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Beyond Hard Power: The Role of Soft Power in Shaping Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Abstract: This study examines the evolving role of soft power in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy, moving beyond the traditional reliance on hard power. By exploring the concept of soft power and its application in Nigeria's international relations, this study reveals the country's growing recognition of the importance of attraction, persuasion, and influence in achieving its foreign policy objectives. The research also examines the domestic and external factors that influence Nigeria's soft power strategy, highlighting the need for institutional strengthening, capacity building, and private sector engagement. Through a critical analysis of Nigeria's soft power initiatives, including cultural diplomacy, international cooperation, and public diplomacy, this study identifies the opportunities and challenges associated with this approach. The study adopted Constructivist approach and Soft Power Theory as its theoretical construct. The study relied on secondary data gathering technique. The study would have implications for Nigeria's policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to understand the complexities of Nigeria's foreign policy and the role of soft power in shaping its international relations.

Key words: diplomacy, foreign policy, hard power, international relations, soft power

Introduction

In the realm of international relations, states employ various forms of power to achieve their objectives. As the conduct of foreign policy becomes increasingly complex, characterised by intricate networks and interdependencies, governments must adapt and innovate to meet the present realities in global politics. Effective foreign policy implementation is crucial, but the evolving international landscape necessitates the incorporation of soft power strategies to remain relevant (Nye, 2020). In today's multipolar world, where numerous actors, platforms, and interests compete for influence, international relationships have become a dynamic and intricate puzzle (Kissinger, 2020). While states of all sizes can still achieve their goals, success increasingly depends on their ability to attract, persuade, and mobilise others through soft power, rather than relying solely on hard power (McClory, 2020).

Soft power involves utilising attraction and persuasion to achieve objectives. The notion of power was popularised by Joseph Nye in the 1990s. According to Nye, soft power is a form of influence that enables one country to shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2020). Soft power is characterised by its reliance on intangible assets, such as culture, values, and ideas, to shape the behaviour of other international actors (Bially-Mattern, 2020). The proliferation of digital technologies has significantly enhanced the capacity of states and non-state actors to generate and utilize soft power on an unprecedented scale (Seib,

2020). In this context, the media plays a crucial role in shaping global policy agendas and influencing public opinion (Castells, 2020). By framing and aggregating news, the media have the power to establish global policy agendas and set the parameters of public discourse.

Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, has long been a significant player in regional and global affairs. However, its foreign policy has traditionally relied heavily on hard power, which has yielded mixed results. One of the primary challenges facing Nigeria's foreign policy is its reliance on military power to achieve its objectives. Nigeria has a long history of military intervention in regional conflicts, including its role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping mission in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Adebajo, 2002). While these interventions have helped to stabilise the region, they have also come at a significant cost in terms of human lives and resources. Also, Nigeria's reliance on hard power has limited its ability to engage in effective diplomacy. As noted by Nye (2011), hard power is push, while soft power is pull. Nigeria's over-reliance on hard power has often relied on coercion rather than persuasion to achieve its objectives. This approach has limited its ability to build effective relationships with other countries and has often led to conflict.

Furthermore, Nigeria's hard power approach has also limited its ability to address the root causes of regional conflicts. Military power is not a substitute for effective governance and economic development (Clapham, 2017). Nigeria's reliance on hard power has often focused on addressing the symptoms of conflict rather than the underlying causes. However, a more effective approach to foreign policy would be to combine hard power with soft power. McClory (2015) noted that soft power is not a replacement for hard power, but rather a complement to it. By combining hard power with soft power, Nigeria can build more effective relationships with other countries and address the root causes of regional conflicts. For instance, the Nigerian music industry has emerged as a powerhouse in Africa, showcasing unparalleled vibrancy and creativity. Nigeria's media and entertainment sector, popularly known as "Nollywood," has experienced remarkable growth since its inception in 1992. Arewa (2015) noted that:

"Nigeria's Nollywood film industry has emerged as a global phenomenon based to a significant degree on local Nigerian and African cultural meanings. The growth of Nollywood highlights complexities of place, identity, and status in global cultural production. Nollywood also underscores the potentially subversive role of technology in redefining cultural space."

The emergence of Nollywood is a testament to the transformative power of digital technologies in the modern era. Unlike other industries where established players have sought to restrict the use of new technologies to protect their interests, Nollywood has thrived by embracing digital innovation. The Nigerian film industry's success is due to a lack of stringent regulations and industry controls, which have allowed unprecedented access to the tools of cultural production. As a result, Nollywood has become a shining example of how marginalised communities can reclaim their narrative and produce authentic representations of their culture, challenging dominant stereotypes and negative portrayals. Currently, Nollywood stands as the second-largest film industry globally, earning recognition for its expertise in various aspects of cinema, including screenwriting, directing, sound design, gaming, cinematography, makeup, and editing (Ogunleye,

2020). A recent study by Statista (2022) highlights the impressive growth of Nigeria's music sector, with revenue increasing from \$26 million in 2014 to \$34 million in 2018. Projections indicate that this figure will continue to rise, reaching \$44 million by 2023 (Statista, 2022). Furthermore, a report by PwC (2020) predicts that Nigeria's entertainment and media industry will experience significant growth, driven by increasing demand for digital content and expanding internet penetration.

Another soft power employed by Nigeria was the establishment of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) by President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida in 1987. The TAC is a Nigerian international volunteer programme to provide technical assistance to African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries. The programme promotes South-South cooperation, capacity building, and sustainable development in recipient countries (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Akinterinwa (2020) noted that the TAC program has made significant contributions to the development of many ACP countries, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development. A study by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (2022) found that the TAC program has also helped to promote Nigeria's foreign policy objectives, including regional integration and cooperation. Given the above, the paper aims to evaluate the relevance of a soft power approach in shaping Nigeria's foreign thrust, influence, promoting its interests, and build bridges with other nations in African countries and beyond.

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Soft power

The concept of soft power, which involves utilising attraction and persuasion to achieve objectives, has evolved from an academic notion to a mainstream concept in international relations. Joseph Nye, who popularised the concept in the 1990s, defines soft power as the ability to shape the preferences of others through persuasion and attraction (Nye, 2019). This form of power relies on intangible assets, such as culture, values, and ideas, to influence the behaviour of other international actors (Bally-Mattern, 2020).

The digital revolution has significantly enhanced the capacity of states and non-state actors to generate and utilise soft power on an unprecedented scale (Seib, 2020). The proliferation of social media platforms, online news outlets, and other digital technologies has enabled actors to disseminate information, shape public opinion, and influence global policy agendas (Castells, 2020). Moreover, the digital revolution has also enabled non-state actors, such as NGOs, corporations, and individuals, to exercise soft power and influence global affairs (Slaughter, 2017).

In this context, the media plays a crucial role in identifying global issues and events, framing and aggregating news, and shaping public opinion (McCombs, 2018). The media's ability to establish global policy agendas and influence public discourse has become increasingly significant in the digital age (Vargo, Guo, 2020). Furthermore, the media's role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy agendas has

also been enhanced by the proliferation of social media platforms, which enable rapid dissemination of information and mobilisation of public opinion (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013).

In the context of international relations, soft power implies that countries can exert influence and achieve their objectives without relying solely on military power or economic coercion. However, the implications of soft power in international relations are multifaceted. First, soft power challenges the traditional notion of power in international relations, which emphasises military strength and economic might (Bially-Materne, 2018). Soft power suggests that countries can exert influence through non-material means, such as culture, values, and ideas. Second, soft power highlights the importance of non-state actors in international relations. Non-state actors, such as NGOs, corporations, and individuals, can wield significant influence through soft power, shaping public opinion and influencing policy agendas (Slaughter, 2017). Third, soft power underscores the significance of public diplomacy in international relations. Public diplomacy, which involves engaging with foreign publics through various means, including media, education, and culture, is a key component of soft power (Seib, 2020). Over time, the application of soft power raises important questions about the measurement and evaluation of power in international relations. Traditional measures of power, such as military expenditure and GDP, may not capture the full extent of a country's influence, as soft power can exert significant influence through non-material means (Vargo, Guo, 2020).

The Concept of Hard power

International relations have long been characterised by the interplay of power dynamics, with states employing various forms of power to achieve their objectives. Hard power, which refers to the use of military force, economic coercion, and other forms of tangible power, remains a dominant feature of international relations (Mearsheimer, 2020). One of the primary applications of hard power is in the realm of national security. States employ military force to protect their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and vital interests (Waltz, 2020). For instance, the United States has utilised its military power to maintain its position as a global hegemon, intervening in various conflicts around the world (Layne, 2020). China has been expanding its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, asserting its claims in the South China Sea (Fravel, 2020). Nigeria played an active role in regional peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts, particularly through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Ogunnubi, 2020). The country's military has been instrumental in these efforts, with Nigerian troops deployed in several West African countries.

However, the limitations of hard power are also evident. The use of military force can lead to unintended consequences, such as civilian casualties, destabilisation, and long-term occupation (Record, 2020). Furthermore, hard power can be costly, both in terms of financial resources and human lives (Kagan, 2020). The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, have had significant financial and human costs for the United States (Crawford, 2020).

Nigeria's foreign policy and dominance of hard power approaches

Existing studies on Nigeria's foreign policy reveal a dominance of hard power approaches, with a focus on military strength, economic coercion, and political influence. This approach is often driven by the country's desire to assert its position as a regional power and protect its national interests (Isike, Oyewole, Oklie, 2024). Several factors contribute to the dominance of hard power approaches in Nigeria's foreign policy. One key factor is the country's colonial history, which imposed a patrimonial state system that prioritises the interests of the ruling elite over those of the general population (Ogele, 2021). This has led to a focus on maintaining power and influence through hard power means.

Another factor is the country's experience with military rule and the subsequent militarisation of politics. It has created a culture of military interventions and a reliance on hard power to resolve conflicts and maintain order. Nigeria's foreign policy has also been shaped by its desire to assert its position as a regional power and protect its national interests. This has led to a focus on building military capacity and exercising economic influence in the region (Ujara, Ibietan, 2018).

However, some studies have also highlighted the limitations of hard power approaches in achieving Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. For instance, the country's experience with military interventions in neighbouring countries has shown that hard power alone is not sufficient to achieve lasting stability and security. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for Nigeria to adopt a more nuanced approach to its foreign policy, one that balances hard power with soft power approaches. This includes building diplomatic capacity, promoting cultural exchange, and engaging in international cooperation on issues such as trade, health, and security (Ogunnubi, Isike, 2018).

Theoretical underpinning

The study adopted two theoretical frameworks as its theoretical construct. They are constructivist approach and soft power theory in international relations.

Constructivist approach

This study employed a constructivist approach to international relations, which emphasises the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping state behaviour (Wendt, 2015; Adler, 2019). This approach suggests that states' interests and behaviours are not fixed, but are instead shaped by their social environment and the norms and expectations that govern their interactions (Katzenstein, 2018). The constructivist approach to international relations has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the post-Cold War era. This approach emphasises the role of norms, identity, and social constructs in shaping state behaviour and international relations (Wendt, 2015; Adler, 2019). At its core, the constructivist approach suggests that international relations are shaped by

the social environment and the norms and expectations that govern state interactions (Katzenstein, 2018).

One of the key components of the constructivist approach is the concept of norms. Norms refer to shared expectations and standards of behaviour that shape state interactions. Norms can be formal or informal, and they can be enforced through various mechanisms, including international institutions and social pressure (Finnemore, Sikkink, 2018). For example, sovereignty is a fundamental principle in international relations that shapes state behaviour and interactions (Krasner, 2017). Another key component of the constructivist approach is the concept of identity. Identity refers to how states perceive themselves and their place in the world (Wendt, 2015). Identity can shape state behaviour and interactions, as states are more likely to cooperate with states that share their identity and values. For example, the European Union's identity as a promoter of peace and stability has shaped its foreign policy and interactions with other states (Thomas, 2017).

The Soft Power Theory

The study adopted a Soft Power theory as its theoretical underpinning. Soft power became popular in the 1990s, according to Joseph Nye. Soft power is based on the idea that states can exercise influence over others by shaping their preferences and interests, rather than simply imposing their will (Nye, 2004). One of the key components of soft power is cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy involves a state's culture, values, and ideas. It can be achieved through various means, including cultural exchange programs, educational exchanges, and international broadcasting (Cull, 2019). For example, the United States has used cultural diplomacy to promote its values and interests in countries such as China and Russia (Kurlantzick, 2019). Another key component of soft power is international institutions. International institutions provide a framework for states to cooperate and address common challenges. States can use international institutions to promote their interests and values, and to shape the preferences and interests of other states (Keohane, 2015). For example, the European Union has international institutions such as the World Trade Organisation that promote its interests and values (Meunier, 2017). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of soft power in international relations. States such as China and India have invested heavily in soft power initiatives, including cultural diplomacy and international institutions (Kurlantzick, 2019; Hall, 2020). The United States has also recognised the importance of soft power and has invested in initiatives such as the Fulbright Program and the Peace Corps (Cull, 2019).

Applications of theories to Nigeria foreign policy thrust

Linking these theories to the study is predicated on the fact that Nigeria has employed cultural diplomacy to enhance its foreign policy drive. This involves Nigerian culture, values, and ideas in other states and societies. These include cultural exchange programs, educational exchanges, and international broadcasting. Also, economic diplomacy has

been employed by the Nigerian state to further influence in the region. This involves Nigerian economic interests. Nigeria has significant economic potential, a large and growing market and a strategic location in West Africa. By promoting Nigerian economic interests through soft power means, such as trade missions, investment promotion, and economic diplomacy, Nigeria can attract foreign investment, promote economic growth, and achieve its foreign policy objectives.

Methodology

This study employed a secondary data gathering technique, leveraging existing data collected by others for diverse purposes. Secondary data, as defined by Bryman (2016), encompasses information previously gathered, which is then utilized to address novel research queries. Such data can be sourced from various outlets, including scholarly journals, government publications, and online databases (Kumar, 2019). Secondary data analysis involves the re-examination and reinterpretation of existing data to derive new conclusions or test novel hypotheses (George, Bennett, 2020). Moreover, secondary data offers a broader scope and larger sample sizes, facilitating more generalizable results (Jackson, 2017).

Analysis

Cultural Attraction

The rapid pace of economic globalisation has sparked intense debate among scholars on the effect of cultural identities. Warnier (1999) and Appadurai (2005) are among those who have raised important questions about how cultural identities are preserved, transformed, or potentially lost in the face of increasing global cultural uniformity. Appadurai's (2005) concept of "glocality" offers a valuable lens for examining the complex interplay between global influences and local responses. This framework highlights a dynamic process of cultural exchange, where local actors selectively absorb, reinterpret, and recontextualise global forces to create innovative, locally grounded expressions that resonate globally.

Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and vibrant entertainment industry present a unique opportunity for the country to leverage cultural diplomacy and enhance its global influence. Cultural diplomacy, which involves the exchange of ideas, information, art, language, and other aspects of culture, has become an essential tool for nations seeking to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation (Nisbet, 2023). Nigeria's thriving creative industries, such as Nollywood and the music scene, exemplify this "global" dynamic, leveraging digital platforms to share uniquely Nigerian stories that blend universal themes with local flavours, appealing to diverse audiences worldwide. Nigeria's music industry, for instance, has gained international recognition, with artists like Wizkid and Tems breaking records globally (Elegbede, 2023). Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, is another significant contributor to the country's cultural diplomacy efforts, providing

a platform for Nigerian storytellers to showcase their talents and promote the country's culture (Olorunyomi, 2023).

According to recent reports, Nigeria's entertainment industry has experienced significant growth, with the music sector's revenue projected to reach \$44 million by 2023 (Statista, 2023). The film industry has also made substantial contributions to the country's GDP, with projections indicating that it will increase its export revenue earnings to over \$1 billion (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2023). According to Prentice (2014), Nigeria has the softest power of any African country. Nollywood, the country's film industry, has become a crucial platform for showcasing Nigerian culture, not just in Africa but globally. The impact of Nollywood on Nigerian culture is evident in various ways. For instance, traditional Nigerian attire has become increasingly popular among other Africans, while the Nigerian accent and English Pidgin are being mimicked and appreciated across the continent. These cultural exports have not only promoted Nigerian culture but also contributed to the country's economy. Nollywood's influence extends beyond cultural promotion, as it has also become a tool for advancing Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. As Nye (2004) aptly puts it, a state's culture is an important source of its soft power in places where it is attractive to others. This underscores the significance of Nollywood as a powerful tool, enabling Nigeria to exert its influence and build relationships with other countries.

Nollywood's reach extends far beyond Africa, with a significant presence in countries with substantial African diaspora populations, such as the US, UK, and Caribbean nations (Miller, 2012). This global footprint is notable, as Nollywood films resonate with audiences who identify with African cultural heritage and experiences, offering an alternative to Hollywood's Western-centric narratives. Nollywood has surpassed Hollywood, Bollywood, and local productions in popularity across sub-Saharan Africa, dominating the film sector with its authentic, locally relevant content. Presently, Nollywood stands as the world's second-largest film industry in terms of production volume, having successfully carved out a unique niche in the global entertainment landscape.

Nollywood has the potential to be a game-changer for Nigeria's influence in Africa. By leveraging its soft power, Nigeria can challenge France's artistic dominance on the continent. This is significant, given France's substantial influence in Africa, which has historically overshadowed Nigeria's and South Africa's efforts (Gallivant Africa, 2024). Nollywood provides a platform for Nigeria to showcase its cultural prowess, positioning itself as a leader in Africa and beyond. The industry has already demonstrated its ability to promote Nigerian culture globally, with its movies and music gaining popularity worldwide. Nigerian musicians, such as Afrobeat singers, have even performed at international events like the 2022 Qatar World Cup Finals (Faidi, 2024). Most importantly, if properly laid out, Nollywood could be a tool for advancing Nigeria's hegemonic potential in Africa.

Technical Aid Corps Scheme

The Technical Aid Corps (TAC) was born out of necessity, as Nigeria faced foreign policy challenges that required adaptable and collaborative solutions. In this context, TAC's soft power approach has proven invaluable in addressing localised challenges

and fostering cooperation among developing nations. As countries navigate complex global dynamics, they must rally support from other nations, even in the face of bilateral conflicts. TAC has become a vital component of Nigeria's soft power strategy, promoting South-South development and cooperation through technical assistance programmes (Odunsi, 2023).

By leveraging Nigeria's skilled workforce, TAC aims to enhance cooperation, understanding, and development among participating countries. This strategic approach has enabled TAC to make meaningful contributions to the development of partner nations, while also promoting Nigeria's interests abroad (<https://dtac.gov.ng/DTAC/>). Through TAC, Nigeria has demonstrated its commitment to South-South cooperation, providing technical assistance to countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. This cooperation has facilitated the sharing of knowledge, expertise, and resources, ultimately contributing to the socio-economic development of participating nations (<https://ntac.gov.ng/en>).

The programme taps into Nigeria's vast talent pool, providing skilled volunteers to countries that request them. The recipient nations span the globe, including several African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, such as Fiji, Jamaica, Belize, Commonwealth of Dominican, The Gambia, Sierra-Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Brazzaville, Sao Tome & Principe, Zambia, Mozambique, Liberia, Guyana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Seychelles, Shelter Afrique (Kenya), Namibia, Djibouti, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Benin Republic, Niger Republic, Republic of Lesotho, Swaziland, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Senegal, others, among others (TAC, 2004). By sharing its human resources, Nigeria is fostering cooperation and development in these partner nations.

The Nigerian Technical Aid Corps (TAC) has demonstrated its commitment to African cooperation and South-South collaboration through tangible actions, setting a precedent for achieving its goals (<https://ntac.gov.ng/en>). By doing so, TAC has solidified its reputation as a reliable partner in African cooperation and broader South-South collaboration. Numerous testimonies from recipient countries attest to TAC's impactful development assistance. For instance, Sam Nujoma, the former President of Namibia, acknowledged Nigeria's role as "a pillar of Africa's freedom" and a dependable partner, highlighting Nigeria's continued support for Namibia's socio-economic programs through the Technical Aid Corps Agreement (<https://dtac.gov.ng/DTAC/>). TAC's efforts have not only strengthened Nigeria's image as a key player in African cooperation but have also contributed to the socio-economic development of recipient countries. As a foreign policy instrument, TAC has successfully fostered bilateral and triangular relations between Nigeria and African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, promoting sustainable development and universal peace.

The Zambian High Commissioner to Nigeria, Godfrey Musundu, praised Nigeria's gesture, referring to the volunteers as "bridge builders" (The Guardian, 2004). Also, during a 2003 visit to Addis Ababa, Nigeria's then-Foreign Minister, Chief Dubem Onyia, met with Ethiopian officials who expressed gratitude for Nigeria's assistance through the Technical Aid Corps (TAC). The Ethiopian officials, including Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu and Education Minister Mrs. Genet Zewde, noted that despite receiving similar aid from Japan and Britain, Nigerian volunteers demonstrated

exceptional dedication during their two-year tenure in Ethiopia. They commended Nigeria's efforts in strengthening South-South cooperation, which had renewed their faith in African self-reliance (Thisday, 2003). Furthermore, there are other instances where TAC volunteers played significant roles in bridge-building between Nigeria and recipient countries. Wale (2011) revealed that:

“In Fiji, a Nigerian volunteer in the Fijian ministry of justice drew up the charges against the failed coup plotters in the country. This role, reclaimed, drew attention to the volunteer and raised his profile so much so that security around him had to be beefed up. This was an example of how volunteers serve the course of justice and promote human rights around the world. On the other hand, he gave the example of a Nigerian head of state who wanted an urgent message delivered to the president of a small, unnamed Caribbean country where Nigeria did not maintain a mission. He revealed that when the foreign ministry officials arrived in that country on a weekend, they found a TAC volunteer who had befriended the prime minister. The volunteer then took them to the prime minister’s village to meet him.” p. 34.

This sentiment is echoed in the Nigerian Technical Aid Corps' (TAC) mission to share knowledge and expertise with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries. By providing technical assistance and promoting cooperation, TAC has become a vital instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy, fostering meaningful connections and socio-economic development in recipient countries.

Democratic promotion and peace diplomacy

Promoting democracy in Africa is another important source of soft power in Nigeria. Regardless of its regime type, the country has consistently supported democratic causes. For instance, Nigeria reinstated presidents in Sierra Leone and São Tomé and Príncipe after military coups (Abacha, 1998; Obasanjo, 2003; Obi, 2009). Key figures like Olusegun Obasanjo have also played a crucial role in shaping institutions like the African Union and NEPAD, which emphasise democratic values and human rights (Obasanjo, Mbeki, 2002). Abuja's support for democracy in Africa is based on several principles. These include rejecting the unconstitutional overthrow of democratically elected governments, providing financial and technical assistance to transitional states, demonstrating leadership and sustaining institutions that promote democratic values, peace and conflict resolution on the continent. For instance, the Obasanjo administration voiced its support for criminalising forced seizures of power in Africa at the 1999 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit in Algeria (Omotola, 2008). This move underscored Nigeria's commitment to upholding democratic principles and promoting peace and stability in Africa.

Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone's conflict showcases a strategic blend of hard and soft power, demonstrating a smart power approach. By leading the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) force, Nigeria effectively combined military might with diplomatic efforts to reinstate President Tejan Kabbah, who had been ousted by the Johnny Paul Koromah Armed Forces Ruling Council (Omoigui, n.d.). This dual approach highlights the interplay between hard and soft power. On one

hand, the use of ECOMOG's force exemplifies hard power, showcasing Nigeria's military capabilities and willingness to intervene in regional conflicts. On the other hand, the restoration of democracy in Sierra Leone underscores the soft power dimension, demonstrating Nigeria's commitment to promoting democratic values and stability in the region. This smart power approach has significant implications for regional security and cooperation, highlighting the importance of balancing military strength and diplomatic efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability.

Nigeria's approach to resolving the conflict in São Tomé and Príncipe showcased a strategic use of soft power. Under President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, Nigeria collaborated with the African Union (AU) to resolve the crisis, exploring diplomatic channels rather than military intervention. Obasanjo's leadership played a crucial role in facilitating a meeting between Major Fernando Pereira, the head of the coup, and a Nigerian envoy. This diplomatic effort led to the signing of a memorandum of understanding among all stakeholders, ultimately paving the way for President Fradique de Menezes' return to office. The success of this diplomatic endeavour prompted Obasanjo to highlight it as a significant achievement for Nigeria's foreign policy. While the threat of military intervention may have influenced the junta's decision-making, Nigeria's reliance on soft power and diplomatic engagement demonstrated a nuanced approach to conflict resolution.

Nigeria played a pivotal role in restoring democracy in Côte d'Ivoire after General Robert Guei's military coup toppled President Henri Konan Bédié in 1999. Abuja swiftly condemned the coup and urged Guei to ensure a transition to democracy within six months (Akpeli, 2021). Nigeria then spearheaded an ECOWAS-mediated process, culminating in the 2000 presidential election, which led to Laurent Gbagbo's presidency. Nigeria's effort was instrumental in promoting democracy and stability in Côte d'Ivoire. By leading the ECOWAS mediation process, Nigeria demonstrated its commitment to upholding democratic principles and promoting peaceful conflict resolution in the region (Nweke, 2010).

Nigeria played a pivotal role in restoring democracy in The Gambia following President Yahya Jammeh's refusal to step down after losing the 2016 presidential election to Adama Barrow (Omotola, 2008). Alongside Senegal, Nigeria demonstrated leadership within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in condemning Jammeh's actions, which posed a threat to peace and stability in the region. As Jammeh's actions prompted Barrow to flee to Senegal, the ECOWAS mediation team, comprising leaders from Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone, worked tirelessly to resolve the crisis. Despite Jammeh's initial resistance, Nigeria's diplomatic efforts, led by President Muhammadu Buhari, ultimately contributed to Jammeh's decision to step down (Nweke, 2010). Nigeria's approach in this instance highlighted its commitment to promoting democracy and stability in the region through soft power. This is evident in its leadership role in negotiations, as opposed to Senegal's focus on the hard power aspect of conflict resolution. Notably, Nigeria's efforts in The Gambia are not an isolated incident. The country has a history of promoting democracy in other nations, including Liberia and Togo in 2005, as well as Guinea-Bissau and Mali in 2012 (Nweke, 2010).

Nigeria's influence in West Africa was evident in Togo, where ECOWAS intervention led to democratic elections after an attempted military coup following Gnassingbe

Eyadema's death (Omotola, 2008). The elections resulted in Faure Eyadéma, the late president's son, taking office. Femi Fani-Kayode, Special Assistant to Public Affairs to President Obasanjo, emphasised Nigeria's commitment to regional peace and stability, stating, "Whatever it takes to ensure... peace, democracy, and stability in the West African sub-region, we will do" (Omotola, 2008, p. 15). In Mali, Nigeria's efforts were more complex. After Tuareg rebels captured Northern Mali and declared the Republic of Azawad in 2012, Captain Amadou Sanogo led a military coup in Bamako, resulting in the AU's suspension of Mali. Nigeria negotiated with Sanogo for a military transition to civilian rule and allowed an ECOWAS force to oversee the transition. However, when Nigerian troops struggled to prevent rebels from advancing on the Malian capital, France intervened and defeated the rebels. Nigeria's actions in both Togo and Mali demonstrate its leadership role in promoting democracy and stability in West Africa (Ebegbulem, 2019). Through its involvement in ECOWAS, Nigeria has played a crucial part in conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts in the region (Offu, Iroh, 2019).

Nigeria's preferred approach to achieving its foreign policy thrust is through multilateral platforms, rather than relying solely on its economic and military might. This strategic choice allows Nigeria to boost its soft power, as noted by Joseph Nye, who argued that multilateralism is a more effective way to increase a nation's appeal than unilateralism. By engaging with international organisations, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria has been able to promote democracy and stability in the region. This multilateral approach has enabled Nigeria to increase its soft power and achieve its foreign policy goals without resorting to coercion. In essence, Nigeria's commitment to multilateralism has been a key factor in its ability to promote democracy and stability in West Africa, and has contributed to its growing influence in the region.

Peacemaking and Peacekeeping

Nigeria's reputation as a premier peacemaker and peacekeeper in Africa is a powerful engine driving its soft power. With her contributions to ECOWAS peacekeeping missions, Nigeria has assisted in the stabilization of the region and in the promotion of peace and security. The ECOMOG intervention is one of the more classic examples of Nigeria's soft power persuasion through peacekeeping (Ogele, 2025). Nigeria's impressive peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Sudan demonstrate its commitment to regional stability. Notably, by 2010, Nigeria had contributed over 200,000 troops to various peacekeeping missions, solidifying its position as a key player in global conflict resolution. The United Nations has also acknowledged Nigeria's significant contributions to peacekeeping operations, with Nigerian troops serving as the military backbone of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) from 2003 to 2018 (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019). By establishing and maintaining peace in Africa, Nigeria ensures its internal security and avoids conflicts stemming from colonial borders. This strategic approach is evident in its bilateral agreements, such as the 1988 accord with Equatorial Guinea. Nigeria's peacemaking efforts extend beyond peacekeeping missions. The country played

a crucial role in mediating conflicts between Burkina Faso and Mali in the mid-1980s, showcasing its diplomatic prowess (Kuna, 2005). These initiatives not only promote peace and stability but also reinforce Nigeria's position as a leader in African conflict resolution.

The resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon serves as a prime example of peaceful conflict resolution in Africa. Despite Nigeria's superior military capabilities, the country chose not to disregard the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) ruling, which granted sovereignty over the oil-rich peninsula to Cameroon. Instead, Nigeria opted for a peaceful approach, demonstrating its commitment to regional stability and cooperation. The ICJ's judgment in 2002 marked a significant turning point in the dispute, as Nigeria agreed to withdraw its troops from the peninsula. The peaceful resolution of the conflict was facilitated by the involvement of international organisations, including the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The Greentree Agreement, signed in 2006, further solidified the peace process, outlining the modalities for Nigeria's withdrawal from the peninsula (Baye, 2010). This diplomatic success story highlights Nigeria's willingness to prioritize peace and cooperation over military might, demonstrating its growing influence as a regional leader in Africa.

Nigeria's peacekeeping endeavours date back to the 1960s, with its inaugural mission in the Republic of Congo. This marked the beginning of a long-standing commitment to promoting peace and stability globally. Throughout the 1960s, Nigeria participated in interventions in West New Guinea, Tanzania, and India-Pakistan, demonstrating its willingness to engage in diverse conflict resolution efforts (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019). The 1970s saw Nigeria's involvement in Lebanon, while the 1990s were marked by participation in numerous missions, including those in Angola, Chad, Iran-Iraq, Iraq-Kuwait, Lebanon, and Namibia. Additionally, Nigeria contributed to peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Croatia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Western Sahara during the same period (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019).

Nigeria played a pivotal role in restoring peace and stability in Liberia, particularly during the country's tumultuous periods in the 1990s and 2000s. In 1990, as Liberia teetered on the brink of ungovernability, Nigeria stepped in to lead ECOWAS's intervention efforts, deploying 3,000 troops to facilitate negotiations between warring factions and pave the way for the 1997 elections (Adebajo, 2002). Nigeria's commitment to peacekeeping in Liberia continued into the 2000s, as the country's civil war reached its climax in 2003. Under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria spearheaded negotiations to end the conflict, working closely with ECOWAS to remove President Charles Taylor and establish a transitional government. This ultimately led to the democratic election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and significant security sector reforms (Adeboye, 2020; Azgaku, 2015). Nigeria's proactive leadership in Liberia's peace process not only helped to stabilise the country but also demonstrated its capacity for effective conflict resolution and regional leadership.

Also, Nigeria played a pivotal role in restoring peace and stability in Sierra Leone through a Nigerian-led ECOWAS force, which conducted peacekeeping and peace-making operations to reinstate President Ahmed Kabbah in 1998, following his ousting

in a military coup the previous year (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019). Nigeria's efforts were instrumental in brokering the peace agreement signed in Lome, Togo, in 1999. Nigeria's contributions to peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone were substantial, providing approximately 80% of the troops and 90% of the funding, while suffering 1,000 casualties (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019). The success of Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts in Liberia impressed the Clinton administration, prompting the United States to support Nigeria's peacekeeping missions rather than intervening directly in conflict zones. Nigeria's gentle approach to peacekeeping has earned it recognition as a leading peacemaker in Africa, with numerous advantages, including global recognition as a key player in African peacekeeping has been acknowledged globally; a United Nations Security Council Membership as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council five times, demonstrating its commitment to international peace and security; and leadership role in facilitating the organization's (ECOWAS) peacekeeping efforts in West Africa.

Challenges and limitations of Nigeria's soft power approach

One of the significant challenges facing Nigeria's soft power approach is its domestic instability. The country's ongoing struggles with insurgency, corruption, and economic instability undermine its credibility and moral authority to promote democratic values and stability abroad (Olanrewaju, 2023). As noted by Adebajo (2017), Nigeria's domestic woes have severely undermined its ability to project power and influence in West Africa. Therefore, Nigeria must address its domestic challenges.

Another limitation of Nigeria's soft power approach is its inadequate institutional framework. The country's foreign policy institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lack the necessary resources, capacity, and expertise to effectively promote Nigeria's soft power (Akinterinwa, 2020). Moreover, the country's diplomatic corps was criticised for its ineffectiveness in promoting Nigeria's interests abroad. Therefore, Nigeria must strengthen its foreign policy institutions.

Nigeria's soft power approach is also limited by its over-reliance on regional organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While ECOWAS has been instrumental in promoting regional stability and cooperation, Nigeria's over-reliance on the organisation undermines its ability to project its soft power independently (Iwilade, 2022). Therefore, Nigeria must diversify its soft power approach to include bilateral and multilateral engagements. Furthermore, Nigeria's soft power approach is challenged by its limited cultural diplomacy. Despite being a culturally rich and diverse country, Nigeria's cultural diplomacy efforts are often inadequate and ineffective (Adesanya, 2020). Therefore, Nigeria must strengthen its cultural diplomacy efforts to promote its soft power and attract foreign publics.

Nigeria's soft power approach is limited by its inadequate use of digital diplomacy. In the age of social media and digital communication, Nigeria's foreign policy institutions must adapt to the changing dynamics of international relations (Ukandu, 2023). Therefore, Nigeria must strengthen its digital diplomacy efforts to promote its soft power and engage with foreign publics.

Conclusion

The paper examined the evolving role of soft power in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy, moving beyond the traditional reliance on hard power. Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved significantly over the years, with a notable shift from reliance on hard power to a more nuanced approach that incorporates soft power. This strategic reorientation acknowledges the limitations of military might and coercion in achieving foreign policy objectives, particularly in a rapidly changing global landscape. By leveraging its soft power, Nigeria has been able to project its influence, promote its interests, and build bridges with other nations. The country's cultural diplomacy, international cooperation, and peacekeeping efforts have all contributed to its growing reputation as a responsible and engaged global citizen. For instance, Nigeria's thriving creative industries, such as Nollywood and the music scene, exemplify this "global" dynamic, leveraging digital platforms to share uniquely Nigerian stories that blend universal themes with local flavours, appealing to diverse audiences worldwide. The TAC programme has earned Nigeria influence among African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries with its vast talent pool, providing skilled volunteers to these countries on request. Also, regardless of its regime type, Nigeria has consistently supported democratic causes. Nigeria reinstated presidents in Sierra Leone and São Tomé and Príncipe after military coups. Furthermore, Nigeria's impressive contributions and performance in peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Sudan demonstrate its commitment to regional stability. However, Nigeria's soft power approach is not without its challenges. Domestic instability, institutional weaknesses, and inadequate resources all pose significant obstacles to the effective deployment of soft power. To fully realise the potential of soft power in shaping its foreign policy, Nigeria must address these underlying challenges and invest in the development of its soft power capabilities. This will require a sustained commitment to strengthening its institutions, promoting its cultural heritage, and engaging in international cooperation. Ultimately, Nigeria's ability to harness the power of soft power will be critical in determining its success in achieving its foreign policy objectives and asserting its influence on the global stage.

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Poza twardą siłą: rola miękkiej siły w kształtowaniu polityki zagranicznej Nigerii

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje ewolującą rolę miękkiej siły w kształtowaniu polityki zagranicznej Nigerii, wykraczając poza tradycyjne poleganie na twardej sile. Analizując koncepcję miękkiej siły i jej zastosowanie w stosunkach międzynarodowych Nigerii, badanie ujawnia rosnące uznanie kraju dla znaczenia przyciągania, perswazji i wpływu w osiąganiu celów polityki zagranicznej. Badanie analizuje również czynniki wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne, które wpływają na strategię miękkiej siły Nigerii, podkreślając potrzebę wzmacnienia instytucjonalnego, budowania potencjału i zaangażowania sektora prywatnego. Poprzez krytyczną analizę nigeryjskich inicjatyw w zakresie miękkiej siły, w tym dyplomacji kulturalnej, współpracy międzynarodowej i dyplomacji publicznej, badanie identyfikuje szanse i wyzwania związane z tym podejściem. W badaniu przyjęto podejście konstruktystyczne i teorię miękkiej siły jako konstrukcję teoretyczną. Badanie opierało się na technice gromadzenia danych wtórnego. Badanie będzie miało implikacje dla decydentów, naukowców i praktyków Nigerii, którzy chcą zrozumieć złożoność nigeryjskiej polityki zagranicznej i rolę miękkiej siły w kształtowaniu jej stosunków międzynarodowych.

Słowa kluczowe: dyplomacja, polityka zagraniczna, twarda siła, stosunki międzynarodowe, miękka siła

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