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International Relations and the Politics of Climate Change in Africa²: A Study of the Nigeria's Just Transition Strategy for Mitigation

By

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Abstract

This article examines Nigeria's climate change mitigation strategy through the lens of international relations theory, analysing how Africa's most populous nation navigates the intersection of domestic energy imperatives, economic development constraints, and global climate obligations. Existing scholarship has treated these pressures largely in isolation, applying realist, liberal institutionalist, or constructivist concepts singly and briefly rather than as an integrated explanatory architecture. Drawing on all three traditions in a single analytical framework, the study evaluates Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the 2022 Energy Transition Plan (ETP), the Climate Change Act 2021, and the country's bilateral and multilateral climate diplomacy. The analysis identifies three overarching tensions structuring Nigeria's climate politics: fossil fuel economic dependence versus decarbonisation commitments; a financing gap of roughly two orders of magnitude between pledged and available climate resources; and the divergence between normative climate obligations accepted in international forums and the domestic political economy realities that constrain their implementation. Findings show that Nigeria's conditional NDC architecture and natural gas advocacy exemplify realist bargaining logic; that liberal institutionalist finance and partnership mechanisms, while diplomatically active, remain structurally inadequate relative to the roughly 400 billion United States dollar Energy Transition Plan requirement; and that constructivist norm diffusion has produced genuine legislative innovation without displacing entrenched developmental priorities. The article further identifies specific interaction effects among the three theoretical logics for example, a liberal-realist tension embedded within the financing gap itself that single-paradigm analyses cannot capture. The study contributes to debates on just transition, climate governance in resource-dependent developing economies, and the structural inequities of global climate finance architecture, and closes with differentiated recommendations for the international community and for Nigerian policymakers.

Keywords: Africa; climate finance; energy transition; international relations; Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

Climate change constitutes one of the most consequential governance challenges of the twenty-first century, generating profound consequences for economic stability, environmental

sustainability, and international security (Adger et al., 2022). The paradox confronting developing nations is stark: countries that have contributed least to cumulative greenhouse gas emissions bear the most severe consequences of climate disruption, while facing simultaneous pressure to industrialise, alleviate poverty, and



participate in costly mitigation regimes (Fankhauser & McDermott, 2022; Okereke, 2023). This contradiction creates distinctive diplomatic and developmental tensions that are especially acute for African nations, whose aggregate contribution to global emissions remains below four per cent despite hosting populations most exposed to climate impacts (Boko et al., 2007; Ford et al., 2023).

Nigeria occupies a pivotal position within this landscape. As Africa's largest economy by gross domestic product and its most populous nation, with approximately 223 million inhabitants, Nigeria's climate policy choices carry continental and global implications (Olanrewaju et al., 2023). Yet the country is simultaneously Africa's leading oil producer, generating approximately 90 per cent of export earnings from petroleum, and among the nations most acutely vulnerable to climate impacts, including accelerating desertification, coastal flooding, disrupted rainfall patterns, and the shrinkage of Lake Chad (Nwosu et al., 2022; Udo & Etuk, 2023). This duality creates a policy environment of fundamental tension in which fossil fuel economic dependence conflicts structurally with climate mitigation imperatives, producing a governance dilemma that recurs, in varying forms, across most oil-exporting developing states (Sovacool et al., 2022; Acheampong et al., 2023).

The empirical puzzle motivating this article can be stated precisely. Nigeria has, on paper, assembled one of the more institutionally elaborate climate architectures among African petrostates: two successive Nationally Determined Contributions, a dedicated Climate Change Act with statutory coordinating machinery, an Energy Transition Plan mapping five sectoral decarbonisation pathways to 2060, and sustained, often diplomatically skilful, participation in multilateral negotiations. Yet implementation has lagged conspicuously behind this institutional ambition, and independent assessment bodies continue to rate Nigeria's mitigation trajectory as critically insufficient relative to Paris Agreement temperature goals (Climate Action Tracker, 2023). Explaining this gap between institutional sophistication and implementation deficit requires moving beyond single-variable accounts whether framed as insufficient political will, inadequate finance, or weak state capacity toward an analytical framework capable of showing how material interest, institutional design, and normative discourse interact to produce this specific, patterned outcome.

This dilemma is not merely economic; it is deeply political, and it plays out simultaneously at the domestic and international levels. Domestically, Nigeria's federal structure disperses environmental and energy responsibilities across national, state, and local tiers of government, creating coordination burdens that complicate the translation of international commitments into implementable domestic policy (Agboola & Ishola, 2022). Internationally, Nigeria must reconcile its self-representation as a climate-vulnerable developing state deserving of differentiated treatment with its material role as a major hydrocarbon exporter whose economic interests are frequently aligned with continued fossil fuel demand. Understanding how these two levels interact requires an analytical framework capable of holding material interest, institutional

design, and normative discourse together, rather than treating them as separate domains of inquiry addressed by separate literatures that rarely engage one another directly.

Despite Nigeria's continental significance, the political dimensions of its climate strategy remain underexamined in the academic literature. Existing scholarship has predominantly emphasised technical aspects of renewable energy deployment, the modelling of transition pathways, or adaptation challenges, with insufficient analytical attention devoted to how international power dynamics, institutional frameworks, and normative pressures jointly shape Nigeria's policy architecture (Adeleke et al., 2023; Ogunbiyi & Olaniyi, 2023). Where international relations concepts are invoked, they tend to be applied singly and briefly, as background colour to what remain fundamentally technical or economic analyses, rather than serving as the organising logic of the inquiry. This article addresses that gap by deploying a multi-theoretical international relations framework integrating realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism to analyse systematically how Nigeria formulates, negotiates, and implements its climate mitigation strategy.

The article makes three contributions. Theoretically, it demonstrates that Nigeria's climate strategy cannot be adequately explained by any single international relations paradigm, and it specifies the empirical domains in which each paradigm has the greatest explanatory purchase, together with the points at which the three interact to produce outcomes none could explain alone. Empirically, it offers the first systematic, document-based reconstruction of the interaction between Nigeria's NDC architecture, its Energy Transition Plan, its domestic legislative response, and its bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, triangulated against independent assessment sources rather than relying solely on official self-reporting. Policy-relevant, it identifies the Energy Transition Plan's approximately 400 billion United States dollar financing gap as the single most consequential constraint on mitigation outcomes, and it shows that this gap reflects a joint failure of the international finance architecture and of Nigerian domestic governance capacity, such that neither international resource scaling nor domestic institutional reform alone is likely to be sufficient.

The study pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it examines the evolution of Nigeria's climate commitments within international climate governance, tracing how successive Nationally Determined Contributions and the Climate Change Act 2021 reflect shifting domestic and international pressures. Second, it analyses the domestic political economy of Nigeria's energy transition, with particular attention to the fiscal centrality of oil revenue, the political durability of fuel subsidies, and the institutional fragmentation of environmental governance. Third, it evaluates the role of international cooperation bilateral partnerships, multilateral climate finance, and coalition diplomacy in enabling or constraining mitigation implementation. Taken together, these objectives allow the article to move beyond description of Nigerian climate policy toward explanation of why

that policy takes the specific conditional, gas-inclusive, and finance-dependent form that it does.

The article proceeds in six further sections. Section 3.0 develops the integrated theoretical framework, elaborating realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist perspectives on climate politics before specifying how the three are combined analytically. Section 2.0 synthesises the existing literature across five thematic areas, identifying six specific gaps that this study addresses. Section 4.0 sets out the qualitative, document-based methodology, the analytical procedure used to code and triangulate sources, and the study's limitations. Section 5.0 presents the empirical analysis of Nigeria's climate strategy, organised around the NDC architecture, the Energy Transition Plan, and the international-domestic interface, and is illustrated with three original data visualisations and a synthesising table. Section 6.0 concludes with a synthesis of principal findings, differentiated policy recommendations directed at both the international community and Nigerian policymakers, and directions for future research.

2.0 Literature Review: Synthesis, Comparison, and Identified Gaps

This section synthesises the existing scholarship on African climate politics and Nigeria's mitigation trajectory across five thematic clusters, before identifying, in Section 2.5, the specific gaps this study is designed to address. The purpose of this synthesis is not merely descriptive; it is to locate genuine points of scholarly disagreement rather than simple gaps in coverage, since it is precisely at these points of disagreement that new empirical analysis can make its clearest contribution.

2.1 African Agency in Climate Politics

Early scholarship framed African nations predominantly as passive victims of climate change, emphasising adaptation needs and vulnerability while largely overlooking continental agency in global climate governance (Okereke & Coventry, 2016; Boko et al., 2007). This victim-centred narrative, while highlighting legitimate concerns about climate injustice, marginalised analysis of African countries' strategic negotiations, coalition building, and domestic policy choices, implicitly treating African states as objects rather than subjects of climate governance. Recent scholarship has substantially challenged this framing: Brown et al. (2022), Mbeva and Pauw (2022), and Atteridge and Dzebo (2023) demonstrate how African nations actively shape international climate discourse through disciplined coalition diplomacy, moral framing of historical responsibility, and selective norm adoption. Vanhala and Kingsbury (2022) extend this agency-focused literature into the domain of global administrative law, showing how African states have increasingly used procedural and legal avenues, rather than purely moral appeals, to press claims within multilateral climate institutions a dimension of agency the vulnerability-focused literature had little vocabulary to capture.

This represents significant theoretical progress, yet geographic bias persists in mainstream climate politics scholarship, with Nigeria and other major African economies underrepresented relative to

their continental significance (Ford et al., 2023; Ogunbiyi & Olaniyi, 2023). The agency literature has tended to focus on continental-level coalition dynamics the African Group of Negotiators as a unified actor rather than on how individual dominant economies such as Nigeria exercise leadership within, and sometimes in tension with, that collective diplomatic posture. This creates an analytical blind spot around exactly the kind of dominant-state agency this article investigates: Nigeria's economic weight within the West African region and its diplomatic prominence within the African Group make it a theoretically important case for understanding how large, resource-rich developing states balance individual national interest against collective continental positioning, yet this balancing act has received comparatively little sustained empirical attention in the literature reviewed here.

2.2 Resource Dependence and Mitigation in Developing Economies

A substantial body of literature examines mitigation challenges in fossil fuel-dependent developing economies, identifying common political economy obstacles. Sovacool et al. (2022) demonstrate that resource dependence creates distinctive transition barriers, including powerful fossil fuel constituencies, fiscal reliance on extraction revenues, and infrastructure lock-in effects that raise the political and economic cost of any rapid departure from hydrocarbon-based development. Acheampong et al. (2023) compare African oil producers Nigeria, Angola, and Algeria identifying a common pattern of conditional NDC pledges, natural gas framing as a transition fuel, and resistance to binding emission targets, suggesting that Nigeria's mitigation posture is not an idiosyncratic national choice but an instance of a broader petrostate pattern. Isa et al. (2023) situate this pattern within Nigeria's specific energy-poverty context, arguing that a substantial share of the population's continued reliance on biomass and off-grid diesel generation complicates any simple mapping of resource dependence onto national-level fossil fuel abundance, since energy poverty and energy sector emissions coexist even within a major hydrocarbon exporter.

However, as Newell and Mulvaney (2023) counter-argue, fossil fuel economies also possess distinctive transition assets, including technical expertise, government infrastructure capacity, and existing energy networks potentially redirectable toward clean energy an optimistic assessment that Temper et al. (2022) contest by emphasising structural path dependencies that make redirection politically and economically costly in practice, whatever the theoretical technical feasibility. The scholarly divide between pessimists who emphasise structural lock-in and optimists who identify transition opportunities maps closely onto debates about Nigeria's own trajectory. Adenle et al. (2022) and Emodi et al. (2022) read growing renewable energy capacity and improving policy frameworks as foundation-building for accelerated future mitigation. Ndubuisi and Udo (2023) and Udo and Etuk (2023) interpret current policies as largely symbolic, adopted to maintain international legitimacy while preserving oil-dependent economic structures. Akpan and Ita (2022), tracing the longer arc of Nigerian

climate policy from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit through the Paris Agreement, offer a partial reconciliation of these positions, arguing that Nigerian climate policy has moved through genuinely distinct phases of increasing institutional sophistication even as the underlying fossil fuel dependence of the economy has remained essentially constant a pattern this article's own empirical analysis, in Section 5.1, substantially corroborates.

This optimism-pessimism divide reflects a deeper disagreement about whether gradual incrementalism or structural disruption better characterises viable transition pathways for petrostates a debate this study seeks to advance through the empirical, finance-focused examination undertaken in Section 5.0, which asks not simply whether transition intentions exist, but whether the financial architecture required to realise them is materialising at anything approaching the necessary scale.

2.3 Climate Finance and Technology Transfer

Climate finance scholarship reveals strong consensus around the inadequacy of current flows relative to developing country needs, with significant disagreement about causal explanation and remediation. Fankhauser and McDermott (2022) estimate developing country climate finance requirements at four to six trillion United States dollars annually by 2030, against actual bilateral and multilateral flows of approximately one hundred billion dollars a gap of roughly two orders of magnitude. Cipler et al. (2023) attribute the financing gap to structural global economic inequalities and developed country unwillingness to transfer resources without extracting developmental conditionalities, framing the shortfall as a political rather than merely technical failure. Roberts and Weikmans (2023) add a measurement dimension to this critique, documenting persistent inconsistencies in how developed countries report and count climate finance disbursements in ways that, they argue, systematically overstate genuine additionality and understate the true scale of the shortfall facing recipient states such as Nigeria.

Pickering et al. (2022) and Weiler et al. (2023) adopt more optimistic assessments, arguing that institutional innovations blended finance instruments, private sector mobilisation, and improved access modalities can substantially scale flows within existing structures, without requiring the kind of fundamental redistribution of global economic power that Cipler et al. (2023) imply is necessary. For Nigeria specifically, neither perspective adequately addresses how domestic governance constraints and absorptive capacity limitations interact with external finance availability to shape actual mitigation investment (Oluwatobi & Brito, 2023) a gap in the literature this article addresses directly through the disaggregated finance-gap analysis presented in Section 5.2.

On technology transfer, Ockwell and Byrne (2023) and Murphy et al. (2022) argue that prevailing intellectual property regimes constitute the primary structural barrier to affordable clean energy access in developing countries, requiring fundamental reform of the international patent architecture. Michaelowa et al. (2022) offer a related but distinct critique, focused not on intellectual property

as such but on the integrity of market-based mechanisms specifically, the additionality standards applied under Paris Agreement carbon markets which they argue have frequently been diluted in ways that undermine both the environmental and the technology-transfer value of market-based cooperation. Popp (2021) defends property rights protections as innovation incentives while acknowledging that targeted interventions may be warranted in specific sectors. Nigeria's experience suggests both perspectives capture partial truths: intellectual property constraints limit technology affordability, but domestic technical capacity deficits and regulatory barriers also significantly impede deployment even where technologies are theoretically accessible on favourable licensing terms.

2.4 Multilateral Negotiations and Regional Cooperation

Research on developing country participation in multilateral climate negotiations has productively shifted from passivity narratives toward recognition of strategic agency. Okereke et al. (2022) and Mbeva and Pauw (2022) demonstrate how the African Group of Negotiators maintains remarkable unity within United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change processes, effectively amplifying continental voices despite limited economic leverage through moral framing, coalition discipline, and procedural expertise. Nigeria's specific contributions to African Group positioning particularly its advocacy at the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties for natural gas as a transition fuel receive insufficient scholarly attention, representing an empirical gap this study addresses directly (Ogunkunle & Mhlanga, 2023). Bodansky et al. (2023) note more generally that the legal architecture of the Paris Agreement was deliberately designed to accommodate exactly this kind of differentiated national positioning within a formally unified framework, which helps explain how Nigeria can simultaneously align with African Group solidarity positions and pursue gas-specific advocacy that partially diverges from a strict decarbonisation-first continental narrative.

Regional climate cooperation scholarship reveals a persistent disconnect between diplomatic solidarity in international negotiations and limited coordinated action in domestic policy implementation (Brown et al., 2022; Gbejowoh & Kehdinga, 2022). Habtezion and Chibvongodze (2022) document substantial West African regional energy integration rhetoric alongside minimal practical progress, attributing the gap to financing constraints, sovereignty concerns, and political tensions among member states of the Economic Community of West African States. Stevis and Felli (2022), writing from a labour and just-transition perspective, add that regional cooperation efforts have also given insufficient attention to the distributional and employment consequences of coordinated decarbonisation across the region an omission with particular relevance for Nigeria, given the scale of informal and formal employment tied to its domestic oil and gas sector. Nigeria's potential regional climate leadership role given its economic and demographic dominance within that regional bloc remains theoretically underdeveloped despite its practical significance for continental mitigation trajectories, a neglect this article seeks partly to redress in Section 5.3.

2.5 Critical Gaps Addressed by This Study

Synthesising this literature reveals six critical gaps. First, theoretical fragmentation persists, with realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist analyses proceeding largely independently without integrative frameworks capable of explaining their interaction. Second, domestic-international linkages remain undertheorised, with studies of Nigeria's energy policy typically treating international factors as exogenous context rather than as constitutive forces shaping domestic policy design. Third, most research offers static policy snapshots rather than longitudinal analysis of trajectory and path dependency across successive NDC cycles. Fourth, implementation deficits receive insufficient scholarly attention relative to policy formulation, leaving the crucial question of whether stated commitments translate into investment and emission reductions comparatively unexamined. Fifth, non-state actor influence on Nigerian climate discourse remains underexplored. Sixth, Nigeria's regional climate leadership potential is empirically and theoretically neglected despite its evident practical significance. This study addresses each gap through integrated theoretical analysis, longitudinal empirical examination, and specific attention to implementation dynamics, international dimensions, and regional considerations.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Analysing Nigeria's climate mitigation strategy requires a theoretical apparatus capable of accounting simultaneously for material interest, institutional design, and normative discourse. No single strand of international relations theory captures this multidimensionality on its own: realism illuminates why states resist binding constraints but struggles to explain sustained multilateral engagement; liberal institutionalism explains why states nonetheless invest in cooperative architecture but has difficulty accounting for persistent non-compliance where material incentives are weak; and constructivism explains normative change but is comparatively silent on the material constraints that determine which norms are institutionalised and which remain rhetorical. This section therefore develops realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist perspectives on climate politics in turn, before specifying, in Section 3.4, how the three are combined into a single analytical framework applied throughout the remainder of the article.

3.1 Realist Perspectives

Realist international relations theory foregrounds state sovereignty, national interest, and the anarchic character of the international system as determinants of state behaviour in climate politics (Mearsheimer, 2021; Torney, 2023). Applied to climate governance, realism predicts that states prioritise short-term economic growth and energy security over collective environmental goods, particularly where mitigation costs are concentrated domestically while benefits are globally diffused (Eckersley, 2022; Colgan et al., 2023). Because no supranational authority can compel compliance, and because any individual state's emission reductions have a negligible effect on global temperature outcomes, realism expects rational state actors to resist binding constraints unless doing so serves a clearly identifiable

national interest. Structural realism further predicts that great-power dynamics condition the climate regime itself: because major emitters retain the capacity to shape or withhold cooperation, smaller and economically dependent states such as Nigeria are structurally positioned as rule-takers whose optimal strategy is to extract maximum concessions from, rather than to shape, the prevailing rules of the game.

Nigeria's structural position as a major oil exporter creates powerful material incentives to preserve fossil fuel markets and to resist international pressure for rapid decarbonisation. The country's conditional NDC architecture committing to deeper emission reductions only contingent upon international financial compensation exemplifies realist bargaining logic: states extract maximum resources from international systems while minimising sovereign policy constraints (Huang & Chen, 2022; Roberts & Weikmans, 2023). Read through a realist lens, the distinction Nigeria draws between an unconditional and a conditional emissions target is not a technical accounting convention but a deliberate negotiating instrument, designed to signal willingness to cooperate while reserving the deepest reductions as a bargaining chip contingent on external transfers. This bargaining logic extends beyond the NDC itself: Nigeria's advocacy for natural gas as a transition fuel within multilateral negotiating fora, examined in Section 5.2, performs a parallel function, converting a material interest in continued hydrocarbon exploitation into a diplomatically legitimate negotiating position.

Contemporary realist scholarship increasingly frames climate change as a security threat capable of reshaping state interests beyond narrow economic calculations (Floyd & Matthew, 2023; Mach et al., 2023). Climate-induced agricultural failure, migration pressures, and resource competition pose direct threats to Nigerian state stability, particularly in the country's arid and semi-arid north, where desertification and farmer-herder conflict have already demonstrated the security dimensions of environmental stress. This securitised framing potentially creates a distinct, security-driven mitigation incentive that operates alongside, and sometimes in tension with, the narrower economic calculus of oil revenue protection. However, these concerns primarily motivate adaptation investment rather than mitigation, since Nigeria's unilateral emission reductions cannot materially influence global temperature trajectories given its contribution of well under one per cent to cumulative global emissions (Detraz & Betsill, 2023). A further realist consideration concerns relative gains: because energy transition reshapes the distribution of global economic advantage between hydrocarbon exporters and manufacturers of renewable energy technology, Nigerian policymakers have reason to weigh not only the absolute costs of transition but its effect on Nigeria's relative economic position vis-à-vis states, including China, that already dominate clean energy supply chains (Sanusi & Olanrewaju, 2023). Realist theory thus predicts that, absent substantial material incentives or credible enforcement, Nigeria will prioritise fossil fuel development a prediction consistent with the persistent expansion of gas infrastructure alongside stated net-zero ambitions documented in Section 5.0.

3.2 Liberal Institutional Approaches

Liberal institutionalism argues that well-designed international regimes can overcome collective action problems through transparency mechanisms, repeated interaction, and structured incentive architectures (Keohane & Victor, 2022; Falkner, 2021). The Paris Agreement's bottom-up Nationally Determined Contribution architecture, which subjects all parties to enhanced transparency review cycles, represents an institutional innovation potentially enabling broader participation than the Kyoto Protocol's top-down approach (Rajamani & Werksman, 2023; Hale, 2023). Rather than imposing uniform binding targets, the Paris architecture relies on reputational pressure, peer review, and the ratchet mechanism of successive, progressively more ambitious NDC cycles to generate compliance over time. Regime theorists further emphasise that institutions reduce transaction costs and information asymmetries between negotiating parties, functions that are especially consequential for a state such as Nigeria, whose technical negotiating capacity is comparatively constrained relative to the wealthiest parties to the Convention (Hickmann et al., 2022). For Nigeria, liberal institutionalism highlights how international climate finance mechanisms the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility, and bilateral development assistance create material incentives for policy action that partially offset transition costs (Pickering et al., 2022; Weiler et al., 2023). These mechanisms function as institutional bridges between international normative commitments and domestic implementation capacity, in principle allowing resource-constrained states to undertake mitigation investments that would otherwise be fiscally unattainable. Issue-linkage theory within this tradition further illuminates how climate cooperation connects to trade access, development assistance, and technology partnerships beyond narrow environmental considerations (Jinnah & Lindsay, 2023). The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, for example, creates new trade incentives for Nigerian emission reductions in carbon-intensive export sectors, potentially aligning market interests with mitigation objectives in a manner that pure environmental diplomacy could not achieve on its own (Mehling et al., 2023). Regime-complex scholarship adds a further institutionalist insight relevant to Nigeria: because climate governance is now distributed across a dense ecology of overlapping institutions the UNFCCC process itself, the Green Climate Fund, bilateral partnerships, and voluntary carbon-market mechanisms states with limited administrative capacity face a coordination burden simply in managing engagement across this fragmented architecture, independent of the substantive difficulty of the underlying policy problem (Hermwille et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, liberal institutionalism faces powerful critiques regarding the inadequacy of current finance flows relative to developing country needs, and the persistent unwillingness of developed nations to honour climate finance commitments, which undermines institutional credibility (Westphal et al., 2023; Victor et al., 2022). If the institutional architecture is to generate the cooperative outcomes liberal theory predicts, its material incentive structures must actually materialise at scale; where they do not, as Section 5.2 demonstrates for Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan, the

gap between institutional promise and institutional delivery becomes itself a significant source of policy distortion, pushing states back toward realist hedging strategies even where they would otherwise prefer deeper institutional engagement. This is, in effect, an institutionalist explanation for realist behaviour: sustained non-delivery by wealthy states erodes precisely the credibility on which liberal cooperation depends, a dynamic this article terms the credibility-erosion mechanism and returns to directly in Section 5.2.

3.3 Constructivist Contributions

Constructivism emphasises the role of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping state preferences beyond materialist calculations (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2023; Barnett & Finnemore, 2022). For Nigeria, constructivist analysis reveals how participation in international climate discourse reshapes domestic elite understandings of national interest and appropriate policy responses through normative socialisation (Aykut et al., 2023). Repeated participation in Conferences of the Parties, technical negotiating sessions, and multilateral working groups exposes Nigerian officials to an evolving international consensus on decarbonisation, net-zero framing, and renewable energy paradigms, gradually embedding these norms within domestic policy vocabulary even where underlying material interests remain largely unchanged. International organisations themselves function as norm entrepreneurs in this process, using their bureaucratic authority to define acceptable policy behaviour and to render alternative framings for example, explicit prioritisation of continued fossil fuel expansion without a transition horizon increasingly difficult to sustain in international forums, whatever a state's underlying material preferences (Barnett & Finnemore, 2022; Hickmann et al., 2022).

The diffusion of sustainability norms, net-zero discourse, and renewable energy paradigms creates normative pressure that influences Nigerian policymakers even absent direct material enforcement. Nigeria's adoption of a 2060 carbon neutrality target however contingent and distant reflects normative engagement with global climate consensus, illustrating how ideas operate independently of immediate cost-benefit calculations (Okereke & Coventry, 2016). That the target year is a full decade beyond the global 2050 benchmark is itself analytically significant: it signals partial, rather than wholesale, adoption of the prevailing norm, consistent with a constructivist account of norm localisation in which international ideas are adapted to, rather than simply imposed upon, domestic political contexts. Norm localisation theory suggests that this kind of selective adaptation rather than either wholesale adoption or outright rejection is the modal outcome when an international norm encounters strong pre-existing local frames, in this instance the deeply institutionalised developmental primacy that Nigerian policymaking has long accorded to poverty reduction and industrialisation (Scoones et al., 2023; Death, 2023).

Climate justice discourse occupies a central constructivist role in Nigeria's international positioning. By framing developed countries as historically responsible for climate change while developing

nations bear disproportionate impacts, Nigeria deploys powerful moral claims that influence negotiation dynamics and resource expectations (Shakya et al., 2023; Klinsky et al., 2023). Epistemic communities transnational networks of climate scientists, policy experts, and development analysts additionally shape domestic discourse by embedding scientific consensus and international best practice into national planning documents (Haas, 2023; Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2023). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change functions as a particularly influential epistemic authority in this respect, its assessment reports providing the scientific vocabulary within which Nigerian officials frame both vulnerability claims and mitigation commitments, even as genuine scientific uncertainty about attribution and impact magnitude is often flattened into more categorical policy language than the underlying science strictly supports (Hulme, 2023). However, competing developmental norms emphasising poverty reduction and economic growth remain deeply institutionalised within Nigerian policymaking, creating normative tensions that generate policy paralysis or selective compliance rather than wholesale prioritisation of mitigation (Scoones et al., 2023).

3.4 Analytical Integration

Rather than treating these three frameworks as mutually exclusive, this article adopts analytical eclecticism identifying specific empirical domains where particular theoretical logics predominate while recognising the interaction effects between them (Sil & Katzenstein, 2023; Lake, 2023). This is not an attempt to synthesise realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism into a single unified theory, an ambition most international relations scholars would regard as both unnecessary and unachievable. It is instead a pragmatic division of analytical labour: each paradigm is assigned to the empirical domain where its causal logic has the greatest explanatory purchase, while the analysis remains alert to the points at which the three interact and jointly determine outcomes that none could explain alone.

Table 1 (presented in full in Section 5.3, following the empirical analysis) previews the logic of this integration by mapping each paradigm's core prediction against its expected empirical manifestation in the Nigerian case. Realist dynamics dominate fossil fuel industry politics and short-term governmental calculations, explaining the persistence of gas infrastructure expansion and the conditional structure of Nigeria's emission targets. Liberal institutionalism better explains medium-term diplomatic engagement and climate finance access, accounting for Nigeria's sustained participation in bilateral partnerships and multilateral funding mechanisms despite their evident shortfalls. Constructivism illuminates long-term normative evolution reshaping elite policy preferences, accounting for the gradual, if incomplete, institutionalisation of climate justice language and net-zero framing within domestic legislation.

Three specific interaction effects, elaborated empirically in Section 5.0, are anticipated by this framework and distinguish it from a merely additive combination of three separate analyses. First, a liberal-realist tension is expected within the financing architecture: institutions generate a cooperative expectation of scaled finance

that realist power asymmetries among donor states then prevent from being adequately resourced, producing chronic underdelivery relative to institutional promise. Second, a realist-constructivist interaction is expected around gas politics: material interest in hydrocarbon revenue is pursued not in spite of, but through, the diplomatic deployment of transition-fuel normative vocabulary, such that the material and ideational dimensions of the policy cannot be analytically separated without distorting the explanation. Third, an institutionalist-constructivist tension is expected within domestic implementation: formal legislative structures are adopted in response to international normative pressure, but the deeper normative commitment required to resource and enforce them domestically remains incomplete, because it competes with equally powerful, and considerably older, developmental norms. Applied to Nigeria, this layered framework reveals how oil dependence a realist constraint international finance opportunities a liberal institutionalist enabler and sustainability norms a constructivist influence jointly produce a climate strategy marked by conditional ambition, sustained institutional engagement, and persistent implementation gaps. This integrated framework structures the literature review in Section 2.0 and the empirical analysis in Section 5.0.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, interpretivist research design drawing on document analysis, secondary data synthesis, and theoretical triangulation. This design was selected because the research questions concern the interpretation of policy meaning and negotiating logic why Nigeria's climate architecture takes the specific conditional, gas-inclusive form that it does rather than the estimation of causal effects amenable to quantitative modelling. An interpretivist design is appropriate where the object of explanation is the meaning and strategic function of policy instruments as much as their measurable content; quantitative modelling of emissions pathways, while valuable for other research questions, cannot by itself recover the negotiating logic that this article seeks to reconstruct.

4.2 Data Sources and Selection

Primary sources include Nigeria's NDC submissions of 2017 and 2021, the 2022 Energy Transition Plan, the Climate Change Act 2021, official statements from United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations, and bilateral partnership agreements. Secondary sources encompass peer-reviewed scholarship, reports from multilateral institutions including the International Renewable Energy Agency, the Climate Policy Initiative, and the Climate Action Tracker, and credible policy analyses produced by governance research centres.

Documents were selected purposively rather than exhaustively, prioritising primary policy instruments that carry direct legal or diplomatic authority the NDCs, the Climate Change Act, and the Energy Transition Plan supplemented by secondary sources that provide independent verification or critical assessment of the claims contained within those primary instruments, most notably

the Climate Action Tracker's country assessments and the Climate Policy Initiative's finance landscape reports. This triangulation strategy was adopted specifically to guard against uncritical reliance on official Nigerian government self-reporting, which as Section 5.1 discusses has itself been the subject of independent methodological criticism.

4.3 Analytical Procedure

The integrated theoretical framework developed in Section 3.0 applying realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist lenses as complementary rather than competing analytical tools enables multi-dimensional analysis of how material interests, institutional mechanisms, and normative pressures simultaneously shape Nigeria's climate strategy. Analysis proceeded through an iterative process of close reading, in which passages of the primary documents were coded according to which theoretical logic or combination of logics best accounted for the specific commitment, target, or framing under examination, with particular attention paid to instances where more than one logic appeared to be operating simultaneously, since these interaction effects constitute the most analytically distinctive contribution of the integrated framework. Coding proceeded in two passes: an initial descriptive pass identifying the substantive content of each policy provision or negotiating statement, followed by an interpretive pass assigning the theoretical logic, or combination of logics, that best accounted for that provision, with disagreements between the two passes resolved by returning to the surrounding textual and negotiating context rather than by default assignment to any single paradigm.

The use of bar chart visualisations in Section 5.0 operationalises three key empirical dimensions NDC emission projections by sector, climate finance receipts by source over time, and the Energy Transition Plan's investment gap by transition pathway to facilitate systematic analysis of implementation deficits and resource shortfalls. Because Nigeria's official documents do not always publish fully disaggregated sectoral or pathway-level figures in a single consistent time series, the sectoral and pathway-level allocations underlying Figures 1 through 3 combine figures explicitly stated in the source documents including the headline BAU, unconditional, and conditional emission totals, the aggregate climate finance ceiling, and the total Energy Transition Plan investment requirement with proportional estimates derived by the author to illustrate plausible sectoral and pathway-level distributions consistent with those totals and with the qualitative pattern described in the underlying reports. These estimated components are disclosed as such and should be read as illustrative of the scale and direction of the gaps identified, rather than as officially reported disaggregated statistics; readers requiring audited sectoral figures should consult the primary NDC and Energy Transition Plan documents directly.

4.4 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Consistent with established practice in qualitative, document-based international relations research, this study addresses trustworthiness through triangulation, transparency, and reflexive acknowledgement of interpretive judgement rather than through the replicability criteria appropriate to quantitative designs.

Credibility is supported by triangulating official Nigerian government documents against independent assessment sources, most importantly the Climate Action Tracker and the Climate Policy Initiative, so that no single interpretive claim rests on official self-reporting alone. Confirmability is supported by the explicit, two-pass coding procedure described in Section 4.3 and by the systematic disclosure, in the notes accompanying Figures 1 through 3, of every point at which the analysis moves from directly reported figures to author-derived estimates. Transferability is necessarily limited: the analysis is a single-country, theoretically structured case study, and its findings are offered as generalisable to the broader class of hydrocarbon-dependent developing states in the qualified sense elaborated by the comparative literature discussed in Section 2.2, rather than as statistically representative of that class.

As the author's own institutional and national position situates this research within the same governance context it examines, reflexivity requires acknowledging that this proximity brings interpretive advantages, including familiarity with the domestic political economy context necessary to read primary Nigerian policy documents against their unstated background assumptions, alongside the standard risks of interpretive bias that attend any researcher's engagement with a policy environment of direct national relevance. These risks were mitigated by systematically counterposing Nigerian government framings against independent international assessments at every stage of the analysis, as described above.

4.5 Limitations

A limitation of this design should be acknowledged. Because the study relies on document analysis rather than elite interviews, it cannot directly access the private bargaining calculations of Nigerian negotiators or energy officials; theoretical attributions of realist, institutionalist, or constructivist motivation are therefore necessarily inferred from public documents and negotiating outcomes rather than confirmed through direct testimony. This is a common limitation of document-based international relations scholarship and is mitigated, though not eliminated, by triangulating official Nigerian statements against independent assessments and against the observed pattern of policy outcomes over time. A second limitation concerns the estimated sectoral and pathway-level figures underlying Figures 1 through 3, disclosed in Section 4.3 above; because these figures are author-derived approximations consistent with reported totals rather than officially audited disaggregations, the visualisations should be read as illustrative of scale and direction rather than as precise quantitative estimates. Future research employing elite interviews with Nigerian climate negotiators, or gaining access to disaggregated official statistics not currently in the public domain, could usefully extend and test the interpretive claims advanced here.



5.0 Results, Analysis, and Discussion

5.1 NDC Architecture, Emission Projections, and Theoretical Interpretation

Nigeria's NDC structure embeds a fundamental tension between declared ambition and implementation conditionality. The unconditional commitment to reduce emissions twenty per cent below a Business-As-Usual baseline by 2030 represents the minimum national obligation, undertaken regardless of external support, while the conditional forty-five per cent target is achievable only contingent upon an estimated 177 billion United States dollars in international support (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021). Figure 1 illustrates sectoral emission projections under all three scenarios, drawing on the aggregate totals reported in Nigeria's 2021 NDC update together with an author-derived proportional allocation across sectors, disclosed in Section 4.3, since the NDC itself does not publish a single consistent sector-by-scenario time series.

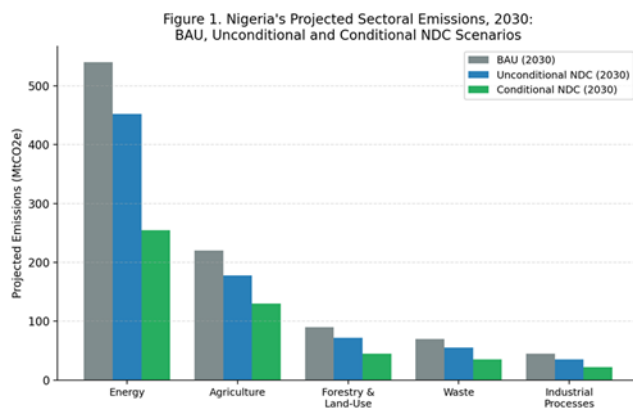


Figure 1. Nigeria's Projected Emissions by Sector — BAU, Unconditional and Conditional NDC Targets (2030). Note: sectoral allocations are author-derived estimates consistent with reported aggregate totals; see Section 4.3.

As Figure 1 shows, the energy sector accounts for the largest share of both projected Business-As-Usual emissions and mitigation potential, followed by agriculture, forestry and land-use, waste, and industrial processes. The gap between the unconditional and conditional targets is widest in absolute terms within the energy sector, quantifying structurally Nigeria's dependence on external cooperation for meaningful mitigation impact: the deepest and most consequential emission reductions Nigeria has offered to the international community are precisely the reductions it has declared itself unable to deliver without foreign finance.

This conditional architecture exemplifies realist bargaining logic: Nigeria maximises leverage over international finance by making deeper mitigation contingent on external compensation rather than unilateral domestic policy decisions (Huang & Chen, 2022; Torney, 2023). Rather than functioning as a straightforward measure of ambition, the conditional-unconditional split operates as a negotiating device, allowing Nigeria to claim credit for an ambitious headline target while formally reserving the right to attribute any shortfall in delivery to insufficient international

support. The Business-As-Usual baseline methodology underpinning both targets has drawn criticism from the Climate Action Tracker (2023) for limited transparency and potentially inflated projections, raising legitimate questions about the true ambition embedded in the reported percentage reductions a methodological concern that reinforces the case, made in Section 4.2, for triangulating Nigeria's official figures against independent assessment. Read against the longer institutional arc traced by Akpan and Ita (2022) from the 2017 NDC through the 2021 update, this pattern also illustrates path dependency: the conditional-unconditional structure was not invented anew in 2021 but rather refined and elaborated from a template already established in the earlier submission, suggesting an institutionalised negotiating template rather than an ad hoc response to any single negotiating cycle.

Conversely, the 2021 NDC update's strengthened emphasis on development co-benefits, gender dimensions, and climate justice framing reflects constructivist norm socialisation through iterative participation in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change processes (Okereke, 2023). The explicit framing of climate action as development-oriented navigates the competing normative obligations of climate responsibility and the right to development, consistent with Klinsky et al.'s (2023) argument that equity considerations must anchor developing country climate obligations if those obligations are to command genuine domestic political legitimacy rather than being experienced as an externally imposed constraint.

The 2021 Climate Change Act domesticates NDC commitments into binding legislative structures with institutional coordination mechanisms, including a National Council on Climate Change tasked with cross-sectoral oversight, representing significant governance progress relative to the largely voluntary, executive-driven climate policy that preceded it (Ologeh et al., 2022). Yet the Act's comparatively limited enforcement provisions and inadequate budget allocations exemplify a pattern Agboola and Ishola (2022) identify as characteristic of Nigerian environmental governance more broadly: formal institutional commitment consistently outpacing practical implementation capacity. Liberal institutionalists attribute this mismatch to insufficient international capacity-building support accompanying the institutional design itself, while realists locate it in the structural fiscal constraints of an oil-dependent state whose budgetary priorities are shaped far more powerfully by short-term revenue pressures than by long-horizon environmental legislation. A constructivist reading adds a third layer to this explanation: the Act's passage itself required, and reflected, a genuine shift in the normative status of climate governance within Nigerian legislative discourse, from a peripheral technical matter to a recognised domain of statutory obligation, even though that normative shift has not yet been matched by a comparable shift in budgetary prioritisation. All three explanations are, on the evidence reviewed here, simultaneously true, which is itself the central analytical payoff of the integrated framework developed in Section 3.0: a single-paradigm account would

identify only one layer of this explanation and would therefore mistake a partial cause for a complete one.

5.2 The Energy Transition Plan: Ambition, Finance Gaps, and Structural Contradictions

Nigeria's 2022 Energy Transition Plan operationalises the country's climate commitments into five integrated sectoral pathways: electricity access expansion, clean cooking, natural gas infrastructure and vehicles, industrial renewables, and carbon capture and storage projecting carbon neutrality by 2060. This timeline, extended a decade beyond the global net-zero consensus commonly associated with 2050, reflects Nigeria's principled assertion of developmental differentiation: the claim that a country with Nigeria's per capita income and energy access deficit is entitled to a longer transition runway than industrialised economies that have already benefited from more than a century of largely unconstrained fossil fuel-based development (Patt, 2023).

Total Energy Transition Plan investment needs reach approximately 410 billion United States dollars through 2060, with domestic sources contributing only an estimated ten billion dollars of that total, creating a structural financing dependence that renders the plan's viability contingent upon international cooperation at a scale the current climate finance architecture has never approached (Emodi et al., 2022; Oluwatobi & Brito, 2023). This is not a marginal shortfall to be closed through incremental improvements in existing finance mechanisms; it represents a category difference between the finance the plan requires and the finance the prevailing international architecture has demonstrated any capacity to deliver.

Figure 2 tracks Nigeria's climate finance receipts by source from 2017 to 2022, drawing on the aggregate ceiling reported by the Climate Policy Initiative (2022) together with an author-derived year-by-year distribution across domestic, bilateral, and multilateral sources, disclosed as an illustrative estimate consistent with the reported trend rather than as an audited annual series.

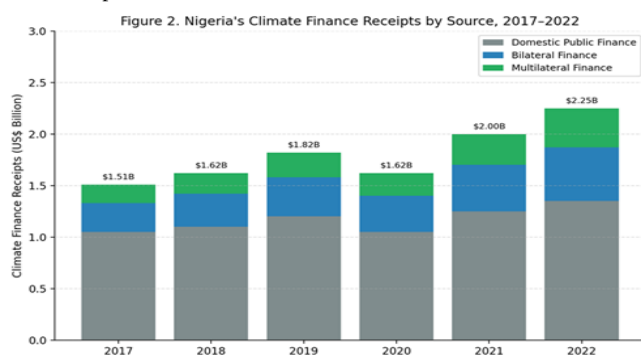


Figure 2. Nigeria's Climate Finance Receipts by Source (2017–2022). Note: source-level annual distribution is an author-derived estimate consistent with the reported aggregate ceiling; see Section 4.3.

As Figure 2 confirms, total annual inflows remained below two and a half billion dollars throughout the period examined a fraction of the investment required even in the near-term phase of the Energy Transition Plan. Domestic public finance dominates in

absolute terms across the period, while bilateral and multilateral contributions, though growing modestly year on year, remain marginal relative to identified needs. The near-total absence of any single year in which combined international flows approached even one billion dollars underscores the scale of the mismatch between diplomatic ambition and financial delivery.

Figure 3 disaggregates the Energy Transition Plan financing gap by transition pathway, drawing on the total investment requirement and the solar-and-wind-specific figures explicitly reported in the plan and secondary analyses, together with an author-derived allocation of the remaining pathways, again disclosed as an illustrative estimate consistent with the reported totals.

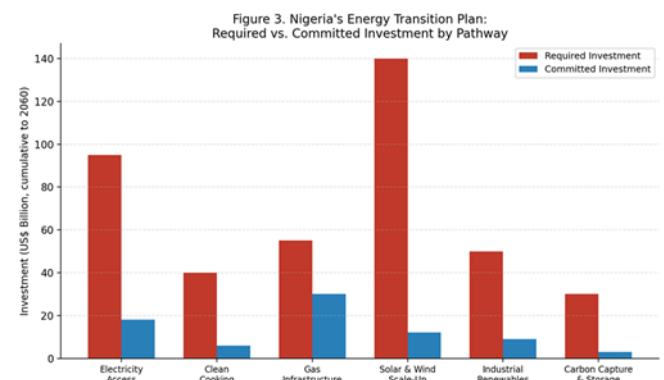


Figure 3. Energy Transition Plan Finance Gap — Required vs. Committed Investment by Transition Pathway. Note: pathway-level allocation is an author-derived estimate consistent with the reported totals; see Section 4.3.

Figure 3 reveals that solar and wind scale-up the flagship decarbonisation component of the plan faces the starkest deficit, requiring an estimated 140 billion dollars cumulatively against only around 12 billion dollars committed. Gas infrastructure, by contrast, shows a comparatively smaller absolute and proportional gap, reflecting both domestic investment capacity and sustained international energy company interest in Nigerian hydrocarbon assets. This pattern is analytically significant: committed finance flows disproportionately toward fossil fuel-adjacent pathways while clean energy pathways face the most severe underfunding, producing a de facto inversion of the Energy Transition Plan's stated decarbonisation priorities precisely the outcome realist political economy analysis would predict once the gap between institutional rhetoric and material investment behaviour is examined directly. This is also the empirical locus of the liberal-realist interaction effect anticipated in Section 3.4: the institutional architecture promises finance roughly in proportion to decarbonisation need, but the material investment interests of both international capital and the Nigerian state itself gravitate toward the pathway solar and wind least aligned with existing commercial and fiscal incumbency, so that the shortfall is concentrated exactly where institutionalist theory would least predict it and realist theory would most expect it.

The finance deficit is compounded by access barriers. Between 2017 and 2021, Nigeria accessed approximately 1.2 billion dollars from multilateral climate funds despite vastly larger identified needs (Climate Policy Initiative, 2022). Bureaucratic approval processes, project preparation costs, corruption-related risk perceptions, and technical capacity deficits collectively constrain access even where international funds nominally exist (Weiler et al., 2023). This access-availability gap substantiates Westphal et al.'s (2023) argument that scaling climate finance is necessary but insufficient absent concurrent domestic governance strengthening a finding that underscores the importance of integrating institutional capacity support with financial transfers, rather than treating the two as separable policy interventions.

The Energy Transition Plan's natural gas positioning remains its most contested dimension. Classifying gas as a transition fuel strategically bridges liberal institutionalist logic accessing climate finance and diplomatic goodwill by framing gas as a progressive step toward decarbonisation with realist interest in maximising domestic hydrocarbon exploitation (Ndubuisi & Udo, 2023; Allan et al., 2023). Howarth (2023) demonstrates that methane leakage across the gas production and distribution chain can negate gas's emissions advantage over coal on twenty-year warming horizons, while infrastructure lock-in effects risk delaying renewable deployment by locking capital, regulatory attention, and grid capacity into hydrocarbon-compatible systems. Nigeria's successful advocacy at the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties for natural gas transition-fuel language illustrates how multilateral diplomatic resources are deployed to embed domestic economic interests within international normative frameworks a realist-constructivist interaction that single-paradigm analyses would miss, since it requires attending simultaneously to the material interest being protected and the normative vocabulary through which that protection is diplomatically legitimated.

5.3 International Cooperation, Regional Dimensions, and Political Economy

Nigeria's bilateral partnerships notably the Germany-Nigeria Climate and Energy Partnership, valued at approximately 200 million euros through 2025, and the United Kingdom-Nigeria Strategic Partnership combine liberal institutionalist capacity-building with constructivist norm diffusion, transmitting international regulatory best practice while reinforcing climate governance norms domestically (German Development Cooperation, 2022). These partnerships operate at a scale that, while diplomatically significant, remains modest relative to the hundreds of billions of dollars the Energy Transition Plan requires, illustrating the gap between the density of Nigeria's bilateral engagement and the financial substance that engagement delivers.

China's engagement presents a distinct dynamic. As Nigeria's largest trade partner and a major infrastructure financier, China invests across both fossil fuel and renewable energy sectors, dominating solar panel supply and creating technology dependencies that reduce equipment costs while raising standards

and sovereignty concerns among Nigerian policymakers and civil society (Sanusi & Olanrewaju, 2023). This engagement reflects realist pragmatism operating within a liberal institutional bilateral framework, partially moderated by constructivist sustainability norms that both governments invoke in public diplomatic framing even as underlying commercial and strategic interests continue to drive the substance of specific projects. The relationship also illustrates the relative-gains consideration flagged in Section 3.1: China's dominance of Nigeria's solar equipment supply chain lowers the immediate cost of Nigerian deployment while simultaneously deepening a specific technological dependence, a trade-off Nigerian policymakers appear to accept as the pragmatically superior alternative to slower, more diversified, but more costly procurement.

Within United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change processes, Nigeria leverages coalition membership the African Group of Negotiators, the Group of 77 and China, and the Like-Minded Developing Countries grouping as force-multipliers for limited individual bargaining power, enabling collective advocacy for differentiated responsibilities, enhanced finance, and developmental policy space (Okereke et al., 2022; Mbeve & Pauw, 2022). This multilateral positioning simultaneously serves liberal institutionalist goals of institutional norm-compliance and realist objectives of resource extraction from developed nations, illustrating again how the three theoretical logics developed in Section 3.0 operate jointly rather than in isolation. However, Ciplet et al. (2023) caution that negotiation victories often yield symbolic concessions without substantive resource transfers, a pattern visible in Nigeria's persistent finance gaps documented in Figures 2 and 3 despite consistent and often diplomatically successful engagement.

Domestic political economy analysis reveals constraints that international cooperation frameworks are structurally ill-equipped to address on their own. Oil revenues comprising approximately fifty per cent of government revenue and ninety per cent of export earnings create fiscal dependencies that powerfully constrain policy autonomy (Udo & Etuk, 2023). Petroleum subsidy costs exceeding ten billion dollars annually in peak years incentivise fossil fuel consumption while crowding out transition investment; repeated reform attempts have triggered social unrest, demonstrating how subsidy regimes embed politically resilient distributional coalitions that any government must navigate carefully, whatever its stated climate ambitions (Iwayemi & Adenikinju, 2022). Constitutional fragmentation of environmental responsibilities across federal, state, and local levels produces accountability gaps in which international commitments lack clearly identified subnational institutional owners capable of ensuring implementation a governance architecture misalignment Agboola and Ishola (2022) identify as a foundational obstacle to Nigerian climate policy effectiveness, and one that no quantity of international finance, on its own, could resolve.

Table 1. Synthesis of Theoretical Predictions and Empirical Findings

Theoretical Lens	Core Prediction for Nigeria	Empirical Manifestation (Section 5.0)
Realism	States prioritise material interest and sovereignty; deep mitigation occurs only against compensation.	Conditional NDC architecture; natural gas positioning; fossil fuel revenue prioritisation (Section 5.1, 5.2).
Liberal Institutionalism	International regimes and finance mechanisms create incentives for cooperative policy action.	Engagement with Green Climate Fund and GEF; bilateral partnerships; but finance flows remain far below commitments (Section 5.2, 5.3).
Constructivism	Normative diffusion and identity reshape policy vocabulary and elite preferences over time.	Climate Change Act 2021; 2060 carbon-neutrality target; climate justice framing in NDC updates (Section 5.1, 5.3).
Interaction Effects	Single-paradigm logics interact rather than operate independently.	Financing gap as a liberal-realist tension; gas advocacy as a realist-constructivist tension; governance fragmentation as an institutionalist-constructivist tension (Section 5.2, 5.3).

Note: Compiled by the author from the theoretical framework (Section 3.0) and empirical analysis (Section 5.0).

Table 1 summarises how the integrated framework's three theoretical logics map onto the empirical patterns identified above. Theoretically, these findings confirm the value of the integrated analytical approach developed in Section 3.0. Realist dynamics explain fossil fuel revenue prioritisation, the conditional NDC architecture, and gas sector advocacy. Liberal institutionalism explains sustained engagement with United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change processes and bilateral partnership utilisation despite their evident financial limitations. Constructivist dynamics explain the evolution of climate justice framing and the legislative institutionalisation of climate norms within the Climate Change Act. Critically, interaction effects emerge that paradigm-specific analyses would miss: the financing gap embodies a liberal-realist tension, in which institutions create cooperation expectations that realist power asymmetries then prevent from being adequately resourced; gas advocacy embodies a realist-constructivist tension, in which material hydrocarbon interest is pursued through, rather than despite, transition-fuel normative vocabulary; and governance fragmentation reflects an institutionalist-constructivist interaction, in which formal structures exist on paper but normative commitment to their implementation remains insufficient against competing developmental priorities embedded just as deeply within Nigerian political culture (Hoffman, 2023; Sending & Neumann, 2023). None of these three interaction effects would be visible to an analysis conducted within a single theoretical tradition, which is the clearest empirical vindication of the analytically eclectic approach specified in Section 3.4.

6.0 Conclusion

This article has examined Nigeria's climate mitigation strategy through integrated realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist lenses, demonstrating that the country's policy trajectory reflects complex interactions among fossil fuel economic dependence, international institutional opportunities, and evolving climate governance norms. The analysis identifies three structural tensions organising Nigeria's climate politics: the fundamental conflict between oil-dependent economic structures and decarbonisation commitments; the vast gap between international climate finance requirements and available flows; and the divergence between normative obligations adopted in international forums and implementation capacity within domestic political economy contexts.

Several principal findings emerge from this analysis. First, Nigeria's conditional NDC architecture and natural gas positioning reflect sophisticated realist diplomacy, maximising leverage over international resources while preserving policy autonomy for continued fossil fuel development. Second, liberal institutionalist mechanisms, while creating meaningful engagement incentives and finance access opportunities, remain structurally inadequate given persistent developed country finance shortfalls that undermine institutional credibility over successive negotiating cycles, a credibility-erosion dynamic that in turn pushes Nigerian policy back toward the realist hedging described above. Third, constructivist norm diffusion has meaningfully influenced Nigerian climate discourse and produced significant legislative innovations, most notably the Climate Change Act 2021, but developmental norms remain sufficiently powerful within Nigerian political culture to prevent genuine prioritisation of mitigation over growth objectives.

Fourth, and most critically, the roughly 400 billion dollar Energy Transition Plan financing gap most acutely visible in the solar, wind, and grid expansion pathways illustrated in Figure 3 constitutes the primary structural barrier to implementation, representing a governance failure of the international climate finance system at least as much as a failure of Nigerian domestic policy design. Fifth, governance fragmentation, institutional capacity constraints, and the entrenched political economy of fossil fuel subsidies create domestic implementation deficits that even substantially scaled international finance could not resolve without concurrent institutional reform. Sixth, and specifically as a result of the interaction-effects analysis summarised in Table 1, the most consequential barriers to Nigerian mitigation are not located within any single theoretical domain but at the junctions between them: in the gap between institutional promise and material delivery, between material interest and normative legitimization, and between formal legislative commitment and substantive domestic implementation. Neither international finance scaling nor domestic institutional reform, pursued alone, is sufficient; the analysis in Section 5.0 indicates that the two must proceed together if Nigeria's stated mitigation ambitions are to translate into measurable emission reductions.

6.1 Policy Recommendations

For the international community, these findings support five recommendations. Climate finance must be scaled dramatically beyond current commitments, particularly for energy access and renewable infrastructure in major developing economies such as Nigeria, whose scale and continental influence make its transition trajectory disproportionately consequential for African mitigation outcomes as a whole. Technology transfer mechanisms must be reformed to decouple clean energy access from restrictive intellectual property arrangements, addressing the concerns raised by Ockwell and Byrne (2023) and Murphy et al. (2022) discussed in Section 2.3, alongside the additionality-integrity concerns raised by Michaelowa et al. (2022) regarding market-based mechanisms specifically. Just transition frameworks must operationalise development differentiation through concrete resources and binding timelines rather than rhetorical acknowledgement of developing country circumstances. Bilateral partnerships, of the kind examined in Section 5.3, should systematically integrate governance capacity building alongside project financing, rather than treating institutional strengthening as a separate or secondary objective. Regional cooperation mechanisms in West Africa warrant dedicated investment as force-multipliers for national climate strategies, building on rather than merely repeating the coalition diplomacy already practised within the African Group of Negotiators, and should explicitly incorporate the distributional and employment considerations flagged by Stevis and Felli (2022) rather than treating regional decarbonisation as a purely technical coordination problem.

For Nigerian policymakers, the analysis supports four principal recommendations: accelerating implementation of the Climate Change Act through adequate budgetary allocation and the development of subsidiary regulation that gives the National

Council on Climate Change genuine coordinating authority; establishing transparent federal-state climate governance coordination frameworks capable of assigning clear subnational ownership for specific mitigation commitments; reforming petroleum subsidies through graduated, justice-sensitive mechanisms that build political coalitions for transition rather than provoking the social unrest that has accompanied previous reform attempts; and strengthening domestic technical capacity for multilateral climate finance access and management, so as to close the access-availability gap identified in Section 5.2 even where international resources do become available at greater scale. A fifth, cross-cutting recommendation follows directly from the interaction-effects analysis in Section 5.3: because the most consequential barriers identified in this study lie at the junction of international and domestic factors, Nigerian negotiators and domestic policy agencies should pursue explicit institutional linkage for example, conditioning specific elements of bilateral partnership design on measurable progress in domestic subnational implementation rather than treating international diplomacy and domestic governance reform as parallel but separately managed tracks.

6.2 Directions for Future Research

This analysis suggests several productive avenues for future scholarship. Comparative analysis of climate strategies across African oil-producing nations Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea could illuminate how varied institutional contexts produce different mitigation trajectories under broadly similar structural constraints, extending the comparative work of Acheampong et al. (2023) discussed in Section 2.2, and could usefully test whether the specific interaction effects identified in Table 1 for Nigeria recur across other petrostate cases or are instead artefacts of Nigeria's particular federal and legislative structure. Longitudinal study of Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan implementation, tracking whether the commitments and finance gaps identified in Figures 2 and 3 narrow or widen over the coming decade, would generate crucial policy-relevant evidence regarding whether the pattern identified in this article proves durable or transitional. Analysis of subnational climate governance variation across Nigeria's thirty-six states could reveal institutional innovations scalable to the federal level, addressing the governance fragmentation concerns raised in Section 5.3. Elite interview research with Nigerian climate negotiators and Energy Transition Plan officials, extending beyond the document-based design adopted here, would allow direct testing of the theoretical motivations this article has necessarily inferred from public documents, as flagged in Section 4.5. Finally, systematic examination of China's climate finance role in Africa navigating between development partnership and environmental governance represents an underexplored frontier with significant implications for understanding contemporary climate politics beyond the Nigerian case specifically.

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