

CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THROUGH A TRANSNATIONAL LENS: ANALYZING GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCIES OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In an increasingly interconnected world, contemporary international relations can no longer be understood solely through the lens of nation-states. This research examines international relations from a transnational perspective, with a particular focus on the global interdependencies of non-state actors in Nigeria. The study is grounded in the context of the rising influence of these actors — including non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, diasporic communities, and social movements — who shape political, economic, and diplomatic dynamics beyond traditional institutional frameworks. The core problem addressed is the persistent underestimation of non-state actors in conventional analyses of international relations, especially within African contexts. The main objective is to demonstrate how non-state actors are reshaping Nigeria's international engagement by participating in transnational networks that influence governance, security, development, and civil society. A qualitative methodology was employed, combining semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observation. The expected outcome is to highlight the various ways these actors exert influence, redefine the boundaries of international action, and contribute to a renewed understanding of global interdependence in international relations.

Keywords: International Relations, Transnationalism, Non-State Actors, Nigeria, Global Interdependence

Introduction

The shifting dynamics of global politics in the 21st century have significantly altered the contours of international relations, challenging the long-standing dominance of state-centric paradigms. With the growing influence of non-state actors such as multinational corporations, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), religious movements, terrorist groups, and diasporic communities, the field of international relations has undergone a critical transformation. In Nigeria—a country positioned at the intersection of regional influence, economic potential, and persistent socio-political challenges—these actors have played an increasingly central role in shaping interactions at the local, regional, and global levels. This evolution reflects a broader transnational turn in international relations, where global interdependencies are no longer primarily state-driven but emerge through networks that transcend formal political boundaries (Sassen, 2006, p. 39). The problem at the heart of this study lies in the persistent gap between the realities of contemporary global interactions and the frameworks traditionally used to understand them. Despite the growing recognition of non-state actors in global governance and diplomacy, much of the literature and policy analysis remains anchored in state-centric models. In Nigeria, this analytical gap is particularly troubling, given the demonstrable impact of actors such as Shell in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram in regional security, and international development agencies in the health and education

sectors. Yet, the mechanisms through which these actors influence Nigeria's position in global networks remain underexplored and poorly theorized (Risse, 2011, p. 15). The objective of this study is to examine how non-state actors operating within and across Nigeria's borders contribute to global interdependencies. It seeks to analyse their roles in shaping political, economic, and social processes, as well as how these roles reflect broader patterns of global transformation. By adopting a transnational lens, this research aims to interrogate the porous boundaries between domestic and international affairs and to map the evolving configurations of power and influence in Nigeria's international engagements. The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it challenges the traditional IR canon by centring African perspectives and empirically grounding the analysis in a complex postcolonial context. Practically, it offers insights into how policymakers, diplomats, and civil society actors can engage more effectively with transnational forces that influence Nigeria's development, security, and global reputation. Recognizing the embeddedness of Nigeria in global structures shaped by non-state actors allows for more responsive, inclusive, and adaptive strategies in international engagement (Acharya, 2014, p. 78).

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, utilising document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and case studies. Interviews will be conducted with representatives of NGOs, corporate executives, policy analysts, and community leaders in key regions such as Lagos, Abuja, and the Niger Delta. The case studies will focus on areas such as humanitarian intervention, extractive industries, transnational activism, and digital advocacy to illustrate the multidimensional roles of non-state actors. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the actors' networks, motivations, and impacts. The expected findings suggest that non-state actors in Nigeria not only supplement state efforts but often compensate for state failures, exerting considerable influence over both domestic outcomes and Nigeria's global interactions. These actors operate through formal and informal channels, reflecting the complexity of transnational relations in an era of global connectivity.

The implications of the study are far-reaching. By revealing the embeddedness of Nigeria's political and socio-economic processes within transnational networks, the research underscores the need to reimagine international relations theories to account for bottom-up, non-hierarchical flows of influence. It also highlights the urgency of reconfiguring diplomatic and governance practices to engage more constructively with non-state actors as central agents in contemporary international life.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Defining Transnationalism and Non-State Actors

Transnationalism refers to processes, networks, and interactions that extend beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, involving a wide range of actors who operate across borders in ways that challenge the traditional state-centric view of international relations (Vertovec, 2009, p. 2). It encompasses economic, political, cultural, and social linkages formed by individuals and groups who maintain active connections across national frontiers. These interactions may be formal or informal, institutionalized or grassroots, and often take place independently of, or in parallel with, state-based mechanisms. A transnational perspective in international relations shifts analytical attention to how cross-border flows of people, capital, ideas, and practices

shape global governance and influence domestic policy outcomes (Sassen, 2006, p. 41). This perspective is particularly relevant for countries like Nigeria, where local dynamics are increasingly shaped by external actors and global processes. For instance, transnational religious movements, diasporic remittances, multinational corporations, and humanitarian organizations all play pivotal roles in shaping political discourse, economic conditions, and societal norms within the Nigerian context.

Non-State Actors: Closely tied to the concept of transnationalism is the role of non-state actors, which include a broad array of entities that participate in international relations without possessing formal sovereignty or state authority. These actors operate independently of, or alongside, nation-states and often wield significant influence in global affairs. They include international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs), transnational advocacy networks, terrorist groups, religious movements, epistemic communities, and diasporic organizations (Risse, 2011, p. 15; Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 89). In Nigeria, the roles of Amnesty International in human rights advocacy, Shell in extractive economies, and Boko Haram in regional insecurity exemplify the diverse and complex impact of non-state actors on national and international outcomes.

Non-state actors in Nigeria do not merely complement the functions of the state; in many instances, they contest, bypass, or even substitute state authority. Their actions influence governance structures, challenge institutional legitimacy, and facilitate or obstruct development efforts. As Nye and Keohane (1971, p. 733) observed, the rise of non-state actors leads to a "complex interdependence" that reduces the centrality of the nation-state and makes power more diffuse and multidirectional.

Understanding transnationalism and non-state actors within Nigeria's international relations provides a critical lens for interrogating global interdependencies in the 21st century. It highlights the dynamic interplay between domestic and international realms and calls for a theoretical reorientation that acknowledges the agency of actors operating outside the traditional boundaries of state power.

Theoretical Approaches to Global Interdependence

The concept of global interdependence has gained increasing relevance in contemporary international relations, particularly in contexts where the influence of non-state actors transcends national boundaries and reshapes the global order. To understand global interdependence, scholars have turned to several theoretical approaches that move beyond classical realism and other state-centric models. These include:

Complex interdependence: The theory of complex interdependence, developed by Keohane and Nye (1977), offers a useful way of understanding today's interconnected world. Rather than seeing international relations as driven only by competition between states, the theory highlights the many overlapping channels through which global interaction occurs. These include not only relations between governments, but also extensive transnational links involving businesses and other non-state actors. As Keohane and Nye argue, such actors have become central to shaping global outcomes (1977, p. 25). Nigeria provides a clear illustration of this dynamic through the growing international influence of indigenous companies. The expansion of Dangote Group across Africa embeds Nigeria within global production and trade networks, while Air Peace strengthens cross-border mobility and economic ties. In the financial

sector, Access Bank and Interswitch connect Nigeria to global banking and digital payment systems. Together, these firms show how Nigerian non-state actors actively shape international relations alongside the state.

Liberal institutionalism also offers a valuable lens by emphasizing the role of international institutions and norms in facilitating cooperation among actors, including non-state entities. Institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union, and ECOWAS provide platforms where both state and non-state actors participate in norm-setting, humanitarian action, and conflict resolution. This is evident in Nigeria's engagement with transnational health partnerships and regional peacekeeping initiatives, which often rely on NGO and private sector involvement (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 521).

Transnationalism, as a broader theoretical perspective, focuses explicitly on the cross-border activities of non-state actors and the formation of transnational networks that influence policymaking, identity formation, and economic flows (Vertovec, 2009, p. 5). In Nigeria, the role of the diaspora in remittance flows and political engagement, as well as the activities of transnational religious movements and environmental NGOs, demonstrates how non-state actors construct and reinforce global interdependencies that bypass traditional diplomatic and state-centric channels.

World-systems theory, rooted in Marxist analysis, conceptualizes the world economy as a hierarchical structure divided into core, semi-periphery, and periphery zones (Wallerstein, 2004). Nigeria, often positioned in the semi-periphery or periphery, is deeply integrated into this global capitalist system. The presence of foreign extractive industries, trade dependencies, and externally driven development agendas underscores the exploitative and unequal nature of global interdependence. Non-state actors, in this view, can either reinforce global inequalities or serve as agents of resistance and alternative development.

Constructivist approaches focus on the social construction of international norms, identities, and practices. Constructivism sees global interdependence not merely as a set of material relationships, but as socially embedded phenomena shaped by discourses, meanings, and interactions among diverse actors (Wendt, 1999, p. 1). Non-state actors in Nigeria play crucial roles in constructing and contesting narratives around governance, democracy, environmental justice, and national identity, contributing to the discursive dimensions of international relations.

For Nigeria, adopting such approaches allows for an appreciation of how local realities are intertwined with global processes, and how non-state actors function as both products and producers of transnational linkages.

Historical Overview of Non-State Actors in Global Affairs

The rise of non-state actors (NSAs) in global affairs reflects a major shift in the traditional state-centric model of international relations. Historically, the state has been the principal unit of analysis and power in global politics. However, this monopoly has gradually been challenged by a variety of actors operating beyond formal state structures, including international organizations, multinational corporations (MNCs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious movements, terrorist groups, and civil society networks. The

roots of non-state influence can be traced back to religious orders and trading guilds in the Middle Ages, which had transnational networks and economic power, often rivalling state actors. For instance, the Catholic Church wielded significant diplomatic influence across kingdoms and empires long before the Westphalian system formally established the sovereign state as the norm (Ruggie, 1993, p. 140). Likewise, merchant empires such as the Hanseatic League operated across borders and influenced regional politics and economies.

The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 reinforced the concept of territorial sovereignty, relegating non-state actors to the periphery of international politics. For centuries, diplomacy and war remained the exclusive domain of nation-states. However, the industrial revolution, colonial expansion, and the evolution of international trade reintroduced non-state dynamics into global relations, particularly through corporations and missionary societies (Strange, 1996, p. 91).

The twentieth century witnessed a significant increase in the prominence of NSAs. After World War II, the emergence of the United Nations system provided a platform for NGOs and civil society to influence international policy. Humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross became key actors during conflicts and post-conflict reconstructions (Barnett, 2011, p. 33). The post-Cold War period further expanded the role of NSAs, particularly with the rise of globalization, digital communication, and neoliberal governance models that emphasized market forces and transnational partnerships. By the 1990s and early 2000s, the influence of NSAs became more visible in areas such as environmental policy (e.g., Greenpeace), human rights advocacy (e.g., Amnesty International), and global health (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). Simultaneously, the growing power of transnational terrorist networks like al-Qaeda redefined security discourses, leading to greater recognition of non-state threats (Stern, 2003, p. 45).

Indigenous Actors Shaping Global Conversations

Across contemporary international relations, Nigerian non-state actors increasingly demonstrate that global influence is no longer the exclusive preserve of governments. Indigenous activists, religious communities, smaller organizations and diaspora networks are actively shaping transnational conversations by translating local realities into globally resonant claims. Their interventions reveal how grassroots agency in Nigeria intersects with international norms, institutions and publics.

Indigenous actors, in particular, have emerged as important voices in global debates on environmental justice, human rights and climate governance. Environmental advocates such as Ojumude Tosan Bishop exemplify how local ecological struggles in the Niger Delta are reframed within international climate discourses. Through participation in continental and global forums, indigenous leaders connect lived experiences of environmental degradation with broader policy conversations, advancing African-centred approaches to climate change that challenge dominant global narratives (Bishop, as cited in Wikipedia, 2025). Similarly, youth-driven activism, represented by figures like Victory Ashaka, shows how creative expression can function as a form of cultural diplomacy. By combining poetry and climate advocacy, such actors mobilize transnational youth networks and shape international perceptions of Nigeria as an active contributor to global sustainability debates (Ashaka,

Wikipedia, 2025). Beyond environmental concerns, Nigerian indigenous engagement extends into human rights and secular advocacy. Leo Igwe's work against harmful practices linked to witchcraft accusations illustrates how local cultural issues become matters of international human rights concern. By collaborating with global networks such as Humanists International, Igwe situates Nigerian civil society within wider ethical and legal debates on human dignity, demonstrating how local activism can influence global normative frameworks (Wikipedia, 2025; Benthall, 2020).

Religious actors also operate across borders through expansive diaspora networks that link Nigeria to Europe and North America. These faith-based connections often support development initiatives and social advocacy, indirectly shaping international discussions on democracy, welfare and values (Orogbemi, 2025). At the same time, scholars warn that such transnational religious flows may introduce external ideologies that complicate domestic governance if not carefully regulated (Authority News, 2025). Alongside these actors, smaller NGOs, philanthropic foundations and diaspora groups reinforce Nigeria's global presence. Campaigns like Bring Back Our Girls demonstrate how domestic activism can galvanise international attention and influence policy responses to security and human rights challenges (Disciplines.ng, 2025). Major indigenous foundations and diaspora communities further embed Nigeria within global development, investment and advocacy networks, acting as informal diplomatic agents beyond the state (Learning to Give, 2025; Vanguard Online, 2025).

Transnationalism in International Relations

Transnationalism in international relations refers to the processes and interactions that transcend national borders and are not solely controlled by state actors. It encompasses the rise of networks, institutions, and identities that operate across multiple states, influencing global politics, economies, cultures, and societies. This concept has gained prominence since the latter half of the 20th century as globalization, technological advancements, and the proliferation of non-state actors have redefined the nature of international engagement.

Traditionally, international relations (IR) has been dominated by state-centric theories such as realism and neorealism, which emphasize the primacy of sovereign states in an anarchic global system. However, transnationalism challenges this orthodoxy by highlighting the role of actors and processes that operate independently of, or alongside, states. These include multinational corporations (MNCs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious networks, diaspora communities, transnational advocacy groups, and even terrorist organizations (Keohane & Nye, 1971, p. 332).

The conceptual foundation of transnationalism was laid in the 1970s by scholars like Keohane and Nye, who introduced the idea of "transnational relations" as direct interactions across borders by non-state entities (Keohane & Nye, 1971, p. 332). They argued that such interactions affect interstate relations and global outcomes, especially in an increasingly interdependent world. This laid the groundwork for liberal and constructivist critiques of the realist paradigm, opening space for analysis of global governance, international norms, and identity politics.

In practice, transnationalism can be observed in various spheres. Economically, global value chains are managed by MNCs whose operations span multiple countries, diminishing the ability of single states to control production and labour standards (Sassen, 2006, p. 230).

Politically, transnational advocacy networks like Amnesty International or Greenpeace influence human rights and environmental policy through lobbying, naming and shaming, and mobilizing public opinion (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 12). Similarly, diaspora communities maintain transnational identities, remit funds, and influence homeland politics, often serving as informal diplomats or conflict actors (Faist, 2010, p. 18).

Transnationalism also reshapes the understanding of sovereignty. Rather than viewing sovereignty as absolute, scholars increasingly conceptualise it as porous or shared, particularly in contexts such as climate governance, migration, and global health (Held & McGrew, 2007, p. 52). The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, illustrated how cross-border cooperation and non-state participation were essential in responding to a global crisis.

The Role of Non-State Actors in Nigeria

Non-state actors (NSAs) have become critical stakeholders in Nigeria's socio-political, economic, and security landscape. Their roles cut across a wide range of sectors, from humanitarian assistance and development to advocacy, service delivery, conflict mediation, and even security provision. In a state grappling with challenges such as corruption, inadequate public services, insurgency, and economic instability, NSAs often fill critical governance gaps, influence policy, and promote accountability.

One of the most visible roles of NSAs in Nigeria is in the development and humanitarian sectors. Both local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a key role in service delivery, particularly in health, education, gender equality, and disaster response. For instance, organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have been instrumental in providing emergency health services in conflict-affected areas in the North-East (Oxfam, 2020, p. 5). Local civil society groups, such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), work actively in civic education, electoral monitoring, and democratic governance.

NSAs also play a significant role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In regions affected by ethno-religious violence, such as Plateau, Kaduna, and Benue States, traditional leaders, religious institutions, and community-based organizations often mediate disputes and facilitate reconciliation processes. These actors possess social legitimacy and cultural embeddedness that often surpass those of formal state institutions (Aghedo & Osumah, 2014, p. 81). Similarly, in the Niger Delta, civil society organizations have advocated for environmental justice, corporate responsibility, and fair distribution of oil revenues, counterbalancing the influence of both the state and multinational oil companies.

Moreover, Nigeria's experience with insurgency and terrorism—most notably from Boko Haram—has intensified the involvement of NSAs in security and humanitarian responses. International actors like the United Nations and various faith-based groups have mobilized resources for internally displaced persons (IDPs), while vigilante groups and local hunters have sometimes supplemented military operations, especially in remote areas (Campbell & Harwood, 2018, p. 11).

Private sector actors also constitute influential NSAs. Large corporations, especially in oil and telecommunications, wield economic power that influences government policy. Through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, companies like Shell and MTN have

contributed to community development, though often with mixed results regarding sustainability and equity (Watts, 2004, p. 45).

Despite their contributions, NSAs in Nigeria face significant challenges, including limited funding, government suspicion, weak regulatory frameworks, and security threats. Moreover, their effectiveness often depends on their ability to maintain neutrality, transparency, and grassroots legitimacy. Nonetheless, their continued presence reflects a dynamic governance landscape in which power and responsibility are increasingly shared beyond the state.

Case Study: Nigeria in the Global Context

Nigeria's complex political landscape, diverse society, and strategic economic significance make it a fertile ground for the activities of non-state actors (NSAs), whose transnational engagements have reshaped governance, diplomacy, and development dynamics within and beyond its borders. One key area where transnationalism manifests in Nigeria is humanitarian intervention, especially in conflict-affected regions like the North-East. The Boko Haram insurgency has attracted the involvement of international NGOs, UN agencies, and faith-based organizations that operate across borders. Organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have played vital roles in providing aid, healthcare, and shelter to internally displaced persons (IDPs). These actors not only complement state efforts but often operate with relative autonomy, governed by global humanitarian norms rather than domestic political constraints (Campbell & Harwood, 2018, p. 7). Moreover, Nigeria's engagement with global development networks reflects the influence of transnational actors. International donors and development partners like the World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID, now FCDO) have partnered with local NGOs and state agencies to address health challenges such as polio eradication and maternal mortality. These partnerships exemplify a form of networked governance, where influence is shared among state and non-state actors across national boundaries (Rosenau, 1990, p. 162).

The Nigerian diaspora is another powerful transnational force. With millions of Nigerians residing in the UK, the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world, remittances now constitute one of Nigeria's largest sources of foreign exchange—surpassing even oil revenues in some years (World Bank, 2021, p. 3). Beyond remittances, diaspora communities also exert influence through advocacy, investment, and engagement in domestic politics. Transnational political activism, including campaigns for electoral reforms and anti-corruption, often emanates from abroad, enabled by digital platforms and global networks.

Civil society groups in Nigeria are also increasingly embedded in transnational advocacy networks. Organizations such as the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) regularly collaborate with international watchdogs and human rights bodies. These collaborations have globalized local struggles, gaining international attention and support for issues like police brutality (as seen in the #EndSARS movement) and electoral transparency (Agbaje, 2021, p. 92). Additionally, multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Nigeria—especially in oil and gas—underscore the country's embeddedness in global capitalism. Companies such as Shell and Chevron exert substantial influence not just economically but also politically. Their operations have drawn international scrutiny regarding environmental degradation and human

rights abuses in the Niger Delta, sparking responses from both local activists and transnational environmental networks (Watts, 2004, p. 58). This demonstrates how global interdependencies can generate both cooperation and contention between state, corporate, and civil actors.

Global Interdependencies and Networks

The contemporary international system is increasingly characterized by the diffusion of power beyond the traditional confines of state actors. This shift is most visible in the rise of global interdependencies and transnational networks that transcend territorial borders, forming intricate webs of cooperation, competition, and influence. In the Nigerian context, these dynamics manifest strongly in the activities of non-state actors—such as multinational corporations (MNCs), civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), diasporic networks, and religious movements—whose operations reveal the depth of Nigeria's integration into global systems.

Non-state actors in Nigeria are not isolated entities; rather, they are embedded within transnational networks that link them to global discourses, funding streams, and institutional frameworks. These linkages enable them to mobilize resources, exert soft power, and influence both domestic and international policy agendas. For example, international NGOs operating in the health and education sectors often collaborate with local civil society groups to implement donor-driven programmes, thereby shaping public policy and development priorities in ways that sometimes bypass the state apparatus (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 89).

Diasporic communities, particularly the Nigerian diaspora in Europe and North America, are another potent example. Through remittances, lobbying, digital activism, and transnational investment, these communities shape economic and political outcomes in Nigeria. Their influence is facilitated by digital platforms that enable real-time communication and advocacy, demonstrating how global networks amplify the agency of non-state actors (Vertovec, 2009, p. 5). In turn, these actors often challenge or complement the authority of the state, contributing to a reconfiguration of international relations from a state-centric to a multi-actor framework (Risse, 2002, p. 261). While interdependence fosters cooperation and access to global resources, it also imposes constraints on state autonomy. In Nigeria, this tension is evident in the reliance on international financial institutions, foreign donors, and multinational corporations. The conditionalities attached to foreign aid or trade agreements often shape domestic economic and political policies, reducing the state's capacity to act independently (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 54). Moreover, the presence of powerful global corporations in sectors such as oil and telecommunications has led to what some scholars describe as "shared sovereignty"—wherein multinational firms wield significant influence over national policy and resource allocation (Strange, 1996, p. 121).

The influence of international regulatory bodies and norms, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or human rights frameworks, also exemplifies how global interdependencies shape state behaviour. Compliance with international standards has become a prerequisite for legitimacy and access to global markets, often pushing states to align their domestic policies with global expectations, regardless of local needs or preferences (Held & McGrew, 2007, p. 33). In this light, sovereignty in the 21st century is increasingly porous and negotiated. Nigeria's interactions with transnational networks illustrate how sovereignty is no

longer solely about territorial control but involves the capacity to navigate, manage, and leverage global interdependencies effectively (Falk, 2002, p. 153).

Challenges and Opportunities in Transnational Relations

The evolution of international relations beyond state-centric models has brought about both critical challenges and promising opportunities. Nigeria's engagement with transnational actors—ranging from multinational corporations and international NGOs to diaspora networks and cross-border criminal organizations—presents a dynamic field in which state authority, sovereignty, and socio-economic development are constantly negotiated. Understanding this duality is central to analyzing Nigeria's place in the global order through a transnational lens.

Security Challenges Posed by Transnational Actors: One of the most pressing challenges in Nigeria's transnational engagement arises from security threats emanating from non-state actors operating across borders. Terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram and its splinter group ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province) exemplify how transnational networks of violence exploit porous borders and weak governance to carry out attacks, recruit members, and receive foreign support (Onuoha, 2014, p. 9). These groups are sustained by flows of arms, finance, and ideological influence across national boundaries, thus complicating the state's capacity to secure its territory and population. Moreover, transnational organized crime syndicates involved in human trafficking, drug smuggling, and arms proliferation have significantly undermined Nigeria's internal security and regional stability. These criminal networks leverage global routes and digital technologies, making them difficult to monitor or contain within the traditional frameworks of national law enforcement (Ikelegbe, 2013, p. 22). The challenge lies in the state's limited capacity to counter these actors due to institutional corruption, weak transnational intelligence collaboration, and under-resourced security agencies. At a broader level, the actions of certain multinational corporations—particularly in the oil-rich Niger Delta—have also posed security risks by fuelling local grievances over environmental degradation, economic marginalization, and perceived foreign exploitation. Such tensions have, at times, escalated into insurgencies, as seen with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), whose transnational linkages facilitated arms procurement and media outreach (Watts, 2008, p. 200).

Economic Opportunities through Transnational Cooperation: Despite these challenges, transnational relations also offer Nigeria considerable economic opportunities. Non-state actors such as multinational corporations, foreign investors, international development agencies, and diaspora networks play a key role in stimulating economic growth and development. The involvement of international oil and gas companies has long been central to Nigeria's economy, contributing significantly to government revenues and foreign exchange earnings, albeit with concerns over sustainability and equity (Obi, 2010, p. 67). Beyond extractive industries, transnational cooperation in agriculture, technology, and infrastructure has opened avenues for innovation and development. For example, public-private partnerships with global firms and donor agencies have supported initiatives in renewable energy, fintech, and telecommunications, helping to bridge infrastructure gaps and promote digital inclusion (Adeleke, 2016, p. 128). International NGOs and development actors have also contributed to capacity-building programmes in health, education, and entrepreneurship, offering social and economic benefits that complement state efforts.

The Nigerian diaspora represents a particularly important transnational economic actor. In 2022, remittances to Nigeria exceeded \$20 billion, making the country one of the top recipients in Africa (World Bank, 2023, p. 14). These financial flows have had a stabilizing effect on household income and investment in small businesses, education, and health, thereby fostering socio-economic resilience. Moreover, diasporic involvement in investment and innovation has led to the creation of transnational entrepreneurial ecosystems that integrate Nigeria into global supply chains and knowledge economies (Gamlen, 2014, p. 183).

Conclusion

This paper explored the dynamic and evolving landscape of international relations by focusing on the global interdependencies and transnational engagements of non-state actors in Nigeria. Moving beyond the traditional state-centric models of international relations, the research revealed the increasingly influential roles played by multinational corporations, international non-governmental organizations, diaspora networks, religious groups, and transnational criminal entities in shaping both domestic and international outcomes. By adopting a transnational lens, the study demonstrates how these non-state actors operate across borders, engage in global networks, and influence Nigeria's economic development, security landscape, and governance structures. Their interconnectedness with global institutions and actors reflects a broader trend of diffuse power, where the boundaries of sovereignty are negotiated rather than fixed. These actors contribute positively to national development through foreign investment, remittances, advocacy, and knowledge transfer. However, they also pose significant challenges, particularly in the areas of security, regulation, and state authority—issues made more complex by weak institutional frameworks and porous borders. The findings underscore the need to rethink international relations theory in ways that account for the agency and impact of non-state actors, especially in the Global South. Nigeria's experience highlights the interplay between globalization, technological advancement, and governance, suggesting that effective engagement with transnational actors is no longer optional but essential. The country's future position in global affairs will increasingly depend on its capacity to manage these relationships strategically, balancing openness to international cooperation with the protection of national interests.

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