REVIEW ARTICLE

Nigeria's Role in Shaping the Development of International Organizations in Africa: An In-Depth Analysis of the African Union

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

This study examines Nigeria's role in shaping the African Union (AU) using structural functionalism theory, analyzing its impact on the AU's formation, maintenance, and evolution through diplomatic actions, financial support, and strategic leadership. Key contributions include Nigeria's pivotal role in the OAU-AU transition, consistent financial support, leadership in establishing NEPAD, participation in peacekeeping missions, and advocacy for the African Standby Force. Using secondary data from scholarly sources and official documents, the research highlights Nigeria's commitment to regional integration, peace, and socioeconomic growth in Africa. Findings demonstrate Nigeria's significant influence on the AU's operational dynamics and policy frameworks, including its stance on unconstitutional government changes and contributions to AfCFTA negotiations, underscoring Nigeria's critical role in shaping the AU into a more effective regional institution.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Africa, the world's second-largest continent, is a diverse tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions shaped by its rich history of trade, colonization, and migration. Within this context, Nigeria emerges as a significant player in regional and continental affairs. With its vast population of approximately 200 million people, extensive natural resources, and strategic geopolitical position, Nigeria has positioned itself as a leader in African politics and development. Nigeria's involvement in international

organizations, particularly the African Union (AU), has been instrumental in shaping the continent's trajectory. Since the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and its evolution into the AU, Nigeria has been at the forefront of regional integration efforts. The country's foreign policy, structured around a "concentric cycle" that prioritizes West Africa, the broader African continent, and the global stage, has consistently emphasized Africa as its focal point.

Nigeria's leadership within the AU is underscored by several key factors. Its status as Africa's largest economy provides significant economic leverage within the organization. Nigeria's active participation in peacekeeping missions across the continent demonstrates its commitment to regional stability. Furthermore, the country's diplomatic influence has been crucial in mediating conflicts and promoting democratic governance. Nigeria's contributions to the AU's budget and its role in initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) highlight its dedication to the organization's goals of economic integration and sustainable development.

This study explores Nigeria's contributions, strategies, and impacts within the AU, highlighting the country's diplomatic maneuvers, economic support, and political leadership. From its role as a founding member of the OAU to its current position in the AU, Nigeria has been pivotal in formulating organizational goals, fostering unity, and driving initiatives in peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and regional integration. By examining Nigeria's engagement with the AU from a historical perspective, this study aims to elucidate the country's significant influence on the organization's evolution and effectiveness in addressing continental challenges.

Objectives of the Study

This study set to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the historical context of Nigeria's involvement in international organizations in Africa, focusing on key initiatives and diplomatic efforts from 1963 to present.

2. To examine Nigeria's role in the establishment and development of the African Union, including its contributions to the transition from the OAU to the AU and its influence on the AU's institutional structure.

3. To assess the impact of Nigeria's contributions on the effectiveness and efficiency of the AU, specifically in terms of:
   a) Decision-making processes within AU organs
   b) Implementation of key AU policies and initiatives
   c) AU's peacekeeping and conflict resolution capabilities
   d) Financial sustainability and resource mobilization of the AU
   e) AU's capacity to promote regional integration and economic development

These revised objectives provide a clearer roadmap for the study, specifying the aspects of AU effectiveness and efficiency that will be examined. This will help guide the research and make the findings more focused and actionable.

Methodology

This study employs an exploratory research strategy using a qualitative approach, relying on secondary data to provide a comprehensive examination of Nigeria's role in the African Union. Data sources include academic journals, books, official documents, news articles, and reports from international organizations, selected based on relevance, credibility, recency, and diversity of perspectives. The analysis process involves content analysis to identify themes and patterns, chronological analysis to trace the evolution of Nigeria's role, comparative analysis to contextualize Nigeria's impact relative to other member states, and critical discourse analysis to understand underlying motivations and power dynamics. Triangulation is used to verify information and ensure reliability. This methodology allows for a nuanced exploration of the complex Nigeria-AU dynamics, offering rich insights that quantitative data alone might not capture, while maintaining a rigorous approach to source selection and analysis.

Literature Review

Historical Context

Since its independence, Nigeria's foreign policy has been based on its commitment to African integration and development. Abegunrin (2009) observes that successive Nigerian leaders, from Tafawa Balewa to Muhammadu Buhari, have prioritized Africa in their foreign policy initiatives. This Afrocentric approach, founded on the concept of Pax Nigerian, portrayed Nigeria as a "big brother" to other African countries (Okereke, 2012).

Nigeria's early contributions to African affairs were most famous for its backing for liberation movements throughout the continent. Saliu (2012) emphasizes Nigeria's diplomatic, moral, and financial capabilities, which are frequently made accessible to African liberation organizations. This dedication extended to Nigeria's strong opposition to apartheid in South Africa, where it led international efforts to isolate the state (Abegunrin, 2009).

Formation of the OAU and Transition to the AU

Nigeria was a key player in the foundation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and its later transformation into the African Union in 2002. Akinsanya (2005) describes Nigeria's diplomatic efforts in influencing these groups' goals, which were initially centered on decolonization and anti-apartheid operations before shifting to economic integration and development. The transfer from the OAU to the AU represented a fundamental shift in African continental politics. Laporte and Mackie (2010) examine the compromises reached throughout this transition, particularly between supporters of a federal union and others who are afraid of giving up national sovereignty. Nigeria's position in this process was critical, as it attempted to strike a compromise between its dreams for African unification and the actual reality of competing national interests.

Nigeria's Contributions to the AU

Economic Influence

Nigeria, Africa's largest country by GDP, holds tremendous economic power inside the AU. According to the World Bank (2023), Nigeria's GDP in 2022 was $477 billion, overtaking Egypt and South Africa. This economic power translates into significant contributions to the AU budget and projects. Nigeria's economic significance goes beyond only financial contributions. Ogbu (2022) examines Nigeria's role in establishing continental economic policies, focusing on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Initially hesitant to join, Nigeria's final support for the AfCFTA was critical to the agreement's viability, given the country's enormous market and industrial base.

Peacekeeping and Security

Despite ranking fourth in Africa's military strength as of 2022 (Elijah, 2023), Nigeria continues to contribute significantly to AU peacekeeping missions. Mustapha (2020) presents an in-depth account of Nigeria's role in conflict resolution efforts across the continent, including missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Darfur. Nigeria's approach to peacekeeping generally focuses on African solutions to African problems. Obi (2021) looks at how Nigeria's peacekeeping doctrine has developed over time, with a greater emphasis on conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction in addition to traditional peacekeeping tasks.

Diplomatic Leadership

Nigeria has continuously campaigned for African solutions to African challenges within the framework of the African Union. Its leadership in promoting democracy and good governance has been notable, albeit occasionally contentious due to internal issues (Olanrewaju & Olorunkanmi, 2020). Nigeria has recently demonstrated diplomatic leadership by mediating political crises in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Klass (2023) examines Nigeria's intervention techniques, focusing on the country's use of both soft and physical power to support regional stability.

Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

Internal Stability and Credibility

Nigeria's ability to lead within the AU is occasionally limited by internal security issues, such as the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry in the northwest, and separatist activities in the southeast. Dauda et al. (2019) investigate how these internal difficulties impact Nigeria's credibility as a regional leader and its ability to effectively contribute to AU activities. Economic instability, including as rising inflation and currency depreciation, also provide problems to Nigeria's regional leadership. According to Adeniran (2023), tackling these domestic economic difficulties is critical for Nigeria's ability to sustain its influence within

the African Union.

Competition with Other African Powers

The emergence of other African economies, particularly South Africa and Egypt, has challenged Nigeria's AU supremacy. This competitiveness has occasionally resulted in diplomatic problems, as seen in the post-apartheid era (Olanrewaju and Olorunkanmi, 2020). Tieku (2021) conducts an in-depth examination of the AU's shifting power dynamics, exploring how competition and collaboration between Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt influence the organization's agenda and decision-making procedures.

AU Institutional Reforms

Recent AU institutional reforms, which began in 2016, present both difficulties and opportunity for Nigeria. The African Union (2022) describes these reforms, which seek to improve the organization's efficiency, financial independence, and global competitiveness. Nigeria's support for these reforms, especially in terms of financial self-sufficiency and bureaucratic efficiency, will be critical to their success. Louw-Vaudran (2023) investigates Nigeria's attitude on several reform initiatives, showing areas where the country's interests match with or deviate from the overall reform agenda.

Comparative Analysis: Nigeria vs. Other AU Powerhouses

Nigeria and South Africa

While both countries are economic powerhouses, they have different approaches to AU leadership. Tieku (2021) compares South Africa's emphasis on its role as a bridge between Africa and the Global South to Nigeria's emphasis on intra-African issues. Nigeria and South Africa's relationship within the AU is complex, with elements of both collaboration and competition. Adebajo (2022) examines how this dynamic plays out in important AU decision-making processes, ranging from peacekeeping missions to economic projects.

Nigeria and Egypt

Egypt's geopolitical position and historical importance in North Africa offer a different type of leadership within the AU than Nigeria's West African focus. Abdel-Latif (2023) investigates how the complementary responsibilities of these two countries are critical for balanced continental representation. The different approaches of Nigeria and Egypt to matters such as AU reform and continental integration provide insight into the organization's diverse

perspectives. El-Bey (2022) investigates how these variations influence AU policies and efforts.

Recent Initiatives and Future Prospects

AfCFTA Leadership

Nigeria's initial reluctance and subsequent leadership in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) demonstrates its significant influence on AU economic initiatives. Ogbu (2022) analyzes the factors behind Nigeria's change in stance and the implications of its engagement for the success of this landmark agreement. The implementation of the AfCFTA presents both opportunities and challenges for Nigeria. Adeniran (2023) examines how Nigeria is positioning itself to benefit from increased intra-African trade while addressing concerns about the potential impact on local industries.

Post-COVID Recovery

Nigeria's engagement in developing the African Union's post-COVID economic recovery policies, including backing for the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT), demonstrates its continued prominence in continental politics (African Union, 2023). Oqubay (2023) conducts a critical evaluation of Nigeria's participation to the AU-led COVID-19 response operations, assessing both triumphs and deficiencies in areas such as vaccine distribution and economic stimulus measures.

Climate Change and Environmental Initiatives

As climate change becomes a more pressing concern on the continent, Nigeria's position on AU environmental initiatives is critical. Okereke (2022) examines Nigeria's involvement in developing the AU's climate change policies, particularly its support for an equitable energy transition that takes into account the requirements of African oil-producing countries.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Structural Functionalist theory and the System theory as theoretical framework of analysis. Classical functionalists believe that in the community, the experience of a pleasant common activity changes people's attitudes toward one another and erodes attitudes that previously reinforced separateness and demanded competitiveness. And that such action must develop gradually as a result of earlier triumphs and learning experiences. As David (1957) said, "the historical task of our

time is not how to keep nations peacefully apart, but how to bring them actively together." The main theoretical tenet of structural functionalism is that peace is akin to national coactivity rather than national coexistence and that man can be liberated from his ties to national loyalty by engaging him in fruitful international cooperation, which could increase welfare rewards to individuals beyond those provided by the state if working alone.

The significance of structural functionalism lies in its capacity to clearly describe the binding of social and cultural forces that offers more rewards in international collaboration than nation-states. Neo-functionalists such as Deustch (1957) and Lindberg (1963) believe that structural functionalism as a theory of integration provides a working condition for states to progress toward collective peace and security because security and welfare are the reasons for every political community's existence.

The structural functional theory approach can also help to understand Nigerian contributions to the development of African international organizations, such as the African Union, by examining how Nigeria's structure promotes stability, cooperation, and development across the continent. This technique also helps analyze how Nigeria's involvement matches with the African Union's overarching goals and how its actions contribute to the organization's success in tackling regional concerns and advancing African interests.

Discussion of the Findings

The analysis of Nigeria's involvement in the African Union (AU) indicates a complex and strong engagement that has considerably influenced the organization's development and effect. Nigeria has historically played an important role in the founding and evolution of African international organizations, most notably in 1963, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established. Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, based on the Pax Nigerian philosophy, demonstrates the country's commitment to supporting continental unity, peace, and prosperity. It was shown that Nigeria has made considerable contributions to the AU through active engagement in peacekeeping operations, conflict resolution, and regional integration projects. These measures have strengthened Nigeria's position as a regional power and a major actor in African affairs. The country's participation in the AU has also been influenced by its

significant economic resources, demographic strength, and smart diplomatic operations. Nigeria's leadership during the transition from the OAU to the AU in 2002 was a watershed event in African regional politics, proving its ability to shape the continent's destiny.

Furthermore, Nigeria's economic supremacy, as Africa's largest country, and military capability have enhanced its standing in the AU. The country's dedication to promoting economic cooperation and development in Africa has helped the AU achieve its goals. Nigeria's diplomatic efforts have also been essential in resolving issues such as decolonization, apartheid, and regional disputes, helping to improve the AU's efficacy and efficiency.

Conclusion

Nigeria's position in the African Union has been critical in achieving the organization's goals of unity, peace, and development. Nigeria's historical engagement in the formation and growth of the AU, along with its economic and military prowess, has solidified its place as a prominent actor in African regional affairs. The country's dedication to Afrocentric foreign policy, as well as its strong engagement in peacekeeping and regional integration programs, has helped the AU be more successful and efficient. Nigeria's leadership in the AU has also been instrumental in addressing key issues such as security, human rights, and sustainable development across the continent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Nigeria should continue to use its economic might to encourage deeper economic integration and collaboration within the AU.
2. Nigeria should increase its commitment to AU peacekeeping missions by providing more resources and training for peacekeepers.
3. Strengthening democratic institutions and promoting human rights are critical for the stability and development of the continent.
4. Nigeria should play a leading role in addressing emerging challenges such as climate change, migration, and security threats.

Nigeria should continue to support regional integration initiatives within the AU, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

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