Research Article

Enhancing democracy in Nigeria: Exploring the strategies of US democracy promotion and the new approach of democratic socialization

Christopher Amrobo Enemuwe ᴵᴰ[1*]

Abstract

Since independence, many African countries have grappled with autocratic systems, predominantly characterized by military and civilian autocratic governance, which has impeded the advancement of democratic principles. Structural challenges, corruption, and ethnic politics rooted in colonialism have plagued the continent. During the 1990s, Southern Africa made notable progress toward democratic governance, while West Africa remained entrenched in a post-colonial order dominated by military and pseudo-democratic regimes. The United States (US), a contentious yet pivotal partner in Africa's development, has increasingly emphasized the support of democratic governance in West African countries such as Nigeria as a strategic element of its foreign policy framework. This paper employs qualitative research methodology, utilizing secondary data and foreign policy documents concerning events, funding, and activities since the early twenty-first century to examine US efforts to promote democracy in Nigeria. While findings indicate that the US has implemented various strategies, including the Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), support for civil society organizations, the US-Nigeria Binational Commission, assistance to the election management body, and diplomatic visits, the study highlights the importance of aligning these strategies with political literacy education to cultivate an inclusive and democratic society in Nigeria. This novel approach to democratic socialization through political education goes beyond the rhetorical dispositions of foreign policy, bilateral agreements, or election observation strategies, aiming to cultivate an inclusive and democratic society in Nigeria.

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[1] Department of Political Science, Idaho State University, Idaho, USA
*Corresponding author: Department of Political Science, Idaho State University, 921 South 8th Avenue, Pocatello, Idaho, 83209, USA.

Introduction

Since gaining independence in the 1960s, many African states have struggled with governance, alternating between democratic and autocratic rule (Akyeampong, 2023). However, there have been some advancements in democratic governance in Africa over the past two decades, although progress varies among countries. Some countries have made strides in organizing credible elections, transferring power between administrations, expanding the political and civic space, and improving adherence to human rights and the rule of law, while others have not (Adejumobi, 2010). For example, Botswana has demonstrated significant advancement of its democratic experiment with the recent election of Duma Boko, the candidate from the opposition party, Umbrella for Democratic Change, following the transition of power from President Mokgweetsi Masisi and his party, the Botswana Democratic Party, which has held governance for over 58 years. Botswana serves as a compelling illustration of the potential outcomes of enhancing democratic practices, particularly considering the commendable educational opportunities afforded to its youth, who frequently receive academic grants for higher education. In stark contrast, numerous regions across Africa, particularly in the western subregion, find themselves ensnared in a cycle of political instability, notably marked by military coups. This troubling trend has led United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to describe it as an "epidemic of coup d'etat," a characterization that gained prominence following the military takeover in Sudan in October 2021 (Nichols, 2021).

The Sahel region, in which most countries are part of the West African subregion, has witnessed a total of seven military coups from 2020 to 2024; precisely two in Mali, two in Burkina Faso, one in Guinea, one in Chad, and one in Niger. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Sudan experienced two coups following the military's ousting of former president Omar al-Bashir, who had maintained an autocratic regime for over 26 years. These countries exemplify how numerous African countries have deviated from the tenets of democratic governance enshrined in articles of the African Union Constitutive Act and African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, opting instead for the unconstitutional changes of government as delineated in the Lome Declaration. This resurgence of coups led to the people-centered and public perception-based study sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2023 titled *Soldiers and Citizens: Military Coups and the Need for Democratic Renewal in Africa* to support an African continent-wide leadership effort in tackling Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG) such as coups (UNDP, 2023).

Nigeria, nonetheless, encountered considerable obstacles in its pursuit of democratic governance. The nation has contended with myriads of challenges, including its colonial history, ethnic divisions, ineffective governance, prolonged military rule lasting nearly thirty years, electoral malfeasance, pervasive corruption, substandard education in many regions, and widespread poverty (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014). Since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, considerable macroeconomic prosperity has been achieved, but protecting

fundamental human rights, especially civil rights, remains a daunting aspect of Nigerian society. The country's pursuit of sustainable democratic goals is hindered by vote buying, corruption, fraud, violence, ballot box theft, ethnic rivalries, and tribal and religious politics. Oni Kayode Julius opines that despite gaining independence in 1960, Nigerian leaders have yet to consider the significance of historical political challenges in the country (Oni, 2016). The slow progress in developing democratic political values can be attributed to the lack of robust political institutions (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014). This highlights the importance of external assistance, particularly from development and state partners such as the US.

The US' support for Nigeria's democratic growth is predicated on two important geopolitical positions that Nigeria occupies in Africa. One is Nigeria's large population, a GDP of almost half a trillion dollars, and the wielding of political influence in Africa, which can directly impact US-Africa policy and aid assistance. Nevertheless, a notable power asymmetry exists between the US and Nigeria, as evidenced by various indicators ranging from military strength to economic performance, with the former consistently demonstrating more remarkable achievements. Secondly, suppose the US hopes to fight terrorism (since its declaration of war on terror in 2001). In that case, it must prioritize Nigeria's security, governance, and human rights as a credible ally in a region where non-state actors battle the state for territorial control, which can be a launchpad into other areas of US interest, such as the Middle East and Europe. Aside from Nigeria's geostrategic and demographic relevance, the US was drawn to Nigeria because of its goal to promote 'liberal democracy' globally and the presence of valuable natural resources such as crude oil (see Peceny & Pickering, 2006).

Despite this, some challenges remain for democracy to establish a stronghold in Nigeria. Thus, the educational system must be adequately supported to allow bottom-up receptivity. Therefore, the current research aims to explore and understand the strategies the US employs in promoting democracy in Nigeria, what distinguishes their approaches, and the rationale behind them. Using qualitative analysis of policy documents, news reports, and academic articles, this study will attempt to answer how the US has promoted democracy in Nigeria since the transition to democracy in 1999.

This study is divided into six sections. Following this introductory section, the subsequent two sections will delve into a comprehensive literature analysis of democracy promotion theory as a pathway to global peace in the literature and explore the history of US-Nigerian relations, respectively. After this, I will analyse the strategies and instruments employed by the US to cultivate a democratic political culture in Nigeria, and then propose an innovative framework dubbed democratic socialization through political education to complement the extant strategies utilized by the US. This framework entails a sociological perspective on political education within Nigeria's academic landscape, advocating for an inclusive, bottom-up approach that aligns with the principle of civic/political education and people centrality in Nigeria to enhance agency at the grassroots level. Finally, I will provide some concluding remarks.

Understanding international democracy promotion thesis as a pathway to global peace

External democracy promotion has been the most essential practice of democratic foreign policy. The democratic foreign policy pertains to the stance of actors like the EU, its member states, and the US government, which aim to promote and strengthen democracy in their bilateral interactions with other countries. It seeks to interpret and elucidate, using the logic of democratic peace, how established developed democracies, such as the US, Western Europe, Canada, etc., use their foreign policy to promote and foster democracy in developing countries to ensure global peace.

Before the twentieth century, there were few efforts to develop theories on international democracy support. In the 1980s, the debate focused on defining the terms 'democracy' and 'peace' as used within the theoretical framing of democratic peace relevant to democracy promotion. Over the past twenty years, there has been a growing emphasis on states deliberately creating a democratic foreign policy that supports democracy, as shown in the literature on the topic. The shift in the behaviour of major powers such as the US and EU towards a democratic foreign policy can be attributed, in part, to the changing dynamics of the early twenty-first century, which include events like the 9/11 attacks in the US (Gat, 2005), the rise of globalism (Hambleton et al., 2003), and the advent of the internet (Thornton, 2001).

However, some scholars have argued that the foundation of democracy promotion and support may be traced back to the writings of the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant rather than originating in the second half of the twentieth century, as most literature constantly uses recent data and states' foreign policies and aid support for their analysis (Diamond, 1992). Kant's essay on Perpetual Peace provides a utilitarian explanation for the current trend of democratic peace, suggesting that peace in democracies is due to the behaviour of individual people (Mello, 2014; Placek, 2012; Wolff & Wurm, 2011, p.79). This aligns with the centrality of people in the question of democracy in the previous section.

Some research has established that a belief in the existence of the democratic peace phenomenon is increasingly gaining acceptance among Western leaders, and this acceptance reinforces democracy promotion as the way to achieve global peace (Kahl, 1998). As Placek (2012, p.1) contends, the global promulgation of democracy emphasizes the need for 'international peace' by aligning with the reinforcement of economic interdependence and international institutions. Such a conscious, active propagation of democracy tends to take a formidable and famous place in global governance, which encompasses the aim and strategy of democratic foreign policies to promote and protect democratic regimes globally by examining how donors exercise their leverage over aid recipients and, more importantly, using a cost-benefit approach to understand the incentives of both donors and recipients (Tan, 2020). However, Parmar (2013, p.231) points out that foreign policymakers have used the idea of democratic peace to divide

the world into opposing blocs based on democratic and non-democratic characteristics as part of an effort, usually a 'Western effort,' to promote democracy and create a 'safer' global environment.

To theorize about promoting democracy by employing both utilitarian and normative frameworks of democratic peace, certain scholars contend that the inherently peaceful disposition of individual citizens collectively shapes the domestic, social, and contractual political environment (Wolff & Wurm, 2011). This environment, in turn, reflects domestic aspirations that influence foreign policy orientations. Consequently, the European Union (EU) and the US project democracy and the associated democratization processes onto other nations, aspiring for economic and political collaboration that may ultimately foster peace (Wolff & Wurm, 2011). Moreover, the theory faces serious backlashes as any effort to promote democracy would ultimately imply the long, tedious, and conflict-ridden democratization process, which might run counter to achieving the net benefit of international peace and closer economic and political ties between democracies.

The theory's intricate nexus with the neo-liberal framework of cross-cutting cleavages highlights the significance of engagement between the 'norm entrepreneurial' country and the receiving nation. This engagement profoundly influences economic cooperation, industrialization, and the modernization of the receiving country's economy, positioning these endeavors as central to governmental efforts in promoting democracy, notwithstanding the challenges that may arise (Diamond, 1988). As a result, considerable challenges arise from the failure to acknowledge and engage with the local actors and the intricate dynamics present in a context such as Nigeria, where an external power like the US seeks to promote democratic ideals. Such dynamics inevitably result in discord, which obstructs the democratic progress that is being championed. However, Bridoux and Kurki (2014) raise a critical question regarding whether international democracy promotion is inherently context-specific or represents an imposition by Western powers, such as the US, on the receiving country.

Historicizing US-Nigeria relations

To understand the US democracy promotion strategy employed in Nigeria, it is crucial to set the stage by explaining the history of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The independence of Nigeria in 1960 and its subsequent membership of the United Nations (UN) signified the initiation of the country's independent foreign policy positions. The relationship between the US and Nigeria commenced a decade following the start of the Cold War, impacted by containment strategies and a commitment to non-alignment (Ayam, 2008; Falola & Njoku, 2020). Notwithstanding the collapse of the Soviet Union after 1991, both the US and Nigeria strived for amicable ties. With its abundant natural resources like crude oil and the largest population in Africa, Nigeria continues to benefit from the US's advanced development, technological innovations, migration, education, and financial assistance. This is well articulated in the amount of

USAID assistance provided to Nigeria.[1]

In retrospect, during the six years following Nigeria's independence, the US established a non-interference and amicable political attitude towards Nigeria, marking the return to US isolationist policy. The pre-World War US foreign policy of non-interference in global politics has been remarked as "splendid isolation" by Dr Kwame Nkrumah in his seminal work titled *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (Nkrumah, 1965, p.41; Powaski, 1997). However, while diplomatic and political relations were burgeoning, the US' core interest in Nigeria was in economic productivity and resources as a newly independent country (Faseke, 2021; Nkrumah, 1965). This was primarily attributed to the conventional US political stance towards African nations, which was driven basically by economic productivity, such as the supply of agricultural raw materials and natural minerals, and the need to expand the US market for finished products. In addition, historically, before the peak of the Cold War, the US considered Africa to be under the sphere of influence of European political power- in the case of Nigeria, it was Britain (Nwachuku, 1998; Ogunbadejo, 1975).

Washington officials also believed that due to Nigeria's strong dedication to democracy before and immediately after independence, it could afford to be less preoccupied with political development in the country,[2] instead "…provide the financial and technical assistance prerequisite to your continued economic progress" (Kennedy, 1960, para 5). In addition, Nigeria's abundant supply of raw materials, including agricultural products and raw minerals, led to an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) along with its growing population, positioning it as an economic powerhouse in Africa. This has led to the widespread belief that Nigeria is the leading economic force on the continent, a reputation it has held for many years. Therefore, arguably, the US' main objective was to support Nigeria's economic development and foster stability economically, socially, and without preceding the political aspects. Nwachuku (1998) accurately observed that this mentality originated from the American belief that its economic dominance and perceived moral strength could be utilized to construct a unified hegemonic system. Okpevra et al., (2021) argue that Nigeria, as a growing economy, established diplomatic contacts with the US based on the latter's strong military capabilities, political stability, economic development, and charismatic leadership.

Also, both countries have had comparable historical experiences, especially in the context of British colonial rule. However, while the American colonies achieved independence through a violent struggle against Britain, Nigeria peacefully gained independence through a negotiated constitutional procedure, and both nations exhibited ethnic diversity (Nwachuku, 1998). It is accurate to say that inter-ethnic relationships have been problematic in Nigeria. At the same time, racial division on different social issues persists in the US, creating an exasperating and distressing experience among the population.

However, it is worth noting that the political relationship between the US and Nigeria developed in a somewhat unbalanced, complex, and tenuous period during the Biafran

War (Nigerian Civil War) between 1967 and 1970. During the war, the US government, under President Lyndon B. Johnson, refused to sell weapons to the Nigerian military government of General Yakubu Gowon due to the undemocratic nature of the Nigerian state at the time. Ogunbadejo (1976) highlights that Washington was naturally cautious about becoming heavily involved in another civil war, given the ongoing Vietnam War, the internal challenges it had caused in the US, and the recollection of American intervention in Congo.

Additionally, there was a significant 'pro-Biafra propaganda campaign' during the war, which the US either allowed or secretly supported (Aluko, 1979, p.91). Moreover, the Nixon Administration had a tough and uncompromising approach to dealing with the complex relations with Nigeria and developing African countries (Aluko, 1979). Nwachuku (1998) and Nwachukwu and Uzoigwe (2004) accurately observed that Nigeria's relationship with the US, especially after 1970, was driven mainly by pragmatic considerations. This indicates a pattern of fluctuating dynamics between the two nations, characterized by periods of amicability and tension.

Ogunbadejo (1976) maintains that the US' questionable position of neutrality during the Biafran War and its refusal to offer military support to the Nigerian military compelled General Yakubu Gowon's Federal Military Government to seek assistance from Moscow. This decision significantly changed Nigeria's previously conflicting and paradoxical Pro-Western non-aligned stance towards the Cold War's political dynamics, raising significant concern in Washington. Although Nigeria's reaction was diplomatic, it championed the total independence of white minority African states like Angola, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Simultaneously, the US backed the minority white government based on the notion that if these countries were to be taken over by 'African rebels' like Robert Mugabe, who were influenced by communist ideology, it could potentially lead to Soviet influence spreading throughout the continent. During the Angola crisis, the diplomatic scuffle between the US and Nigeria transmuted into a schism of reaction and support for opposing sides. While the US supported apartheid South Africa's intervention in Angola–which threw its weight behind the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the Nigerian government continued to maintain relations with the communist and Cuba-backed People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), suggesting that the struggle of the MPLA would amount to the liberation struggle of particularly southern African countries, which would contribute to the independence of all the African continent. There was also a disagreement about the appropriate policies to be taken towards the white supremacist regimes in Southern Africa.

Fortunately, these political challenges did not significantly affect the economic aspects of the US-Nigeria relations. Both countries have demonstrated resilience in economic relations, especially amid tense political and diplomatic situations. According to Ayam (2008), both nations hesitate to adopt policies that could potentially undermine their economic interests. With the end of the ideological schism on the geopolitical front came

new aspirations and strengthened relations. The end of the Cold War profoundly affected the relationship between Nigeria and the US, particularly in promoting democracy, facilitating trade, combating drug trafficking, fighting corruption, and ensuring peace in Africa (Aka, 2002). One area that is the consequence of the new geopolitical relations between the US and Nigeria was in the sphere of peacekeeping required to calm the tensions of the civil wars that engulfed Liberia and Sierra Leone. The reluctance of the US to deploy military forces in Africa after the end of the Cold War led to a series of Nigerian peacekeeping forces intervening in conflicts such as Liberia and Sierra Leone within the West African sub-region. Nigeria's geopolitical influence in Africa and subsequent reaffirmation of the non-aligned position made her a dependable mediator and courted participation in the forces raised to restore and maintain peace in conflict zones (Sule, 2013; Falola & Njoku, 2020).

In contemporary times, more amicable areas of cooperation have been developed, such as academic and research cooperation. Also, the US Department of State recently acknowledged that Nigeria's consular sections have one of the highest numbers of visa processing operations globally. Its Nigeria Mission operates to safeguard over 130,000 US citizens in Nigeria, and tens of thousands of US citizens visit the country annually. Over 13,000 Nigerian students are enrolled in educational institutions in the US, making a substantial economic contribution of over $500 million to the US economy (US Department of State, 2022).

Significantly, descendants of enslaved Africans, with a considerable number having Nigerian heritage, have inadvertently contributed to the economic advancement of the US (Falola & Njoku, 2020). The success of agricultural endeavors in the southern region and industrial activities in the northern region heavily depended on the significant contributions made by these African Americans (Nwachuku, 1998).

Findings and discussion

Instruments and strategies utilized by the US to promote democracy in Nigeria include a) US bilateral policy, b) grants, research, youth development, and workshops, c) Diplomatic visits and the interplay with security considerations, d) Supporting public institutions and election observation, and e) Bilateral forum for discussion. Below are brief but insightful explanations of each of these instruments before going in-depth to introduce democratic socialization through political education as a new approach to US democracy promotion in Nigeria.

US bilateral policy

The US bilateral policy document used in managing its relations is the Integrated Country Strategy (ICS). ICS is a crucial tool for the US in pursuing its foreign policy objectives, including promoting democracy in countries with diplomatic, political, and economic ties to the US. This is because, without this formalized policy instrument, it might be difficult

for the State Department to clearly articulate and prioritize that bilateral relationship with Nigeria while specifying its strategic goals and objectives, as shown in Table 1 below. The objectives of the ICS program in Nigeria are related and directly influenced by the positionality of the goals of the US foreign policy in Africa, which the Bureau for African Affairs has been mandated to coordinate. The ICS action program is derived from the consistently unswerving foreign policy of the US government. Irrespective of the ruling party at the White House, the US persistently prioritizes the issue of global democracy through enhanced security measures (Goldgeier & McFaul, 2003).

Table 1: Democracy aspect of US ICS for Nigeria between the period of 2022 and 2026

Mission goals	Mission objectives
Stronger democratic institutions, governance, and respect for human rights	· Nigeria's governance becomes more accountable, inclusive, and responsive. · Nigeria has stronger democratic institutions, including the rule of law, respect for human rights, decreased corruption, and transparency and accountability in government. · Nigeria reduces endemic corruption at all levels of government.

Source: Department of State's ICS program for Nigeria (2022).

The ICS served two essential functions: first, it acted as an extensive foreign policy manual for foreign operations in countries with which the US maintains bilateral relations, such as Nigeria, thereby lending authority to the allocation of resources by the US Congress, as politicians and diplomats can cite the document's content to support their arguments or requests for funding. Second, it functioned as a reference tool for the activities undertaken by the US State Department and foreign missions, which are tasked with implementing programs, initiatives, and projects designed to promote democracy and other facets of cooperation, including security in Nigeria. In addition, the US utilizes other significant instruments to emphasize its foreign policy objectives, such as bilateral cooperation frameworks and partnership agreements. The US Department of State emphasizes that the US Mission in Nigeria, consisting of the Consulate (in Lagos) and the Embassy (in Abuja), is dedicated to attaining its foreign policy objectives, which stem from democratic consolidation and human rights to peace and stability in Nigeria.[3]

Furthermore, the 1994 National Security Strategy elucidates the foreign policy stance and guiding principles that bolstered America's position in the global community during the initial period after the Cold War. The objectives are to effectively maintain the security of the US through well-prepared armed forces that can collaborate with its allies, strengthen the economic recovery of the US, and advance democracy internationally (The White House, 1994, p.5). The Clinton administration believed that as democracy and economic liberalization become more prevalent worldwide, especially in strategically significant countries, the US will likely become safer, and its people will likely experience

greater prosperity (Goldgeier & McFaul, 2003). A paradigm for expanding democracy that enhances US security by safeguarding, strengthening, and broadening the coalition of free-market democracies- invariably promotes democracy.

Consequently, the escalation of military campaigns in West Africa due to the activities of terrorist groups, the rise of military dictatorship, and financial investments in foreign countries like Nigeria directly influence the US national security. Therefore, ensuring the security and protection of democracy in Nigeria is vital to the US geopolitical and strategic interest. This line of thought manifested in the US backing of Nigeria via the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which issued a warning of a potential military intervention against Niger's armed forces to reinstate the democratically elected government of Mohammed Bazoum.

Although acknowledging the equal status of states in international relations, the power imbalance between the US and Nigeria allows the former to consistently attempt to exert influence over the latter, as evidenced by scholarly works on global superpower politics (Avey, 2012; Powaski, 1997). However, geopolitical exigencies continue to present some challenges to the US government, influencing and holding the Nigerian government accountable to their expected commitments to international legal instruments and ratified international conventions, which Nigeria is a party by guaranteeing the democratic rights of the population, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Convention of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEAFDW). These international legal treaties include, for example, the protection of freedom of expression, the guarantee of the right to peaceful assembly, and the preservation of the right to freedom of association with others. It is worth noting that although "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government" was stated, it did not categorically mention the word 'democracy' in the UDHR (United Nations, 2015, p.44). However, several subsequent clauses articulated the adjective 'democratic' about society- meaning democratic society.[4]

In a communique of the US Mission in Nigeria released on November 26, 2023, President Biden reiterated the US commitment to strengthening its African engagement following the previous US-Africa Leaders' Summit in Washington, DC, in November 2022. This dedication entails prioritizing key areas of great significance to the public (people central to democracy), such as fostering economic prosperity, bolstering democratic institutions, promoting better health outcomes, ensuring heightened security, and tackling the urgent issue of climate change (Greene, 2023).

The intersection of the first foreign policy goal and its objective aimed at fostering robust democratic institutions, governance, and the upholding of human rights, as delineated in Table 1 above, with the subsequent goals of the ICS for Nigeria (although presented in this Table 1) is indicative of the findings established by various scholars on the relationship between democracy, economic advancement, and security (Aka, 2002; Huber et al., 1993; Lipset, 1959).

Grants, research, youth development and workshops

The US Mission to Nigeria has taken a leading role in organizing, or sometimes funding, several conferences, and workshops for various groups, such as youth, women, and girls, to enhance their active involvement in the democratic government sphere in Nigeria. An example was a Youth Action Conference organized by the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation and supported by the US Mission in Nigeria. Former US ambassador Mary Beth Leonard clarified that the US government, through USAID, has allocated $25 million in elections-related assistance to Nigeria for the 2023 election cycle. This support aims to strengthen Nigeria's democratic institution and promote the acceptance and internalization of democratic principles (Leonardo, 2023). Understanding the impact of such kinds of donations, although relevant, there is still doubt over the accountability of the fund and which agencies in Nigeria implemented its use.

The US Mission in Nigeria has been tasked with creating grants of up to $50,000 each, totaling $450,000, under the Public Diplomacy Section (PDS) of the US Mission in Nigeria, which is focused explicitly on NGOs operating in the Northern Nigeria Region, with priority given to the northern region of the country to support their political programs. Ensuring the successful execution and supervision of the sponsored programs and initiatives can be tricky since meticulous monitoring and evaluation are necessary to guarantee the desired results.

One program that enhances youth inclusivity in governance is Youth Power. The Youth Power program, which is in its second phase, a USAID-funded initiative established in 2015, is a prominent ongoing endeavor to foster youth development, particularly in political engagement and economic empowerment. Functioning as a comprehensive repository of resources derived from research endeavors supported by the program, Youth Power offers evidence-based insights into positive youth development (PYD). Under its research and learning activities, the program is devoted to fortifying community systems to achieve enduring health, education, and political and economic empowerment outcomes.

The US must also recognize the need to revitalize democracy on its soil following the 2020 elections and the dramatics that accompanied it while driving for the democratization of other countries. That is why, in March 2023, the Joe Biden administration organized the Summit for Democracy, which brought together leaders from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. The summit's purpose was to reaffirm democratic values in countries, including the US, to address the challenges posed by autocratic regimes on a global scale. Following the summit, the US Mission in Nigeria initiated a series of regional editorial workshops and Town Halls in collaboration with the Nigerian Guild of Editors. The objective is to foster democracy in Nigeria by empowering civil society and the media to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals (US Mission Nigeria, 2023).

The promises of a democratic future can only be developed in an environment that includes partners other than the US in decision-making, action, and access to

information. Nevertheless, according to David Greene, the disparities between the law of Freedom of Information (FOI) in the US and Nigeria are evident in the implementation and execution of the law since it has not garnered sufficient public interest, particularly among journalists (US Mission Nigeria, 2021). It is crucial to guarantee that the complete execution of the Act is relevant on paper and in action. If the opportunities provided to ask questions are not utilized, the efforts of those who struggled for the adoption of the Act in Nigeria would be in vain.

Diplomatic visits and the interplay with security considerations

Diplomatic state visits are another vital tactic the US uses to advance democratic government and fortify Nigerian institutions. These visits have developed into a major political tool proving a nation's unwavering commitment and support to hasten reaching foreign policy objectives, including those mentioned in the ICS. High-level diplomatic visits help governments strengthen their ties with other nations and foster cooperation (Koliev & Lundgren, 2021). Visits have a limited time; hence, host nations must make strategic decisions and rank some nations above others (Koliev & Lundgren, 2021). This offers an understanding of US foreign policy goals, diplomatic institutions, and approaches to evaluate Nigeria's position in the West African subregion and the larger African continent.

However, the level of attention given to Nigeria in recent times is determined by significant geopolitical events, such as the coup in Niger. Such a recent event could potentially risk the economic and security interests of the US and its European allies in Africa. Furthermore, Pentagon officials, including General Michael Langley, the head of US Africa Command, have put forth, among other things, a new proposal regarding the US strategy of promoting during a US Senate Armed Forces Committee hearing. He maintained that the primary goal of America's growing geostrategic and military engagement in Africa was to counterbalance Russian and Chinese influence in the region. Simultaneously, the US is intensely dedicated to executing its comprehensive government-wide strategy alongside partners in the area, including Nigeria, in mutual objectives such as fostering peace and prosperity with implications for democratic survival and consolidation throughout the African continent (US Africa Command, 2023). The extent to which this is true is a subject for another study.

Also, Antony J. Blinken, the US Secretary of State, made a recent trip on the 23rd and 24th of January 2024 to Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria, where he discussed development, regional security in the Sahel and the recent coup in Niger that has dealt a blow to democratic consolidation in West Africa. During the press conference, the central discourse surrounding Nigeria's role as a potential mediator in the restoration of democracy in Niger involved an intriguing consideration of aligning with the American vision for the region. However, this fails to put Nigeria on a sovereign equal footing in international democracy promotion within the Sahel region with its co-opter (the US), who is also courting its vision in Nigeria.

Conversely, there was a noticeable absence of significant US concerns regarding the democratic situation in Nigeria after the 2023 elections, involving wide public outcries over electoral malpractices and ethnic nationalism dividing the country. It took the effort of the renowned Nigerian American author Chimamanda Adichie even to write an open letter entitled Nigeria's Hollow Democracy to President Joe Biden not to recognize the declaration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the President (Adichie, 2023), which the former recognized and even sent a delegation to his inauguration in Abuja despite the result was still being contested in the Supreme Court. These illustrate the US 'double standard' politics regarding democracy. Election observers, including those from the EU, deemed the elections unfair and not free. The US Mission statement, released on the final day of the visit, highlighted the significance of strengthening hardcore military security partnerships rooted in shared political culture and values without an elicit reference to the electoral imbroglio in the previous few weeks, signalling the double standard approach to American democracy support in Nigeria, and the pragmatics of that standard. Economic and security interests significantly impact U.S. diplomatic visits abroad, which affect democracy promotion but are sometimes less critical (Lebovic & Saunders, 2016).

Supporting public institutions and election observation

Through the surface-level assessment of USAID, which provides vital training to individuals of political parties, civil societies, media agencies, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the public institution in charge of running the election in Nigeria, the US can be judged as having supported the democratic process in Nigeria. In addition, partnerships between US public institutions and think tanks, as well as NGOs like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), IRI, and NDI, not only aid in election observation upon invitation from INEC but also assist the commission in implementing reforms that promote more trustworthy and responsible electoral procedures which Nigeria can believe. The USAID Strengthening Civic Advocacy and Local Engagement (SCALE) planned a series of digital civic space conversations in 2023. This resulted in establishing the Safeguard Online Civic Space (SOCS) group, which consists of 108 people, mostly from youth-led CSOs and other groups across several sectors. The group received training on addressing issues such as fake news and internet restrictions, improving online information access, protecting voters from electoral misinformation and disinformation, and enhancing inclusive online information access, particularly for civic and voter education, by targeting vulnerable populations (Badru, 2023).

During a workshop before the 2023 general election, which featured the participation of es-teemed entities like the IRI and NDI and was led by the State of Ohio Secretary of State (Frank LaRose),[5] Professor Yakubu, Chairman of INEC, reiterated his commitment to organizing exemplary elections in Nigeria (Thompson et al., 2013). This commitment assumes importance as it signifies Nigeria's dedication to upholding democratic values

while aiming to reap the full benefits that democracy offers on the international stage. It is worth noting that international norms on democracy can materialize through a signaling process driven by diverse motivations (Hyde, 2011). In response to the growing advantages of operating a democratic government or governance system, initiating international election observations by democratizing governments, such as Nigeria, signals its unwavering commitment to democracy.

These actions could enhance the quality of elections and the competence of the Commission while also fostering public trust in elections and their results (USAID, n.d.). Nevertheless, scholars encounter challenges quantifying support effects due to individuals' divergent viewpoints. USAID also aids the Commission in carrying out a comprehensive voter education campaign, explicitly focusing on voter registration and participation. The objective is to ensure that all citizens, including those with disabilities and other marginalized groups, are aware of, comprehend, and can exercise their right to vote (International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the National Democratic Institute, 2014). These initiatives have enhanced the involvement of formerly marginalized minority groups, such as those with physical disabilities, in the 2023 national election, resulting in their participation on election days nationwide.

Bilateral forum for discussion

It is essential to highlight that the Obama Administration has provided support for Nigerian reform initiatives, such as anti-corruption measures and programs aimed at fostering peace and prosperity in the Niger Delta (Ploch, 2013). In 2010, the Administration created the US-Nigeria Binational Commission, a strategic platform to discuss and resolve issues of shared interest between both countries. The US Congress has argued its interest in Nigerian political advancements, and certain members have voiced apprehension regarding corruption, human rights violations, ecological harm caused by oil drilling, and the peril of violent extremism in Nigeria. As Ploch (2013) explains, the US Congress monitors around $700 million in US foreign aid programs in Nigeria, one of Africa's most substantial US bilateral assistance packages.

The most recent US-Nigeria Binational Commission meeting in Abuja on April 29–30, 2024, expanded on the conversations started on past US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's visit. Both parties acknowledged common interests in security, prosperity, and human development as shared ones. They also agreed that US-Nigeria ties should be grounded on common principles like pluralism, respect for sovereignty, and a will to further democracy and human rights (US Department of State, 2024). Yusuf Tuggar, the Nigerian foreign minister, emphasized Nigeria's 4D approach—Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora. He also accepted Nigerian recommendations to include US assistance in reaching these goals (Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This emphasizes the need for democracy as a basic concept and shows Abuja's commitment to the world community. Still, given the events that transpired during the 2023 election cycle, it is dubious how much such commitment is worthwhile.

Introducing a new approach: Democratic socialization through political education

The findings presented in this paper suggest that the US has taken multifaceted strategies and initiatives to promote democracy in Nigeria, imbibing the duality of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Establishing the US-Nigeria Binational Commission and international fora like the US-Africa summit provides a forum for bilateral and multilateral communication for resolving common issues, including political governance and democracy, security, and development. Emphasizing US dedication to these ideals at the state-to-state level, the US-Nigeria or US-Africa bilateral conference has helped conversations on furthering democracy and human rights. The binational commission elicits the advancement of a top-down process in promoting democratic ideals. In addition to the US ICS for Nigeria and the joint regional strategy for Africa implemented by the Bureau for African Affairs, Nigerian authorities, including the police and INEC, have received support in conducting elections. Critics who have pointed out the pro-Western definite attitude to democracy, which has been oblivious to local dynamics, have sometimes opposed this support.

The US approach to help democracy in Nigeria now depends critically on election observation. This has elicited a range of critical perspectives; however, the US's persistent inclination to prioritize geopolitical interests over a genuinely value-driven approach to democracy frequently undermines any empirical progress it seeks to attain through alternative strategies, which critics often view with skepticism. While this is the case in which the American democracy promotion strategy in Nigeria relies heavily on support and grants given to CSOs and workshop funding as key instruments in the bottom-up approach, I advocate for a socially constructive approach that entails US support for political education. With the recent rise of military coups in West Africa, which has always been an epicenter of unconstitutional government changes in Africa (McGowan, 2003; Souaré, 2024), it is no surprise that military coup experience can affect Nigeria in the nearest possible future.

Without significant sociological changes, like socializing norms that might minimize public transitory enthusiasm and support for unconstitutional government changes such as military coups, Nigerians' cultural and psychological terrain may remain open to political discontent. This discontent suggests that the military coup dynamics seen in West African political geography may soon spread to Nigeria as it is in the same area highly prone to coup occurrence, fostering a climate fit for forming a military takeover. It is important to note that public dissatisfaction alone does not suffice as the sole criterion for a military coup, which is often underpinned by a short-lived 'social legitimacy' derived from public support, a phenomenon observed in the Sahel and West Africa during the coup era spanning from 2020 to 2023. Nonetheless, one must consider the intervening variables, including exclusionary political and economic governance, insecurity, corruption, intricate politico-military dynamics, and the historical context of military involvement in politics—evidenced by five military coups in Nigeria. These

elements serve as either triggering, proximate, or structural factors contributing to coups in Africa or other manifestations of unconstitutional changes that undermine democratic principles in Africa (UNDP, 2023), which the 2000 Lome Declaration of the Organization for African Unity and the 2001 African Union Constitutive Act has found daunting to prevent within Africa's political geography. The above factors effectively undermine foreign support for democracy and diminish domestic and regional efforts to foster democratization across the continent.

While equitable economic collaboration between the global north and south, particularly between the US and Nigeria, is crucial for fostering economic reform, enhancing foreign direct investment, and achieving a balanced trade relationship, I argue that the introduction of US support for political and civic education, as well as education more broadly, is essential for advancing these objectives of democracy promotion. Given Nigeria's ongoing yearly educational strikes, which show the underfunding, this support is especially relevant and should complement current US democratic advancement policies. Rooted in educational sociological imperatives, this strategy protects against unconstitutional changes of government—such as military coups or tenure extensions—which is likely to be greeted with public rejection (see Luttwak, 2016, and UNDP, 2023 for a discussion on conditions for coups). The rationale behind this approach is relatively straightforward and is often overlooked in the extant literature surrounding democracy promotion. Countries that are resilient to coups or experience a lower frequency of military interventions (such as South Korea, Singapore, Japan, India, Israel, Argentina, South Africa, Ghana, etc.), particularly those with robust economic and security frameworks, tend to exhibit significant educational advancement (and political and civic education in particular) among their citizens. This educational growth fosters a reciprocal relationship with the economy, contributing to job creation while simultaneously addressing the recruitment of non-state armed groups from economically marginalized youth or politically disenfranchised communities, which the military juntas in recent coups in Africa (those in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso coups) have used as the primary justification of the overthrow of civilian regimes (see UNDP, 2023).

Regardless of the current strategies, it is imperative to channel democratic pursuit into cultivating a profound comprehension and engagement with political values and norms, encompassing human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This is essential for establishing a robust groundwork within a context as intricate (divided along ethno-religious lines) as Nigeria. The strategy will undoubtedly refocus on fundamental methods for promoting democracy, emphasizing the core of the emerging educated demographic. This demographic fosters a cohesive civic public class that transcends mere bourgeois characteristics, as articulated in Peter Ekeh's seminal analysis of class stratification in post-colonial Nigeria (Ekeh, 1975). It represents a singular class of academic unity, characterized by a shared collective mindset that regards the undemocratic tendencies of civilian and military institutions in governance as intolerable, positioning democracy as the unequivocal standard (Obi, 2008, p.7).

The US support for educational development in Nigeria that is broad and particularly civic for young people in primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education will not deprive the Nigerian government of its agency on budgeting and developing its educational base internally. Still, it will serve as a supplementing approach (through strategic funding of civic education curricula) that can influence the political base of learners to believe in the ideals of democracy. Targeting this demographic audience has intrinsic importance and value in propagating democratic values across society as they develop and interact with their contemporaries, whether formally educated or not. This strategy is advantageous in creating a socio-logical domino effect within beneficiaries' confines. Still, it is also crucial for cultivating a strong democratic culture that can infiltrate every stratum of society. The range of involvement can differ markedly, encompassing family gatherings that encourage discourse on the importance of individual roles in governance to personal dialogues designed to inspire engagement in the electoral process. Every environment provides a necessary basis for intelligent debate and community involvement, which should be encouraged by people with a strong awareness of democratic values.

Methodically investigating democratic values and practices inside educational institutions generates and diffuses agency across the population, shifting away from democratic agency rhetoric at the state, regional, or continental level. Thus, promoting a more informed citizenry and encouraging critical discourse on democratic governance is quintessential for agency at the individual African level. This can be done in a direct manner, which can increase the fertilization of a democratic attitude among young people in Nigeria through the provision of school support programs and initiatives that encourage civic education and democracy studies at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education supported by the USAID and US Mission Nigeria in partnership with the Nigerian government to increase the awareness among the next generation of citizens and leaders of Africa's largest population. Also, the approach brings to light the political nature of human beings since training in political discourse (like civic/political education) enhances human's understanding of political phenomena such as democracy, hinting at the statement "man is a political animal" by famous Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Although this approach to democracy promotion that sees the socialization of democracy through the cultivation of a newly educated class is new, this is the first time it has been advocated in the literature. The partnership between the US and Nigeria has shown a firm commitment to promoting academic growth in the development sector. This is demonstrated by a 2017 USAID report that states that the US government has allocated almost $75 million between 2014 and 2017 to support Nigerian children and youth in improving their lives through better education (USAID, 2017). Additionally, the 2024 Binational Commission has committed to establishing exchange programs focused on education to enhance executive-level relations (US Department of State, 2024). While this emphasis on academic awareness is crucial, it is also essential to enhance individuals' commitment to democratic ideals through political literacy or education initiatives within Nigeria.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in this pursuit by implementing innovative curricula designed to cultivate competent educators who can effectively promote political development in Nigeria. By prioritizing political literacy, schools can empower students and teachers to engage meaningfully with democratic processes and contribute to strengthening democratic values in society. Primarily, the core focus of political literacy education, especially the inclusion of democracy and civic studies, has been described as strengthening the advancement of democratic governance, instilling values to counteract political violence, broadening the appeal of politics, promoting international political education, which includes establishing a trustworthy electoral system, and connecting politics to national and global peace and development (Mezieobi et al., 2022).

The investment in the education of young people on the issue of democracy and other political ideals is vital since a democratic sense of belonging within a state can be adequately nurtured from a young age, and this would create conditions relevant to the growth, development, and sustainability of democracy in a developing country like Nigeria. This is also significant since young people are at the center of a democratic society irrespective of the segmented collectivization of all opinions within a democratic polity. To further express the role the US support can play in developing a Nigerian educational sector that nurtures the ideals of democracy in young people, Stephen Heyneman argues that education in a state is expected to provide ideological cohesion (Heyneman, 1998). In this case, ideological cohesion is the collective and majoritarian acceptance of democracy as a crucial sociopolitical imperative within Nige-ria's neoliberal sociopolitical governance structure. In a segue from a nationalistic end of the state's desire for a collectivized acceptance of political democracy through improved and well-funded civic education, American Philosopher John Dewey suggests a socialist democracy in his 1916 book Democracy and Education. According to John Dewey, the goal of a democratic education system is to foster individual development, both intellectually and morally, while also promoting social progress (Dewey, 2024).

However, before the introduction of this approach of democratic socialization through civic education, a significant challenge persists that necessitates further research: determining the type and quality of democratic knowledge to be taught in Nigerian schools. This issue mirrors the ongoing debate concerning which interpretations of the Nigerian Civil War or the Biafran War should be incorporated into the secondary school history curriculum. Likewise, the discourse surrounding democracy in education is characterized by significant complexity. Critics have highlighted the typologies of foreign democratic aspirations, often influenced by foreign policy pressures exerted on African nations. The current debates regarding the appropriate model of democracy for Africa underscore the need for a nuanced understanding as scholars continue to explore various democratic typologies that reflect the continental diversities based on geographical and cultural contexts (Mezieobi et al., 2022). These stakeholders must analyze closely the various realities in which doctrinal, epistemic, or theoretical conflicts arise regarding the interpretation of democracy and its implementation in educational institutions and

communities to avoid an American-styled democracy in a country that has some cultural dis-similarities with the US (Apple, 2018). Therefore, giving agency to all Nigerian stakeholders in developing and consolidating democratic norms despite receiving US support.

Moreover, research has discovered that political apathy has become prevalent among Nigerian citizens (Chukwudi, 2022). When people lose interest in participating in political activities at the state or national level, it hinders political progress, creating opportunities for less popular candidates to emerge victorious in elections (Chukwudi, 2022). To address this, any US support for civic/political education must instil a sense of responsibility in young minds and offer chances to understand and value the significance of their viewpoints, which provides social relevance. Students (also citizens) must realize that democratic participation transcends mere class involvement, involves engaging in discussions and decision-making processes, cultivating empathy, respect, tolerance, and support, and promoting self-management and collaboration. This has important implications for developing democratic-styled economic opportunities for companies, job creation, agriculture, and other sectors of a democratic and neoliberal society if Nigeria is expected to become one in Africa.

Conclusion

US initiatives have played a significant role in shaping the trajectory of democracy in Nigeria, raising important questions about the effectiveness and implications of foreign involvement in domestic governance. The approach of the US towards Africa, and Nigeria specifically, fundamentally undermines its broader ambitions to propagate its interpretation of democracy. Such a contradiction raises critical questions about the efficacy and sincerity of US foreign policy in the region. Nevertheless, the research presents arguments for raising awareness about democracy in Nigeria within academic circles by highlighting the role of civic/political education among citizens that affects the quotidian experiences, creating a domino effect of the promulgation of democracy at the grassroots level in Nigeria. Finally, the US, working with stakeholders in Nigeria while respecting the borderline of sovereign disposition within international law, must consider the social circumstances that enable the existence of political institutions, such as democracy, in Nigeria. This is to avoid the unfortunate and disastrous demonstration of the effect of US foreign policy poorly framed and administered in the Middle East.

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ORCID

Christopher Amrobo Enemuwe ⓘD https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3143-2618

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