



# Comparative Analysis of the European Union and the United States of America Democracy Promotion Strategies in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Amrobo Enemuwe<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract:

This research addresses the question of external efforts to promote democracy in Nigeria. Samuel Huntington observed that the ‘Third Wave’ of democracy catalysed a rise in global democracies following the 1970s, notably influencing sub-Saharan Africa by the century’s close. It is essential to recognize that many African countries, including Nigeria, face considerable challenges arising from the dominance of authoritarian governments and the variety of ethno-religious divisions rooted in colonial history. In the wake of numerous elections since 1999, Nigeria continues to grapple with the complexities of democratic consolidation, contending challenges such as electoral malpractice and human rights violations. By utilizing a comparative case study methodology to explore the parallels and distinctions between the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), the analysis revealed that despite a notable convergence in the dual strategies adopted by both actors—striking a balance between democratic principles and geostrategic concerns such as security, socio-economic development and migration and insufficient funding for democracy-related initiatives—this impedes any substantial advancement in democratic development in Nigeria. Consequently, this research contributes to understanding the dynamics of external democracy promotion in Africa. This research contributes theoretically by examining the interplay between democratic principles and geostrategic priorities in external democracy promotion, and empirically by revealing how the dual strategies of the US and EU—marked by insufficient funding and competing interests—hinder democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

## Keywords:

EU-Nigeria; USA; Democracy Promotion; Election Observation.

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<sup>2</sup> PhD Student, Department of Political Science, Idaho State University, USA; ORCID: 0009-0002-3143-2618; christopheramrobo@isu.edu/christopherenemuwe@gmail.com.

## 1. Introduction

The ‘Third Wave’ of democracy, according to Samuel Huntington, which began in the 1970s, saw a worldwide increase in democracies following the collapse of Soviet communism and the conclusion of the Cold War, resulting in notable democratic transitions across areas including Latin America, Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa (Saka et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the democratization process in Africa has unfolded in diverse manners, leading to a confluence of distinct paths, trajectories, and results. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, countries across Africa, from Ghana in the West to Idi Amin’s Uganda in the East, experienced the imposition of authoritarian regimes that stifled democratic governance, curtailed freedom of expression, restricted the right to associate, and undermined private property rights. The disintegration of communism, the reunification of Germany, and the progression of democratic principles in Eastern and Central Europe during the 1990s sparked a revitalized enthusiasm for global democratic ideals. Additionally, there was a significant transformation in the perception of security that arose following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which effectively undermined the previously prevailing hard-power framework focused on military confrontation throughout the 1990s (Amirah-Fernandez & Menendez, 2009). This transformation has cultivated a setting that promotes the enhancement of democratic principles in Africa, which has emerged as a central aim for Western governments, notably the United States (US) and the European Union (EU).

Over the past three decades, the advance of re-democratization in sub-Saharan Africa, which started in the 1990s, has been limited by new challenges in civilian administrations (Lindberg, 2009; Adejumobi, 2010). These include incumbents’ threats to overturn constitutional rule on term limits, arrogate more executive powers, and even electoral malpractices and corruption. These can be identified by any ardent student of international democracy monitoring performed by international and nongovernmental institutions such as the Freedom House, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), and the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP). For example, the EIU indicates that fewer than 8% of the global population resides in a full democracy. In contrast, nearly 40% are subjected to authoritarian governance—a proportion that has gradually increased in recent years, influenced by macroeconomic factors, escalating conflicts worldwide, and the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (EIU, 2023). However, it is important to note significant variations in governance performance among African countries owing to the different criteria of democratic and autocratic quality employed by different state-level, multistate levels, and international organizations that assess democracy in countries.

Several countries have demonstrated progress in several areas, including ritualistic endeavours to organize credible elections, the transfer of power between two administrations, the improvement of the multiparty system, the enlargement of political and civil space with improved adherence to human rights and the rule of law, the growth of vibrant media, and moderate economic advancement (Adejumobi, 2010).

Despite initial hope, Nigeria proved *sui generis* in its democratic experiment (Ajayi & Ojo, 2014), compounded ethno-religious chauvinism that culminated as an effect of the grim 1967-70 civil war. The development of democracy in the country is hindered by various factors, including its colonial history, deep-rooted ethnic division, ineffective leadership, military intervention in the democratic process, electoral fraud, widespread poverty, human rights violations, and literacy level differentials (Onukiowa & Agbibo, 2014; Oni, 2014). Electoral fraud exacerbates ethnic conflict, institutional degradation, and political instability (Erameh et al., 2021). In contrast to Ghana, which boasts a total freedom score of 80—indicating a free society—Nigeria is classified as partly free, with a significantly lower score of 44.<sup>1</sup> Despite conducting seven general elections since 1999, Nigeria still faces similar difficulties in consolidating democratic gains, particularly in the electoral aspect (Oladipo, 2016).

The situation in Nigeria, characterised by violence, corruption, human rights violations, and electoral irregularities during elections, suggests a heightened susceptibility to misconduct within its democratic framework (Obi, 2004; Uwazuruike, 2020). This underscores the critical need for external assistance to mitigate the abuse of state institutions and the suppression of democratic processes, mainly from Nigeria's development partners, such as the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (US). Despite the importance of the US and EU democracy promotion, which have arguably endeavoured to cultivate democratic governance in Nigeria through a multifaceted strategy, utilising various tools to advance democracy, existing literature has failed to comprehensively compile and compare the methods of Western actors such as the EU and the US often erroneously summing both actors' strategies within an assumed western hegemonic lens. This study aims to fill the literature gap by showing similarities and differences in promoting democracy by the US and EU, which offers readers from all backgrounds an understanding of how and why both actors promote democracy in Nigeria.

It is worth noting that the US and the EU regard Nigeria's democratisation as an essential geostrategic advantage, given its importance to their African foreign policy aims. Nevertheless, they face a dilemma between maintaining a value-based foreign policy approach and one driven by material geostrategic interests such as security, mineral exploration, trade, and migration. By examining the strategies of the US and EU democracy promotion in Nigeria, this study contributes to understanding democracy promotion in the Global South and demonstrates how foreign actors can facilitate democracy development. The study will be conducted in five separate phases. After this introductory section, section 2 will examine the literature on democracy promotion and global peace. This study does not include a section on the history of bilateral relations such as Nigeria-US or Nigeria-EU or even triangular relations (Nigeria-US-EU) because of the extensive coverage of these topics in the literature. Sections 3 and 4 provide an explanation of the methods utilised in this study and a comparative analysis of the EU and the US promoting democracy in Nigeria, respectively. Section 5 provides some concluding remarks on the study.

## 2. Theorizing democracy promotion and global peace

In his 2008 Claude Ake Memorial Lecture, Cyril Obi stated that democracy is “the only game in town” (Obi, 2008:7), a concept that, while appealing, is often complex and varies in interpretation. There is a broad literature on democracy, ranging from the debate on its definition and origin to its typologies.<sup>2</sup> Research indicates that democracy embodies self-governance in people’s interest, reflecting a collective socio-political identity (Morlina, 2004; Fahner, 2017). In this study, democracy generally refers to a governance system where citizens can influence state affairs directly or through elected representatives, emphasizing constitutional rights and the public’s role (Gillin, 1919). This notion asserts that the leaders of a polity must seek consent from the governed, a fundamental aspect of democratic practice.

Previous research has established that a belief in an extant global democratic peace phenomenon is increasingly gaining acceptance among Western leaders, not just in academia (Kahl, 1998; Gleditsch, 1997). The global promulgation of democracy emphasizes the need for ‘international peace’ by aligning with the reinforcement of economic interdependence and international institutions (Placek, 2012:1). Such an active propagation of the *gospel of democracy* using political and development aid tends to take a formidable 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, why they use a cost-benefit approach to understand the incentives of both donors and recipients (Tan, 2020). By democracy foreign policies, I refer to states that imbibe democracy promotion as an important aspect of external engagement abroad, such as the US and the EU.

The 1945 United Nations (UN) Charter, specifically in Article 2(3), states that “All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.” This provision underscores the enduring significance emphasized by democratic peace theorists, who argue that an increase in the number of democracies will facilitate the resolution of disputes through nonmilitary compromises, ultimately leading to peace (Reiter, 2001). This perspective highlights the belief that democracies are less likely to engage in armed conflict with one another, thereby promoting a more stable international order and peace (Huntington, 1997; Russett, 2019).

Over the past thirty years since 1991, 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 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 such as the 9/11 attacks in the US (Gat, 2005), the rise of globalism (Hambleton et al., 2003), the advent of the internet (Thornton, 2001) and the new understanding of what security entails (Amirah-Fernandez & Menendez, 2009). 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 (Diamond, 1992) and states' foreign policies and aids support for their analysis. Kant's essay on perpetual peace provides a utilitarian explanation for the current democratic peace, suggesting that peace in democracies is due to the behaviour of individual people (Wolff & Wurm, 2011:79; Mello, 2014).

Democracy promotion has been the most essential element of the foreign policy of many developed Western countries (Saka et al., 2015; Youngs, 2001; Khakee, 2007; Goldgeier & McFaul, 2003). Most of the literature indicates that Western governments use their foreign policy and aid to promote and foster democracy in developing countries to ensure 'global peace.' Although this is a debatable realm, foreign policymakers have used the concept of global peace to divide the world into opposing blocs based on democratic and non-democratic characteristics as part of a hegemonic agenda to promote democracy and create a 'safer' global environment (Parmar, 2013:231). In alignment with the extensive literature on promoting democracy, the democratic peace thesis has evolved into a credible framework for addressing national security concerns, transcending its origins as merely an academic concept (Parmar, 2013; Kazmierski, 2011; Burnell, 2013).

Wolff & Wurm (2011) noted that a significant area that has not been thoroughly investigated is the need to understand 'democracy promotion' as a goal and tactic of democratic foreign policy. This involves integrating empirical studies on democracy promotion into theoretical frameworks of international relations rather than domestic political discourse. Thus, Hazel Anne Smith's argument regarding the lack of international democratic theory clarifies the link between democracy, democratization, and global governance (Smith, 2000). Before the twenty-first century, limited research was conducted to formulate theories regarding the support of democracy on an international scale. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, discussions focused on elucidating the concepts of 'democracy' and 'peace' as they pertain to the theoretical underpinnings of the democratic peace thesis, given that the promotion of democracy was perceived to have a significant relationship with the creation of a global democratic peace (Amirah-Fernandez & Menendez, 2009).

The nexus between peace, democracy, and security that surfaced in the 1990s reshaped the global push for democracy, intrinsically linked to the Western hegemonic order established after the Second World War. This relationship underscores how the promotion of democratic values has been influenced by the geopolitical dynamics of a unipolar world, particularly in the context of American *forwardness* in foreign policy and its implications for international stability. Any theoretical endeavour should be based on mechanisms such as the 'logic,' 'targets,' and 'pathways' of influence through which different democracy promotion policies of developed countries impact the domestic political change of developing or 'fledgling' democracies (Wolff & Wurm, 2011).

Gisselquist, Nino-Zarazua, and Samarin (2021) highlight in their systematic review of the impact of aid on democratic development that Thomas Carothers, a prominent American scholar in international democracy support, identifies two existing approaches to democratization: political and developmental approaches. The political approach, particularly linked to US democracy assistance, is based on a limited understanding of democracy that emphasizes elections and political and civil rights. Democratization is conceptualized as a political struggle wherein democrats strive to surpass nondemocrats within society; in contrast, the developmental approach, which is linked primarily to European democracy assistance, adopts a more expansive definition of democracy (Gisselquist et al., 2021). This perspective includes considerations of equality and justice, viewing democratization as a gradual, iterative transformation process involving a complex interplay of political and socioeconomic developments (Young, 2003).

One challenge with external democracy promotion in the literature is the inability to draw broad conclusions on its exact effect on the receiving countries, even though one of the crucial effects of externalizing democracy is to socialize political elites to act through democratic norms (Mello, 2014) and to avoid conflict with one another (Layne, 2014) to achieve peace. Nonetheless, democracy promotion is a pivotal international political phenomenon that prompted Wolff and Wurm (2011) to argue that whether a state should prioritize promoting democracy depends on the level of demand for or lack thereof, echoing influential nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), interest groups, and public opinion.

In places where civil conflicts threaten state stability, one study suggested that countries experiencing tumultuous and violent conflicts, particularly those in Africa, should adopt a minimalist approach during their transition to peace. This approach involves implementing specific electoral procedures and constitutional designs, including a clear separation of powers and power-sharing arrangements to achieve lasting peace (Watts, 2016). Even though it is as old as the democracy peace thesis, this way of thinking about constructing a relevance of the activities of democratic promotion by actors such as the US or Europe dates to liberal internationalism within-state interactions since World War 2, as shown above (Moravcsik, 1997; Legro & Moravcsik, 2014; Layne, 2006). It is also consistent with recent thinking in the search for why to engage in democracy promotion in the first place, sometimes coercing state actors of other countries (preferably considered '*nondemocracies*') into democratic acceptance at their own risk (Gisselquist et al., 2021).

Past research on foreign democracy promotion in the Middle East suggests that the negative impact of American democracy promotion has led to societal destruction. The terrible events in Libya and Iraq perplex residents in donor and recipient countries and global political analysts. Muhammad Ijaz Latif and Hussain Abbas's analysis indicated that the George Walker Bush administration's emphasis on the Middle East for democracy promotion was seen as a positive change "*...to free its people [Iraqis]...and restore control of that country to its own people*" until its catastrophic legacy in the region soon after.<sup>3</sup> The policy of regime change in Iraq to promote democracy, find



weapons of mass destruction, and provide peace became more contentious on the global stage (Latif & Abbas, 2011). The Iraq war and the accompanying portrayal of removing Saddam Hussein as a democratizing mission have hindered successful pro-democracy efforts in several Arab countries. As Latif & Abbas (2011) conclude, the simplified notion of connecting the 'war on terror' with democracy was partly responsible for such an outcome. However, the nature of the conduct, strategy, and approach of American democratic foreign policy might differ based on the current temporal and regime conditions (Aka, 2002).

### *3. Study methods*

This study examines the comparative promotion of democracy in Nigeria by the US and the EU, utilizing a qualitative case design approach referred to as a case study. Researchers employ case study methods in political science and international relations to test and refine theoretical assumptions (Ruffa, 2020). The method often examines complex phenomena, including democracy, justice, and identity, within a social context to improve understanding of these issues (Heale & Twycross, 2018). In this study, by looking at the promotion of democracy in Nigeria as the object of analysis and the EU and US strategies as the cases, the broader democracy promotion in Africa serves as the larger phenomenon of interest to which this study is contributing. Thus, this comparative case study is appropriate for in-depth analysis (Gerring, 2009).

A comparative analysis of the case study is appropriate to examine the similarities and differences in the EU and US strategies for promoting democracy in Nigeria. This method facilitates a systematic comparison of various institutional features across a limited number of cases within international politics of democracy promotion to determine associations between conditions and outcomes of interest (Peterson & Peters, 2020; Brummer, 2020). The selection of Nigeria as a case study arises from a notable lack in the existing literature, which has yet to thoroughly compile and compare these strategies in the context of a nation like Nigeria, recognised as a significant geostrategic partner for Western hegemonic aspirations in Africa. This study will employ qualitative data to analyse the externalisation and democracy promotion efforts of the US and EU in Nigeria. This study will examine the role of foreign actors in the internationalisation of democracy in Africa, with a specific focus on the case of Nigeria.

### *4. Similarities and differences between EU and US democracy promotion strategies*

This section takes a comparative case study approach by examining the similarities and differences between US and EU democracy promotion in Nigeria. It is broadly divided into subsections that analyse the similarities and differences of each actor.

#### *4.1. Similarities between EU and US democracy promotion strategies in Nigeria*

This subsection examines the comparative aspects of various similarities, encompassing foreign policy and international agreements, economic and security interests, election observation and reforms, a strategic non-involvement approach, political dialogue, and a convergence approach to civil society organisation support.

##### *4.1.2. The use of foreign policy and international agreements*

The EU and the US are among the most important partners promoting the norm of democracy in Nigeria. They share comparable approaches to advancing democracy in Nigeria. This is especially true for a country such as Nigeria, where democratic governance is vulnerable or consistently endangered (Aka, 2002; Khakee, 2007). Nigeria, as one of the most densely populated and influential nations in Africa, has been the focus of substantial efforts by both the EU and the US to promote democracy. Although there are few variations in how they are perceived, it has been argued that the policies and strategies on democracy in Nigeria, the US, and the EU exhibit more parallels than differences.

One important aspect of similarity is that the EU and the US prioritized the promotion of democracy as a critical aspect of their foreign policy goals and international agreements with Nigeria. The 2022-2026 US Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for Nigeria, which builds off the Joint Regional Strategy (JRS) for Africa, supports this idea through its strategic objectives of enhancing democracy, upholding universal values, and promoting human dignity. At least the document suggests that the strategies aim to establish robust, accountable, and democratic institutions in Nigeria, driven by a strong dedication to human rights, to foster peace and prosperity. In the same vein, in the 2007 Nigeria–EU Joint Way Forward and the 2000 Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the Organization for African Unity (now the African Union since 2002), the EU acknowledges, like the US, that Nigeria and the EU have shared values and beliefs in peace, security, equality, democracy, and tolerance to foster prosperous and benevolent societies (Nigeria–EU Joint Way Forward, 2008; Cotonou Agreement, 2000).

As the EU's primary institutional framework for managing relationships with sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, the Cotonou Agreement aimed to create a comprehensive development agenda that combines bilateral cooperation with Nigeria and regional collaboration with the broader African continent (through the African Union). The agreement addresses regional challenges by focusing on socioeconomic development and political cooperation while emphasizing political conditionality through democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law (Cotonou Agreement, 2000). Subsection 2 of Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement asserts that the "Respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, which underpin the ACP-EU Partnership, shall underpin the domestic and international policies of the Parties and constitute the essential elements of this Agreement" (Cotonou Agreement, 2000:14).



Theoretically, the EU and US foreign policies highlight the alignment of democratic principles and values among prominent international actors such as the EU and the US, indicating a cohesive strategy for promoting democracy in emerging economies like Nigeria. A comparable perspective can be observed in the responses of US and EU officials to the unconstitutional changes of government in the Sahel, particularly in countries like Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, where there was a call for the military junta to restore the previous civilian administration. This alignment suggests a widespread agreement regarding the significance of democratic governance, which serves as the foundation for international collaboration and policy development. Empirically, the practical implementation of these policy frameworks through specific programs often linked to conditionality (in the case of EU development assistance for the EU and US security and trade cooperation for the US) illustrates a barter system of political value promotion that relies on the agency of recipient countries to enable the acceptance of these values.

#### *4.1.2 Amplifying economic and security interests over values*

The relevance of democratic principles is reflected in the EU's willingness to apply sharp power measures such as sanctions on unconstitutional change of government through coups such as the Sani Abacha's regime, which was also grasped with human rights violations. For example, before European Development Fund aid was suspended in Nigeria in 1995 due to democratic and human rights abuses during General Sani Abacha's regime, the allocated funds between 1992 and 1995 amounted to €210.2 million. They were significantly reduced after that (European Commission, 2008). However, it is worth noting that these measures primarily affected political ties between the EU and Nigeria rather than the former's economic interests (Kenyon, 2018), highlighting the dilemma of choosing between interest-based objectives and value-based principles. While the US adopted a comparable strategy of imposing sanctions during the Sani Abacha regime, it faced a challenging dilemma between reaping diplomatic and economic advantages and adhering to value-driven goals, as highlighted by the advocacy of Black Americans for the US government to implement diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions akin to those employed against the white-minority regime in South Africa (Lippman, 1995; Lopez & Cortright, 1996). A New York Times report titled *US Seeking Tougher Sanctions to Press Nigeria for Democracy* rightly captured the dilemma of Bill Clinton's administration choosing between economic interest and values when it concludes that:

“The Administration has ruled out any embargo against Nigeria's oil exports, currently running at about 1.8 million barrels a day, which provides the Government with 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings. About 40 percent of Nigeria's prized low-sulfur crude is bought by American companies. Just yesterday, Royal Dutch/Shell confirmed it had made a potentially significant oil discovery off the Nigerian coast.” (Lewis, March 12, 1996, para.3)

Another New York Times report titled *Trade Bans Are Boomerangs, US Companies Say* explains why the US double standard consideration for protecting trade over values is pronounced with its foreign policy approach when considering the application of sanctions on Sani Abacha's regime in Nigeria:

"The issue is unilateral sanctions against several countries, like Iran, Libya, and Nigeria, under which the Clinton Administration and Congress have closed off a market to American companies, but no other nation participates. As a result, foreign suppliers replace the Americans." (Uchitelle, September 11, 1996).

Recently, this development has been exemplified by the way Washington addressed the Gabon coup in contrast to the Niger coup (both occurring in 2023). The Biden administration, in collaboration with its European partners, including the EU and France, urged ECOWAS—under the chairmanship of President Tinubu of Nigeria—to deploy troops to reinstate the civilian administration of Mohammed Bazoum. Additionally, the US has shown little concern for Nigeria's democratic situation following the 2023 elections despite public outcries. Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie wrote an open letter criticizing the election despite President Biden's recognition of Tinubu's presidency after election observers deemed the polls unfair to the EU Election Observation Mission.<sup>4</sup>

The US also takes a similar approach by developing an interest-based approach within its bilateral policy towards Nigeria. However, this emphasizes a balance between militarized bloc politicization and economic exigencies. Barbara and Kristan (2005) argue that when comparing Venezuela and Nigeria, the US intertwines its democratic considerations with the strategic need for reliable and inexpensive oil, mainly from non-Middle Eastern sources. As Ayam (2008) noted, the US policy towards Nigeria in the Cold War was guided by two key issues: the containment of communist expansion, and the provision of aid and the strengthening of bilateral economic ties. However, the 9/11 attack in New York and the growth of terrorism globally necessitated a shift to the hard-core conception of security and development, where democracy promotion is considered a geostrategic objective of full-scale military invasions among policymakers in Washington DC, leading to the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. A series of counterterrorism initiatives, such as military-stationed bases such as the \$110 million largest base for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), known as Niger Air Base 201 and Air Base 101, serve as joint mission sites for US and French forces, and the troops stationed in N'Djamena are instructive of the US conceptual security-democracy discourse (Arslan, 2023; Chason et al., 2024).

The US has more strongly adapted its democracy promotion efforts to situational challenges, such as the 'historical opportunity' after the breakdown of the Soviet Union or the 'war on terrorism' after the 9/11 attack (Van Hüllen & Stahn, 2009). In the West African sphere of influence, where Nigeria is a key actor, the US has partnered with Nigeria and other countries, such as Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad, in the fight against insurgency. Recent debate has sparked over the attraction of the US and France to venture into Nigeria as a viable security partner following their eviction from those

countries. Like the US approach in the Middle East, such a tactical move aims to address political Islam not as a problem of Islamic culture itself but rather because of poor social and economic conditions worsened by long periods of authoritarian rule (Amirah-Fernandez & Menendez, 2009; Ploch, 2013). This geostrategic interest in security using the language of authoritarian governance is the source of societal ill, which is overtly conjoint with activities of democracy promotion efforts such as CSOs, election strengthening and observation, projects, and programs aimed at civil education.

#### *4.1.3 Election observation and reforms as imperatives*

The electoral process constitutes an essential element of democratic governance. The electoral landscape of Nigeria represents a significant aspect of its democratic evolution, characterized by the impactful engagement of actors such as the US and EU. Studies have shown that the country's electoral system has been compromised by vote-buying, ballot box snatching, and various forms of electoral malpractice (Oni, 2014; Obi, 2004; Omotola, 2010). Nonetheless, public trust has been further eroded by the dependability and partiality of the election management body (EMB) (Thompson et al., 2023). The EU and US have provided financial and technical assistance to improve electoral management bodies in Nigeria, monitored elections since the country's return to democracy in 1999, and advocated for electoral reforms informed by the insights of their election observation teams (Khakee, 2007; Obiefuna-Oguejiofor, 2018; US Department of State, 2022). Semi-dependent institutions such as the EU Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), Independent Republican Institute (IRI), and National Democratic Institute (NDI) have received funding from the EU and the US, contributing notably to Nigeria's democratic development.

Free and fair elections are essential for the integrity of a democratic system (Omotola, 2011; Silver et al., 2024). Reforming the electoral system is a priority in several countries, including Nigeria, by addressing legal ambiguities in existing laws; implementing new legal requirements; reforming electoral geography (e.g., redrawing constituency boundaries), electoral and party systems, and the EMB; and facilitating the digital transmission of results to align with the evolving sociopolitical and electoral landscape. The results of Silver et al. (2024) study published by the Pew Research Center indicate that 14 percent of Nigerians believe that electoral reform is one way to improve democracy in Nigeria, making it one of the few countries where individuals associate changes with enhanced citizen representation through reform, facilitating easier voting and precise vote conversion.

A fundamental similarity between the democracy promotion efforts of the US and the EU in Nigeria is their focus on enhancing electoral institutional capacity. Both have made substantial investments in strengthening electoral institutions by advocating for reforms that improve the clarity of electoral laws, enhance transparency, and ensure the responsible conduct of elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These efforts include intensive training, workshops, and initiatives to bolster INEC capacity before each electoral cycle. For example, in January 2019, the EU

conducted a one-day intensive training session in Keffi for the INEC's election and party monitoring unit, organized by the European Center for Electoral Support. This training aimed to improve the unit's ability to monitor political financing and vote for trading in compliance with the 2010 Electoral Act (Abogonye, 2019).

Similarly, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has supported INEC's efforts to build public trust and enhance voter education. USAID's initiatives include the Electoral Empowerment of Civil Society Project (EECSP), which strengthens the capacity of civil society organizations to monitor and document electoral processes independently. This project trained 2,500 domestic observers to conduct quick counts and parallel vote tabulation, contributing to a more robust election management system across Nigeria (USAID, n.d.).

The substantial investment by the US in electoral training—amounting to \$50 million allocated for training journalists, INEC officials, and civil society organizations—demonstrates a rigorous commitment to ensuring the credibility of Nigeria's 2023 general elections (Punch Newspaper, 2022). In addition, the support extended to 44 civil society organizations for civic and voter education, benefiting an estimated 68 million Nigerians and highlighting a strategic effort to bolster democratic engagement through a bottom-up approach (Miller, 2024). These bottom-up approaches (and, to some extent, horizontal-level strategies between EU or US think tanks and Nigerian CSOs), characterized by technical assistance, capacity building, and material support, reflect the critical role of robust institutional frameworks for successfully promoting democratic governance in the US and EU. The emphasis on strengthening institutions such as INECs and CSOs working in the political and human rights domain and the judiciary working on electoral issues underscores a broader perception of Western policymakers that democracy in Nigeria is best supported through comprehensive institutional reinforcement (Onwuzoo, 2024).

Ensuring that elections in Nigeria adhere to international standards is a critical priority for both the US and the EU in their efforts to promote democracy (Youngs, 2001; Khakee, 2007; US Department of State, 2022; Thompson et al., 2023). Both have expressed significant concerns regarding the efficacy of Nigeria's electoral reforms, as highlighted by reports from the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), International Republican Institute (IRI), National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and National Democratic Institute (NDI), which underscore substantial deficiencies in electoral law reforms.<sup>5</sup> Key areas requiring attention include media freedom, establishing a more effective regulatory framework, enhancing security during elections, and promoting an inclusive civil society. Additionally, US and EU policymakers emphasize the necessity of judicial reform and capacity building to effectively address pre- and postelection issues.

#### *4.1.4 Strategic non-involvement in Nigeria's domestic politics*

Guided by the recognition of shared values, the EU and US emphasize the importance of promoting democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in their bilateral commitments, addressing various matters of mutual interest and giving Nigerian

stakeholders agency and role-playing to take charge of their affairs. Article 2 (1) of the UN Charter affirms that “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members” (United Nations, 1945). Article 45 suggests that the “...relationship among [member states of the UN] shall be based on respect for the principle of sovereign equality.” Although these provisions of the UN, of which Nigeria, the US, and EU member states are parties, indicate the equality of all states, it is essential to highlight the inequality among states to project political power, economic interdependence, and social values. There is power asymmetry between Nigeria on the one hand and the EU and the US on the other hand (Khakee, 2007). Although the academic literature on Africa–EU relations tends to define such relations as asymmetrical (Khakee, 2007), the politics around the negotiations of large-scale Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with regional economic communities in Africa, such as ECOWAS, through postcolonial lenses, reveals contestations around the assumptions of such asymmetries, asserting agency through diplomacy by regional and state actors and the actions of civil society (Sebhatu, 2021; Ezemenaka, 2019; Mattheis & Kotsopoulos, 2020). Some scholars even believe that policymakers in developed countries need to revise the whims to maintain a colonial perspective on Africa, looking at Nigeria’s growing expertise and the demand not to be a passive receiver of any foreign interest (Oloruntoba, 2015; Haastrup et al., 2021).

In this way, the support provided by both actors does not meddle deeply in the internal affairs of the country, such as those states of the Middle East post-9/11 new security considerations, since the recognition of mutual concerns suggests some practices of democracy by the Nigerian state rather than just financial support, training, capacity building, and diplomatic signalling, which has become the mainstay activity of the US and EU (Del Biondo, 2011). The above call for the US not to recognize the 2023 general election and the US failure to heed the call illustrates that the US might sponsor democracy promotion through the activities of the NDI and IRI or USAID regarding election observation but might not directly intervene to prevent disastrous outcomes, as experienced in the Middle East.

The US ICS for Nigeria suggests a unique representational country-to-country approach that elucidates the bilateralism of two states, Nigeria and the US, in which the US has foreign policy-set goals and objectives, including mission goal 1 of stronger democratic institutions, governance, and respect for human rights, to be pursued through the activities of the US mission in Nigeria. However, the motivation for this country-specific strategy aligns with broader African policy goals articulated in the 1994 National Security Strategy, which emphasizes a comprehensive approach to regional security, democratic development, and economic recovery (US Department of State, 2022; Goldgeier & McFaul, 2003; The White House, 1994:5). This strategy demonstrates how overarching continental frameworks shape national policies. Similarly, the EU’s approach, as evidenced by the Cotonou Convention, integrates democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law into multilateral agreements with African, Caribbean, and Pacific states. This agreement, including the establishment

of the joint EU-ACP parliamentary assembly, underscores the EU's commitment to democratic reforms in these regions, including Nigeria, which is part of the African region (The Cotonou Agreement, 2012; Luxembourg Center for Contemporary and Digital History, n.d.). The EU's *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa* report illustrates the use of political conditionality, such as the €2.7 billion 'Incentive Tranche' from the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), to link aid with governance standards (Council of the European Union, 2007; European Commission, 2020; Haidara et al., 2008:8). While this broader foreign policy strategy exists among EU actors, the national strategy adopted for relations with Nigeria includes the 2008 Nigeria-EU Joint Way Forward and the 2008-2013 European Community-Nigeria Country Strategy and National Indicative Program. The US and EU initiatives are intricately linked to broader regional strategies, emphasizing the critical role of continental organizations such as the African Union in achieving their goals.

#### 4.1.5 Political dialogue

Furthermore, both the US and the EU stress intensified government-to-government political dialogue as a valuable factor in anchoring their relations with Nigeria, elucidating a top-down approach towards the question posed by democracy and democratic governance. Political dialogue is essential in both actors' repertoire to discuss progress and challenges to democracy in their countries. The 2008 Nigeria–EU Joint Way Forward guidelines follow the principles and objectives enunciated in the revised Cotonou Agreement and are recalled in the Lisbon Joint Africa–EU Strategy (Nigeria–EU Joint Way Forward, 2008).<sup>6</sup> The broader development framework of the EU, known as the Cotonou Agreement, is explicit about political dialogue. Since 2000, relations between the EU and African countries and regional organizations, otherwise known as EU-African relations, have undergone dynamic institutional and organizational reordering. The establishment of periodic EU-Africa/Africa-EU/AU-EU Summits created the basis for a region-to-region forum bringing together African and European leaders (European Council, 2022; Haastруп et al., 2021). Article 15, which spells out the structural compositions of the EU-ACP Council of Ministers, stresses the importance of political dialogue in Article 9. According to the last paragraph of Article 9:

“These areas [promotion of human rights, democratization processes, consolidation of the rule of law, and good governance] will be an important subject for the political dialogue. In the context of this dialogue, the Parties shall attach particular importance to the changes underway and to the continuity of the progress achieved. This regular assessment shall consider each country's economic, social, cultural and historical context.” (Cotonou Agreement, 2000).

The political dynamics surrounding the US promotion of democracy in Nigeria exhibit a notable resemblance to the strategies employed by the EU (see Van Wyk, 2020),



especially when examining its extensive diplomatic interactions with the African continent, as illustrated by the 2022 US-Africa Leaders' Summit (US Department of State, 2024). This raises critical questions about the depth and authenticity of such engagements, suggesting that they may often be more about the US strategic interests than a genuine partnership of equals or one intended to strengthen the democratic space in Nigeria. It is imperative to acknowledge that the US has formed a unique commission with Nigeria, known as the US-Nigeria Binational Commission, aimed at facilitating political dialogue at the bilateral level. This initiative, launched during the Obama administration in 2010, reflects the changing international relations in Africa, where summit diplomacy is an essential platform for formal interaction between the two nations and is characterized by its diverse composition. Structurally, it serves as a bilateral platform for dialogues distinct from the US-Africa framework, where the agenda-setting process prioritizes trade and various socioeconomic interests, lacking a mechanism for oversight on political values, in contrast to the EU-Africa summits, which are anchored in Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement.

The use of political dialogue to promote democratic ideals springs from the recognition and self-reflection of US and EU ownership of normative ideals as global actors who attempt the socialization of foreign governments that might hold the promise of similar normative ideals or are open to learning and accepting such ideals (European Parliament, 2017; Checkel, 2005; Schimmelfennig, 2005a). This norm diffusion remains significant even within the EU, the US, and its neighbourhood (Park, 2006). Schimmelfennig (2005b) noted that EU socialization efforts primarily target governments, providing material rewards such as assistance and the advantages of EU membership contingent upon adherence to liberal democratic norms. If compliance is not achieved, the EU withholds the reward, refraining from imposing additional penalties on noncompliant countries or providing extra assistance to alter their cost-benefit dynamics. An example of this can be found in how the EU and US downplayed the outcome of the 2023 Nigerian general election owing to the exigencies and requirements of geostrategic interests in migration, security, and Nigeria's ability to influence geopolitical outcomes in West Africa following the waves of coups in the Sahelian belt despite US and EU election observation bodies stating otherwise regarding the credibility of the process.

#### *4.1.6 Convergence approach for CSO*

In the horizontal approach, the EU and US institutions such as EOM, USAID, and other respective bodies provide Nigerian institutions such as the INEC, police, legislative, and judiciary with capacity training for conducting a credible election exercise (Del Biondo, 2011; Khakee, 2007; European Commission, 2023; Leonardo, 2023). Additionally, an essential component of top-down political dialogue involves government-to-government and often includes CSOs to discuss the development of democratic ideals and how to improve lagging areas.

On the other hand, from the bottom-up perspective, policymakers commonly believe that democratic assistance should be kept pragmatic and practical to the public but within a limited definite boundary. It should serve as a symbolic external source of funding, skills, and protection for NGOs operating in Nigeria's challenging domestic environments (Youngs, 2001; US Mission Nigeria, 2024). As such, the Cotonou Agreement essentialized the importance of civil society and other nonstate actors in realizing the agreement's objectives, including those in Articles 8 and 9. Table 1 highlights the EU's bottom-up approach through phase I (2016-2021) of the EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) program, aimed at empowering civil society organizations (CSOs). The initiatives aim to improve election and civic education within local communities, advance the digitalization of government budgets, provide leadership and legislative training for young Nigerians, and facilitate real-time tracking of public projects, among other essential areas.

Component Area	Key Partners	Amount Allocated
Component 1: Support to the Independent National Electoral Commission	European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES)	13 million Euros with an additional contribution of 650,000 Euros (5% of the total funding to Component 1) from ECES core funds
Component 2: Support to the National Assembly	Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) and Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA)	3 million Euros
Component 3: Support to Political Parties	Political Party Leadership and Policy Development Centre of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS)	2.7 million Euros
Component 4: Support to Media	Institute for Media and Society and the International Press Centre	2.6 million Euros

Component 5: Support to Civil Society Organizations	BBC Media Action, CLEEN Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and the Albino Foundation	3 million Euros
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*Figure 1: EU Support for Democratic Governance in Nigeria, Phase I (2016-2021). Source: European Center for Electoral Support, n.d.*

On the US side, according to USAID (2019), CSOs that receive support from the US government have demonstrated their credibility in Nigeria. This support has empowered Nigerians to hold the government accountable during elections, which justifies the financial and technical aid provided by the US government. An example is the current US Embassy Abuja Public Diplomacy Section (PDS) Annual Program for the 2024 fiscal year. The grant of up to \$50,000 each, totalling \$450,000, is focused explicitly on NGOs operating in the Northern Niger Region, with priority given to the states of Adamawa, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Niger, Taraba, Yobe, Sokoto, and Zamfara. The main objectives of this grant are to promote women, girls, and youth empowerment; encourage civic participation; and support programs and initiatives of NGOs, such as YIAGA and PLAC, that advocate good governance, including transparency and accountability in government (US Mission Nigeria, 2024).

## ***4.2. Differences between EU and US democracy promotion in Nigeria***

This subsection examines the comparative aspects of differences, encompassing funding instruments and geostrategic imperatives of the EU and US democracy promotion in Nigeria.

### ***4.2.1 Funding instruments***

Although there are similarities in the democracy promotion strategies and instruments of the EU and the US in Nigeria, there are also some significant differences in their funding instruments, attitudes towards democratic promotion, and motivations or security considerations, among others. One key aspect is in the realm of funding. The EU employs the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation-Global Europe Instrument (NDICI) and the European Development Fund to bolster democracy promotion in Nigeria. However, the US offers financial support through a different avenue, such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which oversees US development and humanitarian assistance abroad based on its agency priority goals established by the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act (GPRAMA). Parts of the USAID funds for democracy are channelled to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which in turn funds the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for their election observation work and other related activities in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

While the United States articulates lofty ideals regarding democracy in Nigeria, the allocation of resources required to substantiate such rhetoric remains markedly insufficient. The Strengthening Advocacy and Civil Engagement (SACE) project represents a substantial investment of \$19.2 million, funded by USAID and executed by Chemonics International from January 2, 2014, to January 1, 2019 (USAID, 2019). The World Bank's population estimate for Nigeria in 2014 stands at approximately 179.3 million individuals, indicating that the per capita allocation for the project amounts to merely 10.7 cents. Moreover, one would expect some improvement in democracy-related funding in recent years; however, among the top five USAID support sources, the government and civil sector receive the least support.<sup>7</sup> A comparable situation is documented in the EU funding initiative, exemplified by the SDGN phase one, which allocates a mere 13 cents per capita to support democracy projects, calculated based on the 2016 population estimate of 188.6 million individuals. This juxtaposition of lofty rhetoric and diminishing financial resources significantly hamper the potential for substantive democratic advancement, particularly as direct-democracy initiatives remain inadequately funded (refer to Crawford, 2005 for the Ghana case study).

#### *4.2.2 Geostrategic imperatives*

The European Union's efforts to enhance democracy and good governance in Nigeria via electoral policy reforms are shaped by multiple factors, including migration and socioeconomic development (Khakee, 2007). Its approach sought to address the complex relationships among these issues, recognizing the need for comprehensive measures to address the root causes of migration, alleviate socioeconomic decline, and foster improved governance practices in Nigeria. However, the US implementation of policy reforms in Nigeria has been motivated mainly by different geostrategic interests, specifically aimed at maximizing economic benefits and countering terrorist groups (Amirah-Fernández & Menéndez, 2009; Aka, 2002). Appreciating the significance of Nigeria's role as a regional power and its promising economic prospects, the US prioritized democracy initiatives to enhance economic cooperation and trade relations with Nigeria. In addition, considering the existence of different terrorist organizations in the Sahel, the US placed great importance on assisting Nigeria in combating these dangers and fostering stability in the region.

The linkage between security and democracy is integral to both the US and the EU's strategies, emphasizing that security is essential for maintaining democratic norms and vice versa. In the 1990s, Western reform policies, influenced by post-Cold War security theories, incorporated ethical and pragmatic considerations, including political, social, economic, and environmental factors, to address the multifaceted nature of security (Amirah-Fernández & Menéndez, 2009). The EU and US international agreements and bilateral policies towards Nigeria reflect this approach by highlighting the interdependence of democracy and security. However, while they stress collaboration and strategic stability, they differ in their geostrategic concerns in addressing migration and poverty (for the EU) and terrorism and trade (US), issues that drive individuals

toward nonstate actors and transnational networks that threaten both US and EU interests. An area of geostrategic convergence that both actors see as important in Nigeria in promoting democracy is the oil and natural gas supply, especially since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the sanctions preventing oil trade with the Kremlin.

While migration is somewhat contained as one of the utmost security concerns for the EU in promoting democratic norms since most Nigerians use the Saharan desert route to reach the Mediterranean Sea in northern Africa and the southern border of the EU, US policymakers take a more kinetic approach through increasing military cooperation as an important appendix to democracy support.<sup>3</sup> During a press briefing, US President Joe Biden reiterated his unwavering dedication to Nigeria, emphasizing the areas of economic development, security, and safeguarding of human rights (The White House, 2023; Ploch, 2013). This reaffirmation of commitment underscores the enduring nature of the bilateral engagement between the US and Nigeria. As Amirah-Fernández & Menéndez (2009) noted, [Political] reform in democratic and good governance values was enhanced by the link common in Western policy circles between democratization and Western security concerns. Securitizing democracy involves examining the neorealist perspective on the competition between state and non-state actors striving for control over Nigerian territory. The dynamics of power, both on a global scale and within local contexts, significantly influence the outcomes of democratic success or failure. Terrorism in the northern part of Nigeria, which spreads across the Sahel, is an obvious predicament here. Democracy in Nigeria has been threatened by the activities of terrorist groups. Additionally, the failure of past democratic dispensations to be consolidated into practical benefits in terms of good governance that improves the lives of the population exposes youths to ideologies and recruits them by terrorist groups that threaten the US's geostrategic interests in Africa (Onuoha, 2014). The post-9/11 declaration of war on terrorism worldwide reinforced this thinking among stakeholders in Washington, the Bureau of African Affairs, and the US Mission in Nigeria, burdened by the responsibility of monitoring changes in Nigeria and executing policy directions on behalf of the US government.

Conversely, it is the conviction of policymakers in Brussels and various European capitals that the enhancement of governance in Nigeria is fundamentally linked to the augmentation of development cooperation, the promotion of human rights and democracy, and the rectification of job creation problems. They argue that capacity-building support is beneficial and essential in tackling the underlying factors contributing to migratory pressures (Van Wyk, 2020; Ezemenaka, 2019). Furthermore, this approach is posited as a means to fortify adherence to human rights and democratic values in regions where such adherence is notably deficient, while simultaneously reinforcing the progress made.

Democratic consolidation, human rights, and governance serve as political conditionalities in the EU canon of policies towards Nigeria. At the same time, the US does not have such a clear-cut political conditionality embedded in its bilateral policy and, thus, remains flexible in its approach. However, it can invoke sanctions to restore

democratic governance as it did in General Ibrahim Babangida's annulment of the 1993 election (Nwokedi, 1994).

Despite claims that the EU's influence on development cooperation has diminished, ACP states still value their partnership with the EU and its consistent, long-term resources (Pichon, 2023). Some argue that ACP states such as Nigeria may prioritize development aid over democratic norms by turning to donors such as China, who have less stringent requirements regarding human rights and democratic governance. However, policymakers in Abuja cannot throw away years of partnership with the EU. The institutional arrangements, such as the EU–Nigeria joint program and the 2008–2013 European Community–Nigeria Country Strategy and National Indicative Program employed by the EU, underpinned by articles 9-10 on the issue of ensuring essential elements regarding human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, and fundamental elements regarding good governance, are established in collaboration with the various interest groups, including the government in Abuja, playing a significant role in giving it agency on the question of democracy in Nigeria—creating the spirit of ownership and partnership. Article 8 reinforces the notion of accountability of the Nigerian state through political dialogue.

### 5. Conclusion and implications

A comparison of the EU and US democracy promotion initiatives in Nigeria uncovers notable similarities in the instruments employed by both actors. While emphasizing the impact of Nigeria's political environment on the progress of these strategies, the geostrategic necessities of migration control, security, trade, and development significantly influence the EU and the US's endeavours to design and execute their democracy promotion in Nigeria. Both actors regard promoting democracy as a fundamental foreign policy objective, balancing strategic–material goals with value-based ideals. Despite the difficulties in aligning economic and security interests with democratic principles, the EU and US persist in their dedication to fortifying Nigeria's democratic institutions, perceiving democracy promotion as a solution to the challenges impacting their geopolitical significance in Africa and their domestic political landscape, where migrants from countries such as Nigeria, facing socio-economic and security issues, are viewed as a challenge to manage.

Criterion	Similarities	Differences
Foreign international agreements	Both parties use their international agreements, which include bilateral and multilateral policies, to promote democracy in Nigeria	The EU utilizes bilateral foreign policy instruments for ACP countries, such as the 2000 Cotonou Agreement or the 2023 Samoa Agreement, with democracy, human rights, and the rule of law clause to promote democratic values in Nigeria, while the US employs the



		Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for Nigeria and the Joint Regional Strategy (JRC).
Approach	Dual approaches of top-down and bottom-up depending on the interaction with which domestic actor in Nigeria, e.g., CSOs or INEC or executive arms of government	While the EU emphasizes a more country-specific approach, greater coherence, and stakeholder involvement, the US combines rhetorical and diplomatic pressure with support for CSOs and grassroots movements.
Financial provision	Availability of financial support for democratic governance but poor quantity	The EU utilizes the financial provisions of the European Development Fund (EDF), which supports the realization of Nigeria's objectives of the National Indicative Program (NIP), including its components of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance. The US utilizes congress-approved funding managed by USAID, which directly funds CSOs in Nigeria through calls and grants and even the activities of NED, IRI, and NDI that observe elections.
Political dialogue	Both parties utilize bilateral dialogues and meetings to discuss progress and show commitment to democratic principles.	The EU promotes democracy in Nigeria through international meetings and forums (Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement), reinforcing democratic institutions and stakeholder involvement. Conversely, the US engages in high-level discussions mainly where areas of good governance are intermixed with geostrategic issues of trade and security matters.

Development cooperation, democracy, and security nexus	The EU and US formal agreements and bilateral policies towards Nigeria underscored the interrelation between development, democracy, and security.	While the US focuses on traditional security measures such as counterterrorism against terrorist groups as a threat to the consolidation of democracy and trade in Nigeria, the EU takes a broader approach by considering how insecurity contributes to migration and vice versa and the threat to democracy in Nigeria.
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*Figure 2: Criteria for comparison of US and EU democracy promotion in Nigeria.*

*Source: Author's construct.*

Moreover, it is essential to emphasize the findings that reveal that the EU and US frequently employ analogous strategies, such as election observation and civil society involvement, which have somewhat bottom-up significance, to bolster the democratic development of Nigeria. However, any such relevance is dependent on domestic agency. This alignment prompts an inquiry into the question of agency among political stakeholders in Nigeria (ranging from the government to civil society), indicating that the domestic political landscape significantly influences external actors' adoption of cooperative or adversarial strategies. Although both actors prioritize cooperation, their tactics exhibit subtle variances shaped by their distinct geostrategic priorities and funding mechanisms.

Ultimately, the collective affirmation by the EU and the US regarding the critical role of robust institutional frameworks—such as electoral governance—in promoting democratic governance in Nigeria raises significant concerns. This reliance on a cautious approach to managing stability in a fragile state such as Nigeria, divided along ethno-religious cleavages, can lead to the troubling endorsement of fraudulently elected candidates driven by geostrategic priorities. The recognition of incumbent Bola Ahmed Tinubu in contentious political contests, such as the 2023 general election, starkly illustrates this troubling dynamic. Nevertheless, their [US and EU] efforts highlight the imperative and persistent need to adapt democracy promotion to the unique political landscapes of the nations in question, ensuring that support is relevant and practical. Finally, the cooperative approach is indeed favoured, suggesting a notable consensus on the importance of democratic norms in fostering stability and progress in Nigeria. However, it is essential to recognize that this perspective falls short of providing a comprehensive evaluation of the accountability of institutional factors regarding electoral malpractices, a concern frequently lamented by critics such as Chimamanda showcased in her letter to US President Joe Biden.

## Notes

1. Information regarding the ranking of the global freedom index, which includes political rights and civil liberties, and the methodology employed can be found: <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>
2. Some scholars have suggested that there are various kinds of democracies (Mwenda & Obi, 2019), which include deliberative democracy (O'Donnell, 1994; Elstub, 2018), participatory democracy (Barber, 2014; Pateman, 2012), elite democracy (Good, 1999; Higley, 2006), and representative democracy (Alonso et al., 2011; Urbinati, 2011).
3. For the full speech of the former US President speech during the Iraq invasion, please check the Operation Iraqi Freedom website: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030319-17.html>
4. For a look at the letter written by renowned Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie and published by The Atlantic with the title *Nigeria's Hollow Democracy*, check <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/04/nigerias-hollow-democracy/673647>. Additionally, the 2023 EU EOM report can be found here: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-nigeria-2023/european-union-election-observation-mission-nigeria-2023-final-report\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-nigeria-2023/european-union-election-observation-mission-nigeria-2023-final-report_en)
5. These institutions cited their recommendations for reform in the following electoral year reports: IRI/NDI, 2019; NDI, 2023; EUEOM, 2011; 2015; 2019; 2023.
6. The report outlines the modalities of the political dialogue in the Nigeria–EU Joint Way Forward.
7. The USAID's top five sectors funded in Nigeria are humanitarian emergency response (\$327 million), basic health (\$163 million), HIV/AIDS (\$98 million), maternal and child health (\$92 million) and government and civil participation (\$35 million). All the data can be obtained from the USAID result database: <https://results.usaid.gov/results>

## Declarations

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### *Notes on Contributor*

Christopher Amrobo Enemuwe is a doctoral student in Political Science at Idaho State University and holds two master's degrees in population studies and European politics and society from the University of Ghana and a consortium of European universities (Charles University, Leiden University, Pompeu Fabra University, and Jagiellonian University) respectively. His research focuses on sociodemographic factors of fertility, democracy promotion, and security in Africa.

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