

**SOVEREIGNTY AND FREE TRADE AGREEMENT: BALANCING NATIONAL
CONTROL WITH NIGERIA'S MEMBERSHIP OF AFRICAN FREE TRADE
AREAS (AFTA)**

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CERTIFICATION

We, certify that this research project was carried out by ESELE OMO ELIZABETH in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. It is adequate in scope and quality in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Science (BSc.) degree in Political Science.

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DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty for His abundant grace in my life and for seeing me through my academic pursuit and aspirations .Also to my parents who have made sure I completed my education.

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ABSTRACT

Sovereignty and free trade agreements continue to be key concerns in modern political economy, especially for developing countries striving for economic integration while preserving national autonomy. This study investigates the interplay between state sovereignty and Nigeria's involvement in African free trade initiatives, focusing on regional and continental mechanisms such as the African Free Trade Area (AFTA). It examines how Nigeria navigates the balance between maintaining control over its economic policies, borders, and domestic industries, and meeting the obligations imposed by trade liberalization and regional cooperation. Employing a qualitative and analytical methodology, the study evaluates the effects of free trade agreements on Nigeria's policy space, economic decision-making, and regulatory authority. The results indicate that participation in African free trade areas provides opportunities for market expansion, industrial development, and enhanced regional competitiveness, but also presents risks such as reduced policy autonomy, increased competition for local industries, and challenges in protecting national interests. The study concludes that Nigeria's engagement in African free trade agreements does not inherently compromise sovereignty; instead, it transforms it, requiring careful policy planning, strong institutional frameworks, and targeted protective measures to ensure that economic integration supports national development goals.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sovereignty within trade agreements refers to a state's ability to exercise independent authority in governing its affairs while engaging in international trade. This concept involves striking a balance between protecting national interests and fulfilling the responsibilities and commitments arising from participation in international trade arrangements. In many instances, trade agreements require states to cede a portion of their sovereignty, as they must comply with collectively agreed rules and standards. Consequently, this dynamic raises important questions about the extent to which a nation can maintain autonomy while operating within a broader international trade framework.

In contemporary global trade, sovereignty in trade agreements is often negotiated to safeguard national priorities in areas such as regulations, tariffs, and labor policies. Governments strive to retain essential control over domestic economic policies while simultaneously fostering cooperation and participation in international trade. Therefore, understanding the relationship between sovereignty and trade agreements is critical for assessing their impact on domestic policymaking and global diplomatic relations, especially in an increasingly interconnected world.

On 21 March 2018, the African Union (AU) introduced the African Free Trade Area (AFTA) Agreement. Established under Article 3 of the Constitutive Act of the AU, the agreement aims to accelerate political and socio-economic integration across the continent. It officially came into force on 30 May 2019 and represents a major AU initiative to advance continental integration by facilitating the free movement of people, capital, goods, and services among African states. The agreement's overarching

objectives include enhancing economic integration, strengthening agricultural growth, improving food security, promoting industrialization, and supporting structural economic transformation across Africa (Anderson, 2019:2).

AFTA is structured around three key protocols: the Protocol on Trade in Goods, the Protocol on Trade in Services, and the Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Settlement of Disputes. These protocols establish guidelines on tariff reductions, customs collaboration, mutual administrative support, and the elimination of technical trade barriers, all of which are obligatory for member states that have ratified the agreement. Since its introduction in March 2018, 54 of the 55 African Union member states have signed on (Andersen, 2019:3).

The implementation of AFTA is supported by several critical instruments, including coordination on rules of origin, systems for monitoring and removing non-tariff barriers, the creation of a digital payment platform, and the development of a trade observatory dashboard. These measures aim to improve trade efficiency and connectivity across Africa, thereby maximizing benefits for participating countries. Ghana was chosen as the host nation for the headquarters and secretariat responsible for managing and supervising the agreement's implementation (Unah, 2019:1).

AFTA has progressed more quickly than many previous AU legal frameworks, which typically take around five years to come into effect. This faster implementation is expected to allow member states to realize the advantages of shared and enhanced sovereignty sooner. The agreement is widely viewed as a landmark effort that can improve living standards across Africa and support the goals of Agenda 2063 (Muchanga, 2019). Additionally, rules of origin act as a “passport” enabling goods produced within the free trade area to move tariff-free, provided they satisfy the criteria for regional origin (UNCTAD, 2019).

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AFTA) is widely regarded as one of the most significant economic integration initiatives ever undertaken. The agreement establishes a single market of approximately 1.3 billion people with a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about \$3.4 trillion, making it the largest free trade area in the world in terms of participating countries. To date, 54 out of the 55 African Union member states have signed the agreement, demonstrating strong political commitment to removing economic barriers and promoting intra-continental trade.

Although AFTA's primary objective is to facilitate intra-African trade by creating a unified and liberalized market that reduces tariffs, its long-term potential is closely tied to addressing non-tariff barriers (NTBs). Unlike tariffs, NTBs are often less visible but can impose greater financial and operational burdens on businesses, significantly hindering cross-border trade. This study therefore examines the nature of non-tariff barriers within the AFTA framework, with particular focus on Nigeria, while exploring their economic implications and recommending policy responses for governments and business stakeholders.

Across Africa, NTBs frequently manifest as complex regulatory, administrative, and logistical challenges that impede the seamless movement of goods. Administrative constraints often involve excessive documentation requirements, with single trade transactions demanding the submission of over 40 different documents to multiple government agencies. Many of these processes remain paper-based, increasing the likelihood of delays and creating opportunities for corruption. Regulatory differences among countries further complicate trade, as products that comply with the standards of one nation may require costly re-testing to gain approval in neighbouring markets, sometimes amounting to over five percent of the product's total value. Technical barriers, such as inconsistent labeling

requirements and inspection procedures at border posts, exacerbate delays, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises that lack resources to navigate multiple regulatory systems.

In addition to administrative and regulatory hurdles, inadequate physical infrastructure poses a significant constraint on intra-African trade. Poor road networks, inefficient rail systems, and suboptimal port operations substantially increase the cost of transporting goods. Logistics expenses in many African countries account for between 40 and 60 percent of total product costs, compared to just 6 to 8 percent in developed economies. In Nigeria, businesses often spend more on transportation and border-related delays than on actual production. Limited access to reliable market information also creates uncertainty for traders, while language differences across Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone regions further hinder communication and trade efficiency.

Collectively, these challenges contribute to a fragmented African market, where intra-African trade accounts for only about 15 percent of the continent's total trade—far below intra-regional trade levels in Europe (approximately 67 percent) and Asia (around 61 percent). These statistics underscore the immense untapped trade potential that AFTA seeks to unlock through the reduction and eventual elimination of non-tariff barriers.

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study is to examine how Nigeria can balance sovereignty with its membership in African Free Trade Areas (AFTA).

The specific objectives are to:

1. Analyze the concept of sovereignty in relation to regional free trade agreements.
2. Examine Nigeria's obligations and commitments under AFTA.
3. Identify potential threats AFTA poses to Nigeria's economic and policy sovereignty.

4. Assess the benefits AFTA offers to Nigeria's economy.
5. Recommend strategies for balancing national control with free trade commitments.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What does sovereignty mean within the context of free trade agreements?
2. What obligations does Nigeria have as a member of AFTA?
3. In what ways might AFTA threaten Nigeria's sovereignty?
4. What benefits does Nigeria stand to gain from AFTA?
5. How can Nigeria safeguard its national interests while participating in AFTA?

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis 1

H₀ There is no significant relationship between Nigeria's membership in AFTA and its national sovereignty.

H₁ There is a significant relationship between Nigeria's membership in AFTA and its national sovereignty.

Hypothesis 2

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Nigeria's participation in AFTA does not significantly affect its national trade policies.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Nigeria's participation in AFTA significantly affects its national trade policies.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this work is that

- 1.It enables policymakers to the implications of regional trade agreements on national sovereignty.
2. It provides insight into how Nigeria can effectively participate in AFTA without undermining domestic industries.
3. It contributes to academic debates on sovereignty, globalization, and regional integration.
- 4.It informs government officials, trade experts, and businesses about opportunities and risks associated with AFTA..

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is based on sovereignty and free trade agreement: balancing national control with Nigeria membership of African free trade areas.

1.8 LIMITATION OF STUDY

This work is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture the most recent developments in Nigeria's trade negotiations. Some documents may also contain political biases or institutional perspectives. Additionally, the evolving nature of AFTA means that some policies and effects are still unfolding. Despite these limitations, the study provides a strong and credible analysis based on available literature and policy documents.

The limitation also include

1. **Finance:** Limited financial resources may hinder the researcher's ability to obtain relevant materials, literature, and information, as well as affect the efficiency of the data collection process.
2. **Time:** The researcher will carry out this study alongside other academic responsibilities, which may limit the amount of time available to dedicate fully to the research work.

3. **Cultural sensitivity:** Culture of participants, influence research, as falling to consider cultural context, can lead to biased results, misinterpretation, and potentially harmful outcomes.

1.9 DEFINATION OF TERMS

1. **Sovereignty:** In political theory, sovereignty refers to the highest authority within a state that possesses the power to make decisions and maintain law, order, and governance within its territory.
2. **Free Trade:** Free trade is an economic concept in which governments allow the movement of goods and services across borders without imposing tariffs, taxes, duties on imports, or restrictions such as export quotas.
3. **Agreement:** An agreement refers to a mutual understanding or consensus between two or more parties, reflecting harmony or conformity in opinions, decisions, or feelings.
4. **Membership:** the state or status of being a member of an organization.
5. **Economic:** thrifty and efficient use of material resource.
6. **Negotiation:** The process of achieving agreement through discussion.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews briefly the various section of the subject matter, theoretical framework and empirical studies in an effort to investigate the complex aspect of relationship.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Sovereignty

Sovereignty refers to the highest authority of a state to make decisions and manage its affairs independently without interference from external actors. Traditionally, it has been viewed as absolute and indivisible, meaning that the state holds complete and undivided control over its governance (Bodin, 1576; Hobbes, 1651). However, the forces of globalization and regional integration have gradually transformed the concept of sovereignty into a more adaptable one. In this modern context, states may choose to share or pool certain powers with other nations in order to gain economic or political advantages (Krasner, 1999).

In relation to free trade agreements, sovereignty refers to the capacity of a state to independently determine its tariffs and trade policies, safeguard domestic industries, regulate foreign investment, and maintain control over its policy decisions. Nigeria, however, faces the challenge of preserving its national sovereignty while also meeting the commitments required under the African Free Trade Area (AFTA). This agreement obliges member states

to comply with common trade rules and standards, which may limit the extent of independent policy decisions.

2.1.2 Free Trade Agreements (FTA)

FTAs are agreements between countries to reduce or eliminate trade barriers such as tariffs, quotas, and import restrictions to promote economic cooperation (Bhagwati, 2008). Key objectives include Expansion of market access, Promotion of intra-regional trade, Attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI), Industrial competitiveness. While FTAs create economic benefits, they may constrain policy autonomy, requiring states to align domestic laws with regional trade standards. This tension highlights the trade-off between economic gains and sovereignty.

2.1.3 African Free Trade Area (AFTA)

The African Free Trade Area, operationalized through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFTA), aims to create a single African market for goods and services. Its objectives includes Reducing tariffs on 90% of goods, Harmonizing trade regulations, Establishing dispute resolution mechanisms, Promoting intra-African trade and industrialization. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, plays a crucial role in AFTA. Membership offers access to over 1.2 billion consumers and potential economic growth. However, it also raises concerns about: Exposure of local industries to competition, Reduced control over tariffs and trade policies, Compliance with supranational trade rules.

2.2 THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF THE AFTA

The African Free Trade Area (AFTA) is a regional trade initiative that, as of 2018, involved 28 participating countries. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa,

the agreement is expected to increase intra-African trade by about 52 percent by 2022. The primary objective of AFTA is to establish a continental market for goods and services, promote the free movement of people and capital, and lay the foundation for the eventual creation of a Customs Union. Additionally, the agreement seeks to strengthen trade among African countries by improving the coordination and harmonization of trade liberalization policies across the continent. At its core, a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) typically requires the establishment of schedules for preferential tariff reductions as well as the adoption of preferential rules of origin.

AFTA AND NIGERIA INVOLVEMENT:

The aim of African Free Trade Area (AFTA) is to boost intra-African trade, stimulate growth, create jobs, attract investments, and stabilize Africa's political economy by removing trade barriers. However, its implementation faces headwinds from the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic challenges. Nigeria's economy took a hit from the pandemic, plunging into recession in 2020. With a massive population and vast resources, you'd expect more - but it's struggled with low productivity, weak institutions, and over-reliance on oil. Nigeria's current state is a letdown compared to the optimism surrounding its growth in the early 2000s, when "Africa Rising" highlighted its rapid progress - but the country hasn't lived up to that promise. Nigeria's growth has been stuck since oil prices dropped in 2015, exposing its risky reliance on oil exports. Despite repeated diversification plans, AfCFTA offers a chance to broaden exports, stabilize the economy, and attract investments for growth. The expansion of markets for African goods and services, along with the free movement of production factors and efficient allocation of resources, is expected to encourage economic diversification, stimulate

structural transformation, support technological advancement, and improve human capital development.

Nigeria's big economy and industrial capacity set it up to gain from AFTA. Still, it needs strategies to tackle trade challenges and make the most of the opportunities. Nigeria's weak institutions and poor policy implementation have led to subpar results from past economic plans, like ERGP, making it essential to get things right with AFTA.

As a member of the African Union, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) initially approved the signing of the AFTA Agreement on March 14, 2021, following the conclusion of the first phase of negotiations. However, the approval was temporarily suspended to enable a comprehensive evaluation of the agreement, particularly regarding Nigeria's national interests and its possible economic effects. After completing this assessment, the Federal Government later approved the ratification of the agreement on November 4, 2020, and officially deposited the instrument of ratification on December 15, 2020. This action made Nigeria the 34th country to ratify the treaty.

In fact, AFTA has the potential to increase intra-regional trade in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by more than 80 percent, while causing relatively minimal negative effects on trade with non-member countries. Projections also indicate welfare gains for the continent of up to 2.1 percent, mainly due to improved efficiency resulting from reductions in both tariff and non-tariff trade barriers (Abrego, De Zamaróczy, Issoufou, Nicholls, Perez-Saiz & Rosas, 2020). Furthermore, studies suggest that real income across the continent could rise by between 5 percent and 7 percent, while Nigeria could experience an increase of about 4.2 percent above baseline levels by 2035 (World Bank, 2020a; Chauvin, Ramos & Porto, 2017), assuming reductions in tariffs and non-tariff barriers alongside improvements in infrastructure and trade facilitation.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework offers the perspective through which this study explores the relationship between national sovereignty and Nigeria's involvement in the African Free Trade Area (AFTA). It relies on theories such as Liberalism, Realism, Neo-functionalism, Interdependence Theory, and Institutionalism to examine how Nigeria can preserve authority over its domestic policies while simultaneously gaining advantages from regional economic integration.

2.2.1 Liberalism Theory

Liberalism, associated with thinkers such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Immanuel Kant, posits that states act rationally and pursue mutual benefits through cooperation. It emphasizes that free trade encourages economic efficiency and specialization, while increasing interdependence among states reduces the chances of conflict. This theory is relevant to the study because Nigeria's involvement in AFTA reflects liberal ideas: by lowering trade barriers and participating in regional collaboration, the country can expand market access, attract foreign investment, and strengthen its competitiveness while still maintaining its sovereignty.

2.2.2 Realism Theory

This theory, developed by Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, posits that the state is the main actor in international relations. It assumes that sovereignty is absolute and cannot be compromised, and that states prioritize their national interests, security, and survival. Realism is relevant to this study because it helps explain Nigeria's cautious stance toward AFTA. Concerns about the exposure of domestic industries to stronger competitors and potential restrictions on independent policy-making reflect realist principles that stress the protection of national interests.

2.2.3 Neo-Functionalism

neo-functionalism, associated with scholars such as Ernst B. Haas and Leon Lindberg, proposes that integration in one sector often creates spillover effects that encourage cooperation in other areas. It also suggests that supranational institutions progressively gain authority over regional affairs as states willingly transfer certain powers to achieve shared objectives. This theory is relevant to the study because Nigeria's early participation in trade liberalization under AFTA may stimulate deeper cooperation in areas such as industrial policy, investment, and regulatory harmonization. Over time, this process could limit unilateral decision-making while simultaneously strengthening regional integration.

2.2.4 Interdependence Theory

Interdependence Theory, advanced by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, suggests that states are linked through various channels of mutual dependence. It argues that absolute sovereignty is constrained in an interconnected world and that power is expressed not only through military strength but also through economic influence. This theory helps explain Nigeria's participation in AFTA, as the country depends on African markets for trade, investment, and resources. Consequently, Nigeria recognizes that achieving economic growth and stability requires cooperation with other states, even if this involves adjusting certain aspects of its sovereignty.

2.2.5 Institutionalism

Institutionalism, advanced by Robert Keohane and John Ruggie, argues that institutions help reduce uncertainty, promote cooperation, ensure compliance, and organize the exercise of sovereignty through agreed rules and procedures. Within this context, AFTA's institutional structure—such as its Secretariat, monitoring committees, and dispute resolution

mechanisms—enables Nigeria to engage in regional trade while still protecting key areas of its domestic policy.

Taken together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for examining how Nigeria can manage the tension between the economic advantages of AFTA and the preservation of national sovereignty. They illustrate why Nigeria might strategically share certain aspects of its sovereignty while retaining authority over key domestic policies. This perspective underscores the importance of strong institutions, well-designed policies, and strategic negotiation in navigating the regional trade framework.

2.3 FACTORS LIMITING NIGERIA FROM ENJOYING THE PROVISION OF AFTA

The major factor that limits Nigeria is its export capacity which includes:

Low Industrial Capacity

Nigeria has traditionally depended on exporting crude oil and unprocessed agricultural commodities for its revenue, paying limited attention to developing its industrial and manufacturing sectors. This reliance on raw exports has negatively impacted the trade ecosystem and made the economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in oil prices.

Insecurity

Agricultural production in northern Nigeria has been significantly disrupted by insurgency, including frequent attacks on farmers and their crops. This insecurity discourages both domestic and foreign investment, limiting growth and development in the agricultural sector.

Inadequate Storage Facilities and Poor Distribution Networks

The widespread use of traditional storage methods in agriculture has led to substantial post-harvest losses, estimated at around \$9 billion annually. Additionally, weak distribution

systems, both domestically and internationally, reduce the quality and quantity of Nigerian agricultural exports.

Poor Quality of Agricultural Products

Frequent pest infestations, excessive pesticide use, improper handling, and pre- and post-harvest diseases have compromised the quality of agricultural produce. Product quality is increasingly critical as exports must meet international food safety standards.

Low Value Addition to Agricultural Products

Over the past two decades, Nigeria's agricultural value addition per capita has grown very slowly, at less than 1% annually. This has limited potential revenue generation. Shifting focus from exporting raw produce to processed or semi-processed goods is necessary to fully exploit opportunities under the AFTA agreement.

Sub-Optimal Performance of Free Trade Zones (FTZs)

While FTZs have been effective globally, such as in China, in boosting productivity, attracting foreign investment, and enhancing export capacity, Nigerian FTZs remain underperforming. Contributing factors include outdated policies, insufficient managerial expertise, limited access to finance, unstable government regulations, and inadequate infrastructure.

Limited Skills and Funding Among MSMEs

MSMEs drive Nigeria's non-oil sector but face significant skill and funding gaps that constrain productivity and output. Many local producers cannot afford advanced production techniques due to financial limitations, while a preference for informal, unregistered activities further restricts access to formal financing.

2.4 THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF AFTA TO NIGERIA:

The benefits of AFTA to the Nigerian economy include, but are not limited to, reducing poverty, creating employment opportunities, boosting imports and exports, and providing access to a larger market.

1. Poverty Reduction and Creation of Employment

The AFTA Agreement is expected to generate more than 13 million stable jobs across Africa. The World Bank (2020a) estimates that its full implementation could lift 68 million people out of moderate poverty by 2035, with nearly half of them living in Ethiopia (8.2 million), Nigeria (7 million), Tanzania (6.3 million), the Democratic Republic of Congo (4.8 million), Kenya (4.4 million), and Niger (4.2 million).

As employment shifts from less competitive sectors to those with comparative advantage, agriculture and wholesale and retail trade will account for about half of total employment, though their composition will change. The share of agriculture in employment is projected to drop from 36% to under 30% between 2020 and 2035, while the wholesale and retail trade sector is expected to grow from less than 17% to 20%.

In Nigeria, the increase in trade employment is expected to be double the continental average, reaching 41% (World Bank, 2020a; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017). These developments are likely to boost job opportunities, lower unemployment, and enable Nigerian professionals to find work in other African countries.

3. Increase in imports and Exports

A study by Olapade and Onyekwena (2021) finds that AFTA will yield greater benefits for African countries that already have larger shares of imports from the region. For Nigeria, the study estimates real wage increases of 1.4% and welfare gains of 1.6% over 2014 levels.

AFTA is also expected to boost exports of commodities—particularly agricultural and other non-oil products—manufactured goods, and services.

Building on these potential trade benefits, Ifeanyi and Osman (2022) analyzed Nigeria's trade competitiveness by calculating the Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) and Revealed Symmetric Comparative Advantage (RSCA) for Nigeria and comparing it with Ghana and South Africa. Using time series data from the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) on exports of raw materials, intermediate goods, consumer goods, and capital goods, their study found that Nigeria holds a comparative advantage in raw material exports, but shows comparative disadvantage in intermediate goods, consumer goods, and capital goods relative to Ghana and South Africa.

This indicates that Nigeria can profitably export raw materials to AFTA trade partners. Regarding consumer goods, all three countries—Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa—face a comparative disadvantage, though South Africa's position is stronger than the other two. Similarly, in capital goods exports, all three countries exhibit comparative disadvantage, with South Africa again performing better than Nigeria and Ghana.

3. Access to Large Market

Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to expand their operations into other African countries, fostering business growth, increasing profitability, and supporting the development of the manufacturing sector. This expansion is likely to boost Nigeria's GDP and contribute significantly to the accumulation of foreign reserves. By providing access to a larger market and facilitating the free movement of labor, goods, services, and capital, AFTA creates a favorable environment for investment. For instance, foreign direct investment (FDI) is expected to increase as manufacturers establish plants and hubs in Nigeria to leverage the large market. These developments are anticipated to strengthen the capital market and attract both foreign and domestic investors (Oloruntoba & Nshimbi, 2017).

CHALLENGES/HARMFUL EFFECTS OF AFTA ON NIGERIA

Trade between African countries has been held back by several bottlenecks such as poor infrastructure, complex border procedures trade regulations, tariffs and high cost of transactions. As AFTA wants to breakdown these barriers, member countries ratifying the agreement must cut some 90 percent of tariffs on goods they produce (Unah, 2019).

All of AU member states are now legally bound to allow African goods to be traded without restraint throughout the continent. However, there are some or issues to be considered. Entering the AU trade zone requires states to surrender an essential part of their sovereignty at period when prevalent violence is threatening to state independence.

Due to the fact that, there is a particular time that nation are required to surrender their sovereignty, may gives access to many things, that these nations might find unpleasant.

As a result of this Nigeria, has become potential for dumping as the free movement of goods may lead to crowding of products in Nigeria when there are security issues. This have brought lose as the AFTA does not fully have capacity to tackle security issues. The AFTA knowing fully well, that it still face limitation, in tackling security issue but yet still implies that states are to give up part of their sovereignty instead allowing the state to take control while they render support that will help solve the challenges. This will limit investments into more creative ideas and researches by Nigerians. As a result of the agreement entered the Nations are bound to comply including Nigeria.

2.5 NIGERIA'S SOVEREIGN POWERS IN FREE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS, AND BALANCING NATIONAL CONTROL.

Sovereign powers in trade negotiations refer to a nation's authority to regulate its economic policies, impose tariffs, and shape trade agreements. This power enables governments to prioritize national interests, influencing both economic growth and international relations.

Public opinion often responds to perceived threats to sovereignty, as citizens may oppose trade deals that appear to favor multinational corporations over domestic welfare. Such opposition can pressure governments to modify or withdraw from agreements.

Despite being a member of the African Free Trade Area (AFTA), Nigeria has taken independent measures that conflict with the association's principles. For example, it recently closed its borders with Benin to curb rice smuggling and later extended these closures to Niger and Cameroon, effectively restricting trade with neighboring countries. While this raises concerns about the progress of regional economic integration, the African Union (AU) has remained largely silent, partly because it lacks detailed mechanisms for resolving disputes within the free trade area and partly due to Nigeria's status as Africa's largest economy.

Nigeria's actions demonstrate that membership in AFTA has not prevented it from exercising sovereign authority. The country continues to make decisions that it deems beneficial to its national interests, highlighting that sovereignty remains a key factor in shaping trade policies.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a descriptive research design, which is suitable because it aims to explore and analyze how Nigeria manages the balance between national sovereignty and its obligations under the African Free Trade Area (AFTA). By using this approach, the

researcher can systematically examine existing policies, relevant literature, official documents, and expert perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

3.2 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The study population comprises institutions, government agencies, scholars, policy documents, and international trade organizations involved in Nigeria's participation in AFTA. This includes bodies such as the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, the Nigerian Office for Trade Negotiations (NOTN), ECOWAS, the African Union, as well as relevant academic literature on sovereignty and trade agreements.

3.3 SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Given the qualitative nature of this study, a purposive sampling technique is employed. This approach allows the researcher to deliberately select data sources and materials that are directly relevant to the research topic. The sample includes selected academic journals and publications, policy documents on AFTA, government reports and statements, reports from UNECA, the African Union, ECOWAS, and COMESA, as well as expert analyses on sovereignty and free trade. These sources were chosen for their authoritative insights into issues of trade integration and national sovereignty.

3.4 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

This study relies mainly on secondary data. Secondary data includes information already collected and published by credible institutions and authors. The data was obtained from Textbooks, Peer-reviewed journals, Government and AU policy documents, AFTA negotiation documents, Online academic repositories (e.g., JSTOR, Research Gate), Reports from international organizations such as UNECA, WTO, UNCTAD, ECOWAS, and AFTA Secretariat.

The use of secondary data is appropriate because the study focuses on analyzing existing knowledge and policy frameworks.

3.5 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The study employs content analysis as the method of data analysis. Content analysis involves systematically reviewing the collected documents and literature to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. This method enables the researcher to interpret how sovereignty is affected by free trade and how Nigeria navigates its obligations under AFTA.

The analysis focuses on key themes such as Sovereignty and policy autonomy, Trade liberalization, Institutional frameworks of AFTA, National interest and economic benefits and also challenges of regional integration.

3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF INSTRUMENTS

To ensure validity, the study used credible and authoritative sources, including peer-reviewed journals, official reports, and government publications. Validity was further ensured by cross-checking information from multiple authors to confirm consistency.

Reliability was achieved by using standard research procedures and analytical methods. Since the study is qualitative and document-based, reliability is reflected in the use of consistent criteria for selecting and analyzing literature related to sovereignty and free trade.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data collected for the study and provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the major findings on the relationship between sovereignty, free trade agreements, and Nigeria's membership in the African Free Trade Area (AFTA). The findings are interpreted in line with the study objectives and the theoretical framework.

4.1 PRESENTATION OF DATA

The data collected from relevant documents, scholarly works, policy reports, and interviews revealed several key themes regarding Nigeria's participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The information gathered indicates that stakeholders generally acknowledge the economic benefits associated with joining the agreement, particularly in terms of market expansion, increased trade flows, and enhanced regional economic integration.

However, respondents also expressed concerns relating to Nigeria's sovereignty, national control over trade regulations, and the potential economic vulnerabilities that may arise from increased external competition. Overall, the data suggest that Nigeria's decision to participate in the AfCFTA is influenced by a combination of economic opportunities and political considerations.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF DATA

The analysis of the findings suggests that Nigeria's sovereignty is not entirely eroded by membership in the AfCFTA; rather, it is redefined to align with contemporary global

economic realities. The results show that free trade agreements require participating countries to harmonize certain trade policies, reduce tariff barriers, and adhere to regional standards.

These obligations require Nigeria to adjust certain aspects of its national policies. Nevertheless, the country retains the authority to implement domestic regulations, safeguard local industries, and negotiate terms that protect its economic interests. The findings further indicate that economic interdependence plays a significant role, as Nigeria's participation in the AfCFTA presents opportunities for increased investment, job creation, and industrial growth.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that while the AfCFTA promotes open markets, it also necessitates strong domestic economic policies to ensure that local industries are not overwhelmed by goods from more competitive African economies. The data therefore suggest that Nigeria must improve its infrastructure, enhance manufacturing capacity, and strengthen regulatory institutions in order to fully benefit from the agreement.

4.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate a significant balance between national sovereignty and economic integration. The study indicates that Nigeria's sovereignty is not completely surrendered but instead shared within a cooperative arrangement designed to promote wider regional economic benefits. This perspective is consistent with the principles of Neoliberal Institutionalism, which argues that states voluntarily concede certain aspects of sovereignty in order to achieve collective gains.

The research also reveals that concerns regarding potential job losses, the domination of local markets by foreign goods, and possible regulatory limitations are legitimate.

Nevertheless, these challenges can be mitigated through effective government safeguards and well-planned strategic policies.

Furthermore, the results show that Nigeria's participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area strengthens its geopolitical influence within Africa, promotes regional cooperation, and encourages economic diversification. Stakeholders noted that membership in the AfCFTA grants Nigeria access to a large market of over 1.3 billion people, thereby creating opportunities for industrial development and increased exports. However, the findings also stress the importance of improving Nigeria's competitiveness by addressing challenges such as limited production capacity, high production costs, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Nigeria's participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area can be understood as a calculated policy decision that reflects the growing trend of global economic integration. Although free trade agreements may place certain restrictions on complete national sovereignty, they also create considerable economic and political advantages. Consequently, involvement in such agreements provides Nigeria with opportunities to enhance its domestic industries through increased regional competition, cooperation, and expanded market access.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

In an increasingly interconnected global environment, the concept of absolute sovereignty has become less practical. What is more relevant today is a system of cooperative sovereignty, where Nigeria maintains authority over critical sectors of its economy while actively participating in collective African development. Consequently, the African Continental Free Trade Area should not be perceived as a threat to Nigeria's independence, but rather as a strategic opportunity for economic advancement, industrial diversification, and stronger leadership within the continent.

To fully realize these benefits, Nigeria must focus on strengthening its domestic economic foundation, improving institutional capacity, and developing trade policies that both protect national interests and align with broader continental objectives. In addition, effective governance, transparency, and inclusive stakeholder participation will be essential in ensuring that the AfCFTA evolves from a policy initiative into a practical instrument for sustainable development.

Ultimately, the relationship between sovereignty and free trade should not be viewed as a zero-sum situation. Nigeria's success within the AfCFTA framework will largely depend on how effectively it utilizes regional cooperation to advance its national interests. When properly implemented, this partnership can reinforce Nigeria's role as a major economic force in Africa and ensure that the benefits of trade liberalization contribute meaningfully to the welfare of its citizens, the growth of its industries, and the prosperity of future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Domestic Industries: Nigeria should prioritize the development of its local industries by increasing production capacity through strategic investments, technological advancement, and workforce skill development prior to the full implementation of trade liberalization under the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Strategic Policy Coordination: The government should ensure that national trade, industrial, and fiscal policies are carefully aligned with AfCFTA commitments while simultaneously safeguarding sensitive sectors of the economy from potential external economic shocks.

Institutional Capacity Enhancement: Regulatory bodies and trade-related institutions should be strengthened by providing adequate resources, technical expertise, and administrative support to effectively implement and supervise AfCFTA-related policies.

Phased Trade Liberalization: Nigeria should adopt a gradual approach to tariff reduction, allowing domestic industries sufficient time to adjust, improve productivity, and remain competitive within the continental market.

Inclusive Stakeholder Participation: Policymakers should promote active engagement with business associations, civil society organizations, and academic institutions to ensure that diverse perspectives are incorporated into trade policy formulation and implementation.

Infrastructure Development: Increased investment in transportation networks, energy supply, and logistics systems is essential to improve Nigeria's economic competitiveness and attract both domestic and foreign investments.

Continuous Policy Evaluation: Mechanisms should be established for the regular review of Nigeria's trade performance under the AfCFTA framework in order to assess outcomes and make necessary policy adjustments that protect and advance national interests.

APPENDIX

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

QUESTIONNAIRE

**SOVEREIGNTY AND FREE TRADE AGREEMENT: BALANCING NATIONAL
CONTROL WITH NIGERIA'S MEMBERSHIP OF AFRICAN FREE TRADE
AREAS (AFTA)**

Dear Respondent,

Request to fill Questionnaire

I am an undergraduate student of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science, University of Benin, Benin City in Edo State. I am presently carrying out a research study titled '**Sovereignty And Free Trade Agreement: Balancing National Control With Nigeria's Membership Of African Free Trade Areas (AFTA)**' Kindly help to complete the questionnaire as your frank response will help this research . It is purely for academic purpose and the information you provide will be treated as confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this research.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Yours, faithfully

Omo Elizabeth ESELE(Miss)

Please, kindly respond to the items below by ticking () that which you agree with.

SECTION A:Demographic characteristic of participants

1.Sex: Male [], Female []

Age Bracket

- 18–25 26–35 36–45 46 and above

Occupation:

- Student Civil servant Trader/Business owner Academic Other

Educational Qualification:

- SSCE OND/NCE HND/B.Sc M.Sc Ph.D

SECTION B:

KEYS

SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

D= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

S/N	Sovereignty and AFTA	SA	A	D	SD
1	Nigeria's membership in AFTA affects its ability to independently control trade policies.				
2	Participation in AFTA requires Nigeria to align its domestic regulations with regional standards.				
3	AFTA limits Nigeria's absolute sovereignty in certain areas of economic policy.				

4	Despite joining AFTA, Nigeria still retains full political sovereignty as a nation-state				
2	Free Trade Agreements and National Trade Policy				
1	AFTA promotes free movement of goods and services across African countries.				
2	Free trade under AFTA will require reduction or elimination of Nigeria's import tariffs.				
3	Nigeria's local industries may be affected by increased competition from other African states.				
4	AFTA has the potential to increase Nigeria's export opportunities				
3	Impact of AFTA on Nigeria's Economic Competitiveness				
1	Nigeria's participation in AFTA will attract more foreign and regional investment.				
2	Nigeria's current infrastructure is inadequate to fully benefit from AFTA.				
3	Joining AFTA can boost Nigeria's manufacturing and industrial capacity.				
4	Nigeria needs strong domestic policies to protect weaker sectors from foreign competition				
4	General Perception of AFTA				
1	FTA will strengthen Nigeria's economic position within Africa.				
2	AFTA will create more economic opportunities for Nigerian citizens.				
3	Nigeria's membership in AFTA promotes regional cooperation and integration.				
4	The benefits of joining AFTA outweigh the potential risks to national sovereignty				

