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Strategic Autonomy or Structural Dependency? Nigeria's Geoeconomic Statecraft in a Multipolar World

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Abstract

This study examines Nigeria's geoeconomic statecraft within the context of a multipolar world, focusing on the tension between strategic autonomy and structural dependency in its external economic relations. The objectives are to analyse how Nigeria's external engagements reflect the dynamics of autonomy or dependency; examine the institutional and policy frameworks guiding its geoeconomic strategy; and assess the implications of its current posture for long-term development, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership. Guided by the Theory of Geoeconomics popularized by Edward N. Luttwak (1990), the study explores how economic instruments have replaced military power as tools of statecraft in shaping national influence. The study employs a qualitative research design, relying entirely on secondary data from government publications, academic literature, policy documents, and international reports. Data are analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in Nigeria's external economic behaviour and institutional responses to global economic shifts. Findings reveal that Nigeria's external economic relations are characterised by a persistent tension between strategic ambition and structural dependency. While policy frameworks such as the NIRP, ERGP, and National Development Plan articulate aspirations for economic sovereignty, weak institutional capacity and macroeconomic instability continue to constrain progress. The study further finds that Nigeria's dependence on oil exports, external borrowing, and import reliance undermines its long-term development, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership. The study concludes that Nigeria's geoeconomic ambition remains constrained by structural vulnerabilities and institutional inefficiencies. Achieving genuine strategic autonomy requires sustained diversification, institutional strengthening, and coherent alignment between foreign economic policy and domestic resilience. It recommends that government deepen industrial diversification, reform institutional frameworks for efficiency and transparency, and recalibrate foreign economic partnerships to promote balanced and sustainable growth.

***Keywords:** Geoeconomics, Strategic Autonomy, Structural Dependency, Economic Sovereignty, Nigeria, Multipolar World*

I. Introduction

The twenty-first century has ushered in a profound reconfiguration of global power, characterized by the decline of unipolar dominance and the rise of a multipolar order shaped by new centers of influence such as China, India, Russia, and the European Union. For developing states like Nigeria, this shifting landscape presents both opportunities and dilemmas. On one hand, multipolarity promises greater bargaining power, diversified partnerships, and room for strategic maneuvering beyond traditional Western dependencies. On the other hand, the complex interplay of economic interdependence, global value chains, and geopolitical rivalries constrains the ability of middle powers to act autonomously (Acharya, 2018; Nye, 2020). Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country and largest economy, finds itself navigating this delicate balance between asserting strategic autonomy and remaining structurally dependent on dominant global actors.

Over the past two decades, Nigeria's foreign policy and economic engagements have been shaped by the twin imperatives of development and security. Successive governments have sought to leverage external partnerships for infrastructure financing, technological transfer, and market access, particularly through South–South cooperation and engagement with emerging powers such as China, India, and Turkey (Ezirim & Ohaegbulam, 2021). Yet, these relationships have often reinforced Nigeria's reliance on commodity exports, external credit, and foreign investment, reproducing structural dependencies reminiscent of the postcolonial economic order (Akinola, 2022). While Nigeria rhetorically promotes the principle of "strategic autonomy" in its diplomacy—seeking to maintain flexibility and sovereignty in decision-making—its actual policy space remains circumscribed by global financial regimes, debt obligations, and asymmetric trade relations.

The country's geoeconomic posture reflects a broader struggle common to many developing states: how to reconcile national development goals with the structural constraints of global capitalism. Nigeria's participation in multilateral frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the BRICS partnership, and OPEC underscores its aspiration for a more assertive role in global governance. However, persistent domestic vulnerabilities—weak infrastructure, corruption, fiscal instability, and governance deficits—limit its capacity to translate diplomatic ambition into economic influence (Omeje, 2020; Abiodun, 2023). The paradox of Nigeria's statecraft, therefore, lies in the tension between its desire for geoeconomic independence and its enduring structural dependency on external actors and systems.

As the world transitions into an era defined by competing power centers, technological rivalries, and the securitization of trade and energy, the question confronting Nigeria is not merely whether it can navigate these dynamics, but how effectively it can deploy geoeconomic instruments—trade policy, investment strategy, regional diplomacy—to advance national interests without compromising sovereignty. Understanding this delicate balance is essential for assessing Nigeria's evolving role in a multipolar world.

II. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's pursuit of strategic autonomy in global economic relations is continually undermined by entrenched patterns of structural dependency. Despite its regional leadership ambitions, the country remains heavily reliant on crude oil exports, foreign direct investment, and external borrowing, particularly from China, the World Bank, and Western financial institutions. These dependencies shape not only Nigeria's fiscal priorities but also its diplomatic behavior, often compelling alignment with external interests at the expense of domestic developmental autonomy (Omeje & Mwangi, 2019). While Nigeria's engagement with emerging powers has diversified its partnerships, it has not fundamentally altered the structural conditions of dependency. For instance, the China–Nigeria relationship, often celebrated as South–South cooperation, has deepened Nigeria's infrastructure financing but also expanded its debt exposure and trade imbalance (Umezurike & Nwogu, 2022). Similarly, Nigeria's reliance on Western aid and technical assistance continues to influence its economic policy orientation toward neoliberal frameworks that prioritize market liberalization over structural transformation (Adetula, 2020).

The challenge is compounded by the country's internal economic fragilities—rising debt burden, limited industrial capacity, weak export diversification, and policy inconsistency—which constrain its leverage in global negotiations. In this context, Nigeria's geoeconomic statecraft oscillates between aspirational autonomy and pragmatic dependency. The inability to convert diplomatic rhetoric into economic resilience undermines the credibility of its foreign policy and limits its influence in regional and global arenas. This persistent structural imbalance raises a critical question for Nigeria's policymakers and scholars of international political economy: Can Nigeria achieve meaningful strategic autonomy within a global system that perpetuates dependency through trade, finance, and technology? Addressing this question requires a deeper examination of Nigeria's geoeconomic strategies, their outcomes, and the institutional capacity underpinning them in an increasingly multipolar and competitive world order.

III. Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine Nigeria's geoeconomic statecraft within the context of a multipolar world, with particular emphasis on the tension between strategic autonomy and structural dependency in its international economic relations.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Analyse how Nigeria's external economic engagements reflect the dynamics of strategic autonomy or structural dependency.
2. Examine the institutional and policy frameworks guiding Nigeria's geoeconomic strategy and their effectiveness in promoting national economic sovereignty.
3. Assess the implications of Nigeria's current geoeconomic posture for its long-term development, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership in Africa.

IV. Research Questions

Based on the stated objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Nigeria's external economic engagements with global and regional actors reflect the dynamics of strategic autonomy or structural dependency?
2. In what ways do the institutional and policy frameworks guiding Nigeria's geoeconomic strategy enhance or constrain its national economic sovereignty?
3. What are the implications of Nigeria's current geoeconomic posture for its long-term development, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership within Africa?

V. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Theory of Geoeconomics as its guiding theoretical framework to analyze Nigeria's pursuit of strategic autonomy within a multipolar global order. The theory of geoeconomics was popularized by Edward N. Luttwak (1990), who argued that in the post–Cold War era, nations increasingly shifted from using military power to employing economic instruments as tools of statecraft. Luttwak described geoeconomics as "the logic of conflict in the grammar of commerce," emphasizing that global competition among states had moved from the battlefield to the marketplace (Luttwak, 1990). At its core, the theory of geoeconomics posits that states deploy trade policies, foreign investments, sanctions, loans, and technological controls not merely for economic gain, but to achieve strategic and geopolitical objectives. It underscores that economic relations among nations are not always neutral or cooperative; they often reflect underlying struggles for power, influence, and national advantage. While classical geopolitics focused on territorial dominance, geoeconomics highlights the control of financial flows, supply chains, and technological systems as the new arenas of global rivalry (Blackwill & Harris, 2016; Scholvin & Wigell, 2018). Luttwak's insight was later expanded by scholars such as Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris (2016) in their seminal work *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. They observed that states like China and the United States have consistently used economic leverage—through investments, debt diplomacy, and trade restrictions—to pursue national interests abroad. The theory thus bridges the gap between economics and strategy, demonstrating how economic policies function as instruments of geopolitical influence (Drezner, 2019; Scholvin & Strüver, 2020).

Applying the Theory of Geoeconomics to Nigeria provides a framework for understanding how the country navigates global power relations through economic instruments. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and a key energy supplier, operates in a complex environment shaped by the competing interests of major powers such as China, the United States, and the European Union. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to massive infrastructure investments across Africa, including Nigeria's railway modernization and port expansion projects. While such partnerships promise development, they also raise questions about long-term dependency and strategic vulnerability (Nantulya, 2018; Umezurike & Nwogu, 2022). Similarly, Western nations frequently employ trade regulations, investment conditions, and aid frameworks to influence Nigeria's economic choices and governance standards (Adetula, 2020; Omeje & Mwangi, 2019).

Through this theoretical lens, Nigeria's foreign economic policy can be seen as a balancing act between asserting national agency and managing external dependencies. The theory helps explain why Nigeria's leadership frequently emphasizes economic diversification, regional integration, and South–South cooperation as pathways toward autonomy. Yet, it also clarifies why structural dependency persists, given the dominance of foreign capital, imported technology, and external markets in shaping Nigeria's economic trajectory (Akinola, 2022; Ezirim & Ohaegbulam, 2021).

The Theory of Geoeconomics is therefore relevant for this study because it captures the strategic dimension of Nigeria's economic relations in a world no longer defined by bipolarity but by multipolar competition. It provides a conceptual foundation for examining how Nigeria uses its economic resources, diplomatic partnerships, and trade policies to enhance its global standing while confronting structural constraints inherited from historical dependency and the asymmetries of global capitalism. In doing so, the theory illuminates whether Nigeria's geoeconomic statecraft reflects genuine strategic autonomy or a reconfigured form of dependency within the evolving multipolar order.

VI. Empirical Review of Existing Literature

Empirical scholarship on Nigeria's geoeconomic posture has expanded as researchers seek to explain how the country manages its economic diplomacy, resource politics, and strategic engagements within a multipolar global order. Studies generally converge on the idea that while Nigeria aspires to greater strategic autonomy, it remains constrained by external dependencies and weak domestic structures. The following review highlights key empirical contributions, organized by their authors' objectives, theoretical approaches, methodologies, findings, and recommendations.

Adewunmi (2018) investigated Nigeria–China relations within the framework of South–South cooperation, applying the Dependency Theory to assess whether Chinese infrastructure investments promote genuine development or reproduce dependency. Using trade data and policy analysis, the study found that while Chinese funding accelerated progress in rail and energy sectors, the contracts largely favoured Chinese firms and supply chains. Adewunmi concluded that such asymmetrical relations undermine Nigeria's technological development and recommended stronger domestic content policies to enhance bargaining power and industrial capacity. Building on this, Omeje (2020) examined Nigeria's relations with Western powers, particularly the United States and the European Union, using a Political Economy lens grounded in World-Systems Theory. Employing qualitative interviews with policymakers and energy experts, the study aimed to understand how energy dependence influences foreign policy autonomy. The findings revealed that reliance on crude oil exports exposes Nigeria to external price shocks and policy pressures, especially in the era of global energy transition. The author concluded that without economic diversification, Nigeria's foreign policy will remain externally driven, and recommended a shift toward value-added production and renewable energy development.

Similarly, Okafor and Aluko (2021) analyzed Nigeria's regional influence in West Africa through its leadership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Adopting a Realist theoretical perspective, they used a case study method focusing on Nigeria's interventions in The Gambia and Mali. Their objective was to assess how economic strength supports regional leadership. Findings indicated that declining oil revenues and rising debt have weakened Nigeria's capacity to maintain regional dominance. The authors concluded that Nigeria's regional leverage increasingly depends on economic tools rather than military might, recommending stronger fiscal management and regional industrial cooperation to sustain leadership. In a broader African context, Eze and Oloruntoba (2022) explored how external powers deploy economic instruments—including trade, loans, and technology—to influence African states, with Nigeria serving as a primary case. Drawing on Neo-colonialism and Dependency Theory, they employed document and comparative data analysis to examine patterns of economic control. The study found that debt dependence, trade imbalances, and technology imports perpetuate structural subordination. They concluded that diversification toward emerging powers such as China, India, and Turkey often reproduces new dependencies, and recommended that African states prioritize regional self-reliance and technological innovation.

Ogunleye and Ajayi (2023) focused on Nigeria's participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), guided by Institutionalist theory. Using interviews with trade officials and business leaders, they examined whether AfCFTA strengthens Nigeria's geoeconomic position. Findings showed that although AfCFTA opens new regional markets, Nigeria's weak industrial capacity and poor infrastructure hinder competitiveness. The authors concluded that the benefits of continental integration will remain limited unless domestic industries are upgraded, recommending targeted investment in manufacturing and logistics infrastructure. Lastly, Omodia (2021) investigated Nigeria's rising external debt and its implications for sovereignty, adopting a Geoeconomic theoretical framework similar to Luttwak's model. Using secondary data from the Debt Management Office and international financial institutions, the study assessed how debt diplomacy affects policy independence. The findings revealed that growing external borrowing, especially from China and multilateral lenders, constrains fiscal autonomy and limits the state's ability to pursue independent strategies. Omodia concluded that Nigeria's economic policy space is narrowing and recommended transparent debt management and sustainable borrowing frameworks to protect sovereignty.

VII. Gaps in the Literature

Despite the valuable insights offered by existing scholarship, significant research gaps remain. Most studies tend to concentrate on isolated aspects of Nigeria's external relations—such as its engagement with China, the West, or regional bodies like ECOWAS—without providing an integrated analysis of how these collective interactions simultaneously advance or undermine the country's strategic autonomy. This study therefore seeks to bridge that gap by offering a holistic assessment of Nigeria's geoeconomic engagements within the broader context of global multipolarity. Furthermore, previous research has primarily focused on the outcomes of Nigeria's foreign economic relations, paying limited attention to the institutional and policy frameworks that shape these engagements. By examining the domestic mechanisms, policy orientations, and decision-making structures that underpin Nigeria's geoeconomic strategy, this study explores how these internal factors either promote or constrain national economic sovereignty. Lastly, few empirical works have explicitly linked Nigeria's geoeconomic behavior to its long-term developmental trajectory, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership aspirations. This study contributes to filling that gap by assessing how Nigeria's current geoeconomic posture influences its broader developmental goals and its capacity to act as a regional power in Africa within an increasingly competitive and multipolar global order.

VIII. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine Nigeria's geoeconomic statecraft within the context of strategic autonomy and structural dependency in a multipolar world. It relied entirely on secondary data drawn from government publications, academic journals, policy papers, international organization reports, and credible media sources to provide both contextual and analytical insights. Data were collected through document and content analysis, which enabled a systematic examination of themes related to Nigeria's external economic engagements, institutional frameworks, and strategic behavior in global economic relations. Thematic analysis was used to identify and code recurring patterns, allowing for the synthesis of perspectives on how Nigeria's policy choices reflect the interplay between economic sovereignty and dependency. This approach provided a coherent framework for interpreting Nigeria's geoeconomic posture and its implications for national development and foreign policy independence.

IX. Discussion of Findings

Answer to Research Question 1: How do Nigeria's external economic engagements with global and regional actors reflect the dynamics of strategic autonomy or structural dependency?

Nigeria's external economic engagements reveal a complex balance between strategic ambition and structural dependence, shaped by long-standing reliance on commodities, external borrowing, and unequal trade partnerships. The country continues to assert itself as a regional power, yet the nature of its engagements with global and regional partners exposes persistent economic vulnerabilities (Adewale, 2023; Ojong & Eze, 2024). Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) indicate that crude oil and gas still account for over 85 percent of Nigeria's export earnings, while manufactured goods contribute less than 8 percent. This structure underscores a dependence on volatile global markets and external demand. Nigeria's trade relations with China illustrate this imbalance further. Between 2019 and 2024, imports from China rose by 41 percent, reaching ₦8.4 trillion, while exports remained below ₦1.5 trillion, largely dominated by crude oil and raw materials (NBS, 2024; Okonkwo, 2025).

Western economies such as the United States and the European Union continue to dominate Nigeria's energy exports, while international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank exert influence through conditional loans (Eke, 2023). As of the first quarter of 2025, Nigeria's external debt stood at US$42.1 billion (Debt Management Office [DMO], 2025). Although Chinese loans account for only about 10 percent of this debt, nearly half of Nigeria's government revenue in 2024 was spent servicing external obligations (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2024), leaving limited fiscal space for domestic investment (Alao, 2024). At the same time, Nigeria has attempted to strengthen its economic independence through regional and policy reforms. Participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) demonstrates a commitment to regional integration and reduced dependency on extra-African markets (Oduh & Aluko, 2023). Through the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) and the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), efforts have been made to diversify exports and attract investment beyond the oil sector. However, weak infrastructure, policy inconsistency, and bureaucratic delays have limited progress (NEPC, 2024; Otuya, 2024).

Nigeria's pursuit of strategic autonomy is evident in policy rhetoric and selective partnerships, yet the country remains constrained by structural factors that tie its fortunes to global market dynamics. The continued dominance of commodity exports, growing external debt, and dependence on imports reveal that while strategic ambition exists, economic dependency still defines the underlying reality of Nigeria's external engagements (Ibrahim, 2025; Omoruyi, 2024).

Answer to Research Question 2: In what ways do the institutional and policy frameworks guiding Nigeria's geoeconomic strategy enhance or constrain its national economic sovereignty?

Nigeria's institutional and policy frameworks reveal a mix of visionary objectives and weak administrative capacity. Over the years, governments have introduced policies such as the Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan (NIRP), the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), and the National Development Plan (2021–2025) to promote diversification, industrialization, and investment (Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning [MFBNP], 2022). However, these frameworks have produced uneven results due to limited coordination, corruption, and inconsistent implementation (Akinola, 2024; Ekpo, 2023). The Local Content Act of 2010 represents a partial success. According to the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB, 2024), local participation in the oil and gas industry increased from 5 percent in 2010 to 26 percent in 2023, saving the country billions of dollars annually. Yet, similar levels of local content development have not been achieved in other critical sectors such as manufacturing and ICT, where foreign ownership and imports still dominate (Idris & Bello, 2024).

Institutional inefficiencies persist within key agencies, including the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC), and the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission

(ICRC). Long approval processes, overlapping mandates, and poor coordination discourage investors (Olowu, 2023). According to the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business Report* (2024), Nigeria ranked 131 out of 190 countries, a decline from 124 in 2020, reflecting deterioration in the business environment. Frequent macroeconomic instability also undermines institutional credibility. The naira's sharp devaluation in mid-2024, when it surpassed ₦1,400 to the US dollar, intensified inflationary pressures and reduced investor confidence (CBN, 2024; World Bank, 2024). While the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority play stabilizing roles, their interventions are often reactive rather than preventive (Okafor, 2024). Although Nigeria's economic blueprints articulate ideals of self-reliance and transformation, weak institutional execution remains a recurring constraint. The gap between strategic vision and administrative capacity continues to erode policy credibility, making economic sovereignty more aspirational than actual (Adewumi, 2025; Iwuoha, 2024).

Answer to Research Question 3: What are the implications of Nigeria's current geoeconomic posture for its long-term development, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership within Africa?

Nigeria's current geoeconomic posture carries profound implications for its development trajectory, diplomatic independence, and regional influence. As of 2024, the country remained Africa's largest economy with a GDP of about US$470 billion (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2024) and a population exceeding 225 million. However, the structural weaknesses underlying this position, including dependence on oil, persistent inflation, and limited manufacturing competitiveness, pose serious long-term risks (Adewale, 2024). From a developmental perspective, Nigeria's dependence on imports constrains industrial growth and employment creation. The manufacturing sector contributes just 12.8 percent to GDP (NBS, 2024), while youth unemployment stands at 33 percent (ILO, 2024). These trends reflect a pattern in which economic dependency undermines domestic capacity to sustain growth without external financing (Okon, 2025). Consequently, the economy remains trapped in cycles of debt-driven development (CBN, 2024).

Foreign policy autonomy is equally constrained. Nigeria's reliance on international loans and aid limits its capacity to negotiate independently in the global arena (Eze, 2023). Engagements with China's Belt and Road Initiative have accelerated infrastructure delivery, including the Abuja–Kaduna rail and the Lekki Deep Seaport, but have also deepened dependence on foreign financing and contractors (Nwosu, 2024). The influence of external creditors frequently dictates the scope of Nigeria's policy choices, reducing flexibility in advancing national interests (Ojo, 2025). At the regional level, economic and political instability has weakened Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS and the African Union. The cautious response to the 2023 Niger coup highlighted how domestic challenges constrain regional assertiveness (Olorunfemi, 2024). Although Nigeria still commands respect for its population size, natural resources, and cultural influence, its economic fragility has eroded much of its strategic leverage (Agbo, 2024).

There are, however, signs of renewal. Initiatives such as the Renewed Hope Infrastructure Fund, expanded gas diplomacy with North African partners, and the growing digital economy provide opportunities to rebuild regional and international influence (MFBNP, 2024). Yet, these will only translate into sustainable leadership if supported by structural reforms that strengthen institutions, diversify the economy, and align foreign policy with economic capacity (Omotola, 2025). Nigeria stands at a defining moment in its geoeconomic evolution. Its ambitions for autonomy, development, and leadership remain credible, but their realization depends on how effectively the country reforms its economic base and reduces dependence on external actors. Without such reforms, Nigeria's leadership in Africa will continue to rest more on potential than on tangible performance (Ibrahim, 2025).

X. Key Findings

1. Nigeria's external economic engagements reflect a persistent tension between strategic ambition and structural dependency. While the country aspires to autonomy through regional trade and selective partnerships, continued dependence on oil exports, external borrowing, and import reliance reveal deep structural vulnerabilities limiting economic sovereignty.

2. The institutional and policy frameworks guiding Nigeria's geoeconomic strategy—such as the NIRP, ERGP, and National Development Plan—demonstrated visionary intent but were undermined by weak administrative capacity, inconsistent implementation, and macroeconomic instability. Consequently, institutional inefficiency continues to constrain national economic sovereignty.

3. Nigeria's current geoeconomic posture poses critical implications for development, foreign policy independence, and regional leadership. Structural dependency weakens its global negotiating power, while domestic economic fragility erodes its influence within ECOWAS and the African Union, despite efforts to project

leadership through infrastructure diplomacy and regional integration.

XI. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that Nigeria's geoeconomic engagements are characterized by a paradox of ambition and dependency. While policies and initiatives reveal a desire for autonomy and diversified growth, the reality remains one of structural vulnerability to external markets, financial institutions, and geopolitical pressures. Institutional weaknesses, macroeconomic instability, and the persistence of an extractive economic structure collectively erode the country's policy flexibility and development potential. Consequently, Nigeria's aspiration to serve as a continental leader and global economic actor depends not only on diplomatic effort but also on deep-seated economic and institutional reforms. The country's future geoeconomic strength will therefore hinge on achieving a balance between international engagement and domestic resilience.

XII. Recommendations

1. The Federal Government should prioritize structural diversification by promoting manufacturing, digital innovation, and non-oil exports through targeted industrial incentives, infrastructure investment, and public–private partnerships.
2. Institutional reforms should be deepened to improve policy coordination, transparency, and accountability among agencies managing trade, investment, and development planning. Strengthening bureaucratic capacity is crucial to translating strategic goals into measurable outcomes.
3. Nigeria should recalibrate its foreign economic engagements to balance external cooperation with internal resilience. This involves reducing debt exposure, renegotiating unfavorable trade terms, and aligning regional leadership ambitions with realistic economic capacity.

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