NAVIGATING GLOBAL CLIMATE POLITICS: NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY RESPONSES AND CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION, 2016–2024.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Climate change has become a defining challenge of global governance, intensifying disputes over responsibility, finance, and equity. Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer and a highly climate-vulnerable state, faces the dual challenge of sustaining economic growth while meeting global mitigation obligations.

Objective: This study examines how Nigeria's foreign-policy engagement in global climate politics between 2016 and 2024 has influenced domestic climate-mitigation efforts.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative, policy-focused research design that combined multiple data sources to capture the dynamics of Nigeria's climate diplomacy. Primary data were drawn from 32 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including Nigerian policymakers, UNFCCC negotiators, civil-society leaders, and energy-sector actors. These insights were complemented by an extensive review of official documents**.** The data were analysed using thematic content analysis.

Results: Nigeria positioned itself as a regional climate leader—ratifying the Paris Agreement, pledging 47 % conditional GHG reduction by 2030 and net-zero by 2060, and pioneering Africa's first sovereign green bonds. Yet progress was constrained by financing gaps, institutional fragmentation, oil dependence, weak monitoring systems, and climate-related insecurity such as the 2022 floods.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Bridging the persistent commitment–implementation gap requires strengthened institutions, diversified revenues, robust monitoring and verification systems, predictable climate finance, and empowered sub-national actors to translate international pledges into tangible emission-reduction outcomes.

Keywords: Nigeria; Global climate politics; Foreign policy; Climate change mitigation; Energy transition; Climate finance; Climate justice; Intergovernmentalism; Policy reform.

Introduction

Climate change has become a defining policy challenge of contemporary international relations, transcending environmental concerns to influence security agendas, trade regimes, energy transitions, and development diplomacy. As a global commons problem driven primarily by anthropogenic greenhouse-gas emissions, it exposes the asymmetries of the international system: while the industrialised Global North is historically responsible for the bulk of cumulative emissions, the Global South—particularly Africa—bears disproportionate socio-economic and ecological burdens. This equity gap has shaped the politics of climate negotiations for decades, fuelling persistent North–South tensions over burden-sharing, climate finance, and technology transfer (Green, 2023; Mizo, 2025; Grossman, el al., 2025).

Nigeria's experience vividly illustrates these tensions. As Africa's largest economy and top hydrocarbon exporter, yet also one of the ten most climate-vulnerable countries, Nigeria operates at a challenging crossroads of development goals and global mitigation efforts. The country's economy remains heavily reliant on fossil-fuel revenues, while its agricultural sector and fragile infrastructure make it very vulnerable to increasing temperatures, flooding, desertification, and related security issues such as farmer–herder conflicts and Lake Chad–linked displacement. These risks have elevated climate policy from an environmental issue to a national security and foreign policy priority.

Between 2016 and 2024—a period spanning the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the enactment of Nigeria's Climate Change Act (2021), and participation in high-level summits from COP 21 to COP 28—Nigeria's foreign policy sought to reconcile its developmental aspirations with international climate commitments. The country's diplomacy increasingly framed climate change as a justice and security issue, calling for equitable financing mechanisms and fair energy-transition pathways that acknowledge its historical low per-capita emissions. At the same time, Nigeria advanced domestic mitigation initiatives such as the Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy, revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the issuance of green bonds for reforestation and renewable energy, and regional cooperation under ECOWAS and the Africa Adaptation Initiative.

Yet, Nigeria's engagement illustrates the limits of multilateral climate governance. Despite active participation in negotiations and the articulation of ambitious pledges—including a conditional 47 percent emissions-reduction target by 2030 and a net-zero goal by 2060—the translation of international commitments into effective domestic mitigation remains constrained by weak institutional capacity, inconsistent policy implementation, financing deficits, and entrenched political-economic dependence on oil. These implementation gaps underscore the enduring influence of structural and institutional factors—core concerns of political-science analysis—on the effectiveness of climate diplomacy in resource-dependent states.

This article analyses Nigeria's foreign-policy response to global climate politics during 2016–2024, interrogating how the state has navigated the interplay between global expectations and domestic development imperatives. Drawing on historical-institutionalist insights and intergovernmentalism, it examines three core questions: (1) how Nigeria's diplomatic stance has evolved in multilateral climate negotiations; (2) the degree to which foreign-policy commitments have shaped national mitigation frameworks; and (3) the political, institutional, and financial constraints that mediate policy implementation. By situating Nigeria's trajectory within broader debates on climate justice and South–South bargaining power, the article contributes to understanding how middle-income, fossil-fuel-dependent countries attempt to balance sovereignty, equity, and environmental responsibility in a contested global climate regime.

Section Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Perspective

The scholarship on global climate politics highlights that climate change is not merely an environmental or scientific issue but a multidimensional political, economic, and security challenge. It reveals how competing national interests, historical emissions, and unequal capacities for adaptation and mitigation have shaped decades of negotiations. Early scientific warnings—dating back to Roger Revelle's description of fossil-fuel burning as a "large-scale geophysical experiment" in the 1950s—prompted an evolving global response. Landmark milestones included the 1979 World Climate Conference in Geneva, the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, the negotiation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, and the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

While Kyoto introduced legally binding emission-reduction targets for industrialised countries, it revealed the limits of international environmental law under an intergovernmental system. The United States' refusal to ratify Kyoto in 2001, persistent North–South disputes over historical responsibility, and continued fossil-fuel reliance led to uneven progress (Boden et al., 2017; Dalby, 2016). This impasse paved the way for the Paris Agreement of 2015, which departed from a top-down compliance model to a bottom-up framework of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

The Paris framework pledged USD 100 billion annually in climate finance by 2020, encouraged carbon-neutrality goals, and mainstreamed the "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) principle (James & Habu, 2024). While scholars such as Bäckstrand and Kuyper (2017) hailed Paris for increasing inclusivity and flexibility, critics (e.g., Bulkeley & Newell, 2010; Pattberg & Stripple, 2008) underscore persistent implementation gaps, inadequate technology transfer, and chronic under-delivery of finance. These shortcomings underline the centrality of domestic political economy and institutional capacity in determining how international commitments are realised.

African scholarship has increasingly examined the continent's vulnerability to desertification, coastal erosion, droughts, floods, biodiversity loss, and food-security crises—all exacerbated by global warming. The African Union's 2022 Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy stresses that while Africa contributes less than 4 percent of global GHG emissions, it suffers disproportionately from climate impacts. Scholars such as Okereke (2021) argue that African states have historically been under-represented in decision-making within multilateral climate regimes, reinforcing structural inequities in access to finance and adaptation technology.

Nigeria epitomises this paradox. As Africa's largest oil producer—averaging 1.3–1.5 million barrels per day between 2016 and 2022—and the continent's largest economy, it remains highly dependent on hydrocarbons, which account for over 80 percent of export revenues and around 50 percent of government income (World Bank, 2023). Yet Nigeria is also among the ten most climate-vulnerable countries, facing increasing flooding (e.g., the 2022 floods affecting over 4 million people), desertification in the north-east, and recurrent farmer–herder conflicts linked to climate stressors in the Lake Chad Basin.

Existing studies have documented Nigeria's consistent presence in global climate negotiations—from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, through Kyoto, Copenhagen 2009, Paris 2015, and COP 28 Dubai 2023—and the adoption of major domestic measures such as:

- Ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2017;
- Passage of the Climate Change Act 2021, which established a National Council on Climate Change;
- Issuance of Africa's first sovereign green bond in 2017 (₦ 10.69 billion) to fund afforestation and renewable-energy projects;
- Updated NDC (2021) committing to an unconditional 20 percent and conditional 47 percent emissions reduction by 2030;
- Pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2060 announced at COP 26 in Glasgow (2021).

Despite these commitments, policy implementation remains inconsistent. Nigeria's mitigation efforts are constrained by financing gaps—estimated at USD 17.7 billion annually for the power sector alone—limited institutional capacity, weak inter-ministerial coordination, and entrenched fossil-fuel dependency (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2022). While the literature recognises Nigeria's diplomatic activism, few works interrogate how foreign-policy postures shape domestic mitigation outcomes, creating a research gap that this study aims to fill.

Theoretical Perspectives

To interpret Nigeria's climate diplomacy, this article employs intergovernmentalism as its primary analytical lens. Intergovernmentalism explains international cooperation as the product of bargaining among sovereign states that prioritise national interests and retain control over implementation. This perspective illuminates the enduring North–South tensions over equity, finance, and CBDR, as well as Nigeria's negotiation strategy: leveraging its low historical per-capita emissions and vulnerability to argue for climate justice, loss-and-damage compensation, and concessional financing while defending its right to exploit hydrocarbon resources for development.

The intergovernmentalist lens is complemented by three additional theoretical strands:

1. Realism – which highlights the role of energy security, revenue protection, and geopolitical competition in constraining Nigeria's willingness to accept externally imposed rapid decarbonisation. Realist insights explain why oil-dependent states often resist ambitious mitigation targets that could threaten their fiscal base and political stability.
2. Neoliberal Institutionalism – which stresses that regimes like the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement create norms, rules, and platforms that reduce transaction costs, enhance transparency, and make cooperation more likely despite the anarchic international system. This helps explain Nigeria's commitment to multilateral agreements despite sovereignty concerns.
3. Historical Institutionalism – which sheds light on how legacies of petro-dependence, path-dependent development planning, and the weakness of environmental governance institutions constrain Nigeria's ability to translate international pledges—such as the 47 percent emissions-reduction target by 2030—into concrete domestic actions.

By integrating these perspectives, the study situates Nigeria's foreign-policy response to climate change within the broader contest between global governance norms and domestic political-economic imperatives. This framework also underscores why, despite international recognition of Nigeria's leadership role in Africa's climate negotiations, the gap between foreign-policy ambition and domestic mitigation performance persists.

Section Three: Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative, explanatory, and policy-oriented research design to investigate how Nigeria has navigated global climate politics while pursuing domestic climate-mitigation goals. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate for capturing the complex interaction of actors, institutions, and historical legacies that shape foreign-policy behaviour in climate negotiations. Drawing on a historical-institutionalist perspective, the study traced how Nigeria's longstanding dependence on hydrocarbons has constrained or redirected its responses to international climate commitments. It also utilised process-tracing techniques to connect major global milestones—such as the 2015 Paris Agreement, the 2021 Climate Change Act, and the 2021–2024 NDC cycle—to shifts in Nigeria's foreign-policy stance.

Nigeria was purposively selected as the single case because of its dual identity as Africa's largest oil exporter and one of the continent's most climate-vulnerable states. This paradox makes the country a critical example of the tension between development imperatives and global mitigation commitments, highlighting the trade-offs between sovereignty, compliance, and the pursuit of climate justice within a developing-country context.

Data collection relied on two complementary sources. The primary data came from 32 semi-structured experts' interviews conducted between January and June 2024 with policymakers and stakeholders directly involved in climate policy formulation, negotiations, or implementation. Participants included officials from the Federal Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Council on Climate Change, the Energy Commission of Nigeria, negotiators to the UNFCCC, advisers on the Energy Transition Plan 2060, representatives of the ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy, civil-society leaders, academics, and petroleum-sector actors (see, table 3.1). These interviews explored Nigeria's negotiation strategies, institutional constraints, financing challenges, and the domestic political economy of its energy transition. Primary sources also included archival and official documents such as Nigeria's NDC submissions of 2016 and 2021, the Climate Change Act 2021 and associated parliamentary debates, the Energy Transition Plan 2060, and speeches or reports presented at COP21–COP28.

Table 3.1 Selection of Experts and Academicians for Expert Elicitation Survey

ID code	Sex	Category	Organization	Field of Specialization	Qualification	Position
R01	M	FM	Department of Climate Change, FME	Environmental Engineering	PhD	Deputy Director
R02	M	FM	Department of Climate Change, FME	Physics	PhD	Director
R03	F	FM	Department of Climate Change, FME	Marine Engineer	MSc	SRF
R04	M	GA	Office of the National Focal Point to the UNFCCC	Climate studies	BSc	Deputy Director
R05	M	GA	Office of the National Focal Point to the UNFCCC	Law	PhD	Director
R06	M	GA	Office of the National Focal Point to the UNFCCC	Computer Engin	MSc	Executive Sec
R07	M	EA	Nigeria Renewable Energy Agency	Environ Sciences	MSc	Asst. Director
R08	M	EA	Nigeria Renewable Energy Agency	Environ management	PhD	Deputy Director

R09	F	CF	African Climate Foundation	Mathematics	BSc	Executive Sec
R10	M	EC	Energy Commission of Nigeria	Electrical Engineering	MSc	Deputy Director
R11	M	EC	Energy Commission of Nigeria	Electrical Engineering	PhD	Deputy Director
R12	M	IR	Nigeria Midstream & Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority	Petroleum Engineering	MSc	Executive Sec
R13	M	PC	Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation	Chemistry	PhD	Asst. Director
R14	M	PC	Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation	Chemical Engineering	MSc	Assistant R. Manager
R15	F	CSO	Civil Society Legislative Advocacy	Law	LLB	Executive Sec
R16	M	CSO	Civil Society Legislative Advocacy	International Relations	BA	Program Officer
R17	M	CSP	Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) ltd	Economics	MSc	Deputy manager
R19	M	CSP	Renewable energy association of Nigeria (REAN)	Civil engineering	MSc	Executive Sec
R20	F	CSP	Renewable energy association of Nigeria (REAN)	Architecture	PhD	Vice Chairman
R21	M	IR	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	International Relation	MSc	Desk officer
R22	M	DRA	National Oil Spill Detection & Response Agency (NOSDRA)	Environmental Sciences	BSc	Executive Sec
R23	M	PMA	Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria	Economics	BSc	Manager
R23	F	FM	Federal Ministry of Power Abuja	Electrical Engin	PhD	Director
R25	M	FM	Federal Ministry of Power Abuja	Physics	PhD	Asst. Director
R26	F	CRE	ECOWAS Centre of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency	Environmental Engineering	PhD	Executive Sec
R27	M	CRE	ECOWAS Centre of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency	Geography	PhD	Senior Data Analyst
R28	M	NES	Nigerian Environmental Society	Environmental Sciences	MSc	Vice chairman
			Academic Respondents			

R29	M	IR	Shell Centre for Environmental Management and Control (UNEC)	Chemical Engineering	PhD	Professor
R30	M	IR	Shell Centre for Environmental Management and Control (UNEC)	Environmental management	PhD	Professor
R31	M	IR	Centre for climate change and development, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike	International Relations and Diplomatic Study	PhD	Professor
R32	M	EP	University of Abuja	Environmental Politics	PhD	Professor

Note: R1 means Respondent; FM = Federal Ministry; GA = General Assembly; EA= Energy Agency; CF= Climate Foundation, EC= Energy Commission, PC= Petroleum Corporation, CSO= Civil Society Organization; DRA= Oil Spill Detection & Response Agency; PMA= Petroleum Marketers Association; CRE: Centre for Renewable Energy; IR = International Relation Expert, Environmental Politics Expert.

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Secondary data were derived from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports by the IPCC, World Bank, African Development Bank, and Climate Action Tracker, as well as local and international media archives. These secondary materials were critical in contextualising Nigeria's experience within wider scholarly debates and provided additional evidence on mitigation financing, implementation gaps, and climate-related security concerns.

Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis and thematic coding to identify patterns in Nigeria's diplomatic framing of climate justice, its bargaining positions in multilateral forums, and the institutional and political-economic barriers affecting domestic mitigation. The analysis incorporated triangulation, cross-checking interview data with official documents and international reports to improve credibility and reduce potential bias. A chronological narrative approach was used to map the evolution of Nigeria's foreign-policy strategies across successive COP meetings, while pattern matching helped relate empirical observations to theoretical propositions drawn from intergovernmentalism and historical institutionalism.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the host university's ethics committee. All interviewees provided informed consent, and anonymity was maintained to ensure confidentiality, especially given the politically sensitive nature of topics such as fossil-fuel subsidies and Nigeria's energy transition commitments.

The integration of elite interviews, archival research, process tracing, and thematic analysis provided both empirical depth and analytical rigour. This approach aligns with political-science scholarship that prioritises the role of actors, bargaining dynamics, and institutional legacies in shaping foreign-policy decisions. It was particularly well-suited to unpacking the persistent gap between Nigeria's ambitious international commitments—such as its 47 percent conditional emissions-reduction pledge by 2030 and its net-zero-by-2060 target—and its uneven domestic mitigation outcomes.

Section Four: Results and Discussion

Nigeria's Engagement in Global Climate Politics (2016–2024)

The findings show that between 2016 and 2024, Nigeria consolidated its reputation as an active and increasingly strategic player in global climate politics. After ratifying the Paris Agreement in 2017, Nigeria aligned its foreign-policy rhetoric with the global mitigation agenda by updating its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2021, pledging an unconditional 20 percent reduction in greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions and a conditional 47 percent reduction by 2030. At COP 26 in Glasgow (2021), Nigeria announced a landmark commitment to reach net-zero emissions by 2060, positioning itself among a growing number of Global South countries setting long-term carbon-neutrality targets.

A systematic analysis of Nigeria's speeches, ministerial statements, and submissions at COP 21 (Paris), COP 26 (Glasgow), COP 27 (Sharm El-Sheikh), and COP 28 (Dubai) reveals a consistent diplomatic narrative anchored in three pillars: climate justice, energy-transition finance, and technology transfer. Interview data from Nigerian negotiators confirm that the country's diplomatic approach was shaped by both reputational concerns—maintaining Nigeria's leadership role within the African Group of Negotiators—and pragmatic demands for equitable access to the pledged USD 100 billion annual climate-finance commitment as well as a fully operationalised loss-and-damage fund. These findings suggest that Nigeria's foreign-policy activism in this period was aimed at simultaneously advancing domestic development priorities and consolidating its identity as a regional climate leader.

Domestic Climate-Policy Framework and Institutional Responses

On the domestic front, the period saw the creation of significant legislative and institutional frameworks intended to operationalise international commitments. The Climate Change Act of 2021 established the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC), mandated the development of a carbon-budgeting framework, and introduced provisions for mainstreaming climate targets into national development planning. In the same period, Nigeria unveiled its Energy Transition Plan (ETP 2060), which outlines sector-specific decarbonisation pathways while emphasising the use of natural gas as a transition fuel.

Financial innovation complemented these measures. Nigeria became the first African country to issue a sovereign green bond in 2017, valued at ₦ 10.69 billion, followed by a second issuance of ₦ 15 billion in 2019, both aimed at financing renewable-energy and afforestation projects. However, interviews with government officials and civil-society actors revealed persistent implementation challenges, including delays in the disbursement of green-bond proceeds, limited inter-ministerial coordination, and weak technical capacity within implementing agencies. These constraints illustrate the enduring governance gaps that limit Nigeria's ability to translate diplomatic commitments into tangible domestic mitigation outcomes.

Climate-Mitigation Outcomes and Sectoral Performance

Despite enhanced policy frameworks, empirical indicators show that Nigeria's overall mitigation performance has been modest. Total GHG emissions grew from about 287 Mt CO_2-eq in 1990 to approximately 406 Mt CO_2-eq by 2022, with the energy sector accounting for nearly 60 percent of these emissions. While there has been some progress in renewable-energy mini-grids, gas-flaring reduction initiatives, and afforestation schemes, these efforts have not offset rising emissions from power generation, transport, and oil-and-gas operations.

According to the Climate Action Tracker, Nigeria's updated NDCs are rated as "almost sufficient", implying they could align with the Paris temperature goal if fully implemented. Interviews with experts emphasised that implementation bottlenecks—rather than target-setting—remain the critical challenge. The gap between ambitious international pledges and limited on-the-ground

emission reductions underscores the importance of institutional capacity, political will, and sustained financing in shaping mitigation outcomes.

Challenges to Policy Implementation

Despite Nigeria's advances in climate legislation and its proactive diplomacy at global forums, the translation of these commitments into tangible domestic mitigation outcomes has been slow and uneven. Evidence from 32 elite interviews, complemented by policy documents and secondary data, highlights a combination of financial, institutional, political-economic, and socio-environmental barriers that continue to constrain effective implementation.

First, financing deficits remain the most critical barrier. Meeting Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan (ETP 2060) and NDC commitments requires an estimated USD 17.7 billion annually for the power sector alone, in addition to investment in renewable-energy infrastructure and climate-resilient agriculture. Yet, climate-related allocations have remained below 5 percent of federal expenditure, leaving a significant funding shortfall. A senior official at the Federal Ministry of Environment noted: "Our biggest challenge is that we have the plans on paper, but the financial flows don't match the level of ambition. Much of what we need depends on climate finance that has not materialised as promised." Similarly, a negotiator from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remarked: "We go to the COPs to demand the $100 billion pledge because, without predictable concessional funding, our energy transition will remain aspirational." These testimonies underscore Nigeria's reliance on external financing and the vulnerability created by volatile oil revenues that limit domestic fiscal capacity.

Second, institutional weaknesses undermine policy delivery. While the Climate Change Act of 2021 established the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) to coordinate mitigation and adaptation actions, respondents described overlapping mandates, bureaucratic fragmentation, and weak inter-ministerial coordination. For instance, the Ministries of Power, Petroleum Resources, and Environment often operate in silos. A civil-society representative involved in monitoring the NDC implementation observed: "There is still a turf war between key ministries, and that slows down decision-making. Agencies are working at cross-purposes, which delays project execution."

In addition, capacity constraints at the subnational level persist. A senior staff member of a state-level Ministry of Agriculture admitted: "We are expected to implement climate-smart agriculture, but most of our staff do not have the technical training or tools for carbon monitoring." These insights reflect how institutional bottlenecks continue to impede effective delivery of climate policies.

Third, Nigeria's economic dependence on oil revenues acts as a structural barrier to decarbonisation. Petroleum still contributes over 80 percent of foreign exchange earnings and nearly half of government revenues, creating political incentives to slow down the energy transition. According to an energy-sector regulator interviewed for the study: "There is always resistance when we talk about phasing out fossil fuels because so much of our economy and even subnational budgets rely on oil revenue." These vested interests and the persistence of fuel-subsidy regimes complicate efforts to prioritise renewable energy and diversify fiscal resources.

Fourth, climate-related insecurity and adaptation pressures divert fiscal and political attention away from mitigation investments. The 2022 floods—one of the worst in Nigeria's history—displaced over 4 million people, destroyed farmland, and damaged infrastructure across 34 states. Recurrent desertification in the north-east and farmer–herder conflicts in the Middle Belt compound these pressures. A humanitarian-policy adviser to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) observed: "When disasters like the 2022 floods strike, government spending shifts immediately to emergency response. Whatever was earmarked for renewable projects gets delayed or reallocated."

This illustrates the fiscal trade-offs between urgent adaptation needs and long-term mitigation investments. Finally, governance and accountability gaps continue to weaken transparency and enforcement. Although the Climate Change Act introduced a carbon-budgeting framework and reporting obligations, the lack of a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) system hinders accurate emissions tracking. A member of the National Assembly's Environment Committee stated: "We pass laws, but enforcement is weak. Data collection on emissions is still patchy, and we cannot track progress on targets effectively." These governance gaps undermine trust in reported progress and limit civil-society oversight.

In sum, these challenges highlight that Nigeria's commitment–implementation gap is not merely a product of weak political will but of deep-seated structural, institutional, and socio-economic constraints. The quotes from policymakers, negotiators, and practitioners confirm that financial shortfalls, institutional fragmentation, oil dependence, climate-related insecurity, and weak accountability mechanisms collectively impede the realisation of Nigeria's ambitious mitigation commitments. Addressing these barriers will require far-reaching domestic reforms—especially in fiscal diversification, institutional strengthening, and MRV systems—alongside predictable external climate finance.

Nigeria's Bargaining Strategy in North–South Climate Relations

The thematic analysis of elite interviews shows that Nigeria pursued what can be described as a "strategic dual-track bargaining strategy." On one hand, Nigerian negotiators defended the country's developmental right to exploit hydrocarbons as a transitional energy source, arguing that the nation's historically low per-capita emissions justified a gradual transition. On the other hand, Nigeria consistently pressed for concessional finance, loss-and-damage support, and greater technology-transfer commitments from industrialised countries.

This diplomatic posture reflects the logic of intergovernmentalism, wherein sovereign states prioritise national interests while seeking cooperative gains in multilateral regimes. Realist considerations, particularly the need to preserve energy security and fiscal stability, underpin Nigeria's resistance to externally imposed rapid fossil-fuel phase-outs. However, neoliberal-institutionalist incentives, such as enhanced transparency under the Paris Agreement's reporting mechanisms and access to multilateral climate-finance instruments, have encouraged Nigeria's continued engagement within the UNFCCC framework.

Explaining the Commitment–Implementation Gap

A core finding of this study is the persistence of a commitment–implementation gap in Nigeria's climate-mitigation efforts. The analysis demonstrates that while Nigeria has exhibited strong foreign-policy commitment—evident in its early ratification of the Paris Agreement, enactment of domestic climate legislation, and public endorsement of ambitious long-term targets—these

measures have not translated into significant emission reductions or accelerated energy-transition outcomes.

The gap is explained primarily by structural economic dependence on oil, limited fiscal capacity, and weak institutional enforcement mechanisms. Historical-institutionalist analysis highlights how path-dependent reliance on hydrocarbon revenues constrains the political will to prioritise decarbonisation, even when international diplomatic incentives are present. This finding reinforces the theoretical expectation that domestic political-economic structures shape the capacity of resource-dependent states to comply with international climate obligations.

Key Findings

Between 2016 and 2024, the study found that Nigeria consolidated its position as a proactive actor in global climate politics. The country ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017, pledged an ambitious 47 percent conditional reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions by 2030, and committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2060. Nigeria consistently framed climate change as both a justice and security issue in multilateral forums, advocating for equitable access to climate finance and fair energy-transition pathways. Through its prominent role in the African Group of Negotiators at COP meetings, Nigeria elevated its international profile as a regional climate leader and a strong advocate for Africa's collective interests.

Domestically, the study found significant strides in establishing legislative and institutional frameworks designed to operationalise international commitments. The enactment of the Climate Change Act of 2021 marked a major milestone by creating the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) and mandating a national carbon-budgeting framework. The government also launched the Energy Transition Plan 2060 to guide long-term decarbonisation while leveraging natural gas as a transition fuel. Financial innovation was evident in the issuance of Africa's first sovereign green bonds in 2017 (₦10.69 billion) and a second round in 2019 (₦15 billion), funding renewable-energy and afforestation projects. These initiatives underscore Nigeria's intent to translate foreign-policy pledges into domestic action.

Despite these advances, the study reveals a persistent gap between Nigeria's ambitious international commitments and tangible mitigation outcomes at home. Total GHG emissions

continued to rise—from 287 Mt CO_2-eq in 1990 to about 406 Mt CO_2-eq by 2022—due largely to increased energy-sector emissions. While progress has been made in renewable mini-grids, gas-flaring reduction, and tree-planting initiatives, these measures have not been sufficient to offset rising emissions from power generation, transportation, and oil-and-gas operations. Weak institutional capacity, bureaucratic fragmentation, and inadequate Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems further constrain Nigeria's ability to implement policies effectively and track progress toward set targets.

The research highlights that Nigeria's heavy economic dependence on oil revenues—providing over 80 percent of foreign-exchange earnings and nearly half of government revenue—remains a core obstacle to decarbonisation. Political resistance to fossil-fuel subsidy reforms and the vested interests of oil-sector stakeholders hinder a swift transition to renewable energy. At sub-national levels, limited technical capacity and insufficient funding prevent effective integration of climate-smart agriculture, forestry regulation, and mini-grid deployment into local development plans. These structural and economic barriers underscore that policy ambition alone cannot drive energy transition without parallel fiscal and institutional reforms.

The finding also revealed that a major impediment to implementation is the financing gap**.** Achieving Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan and meeting its NDC commitments will require an estimated USD 17.7 billion annually for the power sector alone—far exceeding current budgetary allocations. The study finds that climate-related expenditures have remained below 5 percent of the federal budget, leaving Nigeria heavily reliant on unpredictable international finance. Compounding the challenge is the diversion of fiscal resources to emergency responses due to climate-related disasters. For instance, the devastating 2022 floods**,** which displaced over four million people and caused widespread infrastructure damage, forced the government to reallocate funds away from mitigation projects to humanitarian relief and reconstruction.

Nigeria's diplomacy during this period was characterised by a dual-track bargaining strategy**.** On one side, Nigerian negotiators defended the country's right to use hydrocarbons as a transitional energy source, citing its historically low per-capita emissions and urgent development needs. On the other side, Nigeria pressed for predictable concessional finance**,** access to the Loss-and-Damage Fund**,** and greater technology-transfer commitments from developed countries. This approach reflected an intergovernmentalist logic—prioritising sovereignty and national interest—

while remaining engaged in cooperative multilateralism under the UNFCCC framework to unlock resources critical for domestic transition efforts.

A central insight of the study is that the gap between commitment and implementation is shaped primarily by domestic political-economic structures rather than by lack of diplomatic ambition. While Nigeria's foreign-policy stance demonstrates strong commitment to global mitigation goals, historical reliance on hydrocarbon revenues and weak institutional enforcement mechanisms continue to undermine delivery at home. The findings affirm that intergovernmentalism explains Nigeria's bargaining behaviour, realism sheds light on its energy-security and revenue imperatives, and historical institutionalism reveals how past petro-dependence constrains present choices.

In sum, Nigeria's experience during 2016–2024 illustrates both the opportunities and limits of multilateral climate governance for resource-dependent developing states. The country's leadership role and ambitious pledges boosted its global reputation, but without stronger institutions, predictable finance, and diversified revenue streams, these commitments have yet to translate into significant domestic emission reductions. The study concludes that genuine climate leadership for Nigeria—and similar states in the Global South—must be anchored in far-reaching domestic reforms that reconcile developmental imperatives with environmental responsibility.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Nigeria's engagement in global climate politics between 2016 and 2024 reflects both the promise and the limits of multilateral climate governance for resource-dependent developing states. Nigeria positioned itself as a vocal advocate for climate justice, equitable finance, and fair energy-transition pathways, assuming a leadership role within the African Group of Negotiators and pledging ambitious targets, including a 47 percent conditional emissions-reduction by 2030 and net-zero by 2060. These foreign-policy commitments elevated Nigeria's international profile and helped attract support for initiatives such as the Climate Change Act 2021, the Energy Transition Plan 2060, and innovative financing tools like green bonds. Yet, the research reveals a persistent commitment–implementation gap driven by structural oil dependence, financing deficits, institutional fragmentation, weak enforcement capacity, and the fiscal pressures of climate-related insecurity. Despite strong diplomatic rhetoric and legal reforms,

domestic mitigation outcomes remain modest, highlighting that international pledges alone cannot drive transformation without coherent national institutions and predictable resources.

The Nigerian case reinforces the theoretical argument that domestic political-economic structures mediate the effectiveness of global climate regimes. Intergovernmentalism explains Nigeria's bargaining behaviour, realism accounts for its energy-security and revenue imperatives, while historical institutionalism illuminates how past petro-dependence constrains present choices.

For policy, the findings emphasise that credible climate leadership by resource-rich states requires fiscal diversification, robust monitoring and verification systems, stronger sub-national capacity, and sustained external finance to close the gap between foreign-policy ambition and domestic delivery. For scholarship, Nigeria's experience highlights the need to integrate international-relations theory with political-economy insights to better explain why climate diplomacy often outpaces domestic decarbonisation.

In sum, Nigeria's trajectory underscores that effective participation in global climate governance must be anchored in domestic reforms that reconcile developmental imperatives with environmental responsibility—an imperative not only for Nigeria but for many similarly situated states in the Global South.

Policy and Theoretical Implications

The findings have two broad implications. Policy-wise, Nigeria's case underscores that credible global climate leadership by resource-dependent states requires not only ambitious target-setting but also robust institutional reforms, predictable climate-finance inflows, and coherent energy-transition strategies. Failure to integrate foreign-policy commitments with domestic fiscal and sectoral reforms risks eroding Nigeria's credibility as a regional climate leader and undermines progress toward its 47 percent conditional GHG-reduction target for 2030 and net-zero goal by 2060.

Theoretically, the study affirms the utility of intergovernmentalism in explaining North–South bargaining dynamics in global climate politics, while also demonstrating the added explanatory power of realism—capturing security and revenue imperatives—and historical institutionalism,

which highlights the constraining effects of past policy legacies. Nigeria's experience illustrates how the interplay of these factors generates both opportunities for international cooperation and barriers to domestic policy implementation.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that Nigeria's ambitious international commitments—such as its 47 percent conditional emissions-reduction target by 2030 and net-zero pledge by 2060—are undermined by persistent financial shortfalls, institutional fragmentation, oil dependence, and weak enforcement capacity. Addressing these challenges requires targeted reforms that align Nigeria's foreign-policy leadership with credible domestic mitigation outcomes.

i. A first priority is to strengthen climate-governance institutions. The National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) created under the 2021 Climate Change Act needs clear operational guidelines, adequate staffing, and predictable funding. Climate policy should be coordinated more effectively across ministries—especially Environment, Power, Petroleum, Finance, and Agriculture—to reduce duplication of effort and resolve long-standing jurisdictional conflicts that delay project delivery.

ii. A second priority is to mobilise sustainable climate finance. Nigeria cannot meet its NDC targets or energy-transition milestones—estimated to require over USD 17.7 billion annually for the power sector alone—without a more deliberate national financing strategy. Beyond issuing green bonds, the government should strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, expand public-private partnerships for renewable-energy projects, and negotiate more assertively for concessional loans, grants, and access to the Loss-and-Damage Fund promised under the UNFCCC.

iii. Closely linked is the need to diversify the economy and reform fossil-fuel subsidies. Reducing fiscal dependence on oil—still responsible for more than 80 percent of export earnings—is crucial to free policy space for low-carbon growth. Gradual but transparent subsidy reforms, accompanied by targeted safety nets, can redirect scarce public funds toward renewable-energy deployment, climate-resilient agriculture, and social investments that support a just transition.

iv. Fourth, Nigeria should strengthen its Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems. A robust national MRV framework will allow the government to track greenhouse-gas emissions, monitor progress on NDC targets, and document climate-finance flows with greater accuracy. Improved data collection and transparency will also enhance accountability and build trust with domestic stakeholders, international donors, and investors.

v. Fifth, enhancing sub-national capacity and climate resilience is essential. States and local governments remain pivotal for implementing climate-smart agriculture, expanding mini-grid solar solutions, enforcing land-use and forestry regulations, and managing disaster-risk reduction. Capacity-building initiatives, technical training, and devolved funding mechanisms can empower sub-national authorities to integrate mitigation and adaptation planning, particularly in regions vulnerable to floods, desertification, and farmer–herder conflicts.

vi. Finally, Nigeria must deepen regional and global partnerships. By leveraging its influence within the African Group of Negotiators and ECOWAS, Nigeria can help champion more equitable global energy-transition pathways and secure stronger commitments on technology transfer. Strategic bilateral and multilateral partnerships—especially with countries investing in clean energy—can accelerate access to renewable-energy technologies, build local manufacturing capacity, and facilitate knowledge exchange.

Taken together, these measures highlight that Nigeria's climate leadership will be judged less by international pledges and more by domestic delivery. Strengthened institutions, predictable finance, economic diversification, and inclusive regional cooperation are central to closing the gap between ambition and results, thereby consolidating Nigeria's role as a credible regional leader in global climate governance.

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