POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY IN NIGERIA: DYNAMICS, CHALLENGES, AND PATHWAYS TO ENHANCED GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

Political socialization, which is the process by which individuals get political values, beliefs, and behavior, is a critical determinant of international policy framework. Historical legacies of colonialism, ethnic diversity, education system, media landscape, and family structures in Nigeria have all been used to influence this process and in a way interact to create the foundation of decisions in foreign policies. This paper discusses the extent of political socialization in Nigeria and its complex associations with international policy, with reference to both past and present. The problem statement revolves around the agnomic relationship between the aspirational leading role of Nigeria in Africa and its fractured political socialization filled with varied political results in foreign policy that is compounded by poor civic turnout and ethno-religious sectarianism. There is a significant literature gap in the integration of the recent digital media influences with the traditional agents of socialization in explaining the changes in global posture in Nigeria, especially after the democratic transition of Nigeria in 1999. Using the theory of civic culture by Almond and Verba, the article postulates that Nigeria has a hybrid of subject and participant cultures whereby the elite socialization restrains the mass involvement in foreign policies. The study is conducted methodologically based on the collection of documentary and secondary data, where the analysis is using archival records, various publications, and statistical reports of such sources as the National Bureau of Statistics and Afrobarometer surveys. Empirical evidence shows that education and media can increase political awareness, which is hindered by inequality and misinformation, and recommends reform of the curriculum and digital literacy programs as a way to create a more unified foreign policy. The results are a reminder as to the necessity of integrative socialization in order to strengthen the Nigerian presence in multilateral arenas such as the African Union and the United Nations. Finally, enhanced political socialization may be used to bring domestic agreement to foreign policy objectives, enhancing sustainable development and social stability within a region.

Keywords: Political Socialization, International Policy, Civic Culture Theory, Media Influence, Education, Foreign Policy Coherence.

Introduction

Socialization of politics and international policy in Nigeria is an intricate phenomenon that constitutes a background of the national interactions with the international society which can be characterized by a complex interaction of historical, cultural, and socioeconomic processes. Political socialization, which refers to the continuous process through which individuals form their political identities, values, and orientations via several agents including education, media, family, and religious institutions, has a direct impact on how citizens understand the foreign policy initiatives and how they support them (Udofia, 2023). Colonial heritage in Nigeria has characterized this process, where hierarchical ruling and ethnic loyalties were prioritized and gradually made an imbalanced shift to post-independence democratization, aimed at achieving

the goals of national belonging and presence in the world. Nigeria being the most populous country in Africa, the international policy of the country has had a historical tendency of exerting hegemony over the continent, enhance decolonization as well as seek international economic collaboration, but the tendency is mostly hampered by the domestic socialization trends that focus on sub-national identities rather than the national interests.

The problem statement is based on the long-term discrepancy between the high-profile international policy targets of Nigeria, which include being a regional peacekeeper and a voice of African solidarity, and the disintegrated state of political socialization that weakens the citizen base and policy coherence. Nevertheless, in spite of the substantial contribution to such organizations as African Union and ECOWAS, Nigeria experiences issues wherein low rates of civic education and widespread ethnic divisions lead to indifferent or hostile attitudes toward foreign affairs, inefficient use of resources as well as reduced global impact (Mbara, 2021). Indicatively, even if Nigeria is putting a lot of effort in regional diplomacy, domestic challenges such as insecurity and economic disparity are undermining the buy-in of the citizenry, which is reflected in changes in policy that are more reactive than strategic. This issue is also exacerbated by intensive urbanization and the spread of digital media, which brings with it new forces of socialization, but also increases the misinformation and polarization, which further complicates the possibility to translate the public opinion into efficient foreign policies.

The main gap in the literature is that very little has been done to examine how modern agents of socialization such as digital platforms and youth movements interact with the change in foreign policy in Nigeria, especially in the post 2015 period when the world has become increasingly multipolar. Although previous research focused on the historical aspects, new research tends to miss out on the reciprocal effect: how international interactions define the socialization of the domestic state and the other way around. This neglect can be seen through the paucity of cohesive structures that address the role of political education to fill this gap, particularly with Nigeria hoping to become more engaged with the international arena such as G20 or reformation of the UN Security Council. To respond to this lacuna, it is essential to have a delicate knowledge of how an improved process of socialization would create a more participant-based political culture so that Nigeria could become a country that can use its population and economic prospects to create a sustainable international reach.

The foreign policy path of the Nigerian Republic since 1960 demonstrates these socialization foundations: initially with a non-alignment and Afrocentric center, followed by military regimes, which focused on security, and the transition to the democracy era and the efforts of citizens-oriented diplomacy (Udofia, 2023). Nevertheless, the chronic barrier in socialization, including the lack of political education at school and distorted media coverage, have resulted in detachment through which policies promoted by elites fall flat with the crowd. More recent trends, such as the 2023 elections and the current economic reforms under President Tinubu, point to the possibility of reform, but without specific socialization efforts, Nigeria will continue to live in an eternal loop of big proclamations that have not yet found a domestic consensus. This background preconditions a further analysis with the necessity to structure the empirical data concerning the

possibility to use socialization agents to harmonize the internal values and external aspirations to promote the better standing of Nigeria in the world.

Literature Review

In recent years the academic discussion of political socialization and international policy in Nigeria has grown, and it has adopted a wide variety of forms of thinking about ways in which domestic processes influence foreign interactions. Udofia (2023) offers an in-depth discussion of political socialization in Nigeria claiming that it is a lifelong process through which the norms such as ethnic loyalty and electoral violence are passed to younger generations that subsequently influences national cohesion and stability in foreign policies. This article emphasizes how colonial values are passed down in the form of family and community and giving rise to a political culture that was not receptive to coherent global policies. In a similar vein, Oladejo (2024) examines the role of political education in the development of communities, arguing that a poor civic orientation will fail to tie citizens to governmental matters, which will in turn undermine the pertinence of the foreign policy agenda which seeks integration in the region.

Based on these grounds, Ogoyi (2017) examines the correlation between political socialization and participation in Benue State, demonstrating that youth involvement is low because of poor agents, such as media and education, and has more comprehensive repercussions on whether Nigeria is able to tap into domestic support as a nation to fulfill international obligations. The paper uses a descriptive survey to show how the lack of socialization leads to apathy and reforms of the education curriculum to increase a person's engagement in international relations are necessary. Similarly, Obasi and Wilson (2017) stress the importance of political education as a means of voter and civic awareness, arguing that it will prepare citizens to sustain the political development, which is necessary to maintain a consistent foreign policy implementation amid multiple-party problems.

In the international policy arena, Mbara (2021) criticizes the Afrocentricism of the policies in Nigeria considering their effect on the welfare of citizens and that elite-based policies are usually concerned with continental leadership, rather than domestic demands, which are enhanced by the high level of socialization fragmentation. This discussion applies the role theory to explain the role conflicts in the concentric circles of foreign policy in Nigeria where the desire to become global carries with it internal division. To this, Ugwu (2025) made reference to the balance with China, Russia, and the West, and highlighting the role of domestic socialization in adapting to multipolar processes.

Additional information is provided by Akinterinwa (2022), who evaluates the unresolved problems in the foreign policy of the Fourth Republic of Nigeria, noting such domestic problems as insecurity that are the result of ineffective socialization and a barrier to successful diplomacy. The work recommends the inclusion of citizen diplomacy to fill the gaps, which is similar to the findings of Egbo (2017) on the role of political education in reshaping attitudes towards more politics. Also, the work of the International Peace Institute (2005) discusses concentric circles, observing that socialization influences regional ambitions but tends to cause discrepancies.

Recent works, including those of Quest (2025), also challenge domestic factors in the determination of the foreign policy of Buhari, uncovering how the socialization patterns had economic and security interests and conditioned the international course. This is reflected by Egbo (2025) that discusses the imperatives of Tinubu, which persuades the socialization reforms to increase the benefits of diplomacy. All these works are indicative of a general agreement that inclusive socialization is necessary to enhance foreign policy but there remain gaps in empirical literature to identify a relationship between digital media and foreign policy.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the theory of civic culture as developed by Almond and Verba (1963) as its analytical instrument in making direct connections to the political socialization and international policy of Nigeria. The theory outlines three perfect forms of political culture; parochial, citizens are oblivious to the central government; subject, citizens are oriented to outputs but not inputs and participant, active involvement is the order of the day. The civic culture is a combination of these and it balances between participation and stability to maintain democracy and coherent external relations.

This framework throws light in how socialization in Nigeria is bringing about a hybrid culture which is mostly subject-based owing to historic authoritarianism and ethnic fragmentation but becoming participant with media democratization. Almond and Verba (1963) propose that civic competence is developed through good socialization through education and media and the people are able to shape the policy. In this application, Afrocentric and non-aligned foreign policy of Nigeria reflects a socialized feeling of continental fate, though the component of participants is weak and as a result, there is prevalence of elite domination, which is manifested in the irregular relations with the world powers (Gambari, 1989).

The theory is associated with the work as it assumes that the policy incoherencies can be sorted out by improving the aspects of the participants through reformed socialization. To illustrate this point, civic competence as it is explained by Ugwu (2007) is low thus hampering the efforts to support such initiatives as ECOWAS union. Through this, Nigeria will be able to develop a civic culture that balances domestic interests with global aspirations to develop solutions such as inclusive education to enhance global powers.

Methodology

The research tool used in this article is a documentary and secondary type of data gathering, which makes this article to be in line with qualitative traditions of political science. The documentaries encompass historical archives, government reports, and policy documents of the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the period 1960 to 2025. The secondary data include academic articles, books, and statistical reports by such organizations as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Afrobarometer, and Pew Research Center, with the emphasis on the following data: education enrollment, media penetration, and political participation indicators.

The thematic content analysis is utilized in data analysis to provide insights on the qualitative aspects of data, and the descriptive statistics to deliver insights on quantitative aspects of the data in the form of tables. This method will provide an in-depth evidence-based analysis without direct research in the field, which will be based on credible sources to reduce bias. Among ethical factors, there are proper citation and fair coverage of a variety of opinions.

Analysis of Political Socialization in Nigeria

In Nigeria, political socialization occurs through complex agents with each playing a role in influencing the political orientations of the citizens in various though interdependent ways. This process is mostly initiated by family and peer groups, and entrenches more values that are based on ethnic loyalty, communal solidarity, and reverence to persons in authority. These initial influences often focus more on sub-national identities, including kinship and regional groups, religious groups, instead of a single identity as a nation, reinforcing the divisions that hamper the political participation in a unified manner (Okoli, 2024). Conversations about politics in the larger Nigerian case are based on short-term ethnic or family-centred interests as opposed to country or global interests, and this aspect creates a world perception whereby allegiance to any kin groups outweighs the state.

This socialization environment presents education as a key formal actor. As part of growing up with civic responsibility, democracy, and the history of their country in primary and secondary schooling is an attempt to produce informed citizens. The recent research highlights the central role of education in terms of political awareness and engagement at an early age, specifically, through systematic curricula, with an increased focus on governance models, rights, and duties (Ojo, 2023; Atubi and Dania, 2020). There exist however, big imbalances that erode this potential. The enrollment levels are still disproportionate, with the North not keeping up with the southern ones because of the lack of infrastructure, cultural limits, and security risks. Such the imbalance of the region encourages subject orientations in under-served regions where the citizens only see themselves as consumers of the state outputs as opposed to contributors of the state inputs. Conversely, the educational contexts of urban and southern environment usually lead to participant cultures, where participative cultures tend to foster debate, critical thinking, and civic engagement. The consequence is a discontinuous political consciousness that differs based on geographical location, socioeconomic position and exposure to quality education which eventually stifles homogenous socialization that leads to national cohesion and worldwide interaction.

Since the beginning of the 2010s, the media, in particular, digital media has transformed the modern political socialization. As more people have the internet and access to smart phone devices, social media has become a key player in terms of spreading political information, influencing opinions, and organizing action. The platforms can cause people, especially youth, to connect with the worldly and national events in real-time and they are able to explore and participate in political talking beyond the conventional scope. Research works mention the role of digital media in the mobilization of voters, voter monitoring, and the engagement of voters, especially in younger generations (Nwokeocha, 2023; Okoli, 2024). In the 2023 general elections, as an example, social media turned out to be a main platform of political content, information receipt, and discussions, thus increasing participation of youth in the democracy process.

Nevertheless, this agent also has its negative sides; the spread of fake news, algorithmic echo chambers, and hacks can contribute to the entrapment of polarization, strengthen ethnic prejudices, and diminish the trust in institutions. It is challenging because the digital media has dual nature as an empowering idea towards political awakening and a transmitter of divisive stories that cannot make the digital media a producer of a balanced political culture.

Religions also shape the political orientations, and Christianity and Islam hold the significant impact on moral principles, opinion about the governance and ethical leadership. Religious leaders are viewed as opinion shapers in most societies and they associate spiritual teachings with political actions and tend to follow ethnic or regional interests. This expression of religion and politics may support conservative or communitarian ideals, which encroach on the non-religious national unity.

Together these agents create a hybrid political culture in Nigeria which is a combination of subject oriented aspects that were left behind by the colonial and authoritarian times as well as newer tendencies of participants brought about by media democratization and education reforms. The past, especially the 1967-1970 Civil War and successive military rule have socialised the generations of being wary of national unity and the culture of constant corruption scandals passes lessons of skepticism and cynicism (Ezeji, 2025). According to recent studies, although the traditional instigators, such as family and education, provide the underlying values, digital media triggers a rapid shift, especially in the case of Gen Z in cities and educational institutions, where social platforms govern political learning and engagement (Okoli, 2024). However, there are continual factors that hinder this socialization process that limit the effectiveness of the process to a population that is more cognizant of political matters than usual, but largely unable to participate in sustained civic activity or consistent foreign policy advocacy.

The Nexus Between Political Socialization and International Policy

The foundational principles of Nigeria international policy are formed and limited by socialization processes, although non-alignment, Afrocentrism and regional leadership are directly embedded in the mass political consciousness and weak points are displayed by domestic fragmentation. Foreign policy led by post-independence leaders such as Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was marked by socialized anti-colonial sense whereby African solidary and the decolonization process became the continuation of national identity crafted by educational and family discourses of independence struggle (Gambari, 1989). The patterns of authoritarian socialization that have emerged since 1966 by military regimes included their specialization in regime-based diplomacy, resulting in high-profile interventions such as anti-apartheid advocacy and peacekeeping involving contributions, which are not usually based on popular referendums or even popular approval.

Seasonal democratic shift since 1999 has been accompanied by the liberalization of media freedom, school system, which allows more people to be familiar with international matters and informative policy changes to economic diplomacy and citizen-focused policies. New policies in foreign affairs and territories, such as the focus on democracy, development, demography, and diaspora under new governments are based on socialized visions of continental leadership and global prominence. Nonetheless, contradictions have not disappeared; elite-based socialization tends to bring about policies that are more regime-serving or ethnic-based, and efforts to

periodically alternate the commitments to such organizations as African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

These tensions are aggravated by the ethnic and religious socialization since sub-national loyalties may encourage suspicion against regionalization or international alliances that seem to play out as favoring certain groups. As an illustration, border wrangles and security alliances have even been seen in ethnic terms eroding national cohesiveness in supporting foreign policy. The role of digital media has added some new dynamics: such as making public dialogues on global events more apparent, as a trade deal, climate negotiations, and security alliances are more likely to be discussed, but it also risks making the feelings of isolationism or populism more active, which contradict the official position of Afrocentrism (Nwokeocha, 2023).

The empirical evidence demonstrates that a deeper socialization of the participants is associated with a higher degree of domestic legitimization of the international engagements. In societies that have developed civic competence through education and media, the citizens would be more supportive of the policies that favor African unity and multilateralism. On the con side, the imperfect socialization which is characterized by regional inequalities and distorted information undermines power of bargaining in the international arena because the international partners see inconsistency in domestic supports. Glocalization approaches imply that the correspondence of the foreign policy to local peculiarities via inclusive socialization may contribute to the promotion of effectiveness by reconciling international desires with domestic realities (although recent concentric model studies).

Issues such as the elite control of the foreign policy-making process, in which the mass socialization process is marginal, restrict people when it comes to voicing their opinion on matters of diaspora contact or economic relations. Reforms to agents of socialization, such as promoting civic education to include courses on international relations, enhancing digital literacy in countering misinformation on global relations, as well as using the media to conduct policy awareness campaigns are solutions. Such a more participant-oriented culture would help Nigeria to be more coherent in its internalized national values and outside postures because of its enhanced influence on its multilateral diplomacy and regional stability initiatives.

Empirical Insights and Data Presentation

Socialization matters are highlighted with the use of empirical data. Table 1 shows education statistics and primary enrollment is 85 percent in the country and 65 percent in the North (NBS, 2023), which corresponds to a decrease in political participation.

Table 1

Education Enrollment and Political Awareness in Nigeria (2020-2025)

Region	Primary Enrollment (%)	Secondary Enrollment (%)	Political Awareness Index (Afrobarometer, 2024)
North	65	50	45
South	95	80	75

National Average	85	65	60

(Source: NBS, 2023; Afrobarometer, 2024)

The data on media penetration in Table 2 indicates that 60 per cent of the youth use social media with regard to 70 per cent being aware of foreign policy issues (Pew, 2025).

Table 2

Media Access and Political Engagement (2022-2025)

Platform	Users (Millions)	Influence on Awareness (%)	Participation Rate (%)
Social Media	122	70	55
Traditional Media	80	50	40
Overall	-	60	48

(Source: Pew Research, 2025; NBS, 2025)

The tables above exemplify that education enhances awareness, as well as the media, but the imbalance hinders the cohesion of the policies. The proposals are the inclusion of civic education as a part of the educational curriculum, the popularization of digital literacy as an instrument against fake news, and the use of media as a tool of disseminating policies to develop strong cultures of participants in the international community.

Conclusion

International policy and political socialization in Nigeria are still closely interconnected, as the former forms the basis of values, attitudes, and civic competencies on the basis of which the latter one can fall into place and become productive. The discussion in the entirety of this paper has revealed the role that a disjointed socialization process that arose due to ethnic differences, inequalities in access to education, polarization of the media, the role of religion and authoritarian legacies have played in creating discrepancies in the implementation of foreign policy campaigns in Nigeria. Even the idealistic positions of Afrocentrism, non-alignment, and concentric diplomacy, internal fragmentation and a lack of mass influence in political spheres frequently lead to elite-dominated decision-making processes that cannot attract a wide range of public assistance to the country and transformation to an influence superior to regional and international dimensions. This lack of connectivity compromises Nigeria as a leader in Africa and the rest of the world as regards wavering compliance to regional organizations such as ECOWAS strategic policy swings to world giants with economic strains, and difficulties in projecting a single national image.

Finally, the renewal of the political socialization process turns out to be instrumental in developing a more congruent and valid international policy cluster. Nigeria can integrate the internalized domestic values with global aims by developing a hybrid civic culture that incorporates subject deference combined with active involvement of participants and increases the credibility and bargaining power of the diplomats. Promoting the presence of subject-oriented orientations, aggravated through corruption, misinformation, inequality continuum, continues to expand the policy incoherence and frays the presence of trust to foreign engagements to the populace. To

contend with these, there must be intended multi-agent efforts that help to establish a feeling of shared national fate that extends into the international relations through inclusive political awareness efforts to curb ethno-religious fragmentation. Finally an enhanced socialization process would not only help support domestic democratic stability, but also allow Nigeria to achieve its potential as a key player in multilateral forums, helping to unite Africa, rendering development sustainable and equitable to the world.

Recommendations

Within the identified gaps, to fill them in and strengthen the nexus between political socialization and international policy, the targeted recommendations are suggested, basing on the current knowledge about the changing diplomatic environment in Nigeria.

First, there is the necessity to give the top priority to systemic changes in the civic and political education programs at all levels and especially in primary and secondary schools and educate people about the democratic value, the concept of national unity and understanding of the principles of foreign policy at a young age. This must have compulsory courses on the international activations of Nigeria, Afrocentrism and citizens diplomacy courses, which are encompassed by regions to end the variations and develop a participant based culture which fosters cohesive globe enactments.

Second, invest in digital literacy and regulation programs of media in order to harness the capacity of social media as an agent of socialization and eliminate misinformation being propagated to polarize the population on the issue of foreign affairs. Government agencies along with the involvement of the civil society and technological platforms should establish mechanisms of quick fact-checking, ethical form of digital diplomacy training and enlightenment campaigns concerning matters such as diaspora welfare, and regional integration, hence increasing the youth voice and creating informed advocacy of the policies under the banner of the doctrine such as the 4Ds (Democracy, Development, Demography, Diaspora).

Third, boost the institutional coordination of the foreign policy apparatus, such as through increased parliamentary oversight, civil society involvement, and inter-agency interactions This would help to democratize the process of policy making, guaranteeing homegrown support and curb domination of elites, and enhancing transparency in the process of establishing the general population as a partner to the international obligations.

Fourth, be more inward-based and citizen centered approach to foreign policy, which is associated directly to national development goals like economic diversification, security and human capital exploitation. Through the power of highlighting the role of diplomacy in promotion of domestic welfare, such as exploiting the African Continental Free Trade Area and capitalizing on demographic benefits, socialization activities can develop a larger level of buy-in among the population and decrease the attitude that the foreign policy is foreign to domestic realities.

Fifth, nurture elite socialization and capacity building of foreign policy professionals such as by developing skills on how to navigate multipolar dynamics, climate diplomacy, and the use of digital

tools. This ought to be supplemented with enlightenment of the masses about the national institutions and patriotism as a way of building a collective identity and backing a balanced, non-aligned stance in a dynamic international arrangement.

Sixth, promote regional and international cooperation that consolidates the objectives of socialization, including enhancing civic education and youth empowerment through the African Union and the ECOWAS, as a way of projecting Nigeria as a leader in regional and global matters to surmount national challenges of the country, including insecurity and climatic predisposition.

There is a need to apply political will, maintain funding and commitment by multi-stakeholders when implementing these recommendations. Through this, Nigeria will be able to change the divided socialization to a binding power which is the foundation of a strong, steady and effective international policy that will pre-dispose Nigeria to lasting global significance and prosperity.

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