

THE ROLE OF EXECUTIVE–LEGISLATIVE RELATIONS IN FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The research seeks to examine how executive-legislative dynamics affect foreign policy decision making in Nigeria. While traditionally controlled by the executive, foreign policy in Nigeria is increasingly being called to democratic accountability and thus the importance of the legislative in shaping policy outcomes is brought into focus. In particular, the study attempts to find out what kind of influence executive-legislative relations have on foreign policy decision making and what structural barriers exist to their proper coordination. The research was carried out using a quantitative approach. Data was collected from 40 individuals familiar with political and international affairs by means of structured survey. Descriptive statistics and correlations were used to measure the relationship between the executive-legislative relations and foreign policy decision making. As the results show, a moderate positive connection exists between the examined variables and legislative activity is involved in the formation of foreign policy decisions without dominating in the process. Legislative actions are procedural and reactive in nature and foreign policy decisions remain primarily executive ones. Among the most important barriers to the cooperation can be noted executive dominance, inadequate institutional coordination and insufficient legislative power. Conclusion points to the fact that executive-legislative relations in Nigeria although formally structured remain uneven in actuality. Recommendations for overcoming identified obstacles are offered.

Keywords: Executive–legislative relations; Foreign policy decision-making; Nigeria; Legislative participation; Executive dominance; Institutional constraints; Quantitative analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the formulation and implementation of foreign policy decisions have been the domain of the executive branch, which has the main competence over diplomatic affairs and representation (Bojang, 2018). This process has contributed to maintaining a state-centered approach and marginalized other institutional players. However, the growing complexity of international politics and demands to make foreign policy decisions more accountable have led to increased calls for greater participation in decision-making by various actors, especially the legislature (Yan and Ramesh, 2026; Lenz et al., 2025).

In democratic states, foreign policy decisions result from the interrelations of the involved institutional actors. In particular, foreign policies come into being due to the dynamics of the executive-legislative relations. The legislature plays an important role in foreign policy-making as it possesses a set of constitutional powers that allow influencing decisions (Dubakeme, Folarin and

Oni, 2023). Existing research has demonstrated that high-quality executive-legislative relations positively affect the efficiency and inclusiveness of foreign policy decision-making and increase democratic legitimacy. In contrast, power asymmetry and competition lead to the marginalization of the legislature, which means executive dominance (Adeyeni, Shiyanbade and Ogunbela, 2023).

In Nigeria, relations between the executive branch and the legislature are defined by the dominance of the former over the latter. Even though the legislature formally participates in the making of foreign policies, this process is mostly centralized in the hands of the executive. The legislature is only able to influence foreign policy decisions on a reactive basis, i.e., after they are made (Butler, 2023). It is necessary to point out that there is a considerable tension in executive-legislative relations in the context of foreign policies as far as the formal involvement of the legislature in these processes does not imply its effective contribution. At the same time, there are very few quantitative studies examining how such relations affect the outcomes of foreign policy decision making (Dubakeme, Folarin and Oni, 2023; Adeyeni, Shiyanbade and Ogunbela, 2023).

Hence, this study aims at filling this void by analyzing relations between the Nigerian executive and legislature from a quantitative perspective. It will be possible to determine the degree to which the legislature participates in the decision-making process, evaluate the effectiveness of its activities, and identify the factors that restrict executive-legislative cooperation.

Research Questions

- To what extent do executive–legislative relations affect foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria?
- How effective is the legislative participation in foreign policy decision-making?
- What factors constrain the effectiveness of the collaboration between the executive and legislature?

Hypothesis

Despite legislative participation in foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria, executive dominance and institutional constraints restrict the role of this institution, creating a participatory and asymmetric decision-making structure.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the empirical literature on executive-legislative relations and foreign policy decision making, a considerable role is played by the character of such relations in shaping the processes under discussion. Specifically, even though legislatures participate in the development of foreign policies, their level of influence on such processes depends on relations with the executive branch. For instance, in established democracies, the effectiveness of executive-legislative cooperation in the development of foreign policies increases the quality, legitimacy, and democratic legitimacy of such policies (Lenz et al., 2025). At the same time, the participation of legislatures in decision

making is indirect, i.e., based on oversight and deliberation. As for developing countries, the empirical literature provides plenty of examples of power asymmetry, which hinders the ability of legislators to influence foreign policy decision-making. Centralization of such decision-making prevails as a consequence of executive domination that involves controlling crucial information and policy direction (Featherstone and Papadimitriou, 2023).

In Nigeria, numerous studies also focus on the constrained role of the National Assembly in foreign policies. In particular, Yusuf et al. (2025) show that despite having constitutional powers that

include treaty ratification and oversight, legislators participate in foreign policy processes only reactively and after major decisions have been taken, which decreases their effectiveness. Moreover, according to Dubakeme, Folarin and Oni (2023), while the legislature makes foreign policy-making processes more democratized, it fails to influence the outcome effectively due to numerous constraints such as the lack of access to required information, technical skills, and reliance on the executive in terms of policy direction.

Further analysis shows that relations between the executive and legislature in the foreign policy sphere in Nigeria are characterized by power asymmetry, in which cooperation is overshadowed by institutional rivalry and imbalance. Hence, such characteristics negatively influence oversight capabilities and the legislative ability to shape foreign policies (Idrees, 2023). Comparative analysis of political systems in Africa shows that despite participating in the development of foreign policies, legislatures in most cases fail to exert their influence on decision-making. Involvement in such processes is limited to deliberation and consultation because of the limited institutional and organizational capacities (Tusalem, 2021).

Another important aspect highlighted in the reviewed literature relates to the problem of participation and influence. Many studies assume that the presence of legislators in processes involving foreign policy implies their effectiveness, but no data proves that such involvement affects decision-making and yields policy outcomes. The dominant qualitative nature of these studies also hinders the ability to measure the effect of participation.

Indeed, although qualitative research allows gaining important information on the institutional and structural aspects of foreign policy decision-making, it is important to complement it with quantitative analysis aimed at determining the relationship between certain factors. Thus, it is necessary to conduct quantitative research on this topic.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pluralist theory and Separation of Powers Doctrine serve as the theoretical frameworks in this study because of their potential to describe executive-legislative relations within the context of foreign policy decision-making. Pluralism emphasizes the idea that foreign policy results from the interactions of various actors and does not have to be created by a dominant entity. Hence, both the executive and the legislature have an opportunity to shape foreign policies through oversight and deliberation (Dahl, 1961). However, in reality, there is usually an imbalance of power that might limit the influence of the less dominant actor. Separation of Powers Doctrine assumes that governmental functions should be separated among various branches of power to avoid concentrating powers and ensure responsibility (Esu, 2023). In the case of foreign policy, it implies that the executive leads negotiations and takes other actions, whereas the legislature monitors and approves decisions taken by the executive. Thus, in Nigeria, due to the dominance of the executive and numerous institutional limitations, the influence of the legislature is considerably constrained, which creates a situation in which relations between these institutions are formally participatory and actually asymmetric.

4. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research methodology will be employed in this study to investigate the impact of executive-legislative relations on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria. As a research design that involves the gathering of numerical information, quantitative research facilitates statistical analysis of the association between two or more variables (Lim, 2024). The target population of this research comprises people with adequate knowledge about political and international affairs such as students, lecturers, and other policy-conscious participants. Purposeful sampling is utilized

to select 40 respondents who possess sufficient knowledge regarding the issues to be studied. Questionnaire surveys served as the instrument for data collection through the use of a five-point Likert scale in order to elicit respondents' perceptions about the research issue. Two major variables were identified in this study namely; executive-legislative relations (independent variable) and foreign policy decision-making (dependent variable). Frequency distribution tables, percentage, and mean are applied to present the data gathered. Additionally, correlation analysis was carried out on the relationship between variables. This analysis was performed using software such as Microsoft Excel. Validity and reliability in this research can be achieved by ensuring that items on questionnaires are based on literature, voluntary participation, and respondent anonymity.

5. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

In this part, a dataset of 40 people is analyzed concerning the relationship between executives and legislature and decision-making processes in foreign policies in Nigeria. The analysis involves both descriptive and inferential techniques.

5.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 5.1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	24	60%
Female	16	40%
Total	40	100%

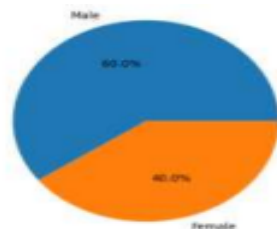


Figure 5.1: Gender Distribution

According to the data, there is a higher percentage of male participants, accounting for 60% of the respondents, while women account for 40%. In other words, the gender distribution is relatively equal, but males slightly outnumber females.

Table 5.2: Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency
Undergraduate	18
Postgraduate	22
Total	40

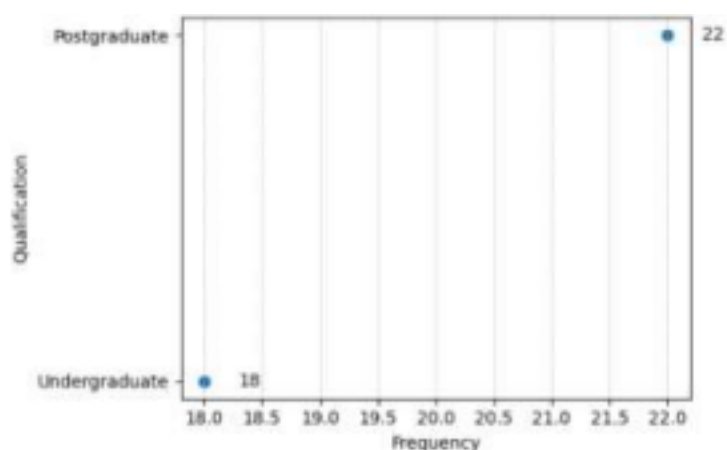


Figure 5.2: Educational Qualification

The dot plot in figure 5.2 shows the education level of the survey participants. From the plot, one is able to see that postgraduate participants (22) are slightly more than the undergraduate participants (18). The graph gives an easily understandable minimal presentation of data that makes it easy to identify which category dominates.

5.3 Descriptive Analysis of Key Variables

Table 5.3: Executive–Legislative Relations

Statement	Mean Score
There is effective interaction between executive and legislature	3.7
Legislature participates in foreign policy discussions	3.9
Executive dominates foreign policy decisions	4.3
Coordination between institutions is effective	3.5

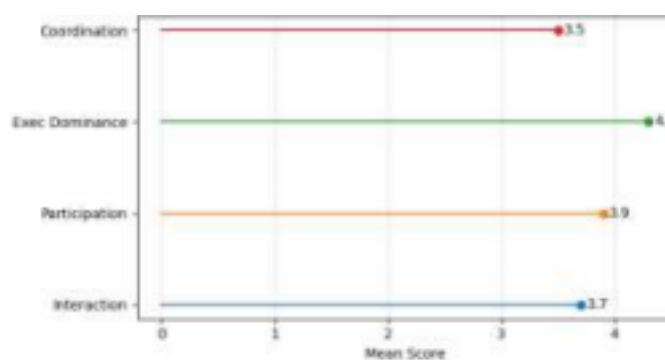


Figure 5.3: Mean Scores of Executives–Legislative Relations

The lollipop graph shown in Figure 5.3 shows the mean scores of executive-legislative relations. It is evident from the graph that the mean score for executive dominance is the highest, which implies that there is a high level of perception regarding executive dominance in foreign policymaking. On the other hand, participation and interaction have mean scores of 3.9 and 3.7, respectively.

Table 5.4: Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Statement	Mean Score
Legislature influences foreign policy outcomes	3.4
Executive controls major foreign policy decisions	4.2
Legislative input improves policy decisions	3.6

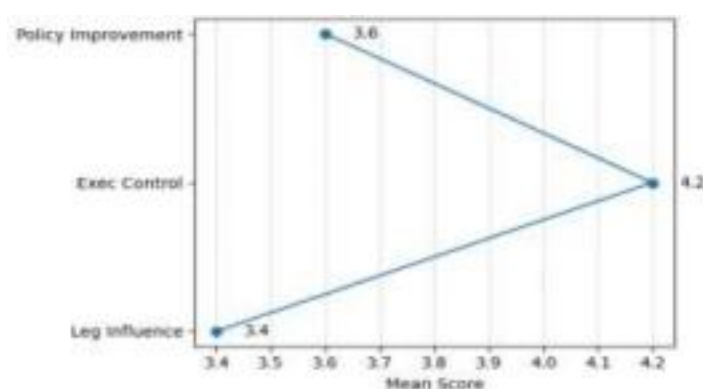


Figure 5.4: Mean Scores of Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Figure 5.4 presents the mean scores of foreign policy decision-making indicators using a line and marker plot. The visualization highlights a clear peak at executive control (4.2), indicating strong dominance of the executive in foreign policy decisions. In contrast, legislative influence (3.4) and policy improvement (3.6) record lower scores, suggesting that although the legislature contributes to the process, its impact on final decision-making remains limited.

5.4 Analysis of Constraints

Table 5.5: Constraints to Effective Relations

Constraint	Mean Score
Executive dominance	4.4
Weak institutional coordination	4.1
Limited legislative capacity	3.9

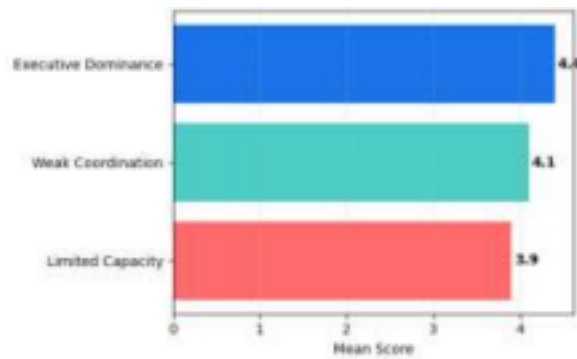


Figure 5.5: Constraints

The graph below shows the factors that limit the relationship between the executive and legislature, organized in an enhanced horizontal bar graph format using color coding. Executive dominance is found to be the most important limiting factor, having the highest average rating of 4.4. This is closely followed by poor coordination at 4.1 and inadequate capability at 3.9.

5.5 Inferential Analysis

Table 5.6: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation (r)
Executive–Legislative Relations & Foreign Policy Decision-Making	0.55

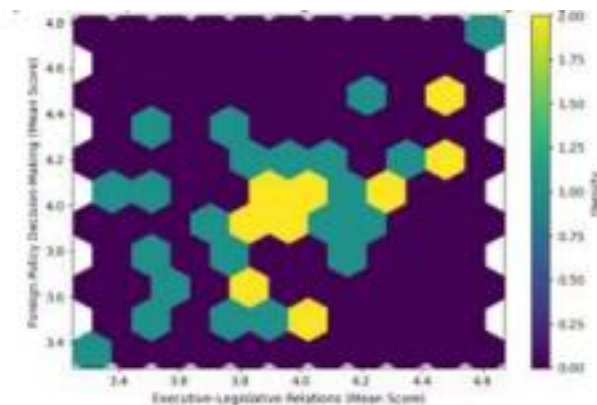


Figure 5.6: Correlation Scatter Plot

The scatterplot presented in Figure 5.6 presents the connection between executive-legislative relations and foreign policy decision-making. The bulk of the data appears in the middle, which means that the majority of answers gravitate toward the center of the chart. The trend in the distribution is upward, suggesting a positive correlation. In addition, the density graph highlights the areas where there is the highest number of answers. In summary, executive-legislative relations impact foreign policy decision-making.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

In this part of the research, an analysis is provided for empirical data gathered during the study. In addition, a comparison between the empirical findings and previous empirical research on executive-legislative interactions and foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria is made in order to draw wider institutional implications from the obtained data.

6.2 Executive-Legislative Relations and Foreign Policy Decision-Making

One of the empirical findings of the current study is a moderately positive correlation between executive-legislative relations and foreign policy decision-making. This means that there is a considerable degree of executive-legislative interaction in foreign policy decision-making that plays an important role in the decision-making process, but cannot be regarded as a determinant of foreign policy outcomes.

These findings confirm previous empirical studies arguing that the foreign policy-making process in developing countries is characterised by partial institutional pluralism. Despite involvement of various parties, their contributions in decision-making are not equal, which is particularly relevant to the role of the legislature in decision-making process (Featherstone and Papadimitriou, 2023). Overall, it can be concluded that, within the Nigerian context, executive-legislative interaction is a tool of consultations and endorsement rather than a framework for joint foreign policy-making.

6.3 Effectiveness of Legislative Participation

According to empirical findings, the legislature plays a moderately effective but structurally constrained role in decision-making. Although the respondents admitted the role of the legislature in the oversight of foreign policy decisions, discussion and debating on them and ratifying of foreign policies, they did not identify legislative participation as a major determinant of foreign policy outcomes. This finding coincides with empirical studies that highlight low legislative influence over foreign policy decisions (Yusuf et al., 2025; Dubakeme, Folarin and Oni, 2023). Typically, the legislature receives proposals for ratification after decision-making processes are already completed, hence its minimal effect on policy formulation. Further, legislative involvement is not considered in terms of affecting foreign policy directions and is viewed as a means of increasing accountability and legitimacy of decision-making processes.

6.4 Executive Dominance and Structural Constraints

As identified by the study, executive dominance is the main structural factor constraining executive-legislative relations and their positive effects on the efficiency of foreign policy decision-making. Moreover, besides executive dominance, other structural obstacles, such as lack of coordination between different government bodies and inadequate legislative capacities, hinder the efficiency of executive-legislative interaction.

These findings coincide with empirical research on the centralisation of foreign policy-making authority within the executive in post-colonial developing countries (Bojang, 2018). Executive dominance over foreign policy-making is associated with the control over diplomatic channels, intelligence and financial assets, and information related to foreign policy decisions. Moreover, the inefficiency of executive-legislative relations can be explained by poor legislative capacities in terms of lacking adequate technical capabilities and knowledge base for decision-making and having a reduced level of information on political events (Dubakeme, Folarin and Oni, 2023; Idrees, 2023).

6.5 Participation vs Influence

One of the most valuable insights obtained through the conducted empirical study is the distinction between participation and influence. Although legislative participation in decision-making is relatively high and positively correlates with executive-legislative interaction, legislative influence in foreign policy-making is limited. The presented findings coincide with other empirical studies highlighting the inefficiency of participation in the absence of legislative influence (Adeyeni, Shiyabade and Ogunbela, 2023). Therefore, while participation can be seen as a positive factor, it should not be confused with actual influence over decision-making processes. This differentiation is especially important when discussing the problem of institutional inclusiveness.

6.6 Institutional Dynamics and Governance Implications

Based on empirical findings, it can be stated that executive-legislative relations in Nigeria are characterised by structural limitations that affect their dynamics. Such issues as executive dominance, weak institutionalisation, and unbalanced relationships limit legislative influence over foreign policy decision-making. At the same time, efficient decision-making cannot be achieved without proper coordination, capacities, and accountability, which leads to institutional interaction being mostly superficial in cases where at least one of these requirements is missing. Therefore, institution building should be prioritised in order to improve the efficiency of legislative participation.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

The current study focused on the influence of executive–legislative relations on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria, and particularly, on the extent of participation of the Nigerian legislature in foreign policy decision-making process, and its implications for decision-making results. It turned out that executive–legislative relations have a certain influence on decision making but do not play a critical role in the process. In Nigeria, legislative involvement in foreign policy decision-making is procedural and reactive rather than active and constructive. Participation takes place through legislative oversight and ratification functions and parliamentary deliberations. All these aspects add legitimacy and accountability to decisions but cannot change the process of foreign policy formation significantly. Thus, we may conclude that Nigeria's decision-making process is institutionalized and relatively equal. Overall, it is clear that there is an essential discrepancy between participation and influence in the area. The structure of institutional interactions provides sufficient opportunities for interaction and cooperation but does not include mechanisms for redistribution of power and influence on the policy outcomes.

7.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the obtained results, the following recommendations are proposed: Improvement of the Legislature Capacity

It is necessary to improve the legislative capacity of the parliament. This implies increasing its technical, analytic, and researching capacities. In other words, investment in policy research units should be done.

Improvement of Executive–Legislative Coordination

Institutions for cooperation between branches should be strengthened. The main means to achieve this goal is regular consultations, establishment of joint committees, and other mechanisms for interaction.

Improvement of the Parliament Access to Information

The access of the legislative body to important foreign policy-related data should be increased. More transparency and openness will allow for more efficient oversight function.

Rebalance of Institutional Powers

Reforms aimed at decreasing executive dominance and increasing the influence of the legislature on foreign policy decision-making should be implemented. For instance, strengthening the influence of the parliament on treaty negotiations is highly recommended.

Proactive Legislative Role

The legislature should become more proactive in decision-making, and its participation in discussions of foreign policy matters should be initiated.

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