

An Evaluation of Personality Factor in Nigeria's Foreign Policy Implementation (1999 – 2025)

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Abstract

This paper critically examines how individual personality traits of key political leaders, specifically successive presidents and diplomats, have influenced Nigeria's foreign policy implementation from 1999 to 2025. Through qualitative analysis of political behaviour, policy decisions, and international engagement, the paper highlights the significant role of leadership psychology of various presidents and their administrations in shaping the nation's diplomatic posture. Using a multidisciplinary approach that blends political science, psychology, and international relations, the study evaluates the personal inclinations of Nigeria's presidents and foreign policy actors to provide a nuanced understanding of personality as a determinant of state behaviour. Through qualitative case studies of five administrations—Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, and post-2023 leadership under Bola Ahmed Tinubu—the study identifies recurring patterns of personality-driven diplomacy, highlighting traits such as assertiveness, introversion, risk tolerance, and power motivation. Findings reveal that foreign policy under these successive administrations was not consistently institutionalized but often reflected and still reflects the individual president's worldview, rhetorical style, and psychological disposition. This personalization contributed to strategic shifts, inconsistent regional engagement, and fluctuating global alliances. The research underscores the need for stronger institutional mechanisms to moderate executive influence and ensure continuity in Nigeria's diplomatic posture. Ultimately, the paper contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for the integration of psychological variables into foreign policy analysis within African presidential systems.

Keywords: Evaluation, Personality, Nigeria, Foreign Policy Implementation

Introduction

Foreign policy has traditionally been viewed through the prism of structural and systemic factors such as economic interests, geopolitical pressures, and institutional capabilities (Waltz, 1979). Nigeria's foreign policy since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, presents a persistent and consequential paradox. As Africa's most populous nation, largest economy, and a regional hegemon endowed with significant human capital, diplomatic history and natural resources, Nigeria possesses the theoretical potential to exert transformative influence on continental and global affairs (Ashiru, 2014; Akinterinwa, 2014). Its stated foreign policy objectives, consistently anchored on concentric circles of national interest, African centrality (Afrocentrism), and global engagement, envisions a proactive leadership role in promoting peace, security, development, and Pan-African solidarity (Yakubu, 2014; Dauda et al., 2017). However, closer observations suggest that the personality of political leaders significantly influences foreign policy choices, especially in presidential systems where decision-making is centralized (Hermann, 2003; Renshon, 2008). Nigeria, a federal republic that

re-embraced democracy in 1999, after many years of military rule, presents a compelling environment to investigate how leadership traits shapes international engagement.

This study which bridges political psychology and foreign policy analysis, seeks to assess the impact of personality traits on Nigeria's diplomatic posture by leveraging content analysis, biographical review, and comparative leadership profiling to trace how different presidential administrations have interpreted Nigeria's role in regional and global politics through personal lenses. This inquiry offers critical insight into the under-explored dimension of foreign policy personality.

Problem Statement

Nigeria's foreign policy has exhibited considerable variability since the country's return to democracy in 1999. However, despite its unwavering rhetorical commitment to Africa, Nigeria struggles to convert its substantial diplomatic investments (peacekeeping, conflict mediation, ECOWAS leadership) into concrete economic benefits or enhanced security for its own citizens. This disconnect between expensive regional interventions and persistent domestic underdevelopment remains stark (Dubakeme & Folarin, 2023). Between 1999 and 2025, Nigeria's foreign policy has undergone various strategic recalibrations, largely reflective of presidential idiosyncrasies rather than doctrinal consistency. From the activist diplomacy of President Olusegun Obasanjo—marked by his Pan-African rhetoric and personal diplomacy—to the cautious, security-centric orientation of President Muhammadu Buhari and currently not so well defined, but assertive foreign policy focus of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu mid-term into his first tenure in office, suggests that individual traits play a vital role in policy implementation (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018). Political leaders' beliefs, leadership style, and personal motivations often steer foreign policy more than bureaucratic norms or national interest (George, 1969; Dyson, 2006).

In African political contexts, institutional policies are often weakened, allowing greater influence from executive personalities (Akindele & Ate, 2000). Nigeria's presidents have historically taken personal interest in shaping foreign affairs, directly appointing key diplomats, intervening in multilateral processes and cultivating personal ties with global actors (Fawole, 2003). The evolution of Nigeria's diplomacy reflects not only geopolitical trends but also psychological profiles, assertiveness, charisma, conservatism, or risk-aversion of its leaders.

While this is partly attributable to shifts in global and regional dynamics, a recurring observation among scholars is the personalization of diplomacy where the personality of the president or key policy actors significantly affects foreign relations and indeed, policies (Fawole, 2003; Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018). Unlike mature democracies where foreign policy is institutionalized and relatively insulated from individual whims,

Nigeria's presidential system concentrates diplomatic authority in the hands of a few executive actors, thus amplifying the role of personal traits, preferences and leadership styles.

Despite this trend, most academic literature has largely marginalized the impact of political psychology and leadership personality in analyzing Nigeria's foreign policy behaviour. Much of the discourse is dominated by structuralism, focusing on economic constraints, institutional weaknesses, or geopolitical imperatives (Akindele & Ate, 2000; Aluko, 1981). This creates a gap in understanding how psychological and personality factors—charisma, sagacity, assertiveness, ideological fixations, or even introversion, can explain inconsistencies, abrupt shifts, or contradictions in diplomatic conduct.

This problem is particularly evident when one compares successive administrations in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in 1999. For example, President Obasanjo's dynamic activism and interventionist diplomacy, contrasted sharply with the brief life of President Yar'Adua's more reserved and constitutionalist stance and Goodluck Jonathan hot and cold foreign policy engagement, while Buhari's tenure prioritized securitization over regional leadership (Adebajo, 2008; Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018). Such discrepancies prompt critical questions: Are these shifts driven by contextual national interests, or do they reflect personal dispositions and leadership psychology?

Furthermore, contemporary literature lacks longitudinal studies tracing personality influence across multiple administrations. Most scholarship offers episodic analysis, without systematically comparing psychological attributes over time. This study therefore seek to address this gap by evaluating Nigeria's foreign policy implementation from 1999–2025 through a personality-centered lens, aiming to uncover the psychological undercurrents behind major foreign policy decisions, omissions, and reversals.

Objectives of the Study

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the extent to which individual personality traits have influenced Nigeria's foreign policy implementation across presidential administrations from 1999 to 2025. The research is guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. Examine the role of executive personality in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy agenda.
- ii. Assess the influence of personal ideology and psychological disposition on decision-making processes in international affairs, particularly within bilateral and multilateral engagements involving Nigeria.

- iii. Compare personality-driven policy shifts across different administrations, identifying patterns, discontinuities, and legacy effects in Nigeria's external relations.
- iv. Evaluate the relationship between personality traits and diplomatic outcomes.
- v. Contribute to the theoretical development of political psychology in African foreign policy analysis.

Scope of the Study

This study spans a twenty-six-year period, covering Nigeria's foreign policy implementation under successive democratic governments from 1999 to 2025. It focuses specifically on presidential administrations beginning with: Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007), Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007–2010), Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015), Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023), and Bola Ahmed Tinubu (2023 – 2025) based on available data up to 2025.

The scope includes, Bilateral diplomacy (e.g., Nigeria's relations with the U.S., China, neighboring ECOWAS states), Multilateral engagement (particularly in the AU, UN, and ECOWAS), Leadership personality traits examined via biographical analysis, speeches, public behavior, and policy decisions as well as foreign ministers and other key diplomatic actors, where their personalities demonstrably shaped outcomes.

The study does not aim to provide a full institutional history of Nigeria's Foreign Service bureaucracy, nor does it assess every foreign policy event. Instead, it focuses on high-impact moments and recurring patterns where the influence of personal leadership style is evident.

Hypotheses: It is expected that leaders with high belief in control, high need for power, and high self-confidence to pursue more proactive, personalized, and potentially high-risk foreign policies. Leaders with lower belief in control, higher task focus on internal issues, and higher Distrust may exhibit more insular, cautious, and bilateral approaches. Conceptual complexity should correlate with nuanced strategies and adaptability.

Significance of the Study

This research holds both theoretical and practical relevance, advancing the field of political psychology in the context of African foreign policy. While political psychology is an established field globally (Hermann, 2003; Renshon, 2008), its integration into African foreign policy studies remains limited. This study contributes to closing that gap by applying psychological frameworks to Nigerian leadership behavior, illuminating

personality-driven diplomacy. The research underscores how personal beliefs, charisma, or ideological rigidity can influence a country's international conduct. By offering insights into individual decision-making processes, it complements structuralism and realist theories of foreign policy (George, 1969; Dyson, 2006). Policy utility for Nigerian policymakers, understanding the implications of personality on diplomacy can improve the selection and training of foreign affairs personnel. It can also guide better institutional checks to balance executive influence and comparative value. Scholars can also use this study as a benchmark for analyzing leadership influence in other African states where executive dominance is a political reality (Akindele & Ate, 2000; Fawole, 2003). This study creates a longitudinal psychological profile of Nigerian foreign policy decision-makers, contributing to historical and biographical scholarship.

Limitations of the Study

Subjectivity in Trait Interpretation: While frameworks help structure analysis, the interpretation of psychological traits from external data could introduce researcher bias. In addition, access to primary sources: Limited access to private interviews or unreleased policy documents restricted the depth of analysis, and the post-2023 Leadership Data under Tinubu: Information on presidents after 2023 is incomplete or based on emerging profiles.

These limitations were, however, mitigated by the rich studies earlier undertaken by the researcher and other scholars, which provided sufficient foundational data that was leveraged for this particular study.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

Political psychology argues that personality traits significantly influence foreign policy decision-making, especially in executive-centric systems (Winter, 2003; Hermann, 2003). Hermann's (2003) typology identifies leadership styles such as "constraint challengers" or "opportunists," offering a framework for evaluating how leaders prioritize goals and process information. Renshon (2008) further demonstrates that belief systems—such as operational codes—can lead to consistent patterns of decision-making across international contexts. Grove (2007) further argues that political leadership fundamentally involves "manipulating support across borders," a process deeply mediated by psychological makeup.

George's (1969) foundational study introduced the "operational code" as a lens for assessing how political leaders interpret the international environment. This approach has been applied widely to presidents and heads of state, demonstrating that personal conviction and cognitive biases can often outweigh systemic calculations.

In African political systems, where institutional checks are weak and power is highly personalized, leader psychology assumes outsized relevance (Akindele & Ate, 2000; Fawole, 2003). Several scholars note that Nigeria's foreign policy reflects not just its regional ambitions, but also the personal engagement of its presidents. Obasanjo's "citizen diplomacy" and extensive globe-trotting, for instance, stemmed more from his activist personality than any national strategic doctrine (Adebajo, 2008; Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018).

This personalization is not limited to Nigeria. Studies of South Africa under Thabo Mbeki and Rwanda under Paul Kagame also confirm the link between personality traits—such as assertiveness or paranoia—and foreign policy decisions (Khadiagala, 2010; Bischoff, 2012). These findings suggest a broader trend across sub-Saharan Africa, where leadership disposition shapes diplomatic style.

Ogunnubi and Isike (2018) argue that Nigeria's foreign policy under successive administrations integrates psychological profiling by providing some comparative insights into Obasanjo and Buhari, arguing that their leadership personas generated contrasting foreign policy outcomes. While Obasanjo's extroversion led to proactive mediation and regional leadership, Buhari's introversion and militarist background contributed to a narrower focus on counterterrorism and sovereignty.

Adebajo (2008) critiques Yar'Adua's passive diplomacy, noting how health challenges and personality contributed to a lower diplomatic profile. Jonathan's presidency, on the other hand, exhibited less ideologically defined focus, which was characterized by a technocratic approach, often interpreted as a personality cautious of confrontation (Onuoha & Mbah, 2015).

These concerns reinforce the need for systematic and comparative psychological profiling across administrations, which is an area this paper seeks to enrich.

Empirical research into Nigeria's diplomacy reveals patterns of personalization across administrations:

Obasanjo (1999–2007): A retired military general with a Pan-African ideology, Obasanjo's active involvement in conflict mediation and global summits reflected his belief in Nigeria's continental leadership (Adebajo, 2008). His "citizen diplomacy" aimed at enhancing Nigeria's global image through direct leader-to-leader engagement (Fawole, 2003). This style of foreign engagement was needed then, given Nigeria's hitherto pariah status under the military era, which Obasanjo had to reverse by restoring Nigeria to the global playing field and becoming again a key influence in Africa. Inheriting international isolation post-Abacha, his core objectives were image rehabilitation, debt relief, reclaiming regional leadership, and promoting African renaissance. Key initiatives: ECOWAS peacekeeping (Liberia, Sierra Leone), NEPAD/APRM, AU revitalization,

aggressive debt relief negotiations, high-profile shuttle diplomacy, bid for United Nations Security Council permanent seat (Adebajo, 2008; Obasanjo, 2014). High oil prices provided resources.

Obasanjo's partnership with other African leaders led to the establishment of key linkages, like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is a peer review mechanism to help the continent's collective prosperity. Unfortunately, most of these lofty ideas were not sustained by subsequent Nigerian presidents and other African leaders. Obasanjo's shuttle diplomacy and engagements with Nigeria's foreign loan lenders like the Paris Club also led to the country's huge debt cancellation and eased the economy of some burdens.

Yar'Adua (2007–2010): Marked by a more procedural and legalistic approach, Yar'Adua's foreign policy was subdued. Scholars attribute this to both his physical ailments and his cautious temperament, leading to lower visibility in global affairs (Adebajo, 2008).

Jonathan (2010–2015): While his foreign policy lacked an overarching doctrine, Jonathan's administration was characterized by diplomatic pragmatism. Onuoha and Mbah (2015) contend that Jonathan's leadership was influenced by technocratic tendencies and a risk-averse personality, leading to minimal confrontation and strategic ambiguity.

Buhari (2015–2023): Buhari's military background and conservative worldview contributed to a securitized foreign policy, often prioritizing counterterrorism and sovereignty over regional leadership (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018). His introverted style translated into cautious global engagements. He was also more inclined towards global Islamic cohesion, both in politics and the economy, with his constant fraternity with the Halal Group and numerous deals with the Sukuk bond. Buhari's ill health at some point in the administration also created a lull in the country's many diplomatic engagements.

Tinubu (2023 – present): The emerging post-2023 leadership under Bola Ahmed Tinubu, though still under analysis, shows early signs of recalibration—moving toward economic rebranding, youth diplomacy, and digital engagement. With high belief in ability to control events (confidence as strategist), Very High Need for Power/Influence (strong desire for impact/recognition), High conceptual complexity (pragmatic, deal-maker), very high self-confidence ("Emilokan" - It's my turn), strong task focus (economic reform priority) and high in-group bias. If personality factors continue to drive this transition, Nigeria may enter a phase of “strategic personalization” in diplomacy, where leadership psychology aligns with long-term statecraft. With Tinubu, Nigeria's foreign policy has undergone a strategic shift toward active regional leadership, economic diplomacy, and diaspora engagement, encapsulated in the administration's “4D Doctrine”:

Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora. However, Tinubu's prolonged delay in appointing ambassadors—over 15 months since recalling all Nigerian envoys in September 2023—has sparked concern among diplomats, foreign policy experts, and civil society groups, especially at a time when Nigeria's green international passport is ranked very low amongst the comity of nations, with its citizens being disrespected and maltreated at borders across the world.

On September 2, 2023, Tinubu recalled all career and political ambassadors from Nigeria's 109 missions abroad, including 76 embassies, 22 high commissions, and 11 consulates. As of the third quarter of 2025, no new ambassadors have been appointed, though 14 consuls-general and *chargés d'affaires* were deployed to manage routine operations. This development, which is strange in the diplomatic history of Nigeria since her independence in 1960, has been criticized by the Association of Retired Ambassadors as a gig draw backward for the country's international relations, especially at a time Nigerian citizens in the diaspora are facing numerous challenges of abuses.

Tinubu's tenure as Chairman of the Economic Community of African States (ECOWAS) was characterized by a wave of military coups in the francophone member states of Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso, with attempts in Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon. His efforts to restore democratic rule in those states was not fruitful as his threat of using military force led to tension in the sub region and eventual exit of the three countries from ECOWAS. Chaired ECOWAS with visible personal investment, seeking to restore democratic norms but facing significant regional pushback and complexities (ICG, 2023, p. 5).

Half way into Tinubu's first tenure and may be another renewed tenure in 2027, much cannot be said of this administration in this study.

These empirical insights underscore a critical gap, where most studies describe foreign policy shifts but do not systematically evaluate the psychological mechanisms behind them. This paper responds to that gap by integrating trait analysis and operational code methodology into the study of Nigerian presidential diplomacy.

Comparative Analysis: Personality, Strategy and Outcomes

The oscillation in Nigeria's foreign policy implementation across administrations underscores the profound impact of leadership personality. Several critical patterns emerge from this longitudinal analysis:

The Charisma-Engagement Nexus: Leaders exhibiting high extraversion and strategic

ambition (Obasanjo, potentially Tinubu) consistently pursued higher levels of international engagement and proactive diplomacy. They leveraged personal charisma and networks to achieve significant, high-visibility outcomes (debt relief, conflict mediation). However, this often came at the cost of institutionalization, making policies vulnerable to leadership change and sometimes creating perceptions of overreach or personalization.

Pragmatism vs. Ideology: A spectrum exists between pragmatic economism (Jonathan) and ideological/nationalist orientations (Buhari). Jonathan's openness facilitated a focus on economic diplomacy, aligning with critiques advocating economic foundations for foreign policy. Buhari's high conscientiousness in rule adherence and strong convictions translated into a narrower focus on security and anti-corruption, arguably contributing to regional perceptions of Nigerian disengagement during critical Sahel security crises. This highlights a tension between Afrocentric idealism and national interest prioritization noted since independence.

Institutional Strength vs. Personalization: Nigeria's foreign policy machinery (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, technical committees) remains relatively weak and susceptible to presidential override. Administrations dominated by highly assertive personalities (Obasanjo, Tinubu) tended to marginalize institutional channels in favor of direct, personalized diplomacy. While potentially efficient in the short term, this hindered the development of a coherent, enduring "Nigerian" foreign policy tradition independent of the incumbent's persona. Yar'Adua's more consultative style offered potential for institutional strengthening but was cut short.

The Economic Diplomacy Gap: Despite rhetorical commitments, only the Jonathan administration made economic diplomacy a truly central pillar, reflecting his pragmatic openness. Others subordinated it to security (Buhari) or political/diplomatic objectives (Obasanjo, Tinubu initially). This contrasts sharply with successful models like India, where economic diplomacy has been the consistent, strategic driver of foreign policy, propelling its rise as an emerging power. Dubakeme and Folarin (2023) starkly contrast India's "stealth economic diplomacy" with Nigeria's lack of strategic coherence, contributing to Nigeria's relative economic stagnation despite its potential.

Afrocentrism Recalibrated: Afrocentrism remained a constant rhetorical pillar across all administrations—a legacy of Nigeria's foundational foreign policy principles and its concentric circle model. However, its implementation varied dramatically with personality: from Obasanjo's activist interventionism and Buhari's retrenched "Nigeria

First" version to Tinubu's assertive stance on democratic norms via ECOWAS. This demonstrates that core principles are filtered through the leader's worldview and priorities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the interdisciplinary domain of Political Psychology, drawing primarily on two influential models: Operational Code Theory and Trait-Based Leadership Analysis. These frameworks offer complementary lenses for evaluating how personality influences foreign policy decision-making, particularly in executive-dominated systems like Nigeria's.

Operational Code Theory

First conceptualized by Alexander George (1969), Operational Code Theory explores how a leader's beliefs about politics, power, and strategy affect foreign policy behavior. The theory distinguishes between:

- Philosophical Beliefs: How the leader views the nature of political life and other actors (e.g., hostile vs. cooperative worldviews).
- Instrumental Beliefs: How the leader believes political goals should be pursued (e.g., use of diplomacy vs. coercion).

Applied to Nigerian leaders, this theory can illuminate how presidents from Obasanjo to Buhari and now Tinubu, interpreted global affairs through differing belief systems. For instance, Obasanjo's belief in multilateralism and moral leadership may reflect a cooperative worldview, while Buhari's emphasis on sovereignty and security suggests a more adversarial orientation. Tinubu on the other hand is more concern about revenue conservation internally than deploying Ambassadors to foreign missions to protect the dignity of Nigerians all over the world.

Trait-Based Leadership Analysis

Developed by Hermann (2003), this model assesses leaders using measurable psychological traits that influence foreign policy behavior that has to do with: the Need for Power, distrust of others, conceptual complexity, self-confidence and task vs. relationship focus.

These traits are useful for comparing Nigerian presidents across time. For example, Obasanjo scored high on power motivation and conceptual complexity, while Buhari's leadership style reflects strong task focus and lower openness to external ideas.

Trait analysis reveals how presidents process information, interact with advisors, and approach international negotiation making it particularly valuable in systems where personal discretion drives policy.

Presidentialism and African Diplomacy

A third layer of this framework considers the institutional context—presidentialism in postcolonial Africa. Scholars such as Akindele & Ate (2000) and Fawole (2003) have noted that African presidents often wield disproportionate control over foreign affairs due to weak institutions and centralized authority. This magnifies the relevance of personality in diplomatic outcomes, justifying the psychological lens adopted in this study.

Together, these theories offer a robust framework for evaluating how Nigerian presidents from 1999–2025 which have shaped foreign policy outcomes through distinct psychological and ideological profiles. They also allow for both qualitative and empirical analysis, integrating leadership traits with policy decisions over time.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory case study design. The central aim is to understand how personality traits of Nigerian presidents and key foreign policy actors have influenced diplomatic behaviour between 1999 and 2025. A case study approach allows for in-depth analysis of each administration within its historical, political, and psychological context.

The design integrates theories from political psychology with foreign policy analysis, creating a cross-disciplinary framework that accommodates biographical detail, rhetorical data, and decision-making patterns.

The population used for this study includes Nigerian Presidents from 1999–2025: Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, and post-2023 leadership.

Key Foreign Ministers and Presidential Advisors involved in high-level diplomatic engagements. A purposive sampling method is used to select political actors whose personal dispositions visibly influenced foreign policy, based on historical records, academic literature, and diplomatic archives.

The study employs multiple data sources for triangulation:

- Biographical Analysis: Books, memoirs, and scholarly biographies (e.g., Obasanjo's *My Command*, and Buhari's political profile) are used to map leadership personality traits.

- Document Analysis: Government communiqués, foreign policy white papers, presidential speeches, and National Assembly debates are examined to identify recurring psychological patterns.
- Media and Interview Data: News articles, televised appearances, and credible interviews with the presidents and foreign ministers are analyzed to observe behavioral and rhetorical cues.
- Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journals and theoretical works guide trait assessment and offer comparative leadership contexts (Hermann, 2003; George, 1969).

Data Presentation and Analysis

a. Trait Analysis

Using Hermann's (2003) framework, the study evaluates the need for power, Conceptual complexity, self-confidence, distrust of others and task vs. relationship orientation. These traits are coded based on content from speeches, policy decisions, and leadership behaviour during major foreign policy events.

b. Operational Code Analysis

The study applies George's operational code matrix to assess each leader's philosophical beliefs: e.g., worldview and perception of allies vs. adversaries and instrumental beliefs: e.g., preferred means of achieving foreign policy goals (diplomacy, coercion, multilateralism). This helps to uncover ideological consistency and belief-driven decision-making.

c. Thematic Content Analysis

All collected data is subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring motifs such as regional leadership ambition, isolationism, Afrocentrism, or global realignment. NVivo or similar qualitative software was applied used to code patterns and ensure reliability.

Validity and Reliability

Triangulation: Multiple sources (documents, media, and academic literature) are cross-examined to validate personality assessments.

Peer Review: Preliminary profiles and findings are reviewed by experts in political psychology and African diplomacy to strengthen reliability.

Historical Consistency Check: Decisions and diplomatic behavior are assessed over time to verify enduring personality traits and their influence.

To present findings from the qualitative analysis, data is structured around five presidential administrations in Nigeria from 1999 to 2025. Each profile combines operational code traits, psychological attributes, and foreign policy behavior. Content was extracted from speeches, biographical texts, policy statements, media coverage, and diplomatic outcomes which were qualitatively analyzed with the use of NVivo metrics to code the data collected in accordance with the study objectives..

Summary Table 1: Presidential Personality Profiles and Foreign Policy Orientations

President	Dominant Traits	Operational Code Outlook	Diplomatic Style	Key Foreign Policy Focus
Olusegun Obasanjo	Assertive, Charismatic, High Need for Power	Cooperative world with proactive means	Activist & Afrocentric	Pan-Africanism, Peacekeeping, Global Rebranding
Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	Reserved, Procedural, Risk-Averse	Cautious worldview with legalist means	Passive & Minimalist	Constitutionalism, Domestic Consolidation
Goodluck Jonathan	Pragmatic, Technocratic, Low Need for Confrontation	Ambiguous worldview with calculated diplomacy	Quiet Multi-literalist	Soft Power, Economic Engagement
Muhammadu Buhari	Task-Oriented, Introverted, Security-Focused	Adversarial worldview with defensive posture	Sovereignty-Prioritizing	Counterterrorism, Territorial Integrity
Ahmed Bola	Adaptive traits	Mixed signals,	Rebalancing	Regional

Tinubu	emerging from preliminary analysis	pending deeper profiling from inability to appoint Ambassadors	Engagement	Leadership, Economic Realignment
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Source: *Selected NVivo Metrics, 2025*

Profile for post-2023 under Tinubu leadership is evolving and subject to updates as more data becomes available.

Thematic Findings by Administrations

1. Obasanjo (1999–2007)

Emphasis on Pan-African leadership and moral diplomacy, frequent international travel and face-to-face diplomacy and used personal influence to reintegrate Nigeria into global platforms post-military rule. Example: Speech at the AU Summit (2001) emphasized Nigeria's "moral obligation" to lead conflict resolution efforts.

2. Yar'Adua (2007–2010)

Yar'Adua tended toward constitutional restraint and legal frameworks that lowered international visibility due to his health issues and introversion. He preferred procedural channels over direct engagement. For instance, he declined aggressive intervention in Zimbabwe crisis, citing legal limitations.

3. Jonathan (2010–2015)

Jonathan focused on economic diplomacy and public-private partnerships. He delegated foreign policy roles to technocrats and ministers and maintained cordial international relations with minimal confrontation. For example, his engagement with China and the World Bank reflected pragmatic, non-ideological diplomacy.

4. Buhari (2015–2023)

Buhari prioritized security concerns about Boko Haram, Biafra agitations and the need for border control. He limited his participation in non-security-related summits, but emphasis strongly on sovereignty, which reflected in his reluctance toward foreign intervention to help subdue the criminals, in the country. For instance, Buhari's 2016 UN speech focused heavily on national security, territorial integrity, and anti-corruption.

5. Post-2023 Under Tinubu Leadership

Tinubu's emerging focus on rebranding Nigeria's regional role, signals toward economic diversification and youth diplomacy by balancing legacy constraints with new engagement models.

Table 2: Coded Traits Across Administrations

Trait	Obasanjo	Yar'Adua	Jonathan	Buhari	Tinubu (Post-2023)
Need for Power	High	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Conceptual Complexity	High	Moderate	High	Low	TBD
Task Orientation	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	Moderate
Risk Appetite	High	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate
Diplomacy Engagement	Extensive	Limited	Selective	Focused	Growing

Selected NVivo Metrics, 2025

Findings, Discussions and Implications

Leadership Personality as a Determinant of Diplomatic Strategy

As indicated in Table 1 (*Presidential Personality Profiles and Foreign Policy Orientations*), Obasanjo and Tinubu (early) demonstrate high activism driven by high belief in control and need for influence. Buhari represents significant retrenchment, prioritizing internal tasks and exhibiting distrust of complex multilateralism. Yar'Adua/Jonathan fall in between, with Yar'Adua's moderation and Jonathan's crisis management. Obasanjo and Tinubu exhibit highly personalized diplomacy, centralizing control, reflecting high self-confidence and need for influence. Buhari's style was less personally visible but, still centralized within his in-group. While Yar'Adua relied more on process, Jonathan focused on managing crises. In response to crises, Table 2 (*Coded Traits*) reveal Obasanjo and Tinubu's high Self-Confidence/Belief in control, initiate proactive responses (peacekeeping, ECOWAS sanctions), unlike lower-scorers, (Jonathan), who react more defensively. Buhari focused narrowly on core security threats.

On Economic Diplomacy, all engaged, but style differed: Obasanjo leveraged activism for debt relief. With Yar'Adua and Jonathan narrowing on frameworks, Buhari sought direct bilateral deals; Tinubu aggressively pushes "open for business" as central plank. On the in-group reliance bias, of Jonathan, Buhari, Tinubu, exhibit high in-group risks, policy insularity, and potential for groupthink. Obasanjo and Yar'Adua showed more openness, though still within presidential circles. As a result of distrust, Buhari's high distrust correlated with strained relations and skepticism of international actors.

One of the clearest findings is that the personality traits of Nigerian presidents have influenced foreign policy implementation significantly, often more than institutional doctrine or bureaucratic input. For instance, Obasanjo's high need for power and proactive worldview manifested in a diplomacy style that emphasized international visibility, continental leadership, and frequent mediation in African crises (Fawole, 2003; Hermann, 2003). His extroverted leadership correlated with expansive bilateral ties and Nigeria's reintegration into global forums post-military rule.

In contrast, both tables 1 and 2, summarize Yar'Adua's reserved and health-limited presidency, exhibiting minimalist diplomatic engagement. The few international initiatives his administration pursued were rooted more in legalistic reasoning than ideological ambition—suggesting a cautious, constrained leadership style (Adebajo, 2008). His presidency confirms Hermann's (2003) hypothesis that leaders with low need for power and high constraint adherence will opt for narrow foreign policy strategies.

These traits didn't operate in a vacuum, they shaped how successive administrations interpreted the Niger Delta crisis, Boko Haram, oil price crashes, or regional coups, and which options they perceived as viable or desirable.

Goodluck Jonathan's presidency lacked a strong ideological foreign policy doctrine, but his technocratic personality favored economic diplomacy and regional stability. Diplomatic engagements under Jonathan were largely transactional, avoiding overt confrontation and ideological commitments. This mirrors Winter's (2003) suggestion that personality-oriented foreign policy can take the form of strategic pragmatism rather than doctrinal coherence.

However, scholars like Onuoha and Mbah (2015) argue that Jonathan's soft power approach—while non-confrontational—resulted in reduced Nigerian visibility in global affairs, potentially diminishing the country's regional leadership position. His personality-driven moderation helped stabilize bilateral ties but left minimal legacy in shaping African multilateralism.

Muhammadu Buhari's administration adopted a foreign policy deeply rooted in national security imperatives. Personality traits such as introversion, risk aversion, and strong task orientation translated into cautious engagement with global powers and a defensive diplomatic stance. Buhari rarely attended non-security international summits and prioritized sovereignty over regional leadership—manifesting operational beliefs that saw the international system as adversarial (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018; Renshon, 2008).

This approach underscores George's (1969) view that leaders with pessimistic worldviews and coercive strategies tend to limit cooperation and external intervention. While this built Nigeria's posture of self-reliance, it also narrowed its influence within ECOWAS and the AU.

Across administrations, foreign policy shifts reflected personality traits more than any codified national interest doctrine. Obasanjo's active diplomacy was discontinued under Yar'Adua, while Jonathan and Buhari alternated between quiet diplomacy and strategic insularity. This discontinuity suggests a lack of institutional buffering in Nigeria's diplomatic system, further validating Akindele and Ate's (2000) critique of executive dominance and personalization in African diplomacy.

The emerging post-2023 leadership under Bola Ahmed Tinubu, though still under analysis, shows early signs of recalibration—moving toward economic rebranding, youth diplomacy, and digital engagement. If personality factors continue to drive this transition, Nigeria may enter a phase of “strategic personalization” in diplomacy, where leadership psychology aligns with long-term statecraft. With **Tinubu**, Nigeria's foreign policy has undergone a strategic shift toward **active regional leadership, economic diplomacy**, and

diaspora engagement, encapsulated in the administration’s “4D Doctrine”: Democracy, Development, Demography and Diaspora.

The findings support earlier arguments that foreign policy in Nigeria lacks institutional insulation from executive traits. This leads to volatility in diplomatic priorities and undermines strategic continuity. As Fawole (2003) posits, Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs often acts reactively, following presidential cues rather than shaping policy independently.

To remedy this, scholars advocate for strengthened institutional frameworks that balance personal leadership with bureaucratic continuity—ensuring that Nigeria’s global engagements remain consistent irrespective of personality transitions (Bischoff, 2012; Khadiagala, 2010).

Recommendations & Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that personality traits—ranging from assertiveness and pragmatism to introversion and task orientation—play a crucial role in shaping Nigeria’s foreign policy decisions. Across the five presidential administrations analyzed, foreign policy outcomes showed strong correlation with individual leadership styles and psychological dispositions rather than institutional doctrine or bureaucratic consistency. The research reinforces the idea that in presidential systems with weak institutional constraints, foreign policy becomes an extension of the president’s worldview, operational beliefs, and leadership traits (George, 1969; Hermann, 2003). The transitions from Obasanjo’s activist diplomacy to Yar’Adua’s legalistic minimalism, Jonathan’s technocratic caution, and Buhari’s security-centric posture highlight how leadership psychology introduces significant discontinuities into Nigeria’s international engagements.

While personality-driven diplomacy has enabled flexibility, visibility, and occasionally bold leadership, it also risks incoherence and policy reversals. The lack of durable foreign policy institutions in Nigeria means that diplomatic priorities fluctuate with changes in leadership, undermining the country’s strategic credibility.

The study offers the following recommendations that can be considered in understanding the impacts of personality traits in Nigeria's foreign engagements and policy implementation:

- i. **Institutionalize Foreign Policy Frameworks:** Nigeria should develop a comprehensive and codified foreign policy doctrine that limits the volatility caused by leadership changes. The National Assembly and Ministry of Foreign Affairs can champion legislation that sets long-term diplomatic goals to guide administrations irrespective of personality differences.
- ii. **Enhance Leadership Profiling in Public Policy:** Personality assessment should become part of political leadership training and candidate evaluation. Universities, think tanks, and policy schools can offer modules on political psychology and its relevance to statecraft, helping future leaders understand how personality influences governance.
- iii. **Strengthen Ministry of Foreign Affairs Autonomy:** The ministry should be empowered to lead strategy formulation rather than simply executing presidential directives. Institutional memory and expert input can offer continuity when executive styles differ drastically.
- iv. **Invest in Political Psychology Research:** Nigeria's academic institutions should promote interdisciplinary research that explores the psychological dimensions of leadership. This can enrich African foreign policy literature and provide empirical foundations for future reforms.
- v. **Promote Strategic Diplomacy Training:** Diplomats and Foreign Service officers should receive training in negotiating across psychological styles—enabling them to interpret and adapt to the temperament of foreign leaders, thereby enhancing Nigeria's global engagement.
- vi. **Leverage Leadership Traits Systematically:** Recognize that personality will always matter. Establish formal mechanisms (e.g., structured presidential briefings, utilization of Special Envoys with specific mandates aligned to the NFPS) to channel the strengths of different leadership styles (e.g., Obasanjo's network-building, Yar'Adua's rule-based approach) towards the nationally defined strategy rather than personal

agendas. Utilize empirical insights on leadership traits to inform team composition around the President.

- vii. Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight: Mandate regular reporting by the Foreign Affairs Minister to the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committees, not just as an activity but on progress against National Foreign Policy Service objectives. Enhance legislative scrutiny of major international agreements and deployments will help the institution and its policy in focus. Nigeria possesses the latent capacity for transformative regional and global influence

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