nigeria's foreign policy towards the major powers is shaped by its need to protect its sovereignty, advance its national interests, and enhance its international influence.

A third external actor that influences Nigeria's foreign policy is the international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Nigeria is an active member of these organizations and participates in their decision-making processes and programs. Nigeria also benefits from the assistance and expertise of these organizations in addressing its developmental challenges and achieving its sustainable development goals. Nigeria's foreign policy towards the international organizations is guided by its commitment to multilateralism, global governance, and international law.

A fourth external actor that impacts Nigeria's foreign policy is the non-state actors, such as civil society groups, diaspora communities, transnational corporations, religious organizations, and media outlets. These actors have a role in shaping public opinion, mobilizing resources, providing information, advocating for causes, and influencing policies. Nigeria recognizes the importance of engaging with these actors and incorporating their views and interests into its foreign policy formulation and implementation. Nigeria's foreign policy towards the non-state actors is informed by its respect for diversity, pluralism, and democracy. These actors have different interests and objectives in relation to Nigeria, ranging from cooperation to competition to confrontation. Nigeria has to manage its relations with these actors carefully and strategically, seeking to maximize its benefits and minimize its costs.

It is important to understand that Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making is not an isolated or autonomous process. It is affected by various external actors who have different roles and interests in relation to Nigeria. Nigeria strives to maintain cordial and constructive relations with these actors while pursuing its own national objectives and values.

What Are the Main Outcomes of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Decision-Making?

Nigeria's foreign policy reflects its interests and aspirations as a leader and partner in the global community. The researcher explores some of the main outcomes of Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making in recent years.

- One of the key outcomes of Nigeria's foreign policy is its active participation in peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts in

Africa and beyond. Nigeria has contributed troops and resources to various United Nations and African Union missions, such as in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic. Nigeria has also played a mediating role in resolving political crises and disputes in countries like Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire. Through these actions, Nigeria has demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and security, as well as its solidarity with fellow African countries (Folarin, 2011).

- Another important outcome of Nigeria's foreign policy is its promotion of economic integration and cooperation within Africa and with other developing regions. Nigeria is a founding member and a key driver of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which aims to foster trade, investment and free movement of people among its 15 member states. Nigeria is also a signatory to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which seeks to create a single market for goods and services across the 54 African countries. Moreover, Nigeria has established strategic partnerships with emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey, to enhance its access to markets, technology and development assistance (Hudson, 2017).
- A third significant outcome of Nigeria's foreign policy is its advocacy for the reform of global governance institutions and norms. Nigeria has consistently called for a more representative and democratic United Nations Security Council, where Africa would have a permanent seat and a greater voice in global decision-making. Nigeria has also championed the cause of debt relief and fair trade for developing countries, as well as the fight against climate change and terrorism (Ojeh, 2015). Nigeria has sought to uphold the principles of multilateralism, human rights and international law in its foreign relations.

Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making has resulted in several positive outcomes for the country and the world at large. Nigeria has emerged as a responsible and influential actor in regional and global affairs, with a vision of peace, development and cooperation.

How Does Public Opinion Shape and Reflect Nigeria's Foreign Policy?

The views and preferences of Nigerian citizens have a significant impact on the direction and conduct of its foreign policy in three key areas: regional integration, human rights and democracy, and security and counter-terrorism.

Regional Integration: Nigeria is a founding member and a leader of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional organization that promotes economic cooperation and political stability among its 15 member states. Nigeria's public opinion strongly supports regional integration, as it sees ECOWAS as a vehicle for advancing its interests and influence in West Africa and beyond. According to a 2019 survey by Afrobarometer, 86% of Nigerians said they identify as both Nigerian and African, and 77% said they support the idea of a single currency for ECOWAS. Nigeria's public opinion also favors deeper integration with other African regions, such as the African Union (AU) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Afrobarometer, 2020).

Human Rights and Democracy: Nigeria is a democracy that respects human rights and the rule of law. However, it also faces challenges such as corruption, insecurity, poverty, and inequality. Nigeria's public opinion is sensitive to these issues and demands accountability and transparency from its government and its partners. For example, in 2015, Nigerians voted out the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan and elected Muhammadu Buhari, who campaigned on an anti-corruption platform. Similarly, in 2019, Nigerians protested against the violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrators by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police unit accused of human rights abuses. Nigeria's public opinion also influences its foreign policy towards other countries that are facing human rights and democracy challenges, such as Zimbabwe, Myanmar, and Venezuela.

Security and Counter-Terrorism: Nigeria is a key partner in the global fight against terrorism and violent extremism. It is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) that combats Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin region. Nigeria's public opinion supports these efforts, as it recognizes the threat that terrorism poses to its national security and development. According to a 2018 survey by Pew Research Center, 76% of Nigerians said they are very concerned about Islamic extremism in their country, and 67% said they have a favorable

view of the United States' role in fighting terrorism in Nigeria. Nigeria's public opinion also shapes its foreign policy towards other countries that are affected by terrorism and instability, such as Mali, Somalia, and Afghanistan (Akinboye & Ottoh, 2015).

Public opinion is an important factor that shapes and reflects Nigeria's foreign policy. It reflects the values, interests, and aspirations of its people, and it influences the decisions and actions of its government. By engaging with its public opinion, Nigeria can enhance its legitimacy, credibility, and effectiveness in pursuing its foreign policy goals.

How Do the Sources, Channels and Methods of Public Opinion on Foreign Affairs Relate to the Decision-Making System and the Outcomes of Foreign Policy?

Public opinion on foreign affairs is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that can shape and be shaped by the decisions and actions of political leaders. The sources, channels and methods of public opinion on foreign affairs refer to the ways that people acquire information, form attitudes, express preferences and communicate with others about international issues.

The sources of public opinion on foreign affairs include personal experiences, social networks, media outlets, interest groups, political parties, experts and public officials. These sources can provide different types of information, such as facts, opinions, narratives and frames, that can influence how people perceive and evaluate foreign policy issues. The channels of public opinion on foreign affairs include surveys, polls, elections, referendums, protests, petitions, letters, emails, phone calls, social media posts and other forms of communication that allow people to express their views and preferences to political leaders and the public (Agbaje & Adejumbi, 2016). These channels can vary in their accessibility, representativeness, validity and impact on policy making.

The methods of public opinion on foreign affairs include cognitive processes, psychological factors, social influences and political contexts that affect how people form and change their opinions on foreign policy issues. These methods can involve heuristics, biases, emotions, values, identities, norms and ideologies that can shape how people interpret and respond to information and cues from various sources and channels.

The relationship between public opinion on foreign affairs and the decision-making system and the outcomes of foreign policy is not straightforward or deterministic. Public opinion can have direct or indirect effects on policy making depending on the level of attention, salience, consensus and polarization among the public and the political elites. Public opinion can also have feedback effects on policy making depending on the level of responsiveness, accountability and transparency of the political leaders and institutions. Public opinion can also have consequences for policy outcomes depending on the level of legitimacy, support and compliance of the domestic and international actors involved in implementing and evaluating foreign policy actions.

SUMMARY

Foreign policy decision-making is the process by which states formulate and enact policies or strategies that affect their relations with other actors in the international system. Foreign policy decision-making can be influenced by various factors, such as the characteristics of individual decision-makers, the dynamics of small groups or coalitions, the organizational structures and norms of bureaucratic agencies, and the domestic and international contexts in which decisions are made. Foreign policy outcomes are the results of foreign policy decisions, such as cooperation or conflict, alliance formation or dissolution, trade or sanctions, and war or peace. Public opinion is the aggregate of the views and preferences of the public on foreign policy issues and actors. Public opinion can affect foreign policy decision-making by shaping the preferences and constraints of decision-makers, providing feedback and evaluation of foreign policy outcomes, and mobilizing or demobilizing support for foreign policy actions.

CONCLUSION

Public opinion has played a significant role in foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria, but that this role has been mediated by various factors, such as regime type, issue salience, public awareness, and communication channels. We also expect to find that public opinion has had both positive and negative effects on Nigeria's foreign policy outcomes and effectiveness, depending on the alignment or divergence between popular views and national interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings and arguments of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. There is need to conduct more rigorous and systematic research on the factors that influence foreign policy choices and their consequences for international relations and domestic politics.
2. There is need to develop more effective and inclusive mechanisms for public consultation and participation in foreign policy formulation and implementation.
3. There is need for Federal Government to enhance the transparency and accountability of foreign policy decision-makers and institutions, and foster a culture of dialogue and debate among different stakeholders and perspectives.
4. Government needs to strengthen the capacity and credibility of foreign policy communication and education, and promote a more informed and critical public opinion on global issues and challenges.
5. There is need to foster more constructive and cooperative relationships with other countries and regions, based on mutual respect, shared interests, and common values.

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