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POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE SHAPING OF FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOR IN DEVELOPING STATES

Dr. Nighat Younas[*1], Muhammad Rashid Aziz[2]

[*1]*Assistant professor University of Poonch Rawalakot Azad Kashmir*
[2]*Incharge and Lecturer School of Law, University of Poonch Rawlakot Azad Jammu and Kashmir*

[*1]nighatyounas@upr.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *
Dr. Nighat Younas
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ABSTRACT

The paper examines how political institutions are critical in influencing the behavior of foreign policies in developing states. Although the classical international relations theories suggest that the systemic factors including power distribution, and the need to secure, are important in influencing the foreign policy decisions, this paper maintains that domestic political institutions including executive structures, legislative body control, capacity to perform bureaucracy and informal networks are also influential in influencing the foreign policy decisions. The study assumes a conceptual and analytical framework in which it combines the concepts of realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism and domestic institutionalism to address the role of institutional configurations in the decision-making process of strategy.

The paper, based on comparative case studies that demonstrate that the institutional strength and coherence play a significant role in determining the consistency of foreign policy, ambition and international credibility. The article's research is based on more than twenty academic resources, such as journal articles, books, and government reports and policy briefs to achieve the empirical rigor. It finds that institutional change and democratic establishment are critical to improve the effectiveness of foreign policy in the Global South. The paper aids in a more subtle interpretation of the foreign policy in developing countries by preempting the internal sources of international action and provides policy advice on how that institutional capacity and policy autonomy can be reinforced.

Keywords: *Political Institutions, Foreign Policy Behavior Developing States, Civil-Military Relations, Institutional Capacity*

1.INTRODUCTION

Political institutions comprise formal organization that includes the constitutions, legislatures, the executives, judiciary and bureaucracies and informal organization comprising of norms of patronage, networks, and ideological legacies (North, 1990). Such institutions dictate the decision-making power, decision making methods and the degree to which the decisions are to be held to account or challenged. Foreign policy is not necessarily a result of strategic national interest but rather heuristic of institutional politics, elite interests, and survival tactics of the regime in most developing states (Galal, 2019).

It is particularly in the Global South that the importance of political institutions in influencing foreign policy becomes particularly visible, since states there are usually confronted with such problems as insufficient state capacity, problematic legitimacy, and dependence abroad (BTI, 2024). In contrast to the consolidated democracies where institutional checks and balances are those that bring predictability and accountability, hybrid regimes, which are a combination of democratic

and authoritarian components, are common in the developing states. In these situations, foreign policy can be an instrument of legitimizing regimes, or enriching elites or projecting ideologies instead of being a consistent policy of pursuing national interests (Rizvi, 2019).

This paper will claim that the focus of analyzing the behavior of foreign policy in developing states should be on the systemic and domestic analysis. It argues that political institutions are dynamic actors which do influence the way states perceive their external environment, develop strategic priorities and interact with actors in the international system. It assumes a multidimensional model of analysis that combines the realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and domestic institutionalism in analyzing the interaction between institutional structures and foreign policy behavior.

There are three main objectives that inform the research. To begin with, it attempts to conceptualize the connections between political institutions and foreign policy by recognizing the major institutional variables that can shape the decision-making. Second, it offers the typology of political institutions in developing countries, which emphasize the variety of institutional setups and its foreign policy implications. Third, it performs a comparative study of four case studies (Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, and Ethiopia) in the period 2018-2024 and explains how various institutional structures yield diverse foreign policy consequences.

With its emphasis on the local roots of foreign policy, the current paper will add to the increasingly expanding literature that questions the paradigm based on the state in the international relations field and its systemic perspectives. It provides a more localized and situation specific approach to the development process of the developing states within the complexities of global politics. By so doing, it emphasizes the role of institutional reform, capacity building and democratic consolidation as conditions to the successful and strategic foreign policy in the Global South.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The behavior of the foreign policy in developing states cannot be explained without a solid theoretical framework that takes into consideration both the systemic forces and the domestic institutional ones. In this section, I will review four key paradigms, namely realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and domestic institutionalism, and discuss their suitability in studying political institutions and foreign policy in the Global South.

Realism and Neorealism

Realism is also among the most important theories of international relations that highlight the anarchic character of the international system, the sovereignty of states, and the national interest is achieved by the accumulation of power (Waltz, 1979). The approach to foreign policy of realism in its classical form is a rational reaction to the external threat, which is not much affected by the domestic political framework. This would be refined through the concept of neorealism or structural realism which emphasizes the allocation of capabilities by states as the main determinant of behavior (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Nevertheless, the explanatory strength of realism is less strong when it comes to developing states because foreign policy in the latter state is frequently determined by domestic political conflicts, institutional pandemonium, and the need to survive as a regime. To illustrate, the systemic pressures are insufficient in explaining why Pakistan has aligned itself strategically with China and had an ambivalent relationship with the United States; the domestic civil-military factors make a significant contribution (Idrees and Khan, 2024).

Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal institutionalism provides an alternative perspective on realism, which focuses on the importance of international institutions, collaboration and interdependence. It stipulates that the existence of democratic governance, rule of law, and institutional accountability leads to more predictable and peaceful international behavior of foreign policies (Keohane, 1984). In third world countries, however, the success of liberal institutionalism is reliant on the power and legitimacy of home institutions.

The presence of a legislature, independent judiciary and a professional bureaucracy in a state is more likely to conduct multilateral diplomacy and respect international norms. The involvement of Nigeria in ECOWAS peacekeeping operations and the support of regional integration is a

reference to liberal institutionalist trends, however, with a limitation due to an internal institutional fragmentation (Adebajo, 2021).

However, liberal institutionalism tends to take an institutional maturity that most developing states do not have. Authoritarian practices often undermine liberal norms in the case of hybrid regimes, in which democratic institutions coexist with authoritarian practices. The situation with Brazil under President Bolsonaro was not an exception because the executive populism came into conflict with the multilateralism of the foreign ministry (Casarões, 2020).

Normative Structures and Constructivism

Constructivism brings a sociological aspect of foreign policy analysis through focusing on identity, norms and discourse. It contends that the behavior of states is not a reaction to material circumstances but determined by the influence of ideas including historical narratives, cultural values and social expectations (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism is especially applicable in developing states in ways of comprehending the role of the postcolonial legacies, religions and regional identity in the foreign policy.

An example of such a case is that Ethiopia involvement in the African Union and its peace-making move towards Eritrea was packaged as pursuing pan-African unity and stability in the region, as normative commitments that did not consider the strategic considerations (Abbink, 2019). On the same note, the way Pakistan has prioritized Islamic unity in its international relations with the organization of Islamic Cooperation is an example of identity politics in international relations (Saifullah and Qaisrani, 2023).

Constructivism also puts emphasis on the impacts of domestic political institutions in the creation and transmission of norms. The construction of narratives of national identity and foreign policy is done by political parties, media and civil society organizations. The foreign ministry (Itamaraty) was a norm entrepreneur in Brazil, opposing efforts of the executive to derail multilateral commitments (Lima, 2021).

Domestic Institutionalism

Domestic institutionalism is a middle ground between systemic theories and constructivist approaches: it is concerned with the role of internal politics structures in mediating the behavior of foreign policies. It assumes that the structure, capacity and legitimacy of political institutions define the consistency, ambition and attainment of foreign policy (Putnam, 1988). This view is especially appropriate in the developing states, where institutional divergence is severe and usually definitive.

Presidential systems, such as, are more inclined to divide the powers of foreign policies to the executive, which allows making quick but even unilateral decisions. Parliamentary systems need to have more of a consensus and this can result in more stable but slow changes in foreign policy. The civil-military relations are also quite crucial; the foreign policy of the state is frequently based on the security needs, not on the diplomatic relations.

Another significant variable is the bureaucratic capacity. Foreign ministries and planning agencies are managed more professionally, giving them better strategic vision and diplomatic nimbleness, but politicized or under-funded bureaucracies result in a reactive and disjointed foreign policy. Institutional incoherence was a weakness of the foreign policy of Nigeria led by Buhari, with overlapping mandates and lack of coordination among agencies (Ibeanu, 2022).

The situation is further complicated by informal institutions - patronage networks, ethnic coalitions, or religious affiliations. Such networks frequently influence foreign policy priorities, particularly within such areas as diaspora politics, migration politics, and aid politics. Ethnic federalism and informal elite bargaining had a substantial impact on the foreign policy of Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia (Lefort, 2022).

Domestic institutionalism therefore offers a holistic approach to the foreign policy behavior among developing states. It takes into consideration the heterogeneity of institutional organization, the interaction of formal and informal structures and regime type effects on strategic decisions. It makes it possible to understand international behavior in a more refined and empirically-based manner, by pre-determining the home setting.

TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN DEVELOPING STATES

It is found that political institutions in developing countries have a great variety of structural forms, levels of autonomy, and functional competencies.

These differences play a major role in the behavior of foreign policies since institutional design defines the decision-maker, policy making process and the degree to which the policy will be based on national agreement or elite interests. This section provides the classification of the key institutional types and discusses their implication to the foreign policy.

Executive Systems: Presidential, Parliamentary, and Hybrid Systems

A major factor influencing the control of foreign policy is the executive structure. Presidential systems, including Nigeria and Brazil, have the president usually having a large amount of unilateral authority through foreign policy. This centralization may facilitate quick decision-making and at the same time, it may pose a risk of personalization and volatility particularly when the institutional checks are fragile (Adebajo, 2021). As an example, the foreign policy orientation in post-Bolsonaro Brazil with a newly elected President involved sudden changes, such as breaking the ties with regional blocs and the mistrust in multilateralism (Casarões, 2020).

Parliamentary systems, in its turn, share the foreign policy power between the executive and legislative branches more equally. Such a structure encourages consultation and agreement-making but can reduce the speed of decision-making. The parliamentary system in Ethiopia is formally inclusive, but the political power and dominance of the ruling parties and ethnic federalism have compromised it, restricting the real legislative oversight (Lefort, 2022).

Hybrid regimes are popular in most of the developing states, and they are a mixture of the two systems. The semi-presidential system of Pakistan enables the prime minister to have control over the foreign policy, though the military still plays a crucial role and introduces a bipartisan power system, which makes strategy coherence complicated (Idrees and Khan, 2024).

Civil-Military Relations

A balance between civilian institutions and military institutions is a very important aspect in foreign policy behavior. Foreign policy in states with the military being a dominant factor is likely to embrace security issues, territorial integrity and strategic alliances. This is the case with Pakistan in which the military influences major decisions made regarding India, Afghanistan, and China because of its dominance on strategic planning and intelligence (Rizvi, 2019).

On the other hand, those states where the military is strongly civilianized tend to follow rather diplomatically subtle and economically oriented foreign policy. Civil-military relations of Nigeria have been on the upswing since the restoration of democracy; however, institutional flaws continue to enable the military to shape foreign policies, specifically in the issue of regional security (Ibeanu, 2022).

Legislative Institutions

The legislatures can be key veto players or facilitators in the foreign policy. Their position relies on constitutional provisions, party politics and institutional ability. The level of institutional autonomy is also found in Brazil, where the executive decisions regarding international agreements are sometimes challenged by the National Congress (Lima, 2021). Conversely, the parliament in Pakistan has little say in foreign policy and frequently ends up ratifying executive decisions without proper discussion (Saifullah and Qaisrani, 2023).

Fragments of legislation, which are typical of most developing states, also complicate the issue of foreign policy coherence. The National Assembly, which is split along ethnical and partisan beliefs, has difficulties in delivering consistent checks and balances in Nigeria, and as a result, policy discontinuities and poor execution (Adebajo, 2021).

Bureaucratic Capacity

The bureaucracy of the foreign policy has a long-lasting influence on strategic planning and diplomatic implementation because of its quality and independence. There is an increased level of coherence and credibility by having professional foreign ministries with career diplomats and experts of policy. A good example of this is the Itamaraty of Brazil which can be considered a stabilizing factor in the face of executive volatility (Lima, 2021).

On the contrary, bureaucracies that are politicized or lack sufficient resources are a hindrance to effective foreign policy. Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nigeria lacks a budget, has overlapping roles and responsibilities, and lacks a strategic ability, which leads to an environment of reactive and broken diplomacy (Ibeanu, 2022). The bureaucracy of

foreign policy in Ethiopia has been reduced by the patronage of ethnic groups and the frequent change of leaders which has weakened the institution memory and continuity of strategies (Abbink, 2019).

Judicial Institutions

Judicial institutions affect the foreign policy by ruling on the international treaties, human rights related obligations, and executive powers, though they are not given adequate attention. In Brazil, foreign policy issues have been periodically interceded by the Supreme Federal Court, which strengthens the constitutional restraints of executive authority (Casarões, 2020). Judicial activism in Pakistan and Nigeria is more intermittent and usually bound by political forces.

Informal Institutions and Patronage Networks.

The informal institutions (ethnic coalitions, religious affiliations, and patronage systems) are very important in informing the priorities of the foreign policy. These are networks that tend to interfere with the making of diaspora involvement, development assistance, and migration diplomacy decisions. Informal elite bargaining influences regional diplomacy and trade negotiations in Nigeria, whereas in Ethiopia, ethnic federalism influences the region with foreign policy narratives and alliances (Lefort, 2022).

Formal structures can be supported or destroyed by informal institutions. They increase the legitimacy and responsiveness when they are in accordance with the national interests. They corrupt institutional coherence and priorities when they are motivated by elite interests.

MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE

The mechanisms producing the impact of political institutions in the development states on the foreign policy behavior comprise a complex of mechanisms that involve formal constraints, enabling structures, and informal networks. They dictate the foreign policy conceptualization, debate, and implementation, and they differ dramatically among institutional settings. This part examines the main avenues by which political institutions determine foreign policy with the emphasis on the executive power, legislative control, bureaucratic potential, judicial interference, and informal institutions.

Executive power and Strategic independence

In most of the developing states there is disproportional power of the executive branch of power in matters of foreign policies. The necessity to respond quickly to the events happening all over the world and technicality of the work of diplomats often explain such concentration of power. Nevertheless, the overpowering presidential authority may result in individualized and unpredictable foreign policy practices, especially where institutional restraints are feeble.

An example is the administration of Brazil under President Bolsonaro which had adopted an ideologically nationalistic foreign policy coupled with distrust in multilateralism. His actions to pull out of regional forums and confront environmental agreements were motivated more by his personal beliefs than the institutional agreement (Casarões, 2020). The foreign ministry, which is professional, and had traditionally acted independently, could not regulate these impulses, because of the lack of institutional leverage (Lima, 2021).

In Pakistan, foreign policy is being influenced by military establishment, whereas the prime minister is the nominal leader. Such a two-legged authority system causes confusion and restricts the power of the civilian in the affairs concerning India, Afghanistan, and China (Idrees and Khan, 2024).

Policy Legitimacy and Legislative Oversight

The legislatures are critical in the legitimization of the foreign policy by debating, ratifying treaties, and controlling the budget. Theoretically, a legislative role will make foreign policy to represent national interests other than elite preferences. In reality, though, there are large disparities in legislative influence in developing states.

The constitutional power of the National Assembly to control the foreign policy in Nigeria is compromised by fragmentation, lack of expertise and dominance by the executive. Consequently, the decisions of foreign policy do not go through the legislative process, which creates discrepancies and lack of proper implementation (Adebajo, 2021).

The legislature in Brazil has enjoyed more autonomy where it has on some occasions questioned executive decisions and claimed its authority in ratifying treaties. This policy mobilization increases the legitimacy of policies and promotes stability in administrations (Lima,

2021). In Ethiopia, legislative control is formal as the ruling party is entrenched in parliamentary processes and restraining any actual discussion on foreign policy issues (Lefort, 2022).

Strategic Coherence and Bureaucratic Capacity

The foreign policy bureaucracy plays a critical role in interpreting the political instructions into practical courses of action. Strategic business continuity, diplomacy and institutional memory are some of the products of high capacity bureaucracies. On the other hand, politicized or under-funded bureaucracies make it difficult to execute or implement policies effectively and diminishes the international credibility.

Itamaraty of Brazil is generally considered as one of the most professional foreign ministries in the Global South. The stability and strategic richness of its career diplomats and institutional culture have traditionally helped it stay stable and offer strategic depth even when the executive has been volatile (Lima, 2021). Conversely, Nigeria has a weak Ministry of Foreign Affairs that has overlapping mandates, constraints on budget, and lacks coordination which leads to reactive and fragmented diplomacy (Ibeanu, 2022).

The foreign ministry of Pakistan will be operating in a very limited capacity with most of the strategic choices being taken by the military and the intelligence community. This compromises bureaucratic independence and restricts the influence of the ministry in the process of long-term foreign policy (Rizvi, 2019). The bureaucracy of the foreign policy in Ethiopia has been undermined by ethnic favor and a high turnover of leaders, which has weakened bodies as well as strategic foresight (Abbink, 2019).

Courts and Legal restrictions

The judiciary is able to alter foreign policy either through construing the provisions of the constitution, determining the validity of treaty commitments, and curbing executive overreaching. Although their action, in most cases, is indirect, it is a fact that courts are able to influence the legal context in which foreign policy functions.

The Supreme Federal Court in Brazil has at times taken action in the foreign policy, strengthening constitutional boundaries on the executive power and enforcing international obligations (Casarões, 2020). Judicial activism in Pakistan and Nigeria are more patchy and restricted by the political pressures which limit its effect on foreign policy.

The judiciary of Ethiopia is not very independent and does not interact much with the foreign policy. The lack of judicial checks and balances also helps to make the executive more dominant and decrease accountability in international affairs (Lefort, 2022).

Elite Networks and Informal Institutions

The informal institutions like the patronage systems, ethnic coalition, religious affiliation, and the business networks play a major role in influencing the foreign policy priorities. Such networks tend to exist beyond the form of formal organizations and affect the aid negotiation, diaspora activities as well as regional formation.

Informal elite bargaining influences trade negotiation and regional diplomacy in Nigeria especially in ECOWAS. Attachments to ethnicity or religion provide frames of foreign policy, and they determine the appointment of diplomatic staff (Ibeanu, 2022). In Ethiopia, foreign policy orientations are determined by ethnic federalism and informal coalitions of elites, particularly concerning the neighboring states and the diaspora communities (Lefort, 2022).

The informal networks such as religious groups, business elites, and diaspora organizations also influence the foreign policy of Pakistan. These actors shape policy discourse, pressure certain results, and help in shaping the national identity formation in the foreign relations (Saifullah and Qaisrani, 2023).

CASE STUDIES

In order to provide the theoretical and institutional dynamics as explained above, four comparative case studies will be presented in this section which includes: Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, and Ethiopia. Both cases emphasize the way in which the domestic political institutions of executive authority, civil-military relations, bureaucratic capacity, and informal networks influence the foreign policy behavior, albeit in different ways.

Pakistan (2018 to 2022): Dualism in Civil-Military Relations, and Strategic Realignment

The 2018-2022 foreign policy of Pakistan was characterized by a new strategic orientation towards China, a reset of relations with the United

States, and an active international policy in the region, in relation to Afghanistan and India. Although Prime Minister Imran Khan officially headed foreign policy, the military elite still played the decisive role in influencing the strategic decisions, particularly those related to the security and regional alliances (Idrees & Khan, 2024).

The civilian-military dualism of the institutions formed a discontinuous foreign policy machine. The Foreign Affairs ministry was marginalized many times to the strategic planning that was majorly military-dominated especially with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the army general headquarters. Such a structure curtailed bureaucratic independence and a long-term strategic integrity (Rizvi, 2019).

There was little parliamentary check and balances and the debate around foreign policy seldom entered into real substantive matters. Civil society organizations such as religious networks and diasporas helped to construct the discourse on Kashmir, Islamic solidarity and humanitarian diplomacy. The involvement of Pakistan in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and its support of Muslim interests was a sign of ideological dedication, as well as domestic politics (Saifullah and Qaisrani, 2023).

Nevertheless, Pakistan had been tactful in its diplomacy, using its strategic position and nuclear capabilities to keep up with world forums. Nevertheless, institutional fragmentation, and civil-military strains, still constrained its capacity to execute an effective and a long-term foreign policy agenda.

Nigeria (2019 to 2023): Regional Diplomacy and Institutional Fragmentation

The foreign policy of President Muhammadu Buhari was both reserved in regional leadership, selective in international interactions, and economic diplomacy. Nigeria as the most populous nation in Africa and one of the most influential ECOWAS members also wanted to establish its presence in West Africa and cope with the institutional difficulties on the domestic level.

Foreign policy power was vested in the executive by the presidential system, and institutional fragmentation was a weakening factor of strategic coherence. The ministry of foreign affairs was under-resourced and there was overlapping mandate and coordination with other agencies was also low (Ibeanu, 2022). The oversight of the legislative branch was formal and the National Assembly seldom questioned the decisions of the executives or opened a substantive debate on foreign policy.

The level of civil-military relations was rather normal, although the military continued to dominate the issue of security policy in the region, especially in terms of maintaining peace and counterterrorism. The involvement of Nigeria in ECOWAS missions and the role of the country in the resolution of conflicts in the region demonstrated its interests as well as normative dedication to stability in the region (Adebajo, 2021).

The influence of informal institutions was also very much on the priorities of foreign policy. The diplomatic appointments, trade negotiations, and the involvement of the diaspora were based on ethnics, religious affiliation and patronage networks. These networks were not always formal and led to inconsistency in policy and elite oriented diplomacy.

In spite of these, Nigeria managed to retain its regional power, using its economic power and strategic positioning. Nonetheless, its capacity to portray foreign policy with coherent and possible leader-like qualities was still strained by institutional shortcomings.

Brazil (2018 to 2024): Bureaucratic Resilience vs Executive Populism

Foreign policy in Brazil, 2018-2024: The populist efforts of President Jair Bolsonaro caused the country to undergo a dramatic change in its foreign policy, which was mitigated by the institutional strength of the foreign ministry. The administration of Bolsonaro embraced a nationalist and anti-globalist approach on challenges to the multilateral institutions, environmental agreements, and regional cooperation structures (Casarões, 2020).

The system of presidency gave Bolsonaro a significant influence over foreign policy, which he applied to place Brazil in the ranks of conservative governments and challenge the orthodoxy of alliances. Nonetheless, there was a counter by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), which used its professional culture and memory to oppose the sudden change of the policy (Lima, 2021).

The legislative institutions were more active than in other developing states and at times interfered with the executive decision-making and demanded

their participation in its ratification of treaties and oversight of the budget. Another way the judiciary interfered was in the foreign policy, which strengthened the constitutional boundaries and supported the international obligations.

Informal networks such as agribusiness lobby, evangelical organizations, or nationalist think tank also influenced the foreign policy of Brazil. Such actors had sway in the trade, climate policy, and regional diplomacy and tended to demand policies that were in line with the domestic ideological agendas.

The examples of executive volatility had not removed the levels of strategic coherence in Brazil because of bureaucratic professionalism and institutional checks. Its interaction with BRICS, Mercosur and the United Nations was marked with limited pragmatic interests as well as normative commitments which were nonetheless through a contentious domestic environment.

Ethiopia (2018 to 2024): Institute Fragility and Executive Ambition

The foreign policy of Ethiopia in the years of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was characterized by an ambitious regional policy, a reconsideration of the country's politics, and internal institutional issues. The administration of Abiy was making peace with Eritrea, approaching the Gulf states, and making Ethiopia a leader in the Horn of Africa region (Abbink, 2019).

It was through the parliamentary system that foreign policy powers were formally given out, yet, in essence, the executive took the decision-making role. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not autonomous and was not able to plan and execute its plans; the changes in leadership and politicization were frequent and sabotaged the strategic planning (Lefort, 2022).

Civil-military relations were intricate, where the military had an active part in the security on the regions and management of intra-regional conflicts. The Tigray conflict and the ethnic tensions in general shifted the focus of diplomacy and worsened the international relations of Ethiopia especially with the western donors and human rights groups.

Foreign policy was hugely affected by informal institutions, particularly, ethnic coalitions and patronage networks. The ethnic federalism in Ethiopia influenced its foreign policies and coalitions as regional governments at times have independent diplomatic relations. There was also the contribution of Diaspora communities who lobbied the world and impacted on public diplomacy.

Although Abiy had a diplomatic ambition, Ethiopia could not maintain a consistent foreign policy due to institutional vulnerability and internal strife. It was sporadic in its involvement with African Union and the United Nations and was limited by the instability in the country.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The four case studies of Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, and Ethiopia indicate some unique trends in the ways of how political institutions influence foreign policy behavior among the developing states. Although every country is functioning in its own historic, cultural, and geopolitical background, some similarities of observations are raised which highlight the pivotal role of institution design and capacity.

In Pakistan and Ethiopia, executive power has a strong impact on the foreign policy at the cost of the institutional control and bureaucratic consistency. The civil-military dualism of Pakistan forms a disjointed system of foreign policy, whereas the dominance of the executive in Ethiopia is worsened by ethnic federalism and institutional weaknesses (Idrees et al., 2024; Lefort, 2022). Conversely, Brazil shows that the bureaucratic resilience and involvement in legislation can dampen executive populism, maintaining strategic coherence despite the changes of ideologies (Lima, 2021).

Nigeria has been in an intermediate position, whereby institutional fragmentation restrains executive dominance. Foreign policy is led by the presidency, with poor legislative checks and proper bureaucratic capacity leading to inconsistent and reactive diplomacy (Adebajo, 2021; Ibeanu, 2022).

The impact of civil-military relations on foreign policy priorities is great. The military influences the strategical decisions of Pakistan focusing on security and regional alliance. The military in Ethiopia has a twofold role in the domestic and foreign policy, and frequently the demarcations between the domestic and foreign policy are undistinct (Rizvi, 2019; Abbink, 2019). The military influence of Nigeria is relatively limited, orienting on peacekeeping operations in the region, counterterrorism, whereas Brazil has the well-developed civilian control of the military.

The foreign ministry of Brazil (Itamaraty) provides an example of how the continuity of policies and the credibility of these countries internationally can be improved with the help of bureaucratic professionalism. Nigeria and Ethiopia are struggling with under-equipped and politicized bureaucracies that curtail strategic thinking and diplomatic acumen. The foreign ministry of Pakistan works under the military control, which minimizes its independence and performance (Saifullah and Qaisrani, 2023).

Ethnic coalitions, religious affiliations, and patronage systems are informal institutions that are very instrumental in foreign policy in all of the four cases. These networks affect the diplomatic appointments and regional alliances in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The religious and diaspora actors construct the discourses of Islamic solidarity and humanitarian diplomacy in Pakistan. Agribusiness lobbies and evangelical groups are informal networks, which affect trade and environmental policy in Brazil (Casarões, 2020).

Democracy institutions are likely to generate more open and deliberative foreign policy. The judicial and legislative involvement in Brazil increases accountability and the problem of fragmentation sabotages democratic structures in Nigeria. Pakistan and Ethiopia have hybrid regimes, as formal institutions of democracy coexist with authoritarianism practices and result in personalized and unstable foreign policy behavior.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Though political institutions are very important in the process of determining foreign policy behavior in developing states, the influence is usually limited by various structural, contextual, and external pressures. This part defines the inhibitory factors that threaten the institutional effectiveness and strategic coherence in the process of foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Numerous developing states are afflicted by institutional fragility, low rule of law, low bureaucratic capacity and politicized systems of governance. Such incompetencies hinder the capacity of institutions to devise a consistent foreign policy, react to international events and take part in strategic planning. Changing leadership and ethnic favoritism have also undermined bureaucratic stability in Ethiopia, as have the problem of overlapping mandates and constrained budgets in the foreign ministry in Nigeria (Lefort, 2022; Ibeanu, 2022).

There is also institutional fragility which influences legislative and judicial oversight. In Pakistan and Ethiopia, parliaments hardly have any substantial debate on foreign policy, and courts in Nigeria and Pakistan are limited by executive power and political influences. Such restrictions make the foreign policy less accountable and able to respond to the preferences of elites instead of the national will (Rizvi, 2019; Adebajo, 2021).

Third world countries frequently have to deal with great external pressure in form of donor conditionalities, debt repayments and geopolitical tussles. These forces limit the autonomy of institutions and misalign priorities of foreign policies. To illustrate, Pakistan has been influenced in making strategic choices due to its dependence on Chinese investment via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Ethiopia has been affected by its relationships with the Gulf states, owing to aid dependency and regional security perceptions (Idrees & Khan, 2024; Abbink, 2019). Foreign policy decisions are also complicated by the asymmetries of power on the global scale. Emerging states have to work within the relations between major states and other adjusting to both regional obligations and national limitations. This balancing tendency commonly results in volatile and reactive foreign policy, particularly where institutions are not able to develop long-term policies.

A major issue with analyzing an institutional impact on foreign policy is the unavailability of credible information and transparency. Most developing states lack published documents on their foreign policies, and their decision-making mechanisms are also very secretive. This restrains academic study and minimizes social responsibility. Although informal institutions are powerful, they are not easily measurable and they tend to be beyond the scope of any form of formal reporting. Irrespective of these, the centrality of political institutions in the foreign policy action by the developing states cannot be ignored. Dealing with institutional shortages, creating more visibility, and decreasing reliance on externalities are critical measures to achieving strategic independence and successful internationalism.

CONCLUSION

As it has been illustrated in this paper, political institutions can form the key to the behavior of foreign policy in developing states. Although systemic theories provide a productive understanding of how the external pressure influences the behavior of states, they do not tend to consider the domestic orders serving as a mediator of the strategy made. This paper has demonstrated that the institutional structures, including executive power, legislative control, bureaucratic potential, civil-military association, and informal systems, have a significant impact on developing nations and their participation in the global system.

The comparative analysis of Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, and Ethiopia 2018-2024 represents the variety of institutional arrangements and its effects on the outcomes of the foreign policies. The civil-military dualism in Pakistan, the institutional fragmentation in Nigeria, the institutional bureaucracy in Brazil and the executive domination in Ethiopia shows two different ways in which institutions can influence strategic behavior. The cases identify the significance of institutional strength, coherence, and legitimacy in effecting coherent, credible, and effective foreign policy.

Nevertheless, institutional influence is not limited. The weaknesses of fragility, being dependent on the external world as well as lack of transparency still limit the capability of developing states to develop and implement strategic foreign policy. These challenges are to be dealt with through institutional reform, capacity building and democratic consolidation. Conclusively, the paper will add to a better-informed and empirically based interpretation of foreign policy in the Global South. It proposes that further studies are needed to understand the interplay between institutional evolution and international engagement as well as guiding policymakers to focus more on institutional development as a pillar of strategic autonomy and global irrelevance.

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