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Towards a Distant Alliance: Technology in the Nigeria – Russia Partnership

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Abstract

Introduction. Existing accounts of Nigeria – Russia relations concentrate heavily on diplomacy and arms sales, leaving the more granular, sector-level basis for cooperation comparatively under-theorized. The research examines three areas in which the two countries' declared priorities intersect: digital technology and e-governance, cybersecurity, as well as atomic sector and electricity.

Methods and Materials. The article draws on Nigerian and Russian government data, sector reports, and the peer-reviewed literature. The article proceeds sector by sector before turning, in the discussion, to the common institutional obstacle that appears to constrain progress across all the areas.

Results. The research shows that Nigeria's structural needs in each of these areas correspond closely to capabilities Russia has developed and is, under the pressure of Western sanctions, more willing than before to export. At the same time, several of the specific instruments considered in the wider literature – most notably mass public surveillance as an anti-corruption tool – carry governance and civil-liberties costs that deserve more explicit treatment than they typically receive.

Discussion and Conclusion. The article argues that Nigeria's chief constraint is not the absence of complementary Russian capacity but the absence of an institutional mechanism to convert

periodic high-level agreements into implemented, monitored projects, and it proposes a narrower set of near-term priorities – a bilateral cybercrime information-sharing protocol, technology transfer, and targeted atomic industry investment – as a more tractable basis for near-term cooperation than the broader partnership agenda usually described.

Keywords: Nigeria; Russia; technology cooperation; cybersecurity; atomic industry; South–South cooperation

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На пути к «отдаленному союзничеству»: технологии в партнерстве России и Нигерии

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Аннотация

Введение. Существующие исследования нигерийско-российских отношений в значительной степени сосредоточены на дипломатии и продаже оружия, оставляя более детальную, отраслевую основу сотрудничества сравнительно малоизученной. В исследовании рассматриваются три отрасли, в которых пересекаются заявленные приоритеты двух стран: цифровые технологии и электронное управление, кибербезопасность, а также атомная промышленность и электроэнергетика.

Методы и материалы. В исследовании использованы данные нигерийских и российских правительств, отраслевые отчеты и рецензируемая научная литература. В статье рассматривается каждый сектор отдельно, после чего в ходе обсуждения затрагивается общее институциональное препятствие, которое, по-видимому, сдерживает прогресс во всех областях.

Результаты. Исследование показывает, что структурные потребности Нигерии в каждой из этих областей тесно соответствуют возможностям России, и что Россия, под давлением западных санкций, более охотно экспортирует эти возможности. В то же время, ряд конкретных инструментов, рассматриваемых в более широкой литературе, прежде всего, массовое общественное наблюдение как инструмент борьбы с коррупцией несёт в себе издержки в сфере управления и гражданских свобод, которые заслуживают более подробного рассмотрения, чем им обычно уделяется.

Обсуждение и заключение. В статье утверждается, что главным препятствием для Нигерии является не отсутствие дополнительных российских возможностей, а отсутствие институционального механизма для преобразования периодических соглашений на высоком уровне в реализуемые и контролируемые проекты, и предлагается более узкий набор краткосрочных приоритетов – двусторонний протокол обмена информацией о киберпреступности, передача технологий и целевые инвестиции в атомную промышленность – в качестве более приемлемой основы для краткосрочного сотрудничества, чем обычно описываемая более широкая программа партнерства.

Ключевые слова: Нигерия; Россия; технологическое сотрудничество; кибербезопасность; атомная промышленность; сотрудничество Юг-Юг

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Introduction

Nigeria – Russia relations possess more historical depth and diplomatic continuity than is generally recognised in the wider literature on Nigerian foreign policy, rooted in decisive Soviet support during the Nigerian Civil War and sustained, if unevenly, through six decades of diplomatic, educational, and technical engagement [1–3]. That depth has not, however, translated into a correspondingly deep economic or technical partnership. Existing accounts of the relationship tend to treat 'Nigeria–Russia cooperation' as a single undifferentiated category, generally organised around diplomacy and arms sales. This article asks a narrower and more tractable question: in which specific technology sectors do Nigeria's stated development needs and Russia's demonstrated capabilities plausibly intersect, and what would a realistic near-term cooperation agenda in each sector look like?

Three sectors are considered: digital technology and e-governance; cybersecurity; as well as atomic sector and electricity. These are not the only plausible areas of cooperation, but they are the areas in which Nigeria's own policy documents identify persistent capacity gaps and in which Russia has, independently of the Nigeria relationship, built up demonstrable sectoral expertise. The analysis draws on Nigerian government and statistical-agency data, Russian government statements, and the peer-reviewed and grey literature on Nigeria – Russia relations, Russian technology policy, and Nigerian development challenges. Where the existing literature has tended toward advocacy – arguing that a given form of cooperation would straightforwardly benefit Nigeria – this article attempts a more measured treatment, noting in particular that the technology-transfer model most commonly proposed for anti-corruption and law-enforcement purposes (mass public surveillance) raises governance and civil-liberties questions that a policy-oriented literature should not pass over. The article proceeds sector by sector before turning, in the discussion, to the common institutional obstacle that appears to constrain progress across all the areas.

Theoretical framework

Today, under the sanctions imposed by governments of unfriendly countries against Russia, communications with friendly but geographically distant states (Asia, Africa, Latin America) are often more effective than with unfriendly ones, even if they are geographically closer.

Based on the ideas of open regionalism that regional associations should be open to interaction with other countries and economic blocs, and that participants in these associations can be involved in other integration projects, today we are witnessing “overlapping membership of a large number of states in various regional structures, the supplementation of formal interstate interactions at the regional level with expanding sustainable informal and “private” ties due to the participation of non-state actors in regional integration, the formation of regional cooperation networks in various spheres” [4]. This also includes the concept of “multi-level integration” – a process in which participating states independently determine the directions, level of representation (heads of state, government,

ministries, etc., or with the participation of businesses, experts, and public associations), and extent of their participation in the integration process.

The negative aspects of the European integration experience stimulate the search for new forms and models of cooperation between states, free from neocolonial dictates and the rigid imposition of supranational will. Based on the ideas of transregionalism (an international relations phenomenon that describes cooperation and competition between countries and regional groups that go beyond traditional regional boundaries) [5] and the concept of the "global region" (implies the institutionalization of cooperation between various regional and subregional groups, as well as individual states, which leads to the emergence of new forms of interaction, which allows states to realize their global potential, overcome regional limitations and disseminate national development models) [6], we can talk about the possibility of "distant alliance". This idea emphasizes not geographic proximity, but rather the development of communications, which facilitates cooperation and integration. At the same time, distant states will avoid territorial disputes, and illegal migration flows from these countries will be easier to control. For Russia, this will provide an opportunity to diversify its ties. In the future, such a distant alliance could expand the format of structures allied to Russia (for example, the Eurasian Economic Union has concluded agreements with ASEAN, Iran, Serbia, and others, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has expanded with the accession of Belarus, Iran, India, and Pakistan), thanks to digitalization, which reduces the costs associated with distance, as well as risks such as sanctions from unfriendly countries, dependence on the technologies of these countries (the so-called digital colonialism [7]), the gap in digital transformation indicators and the lag behind leading countries, ensuring information security, the drain of talent in the digital sphere, technical problems (in particular, the problems of creating unified protocols for online transactions between states, data exchange standards), etc. The example of relations between Nigeria and Russia confirms that such a development of the situation is possible, which will be demonstrated below.

Following the ideas of neofunctionalism [8], according to which the development of specific areas of cooperation, in particular in the field of technology, leads to the need for political regulation of these processes at the level of international organizations, studies show that cooperation between states in the field of technology, in particular digitalization, can contribute to their integration [9], creating new opportunities for cooperation and interaction between government, business, and citizens of different states in the following ways:

1. Improving communication and information exchange. Digital platforms and tools simplify and accelerate the exchange of information between countries, which is critical for coordinating actions and making joint decisions.

2. Developing cross-border e-commerce and the economy. Digital technologies such as e-commerce, cloud computing, and supply chain management systems enable businesses in different countries to interact more effectively and sell goods and services to each other, thereby promoting economic integration.

3. Reducing transaction costs. Digitalization reduces costs associated with transportation, customs clearance, and other procedures, making cross-border transactions more attractive and facilitating trade and investment between countries.

4. Promoting joint projects and innovation. Digital platforms for collaboration and knowledge sharing enable countries to develop and implement joint projects in science, technology, education, and culture, thereby fostering deeper integration.

5. Creating a unified digital space. The integration of government information systems and communications structures facilitates the creation of a unified digital space, facilitating interaction between government, citizens, and businesses across borders.

Our previous research shows that digitalization is actively used by strong powers to maintain and expand their influence (in the case of Francophonie – through culture, and in the case of the EU – through the economy) [10]. Moreover, research has shown that the more similar the digital policies and legislation of states, the more intense the political cooperation between them [10]. This is partly consistent with the neofunctionalist theory, which states that the cooperation in particular sectors (incl. digital) leads to the need for political regulation of these processes.

Findings: Digital Technology, Innovation, and E-Governance

Nigeria and Russia occupy markedly different positions in global innovation rankings, a gap that is itself informative about what a realistic partnership can and cannot achieve. In the World Intellectual Property Organization's Global Innovation Index, Russia ranked 59th of 133 economies in 2024, after ranking as high as 45th in 2021; Nigeria ranked 113th of the same 133 economies, an improvement on its 2020 position of 117th but still in the bottom quartile globally[1,2]. Figure 1 plots both trajectories. The gap is wide enough that a straightforward 'transfer' of Russian innovation capacity to Nigeria is not a realistic short-term proposition; what is more plausible is targeted cooperation in specific applications digital public services, agricultural technology, and STEM training infrastructure – rather than a general innovation partnership.

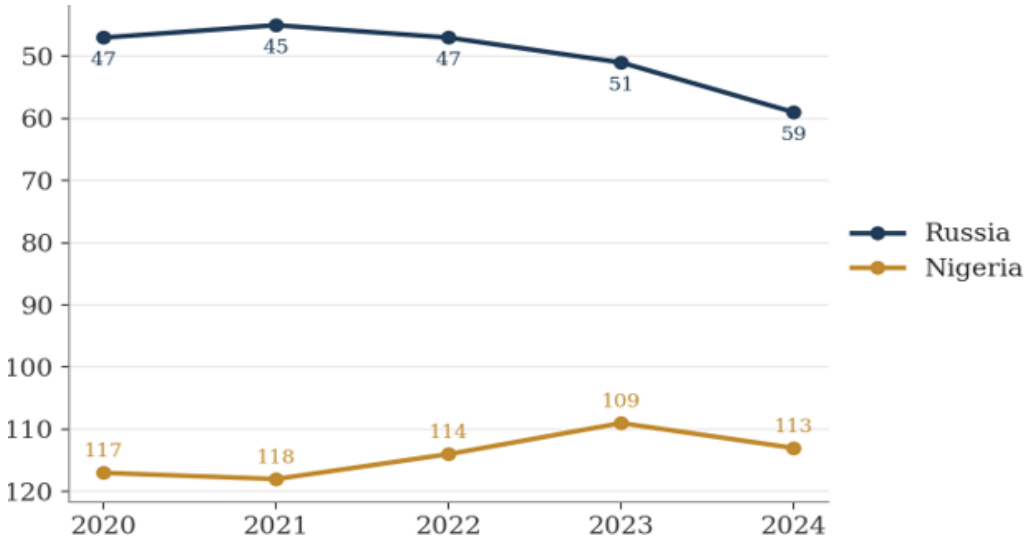

Fig. 1. Global Innovation Index rank, Russia and Nigeria, 2020–2024 (lower rank = more innovative)
Рис. 1. Рейтинг Глобального индекса инноваций, Россия и Нигерия, 2020–2024 гг.
(более низкий рейтинг = более высокий уровень инноваций)

[1] Nigeria ranking in the Global Innovation Index 2024 // World Intellectual Property Organization: [сайт]. URL: https://www.wipo.int/edocs/gii-ranking/2024/ng.pdf (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[2] Russian Federation ranking in the Global Innovation Index 2024 // World Intellectual Property Organization: [сайт]. URL: https://www.wipo.int/edocs/gii-ranking/2024/ru.pdf (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

Source: Nigeria ranking in the Global Innovation Index 2024; Russian Federation ranking in the Global Innovation Index 2024. World Intellectual Property Organization (author's compilation).

Источник: Рейтинг Нигерии в Глобальном индексе инноваций 2024 года; рейтинг Российской Федерации в Глобальном индексе инноваций 2024 года. Всемирная организация интеллектуальной собственности (авторская подборка).

One specific application merits closer attention because it recurs prominently in the literature on Nigeria – Russia technology cooperation: the use of public video surveillance as an anti-corruption and law-enforcement tool, modelled on its extensive deployment in Russian cities[3]. The argument, in its strongest form, holds that ubiquitous camera coverage could reduce petty corruption in Nigerian policing and improve compliance with traffic and public-order regulations. This argument has some empirical support in the general literature on situational crime prevention, but it understates two costs that a policy-oriented assessment should register explicitly. First, mass surveillance infrastructure requires a level of institutional oversight and data-protection regulation that Nigeria has not yet fully developed; without such safeguards, the same infrastructure that could deter petty corruption could equally be repurposed for the surveillance of political dissent or civil society activity. Second, the Russian case itself is not an unambiguous model: Russian urban surveillance networks have documented uses in monitoring political protest as well as ordinary crime[4]. A more defensible near-term proposal is narrower: technical cooperation on e-governance applications with a clearer public-service rationale and a smaller surveillance footprint, such as digitized passport and identity-document processing already partly in place in Nigeria – and electronic voting infrastructure, an area Russia has piloted domestically since 2019[5].

Artificial intelligence is a second area of active, independently verifiable investment on both sides. Russia has stated an ambition to be among global AI leaders by 2030 and reported approximately $181 million in AI-related investment between 2021 and 2023, with a further 5.2 billion rubles earmarked by the government for 2024[6,7][11]. Nigeria's federal government has, over the same period, established a National Artificial Intelligence Trust, approved a rural-connectivity initiative intended to extend mobile access to some 21 million additional people, and partnered with Google on AI-focused funding for startups and talent development[8,9,10,11]. These are independent, parallel investments rather than joint ones. A

[3] Epifanova, A. Online elections in Russia: Manipulating votes in a new digital realm. 21.05.2021 // German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP): [сайт]. URL: https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/online-elections-russia (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[4] Epifanova, A. Online elections in Russia: Manipulating votes in a new digital realm. 21.05.2021 // German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP): [сайт]. URL: https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/online-elections-russia (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[5] Epifanova, A. Online elections in Russia: Manipulating votes in a new digital realm. 21.05.2021 // German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP): [сайт]. URL: https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/online-elections-russia (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[6] Russia invests $181mn into AI growth through 2021–2023. 10.01.2024 // Daryo: [сайт]. URL: https://daryo.uz/en/2024/01/10/russia-invests181mn-into-ai-growththrough-2021-2023/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[7] Russia to spend over 5 bln rubles to support development of AI technology in 2024 – Mishustin. 17.09.2023 // Interfax: [сайт]. URL: https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/94917/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[8] Esene, I. Ministry announce N2.8billion Google support to advance AI talent development in Nigeria. 31.01.2024 // Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy: [сайт]. URL: https://fmcide.gov.ng/ministry-announce-n2-8billion-google-support-to-advance-ai-talent-development-in-nigeria/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

realistic bilateral agenda would build on this existing momentum through concrete, bounded instruments, for example, placements for Nigerian AI researchers at specialised Russian institutions such as Sirius University, or joint ventures between Russian and Nigerian AI firms operating under ordinary commercial terms rather than the more expansive, loosely specified 'technology partnership' language that recurs in the descriptive literature.

Findings: Cybersecurity

Nigeria's cybercrime problem is well documented in both domestic and international sources and is best understood as a governance and labour-market problem with a technological expression rather than a primarily technological problem in itself. Contributing factors identified in the literature include weak public-sector accountability, high youth unemployment, and, in a smaller number of documented cases, complicity by financial-sector insiders: the Nigeria Deposit Money Banks literature records 320 cases of staff involvement in fraud and forgery in 2017, rising to 899 in 2018 [12]. Nigeria recorded 9.87 million unemployed persons in 2024, of whom 4.18 million were youths aged 15–34[12], a labour-market backdrop against which the persistence of cybercrime is unsurprising even as it remains a serious reputational and economic liability.

The 2024 World Cybercrime Index, compiled by researchers at Oxford and UNSW from a structured survey of cybercrime experts, ranks Nigeria fifth globally among cybercrime-source countries, behind Russia, Ukraine, China, and the United States [13][13]. Figure 2 reproduces the full top ten. The inclusion of both Russia and Nigeria among the same small set of globally significant source countries is, on one reading, an argument for bilateral cooperation: both governments have an interest in a functioning international framework for cybercrime investigation and extradition, and cooperation between their respective enforcement agencies – the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and its Russian counterparts – could plausibly extend both countries' domestic law-enforcement reach into cases with a cross-border dimension. On another reading, it is a caution against overstating what either country can offer the other by way of technical solutions: both are net cybercrime exporters relative to their level of digital development, suggesting that governance and law-enforcement capacity, not access to Russian technology specifically, is the binding constraint on the Nigerian side.

[9] O'Grady, V. Nigeria's FEC approves AI and rural connectivity initiatives. 05.02.2025 // Developing Telecoms: [сайт]. URL: https://developingtelecoms.com/telecom-business/telecom-regulation/17954-nigeria-s-fec-approves-ai-and-rural-connectivity-initiatives.html (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[10] Ranjan, A. Nigeria advances AI and connectivity with two major government initiatives. 05.02.2025 // TechAfrica News: [сайт]. URL: https://techafricanews.com/2025/02/05/nigeria-advances-ai-and-connectivity-with-two-major-government-initiatives/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[11] FG launches new N100 million AI fund with Google to empower startups. 07.10.2024 // Startup Lagos: [сайт]. URL: https://www.startuplagos.net/post-detail/fg-launches-new-n100-million-ai-fund-with-google-to-empower-startups (дата обращения: 15.01.2026).

[12] 2025 unemployment statistics in Nigeria. 06.08.2026 // MyJobMag: [сайт]. URL: https://www.myjobmag.com/blog/unemployment-statistics-in-nigeria (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[13] World-first 'Cybercrime Index' ranks countries by cybercrime threat level. 10.04.2024 // University of Oxford: [сайт]. URL: https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2024-04-10-world-first-cybercrime-index-ranks-countries-cybercrime-threat-level (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

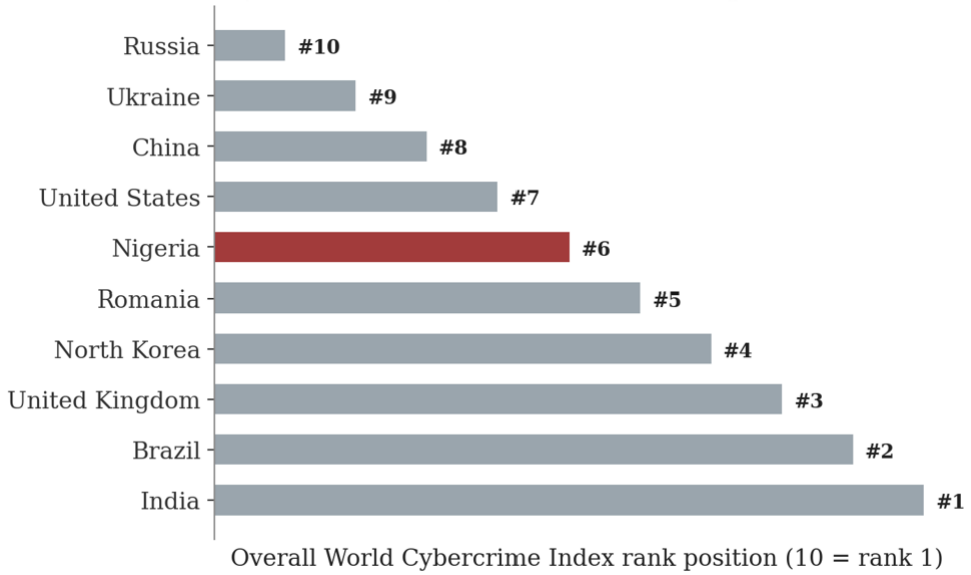

Fig. 2. World Cybercrime Index – top ten source countries, 2024 год [13].
Рис. 2. Всемирный индекс киберпреступности – топ-10 стран-источников киберпреступлений, 2024 год [13].

A realistic bilateral agenda in this area is narrower than the technology-transfer framing found elsewhere in the literature: a structured information-sharing protocol between the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and its Russian counterparts, covering both prevention-oriented intelligence and post-crime investigative cooperation, together with a bilateral extradition arrangement for cybercrime offences specifically. Nigeria's 2015 Cybercrime Act provides an adequate domestic legal basis for such cooperation on the Nigerian side [14].

Findings: Civil Nuclear Energy and the Electrification Gap

Nigeria's electricity deficit is well documented and structurally severe. Estimated demand of approximately 40,000 megawatts is met by an installed generation capacity of only 12,522 megawatts[14], with natural gas supplying roughly 79 percent of generation and hydropower most of the remainder[15]. The deficit stems less from a shortage of primary generation capacity than from the deterioration of transmission and distribution infrastructure, a distinction with direct implications for where cooperation is likely to be most useful [15][16].

[14] Electricity, power systems and renewable energy. U.S. Department of Commerce. 06.06.2023 // International Trade Administration: [сайт]. URL: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/electricity-power-systems-and-renewable-energy (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[15] Total electricity demand in Nigeria from 2000 to 2023 // Statista: [сайт]. URL: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1306955/electricity-demand-in-nigeria/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[16] Challenges to the Nigerian power grid. 02.04.2024 // UKNIAF: [сайт]. URL: https://ukniaf.ng/challenges-to-the-nigerian-power-grid/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

Table 1 / Таблица 1

Nigeria's Electricity Capacity Gap Against the Geregu Nuclear Addition
Разрыв в мощности электроэнергетического сектора Нигерии в связи с вводом в эксплуатацию атомной электростанции в Герегу

Indicator	Megawatts (MW)
Estimated national electricity demand	≈ 40,000
Current installed generation capacity	12,522
Capacity gap (demand minus installed capacity)	≈ 27,478
Geregu nuclear power plant (Nigeria–Russia agreement)	2,400
Residual gap after Geregu plant becomes operational	≈ 25,078

Source: compiled from Electricity, power systems and renewable energy. U.S. Department of Commerce. International Trade Administration (June 6, 2023) and [16]; figures as reported in the underlying sources.

Источник: Данные составлены авторами на основе информации из Electricity, power systems and renewable energy. U.S. Department of Commerce. International Trade Administration (June 6, 2023) и [16]; цифры приведены в соответствующих источниках.

Russia's Rosatom has pursued nuclear-plant construction as an instrument of foreign economic policy in the developing world for over a decade, with completed or under-construction projects in China, India, Iran, Hungary, and Belarus, active construction in Egypt, Bangladesh, and Turkey, and framework discussions extending to Myanmar, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Brazil, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Sri Lanka [17–18]. The 2018 framework agreement between Nigeria and Russia envisages a 2,400-megawatt plant at Geregu, Kogi State [16]. As Table 1 makes clear, even full delivery of this project would close less than one-tenth of Nigeria's estimated capacity gap; nuclear cooperation with Russia is, on the arithmetic alone, better understood as one contributing component of a diversified generation strategy than as a solution to Nigeria's electrification problem in itself.

Given that Nigeria's more immediate constraint is transmission and distribution rather than generation, the more consequential near-term cooperation opportunity may lie less in the nuclear plant itself than in a parallel programme to rehabilitate transmission infrastructure and, over the medium term, build domestic manufacturing capacity for cables, meters, transformers, and switchgear, an area where Russian engineering firms have relevant industrial experience[17]. A stable power supply would plausibly support the returns described in the general development-economics literature on infrastructure and investment—lower self-generation costs for firms currently reliant on diesel generators, at an estimated national cost of ₦327.05 billion annually[18], and improved conditions for both new investment and the return of manufacturers that previously relocated to other African markets with more reliable power. These effects are plausible extensions of the existing infrastructure-economics literature rather than findings specific to Nigeria–Russia cooperation, and they would apply to power-sector investment from any credible partner.

[17] Onyekwena, C., Ishaku, J., Akanonu, P.C. Electrification in Nigeria: Challenges and way forward. October, 2017 // Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA): [сайт]. URL: https://cseaafrica.org/images/posts/5123442171117655.pdf (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[18] Esifiho, F. Nigerians spend N327.05bn annually on petrol, diesel – NBS report. 25.10.2024 // Businessday NG: [сайт]. URL: https://businessday.ng/news/article/nigerians-spend-n327-05bn-annually-on-petrol-diesel-nbs-report/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

What Does Russia Gain

A bilateral relationship persists only if both parties perceive net benefit, and the existing literature on Nigeria – Russia relations has tended to focus disproportionately on what Nigeria stands to gain. Nigeria's own contribution to the relationship is more substantial than this asymmetric framing suggests. Nigeria's GDP, valued at roughly US$362.81 billion in 2023 with a market capitalisation of approximately US$43.79 billion in early 2025[19,20], together with its position as Africa's most populous country and a gateway to a wider regional market whose combined capitalisation exceeded US$1.35 trillion at the start of 2025[21], gives Russian firms a plausible commercial rationale for deeper market entry, particularly if undertaken through Nigeria-based manufacturing rather than direct export, which would be consistent with the trade-imbalance concerns raised by Russia's own ambassador[22]. Nigeria's shared border with Niger, and its position on the periphery of the Sahel security crisis in which Russia has established a growing military and political footprint, gives the relationship a security as well as a commercial dimension for Moscow, though the extent to which improved Russia – Nigeria relations would translate into broader positive African perceptions of Russia is a plausible but empirically untested proposition rather than a demonstrated effect.

Constraints on the Relationship

Three constraints on deeper Nigeria – Russia cooperation recur across the existing literature and merit direct treatment. The first, institutional follow-through, has been a consistent theme throughout this article and requires no further elaboration here beyond noting that it applies with equal force to each of the strategic-level proposals discussed above.

The second constraint, commonly described as a residual preference among Nigerian policymakers for Western partners, is frequently attributed in the advocacy literature primarily to colonial-era sentiment. This is only partly persuasive. Nigeria's Western orientation reflects a set of durable, materially grounded relationships – the United States as Nigeria's largest single crude-oil buyer, extensive Nigerian diaspora and educational ties to the United Kingdom and North America, and a Western-dominated international financial architecture in which Nigeria's dollar-denominated debt and trade are embedded – rather than sentiment alone. The comparison the wider literature draws to India, which maintains extensive Russian defence and energy cooperation without diminishing its Western ties[23,24], is instructive but incomplete: India's diversification was underwritten by a much larger and

[19] Nigeria imports from Russia. 2026 // Trading Economics: [сайт]. URL: https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/imports/russia (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[20] Nigeria market capitalization, 1985–2025 // CEIC: [сайт]. URL: https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/nigeria/market-capitalization (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[21] How capital market development can help shape Africa's future. 02.12.2024 // CFA Institute: [сайт]. URL: https://www.cfainstitute.org/insights/articles/capital-market-development-africa-future (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[22] Russia pledges to end trade imbalance with Nigeria. 26.08.2025 // Voice of Nigeria: [сайт]. URL: https://von.gov.ng/russia-pledges-to-end-trade-imbalance-with-nigeria/ (дата обращения d: 25.07.2026).

[23] Milestone in India-Russia nuclear cooperation. 10.08.2016 // Embassy of India, Moscow: [сайт]. URL: https://indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/nuclear-coopera.php (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[24] Şefkatli, F.E. Strengthening ties: The evolution of security partnerships between Russia and Nigeria. 20.03.2024 // ORSAM: [сайт]. URL: https://www.orsam.org.tr/en/strengthening-ties-the-evolution-of-security-partnerships-between-russia-and-nigeria/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

more diversified domestic economy and a substantially larger arms-import negotiating position than Nigeria currently possesses, which affected how much diversification risk India could absorb. Nigeria's caution is therefore better characterised as a rational, if perhaps overly conservative, response to real asymmetries in economic leverage than as an irrational colonial hangover, even if the latter framing captures part of the picture.

The third constraint, concern about Russian domination, is treated in the existing literature as baseless, on the grounds that Russia's engagement with India, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and South Africa has not produced dependency of the kind the concern envisages. This comparison is reasonably persuasive for India and Kazakhstan, both of which negotiate with Russia from a position of substantial independent economic and military capacity, but less so for Belarus, whose relationship with Russia is asymmetric in ways that at least some observers characterise as involving significant loss of independent foreign-policy latitude. The more defensible version of this argument is not that dependency risk is absent, but that it is a function of the relative bargaining power each partner brings to the relationship rather than an inherent property of dealing with Russia specifically – which implies that Nigeria's own priority should be strengthening its independent economic base rather than assuming the risk away.

Discussion: A Common Institutional Constraint

Two claims recur in the existing advocacy literature on Nigeria–Russia relations and are treated with particular care here. The first is that Nigeria's relatively cautious posture toward Russia reflects a colonial-era psychological attachment to the West that has little basis beyond sentiment. The second is that a Russian-supported domestic arms industry could substantially reduce Nigeria's security dependence within a short time horizon. Both claims contain a defensible core but are, in their strongest forms, overstated; this article attempts to state each proposition in its most defensible version rather than its most rhetorically convenient one.

The most consequential recent development is qualitative rather than quantitative: in a 2025 interview, Russia's ambassador to Nigeria acknowledged the imbalance directly and pointed to the establishment of a Russian Trade Mission in Abuja, early efforts by Russian agribusiness firms to register Nigerian shea-butter supply chains, and a renewed audit of the Ajaokuta Steel Complex as first steps toward correction[25]. Independent assessment of Russia's economic leverage in Nigeria, however, remains sceptical: one recent comparative analysis found Russia accounts for well under one percent of Nigeria's total trade, against China's position as Nigeria's largest trading partner with financed infrastructure running into billions of dollars, and characterised the pattern of Russian pledges since the Obasanjo era including the original, still-unrealised Ajaokuta commitment – a s consistently aspirational rather than delivered[26]. This is the same institutional-implementation gap visible in other major Nigeria – Russia agreements, including the still-unrealised 1976 Ajaokuta steel

[25] Russia pledges to end trade imbalance with Nigeria. 26.08.2025 // Voice of Nigeria: [сайт]. URL: https://von.gov.ng/russia-pledges-to-end-trade-imbalance-with-nigeria/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

[26] Klomegah, K.K. Power without purse: Russia's limited economic leverage in Nigeria exposes a strategic weakness. 29.12.2025 // Modern Diplomacy: [сайт]. URL: https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/12/29/power-without-purse-russias-limited-economic-leverage-in-nigeria-exposes-a-strategic-weakness/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

complex [19–20], and it bears directly on how much weight the trade-diversification proposals below can realistically carry in the near term.

Within this constrained picture, several narrower interventions are more defensible than a general call to 'expand trade.' A joint Nigeria – Russia trade-information body, with offices in both countries' commercial centres and a bilingual public information function, would address the specific information-asymmetry problem identified above without requiring either government to alter its underlying export structure. Settlement in national currencies – naira and ruble – would reduce transaction costs and, following the precedent Russia has already established in its trade with China and India, is technically straightforward, though it should be recognised that ruble volatility and naira convertibility constraints limit its near-term scale. A more realistic sequencing than a broad trade-diversification push is to concentrate the diversification effort on the small set of items – shea products, cocoa derivatives, and processed agricultural goods – where Russian import demand and Nigerian supply capacity are already aligned, as the Russian Trade Mission's own early efforts suggest[27], and to treat industrial-capacity-building for a broader export basket as a longer-term, separately resourced objective.

Across all the sectors examined here, a consistent pattern emerges. Nigeria's needs and Russia's capabilities are, on the available evidence, genuinely complementary in specific, bounded applications – targeted AI research placements rather than open-ended technology transfer and discrete atomic infrastructure components. Where the wider descriptive literature on Nigeria – Russia cooperation tends to over-reach is in moving from this genuine complementarity to broad, loosely specified partnership proposals that lack an implementation mechanism. This pattern is visible across the two governments' major agreements more generally, from the still-unrealised 1976 Ajaokuta steel complex [19–20] to the consistently modest bilateral trade volumes both governments' own statements describe as falling short of potential [21]: the two governments have shown themselves capable of signing agreements but not, historically, of completing the multi-year projects those agreements are meant to enable.

This article's narrower, sector-specific proposals are offered partly as a corrective to that pattern. A bilateral EFCC – Russian law-enforcement information-sharing protocol, a technology-transfer programme, and a small number of discrete atomic industry components are each achievable within a single presidential term and each individually auditable, in contrast to the more diffuse 'comprehensive partnership' framing that recurs elsewhere. It should also be acknowledged that some proposals found in the wider literature, most notably the surveillance-based anti-corruption model, carry costs that a purely instrumental cost-benefit framing tends to understate, and that Nigerian policymakers would be right to treat with more caution than technological enthusiasm alone would suggest.

And here the questions arise: How attractive is the digital strategy proposed by Russia for countries of the Global South? Can Russia be called a digital empire in this context?

In today's digital space, it is appropriate to apply the concepts of empire, metropolis, dependency, colonialism, and imperialism to the analysis of digital policy. Historically, empires signified supreme power and expansion; today, such forms of power are disguised

[27] Russia pledges to end trade imbalance with Nigeria. 26.08.2025 // Voice of Nigeria: [сайт]. URL: https://von.gov.ng/russia-pledges-to-end-trade-imbalance-with-nigeria/ (дата обращения: 25.07.2026).

as new structures of globalization and digital networks. The very existence of centralized power and political institutions, including among "Western democracies", recalls the relevance of empires. The question of the compatibility of imperial characteristics and free online communication remains open. The Internet is not a completely neutral platform. In this context, a digital empire appears as a global network comprising a metropolis, dominions, and colonies. The metropolis builds relationships with dependent countries through its allies and partners; hostile regimes face war. Digitalization is actively used by powerful countries to maintain and expand their influence (in the case of Francophonie, through culture, and in the case of the European Union, through economics). Furthermore, digitalization can be used as part of "soft power" and to organize protests aimed at regime change[28].

Digital imperialism is the concept that powerful states and large tech corporations use digital infrastructures, data collection and processing, platform control, and global standards to increase their influence beyond traditional boundaries of sovereignty. Digital imperialism as a concept is an extension of the theories of cultural imperialism and media imperialism and, in turn, has become the basis for the development of the concepts of platform and blockchain imperialism[29]. Having become part of the Marxist categorical apparatus more than 100 years ago, imperialism in digital space today includes economic dominance through data, political influence through regulatory and technological levers, cultural influence through media and platforms, and the management of global norms and infrastructure. The focus of research on digital imperialism has shifted toward African countries, but some countries can simultaneously be both subjects and objects of digital colonization (in particular, China, which still depends on a number of foreign technologies). Here we can put forward the idea of the self-reproduction of digital imperialism. China, having adopted Western technologies it fought to obtain in the 1990s and 2000s, is now gradually becoming a subject of digital colonialism, gratuitously exporting its own digital solutions to countries in the Global South. The problem here is that this does not change the underlying system of dominance and subordination in the digital space, which continues to reproduce itself. This idea is somewhat similar to the flying geese paradigm in economic theory, which explains technology transfer and economic growth through a model of import, domestic reproduction, and subsequent export, where the movement of developing countries resembles a flying wedge of birds. Three key players can be identified competing for the right to set the rules for the digital world (the US, EU, and China), and three corresponding regulatory models: the European model, with its emphasis on law and regulation (GDPR, the Data Act, regulatory requirements for cross-border data transfers as an attempt to strengthen digital sovereignty); the American model, with its emphasis on markets and infrastructure (the role of US platforms and cloud services as critical infrastructure, as well as regulatory and legal mechanisms, such as data protection and antitrust regulations); and the Chinese model, with its emphasis on "digital sovereignty" and the "Digital Silk Road" (state control, large digital

[28] Nye, J. Cyber Power. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, May 2010: [эл. доступ]. URL: https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/pantheon_files/files/publication/cyber-power.pdf (дата обращения: 01.08.2026).

[29] Giddens, A. Media Imperialism? // Sociology. 6th edition. Revised and updated with Ph.W. Sutton. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. P. 764–766.

corporations within the country, and the export of technological solutions to other regions under the direction of state interests).

The Russian approach to digital policy often links sovereignty and control over data with state regulation of the digital economy. In this context, Russia seeks digital sovereignty, data localization, and governance of digital infrastructures as a way to increase influence at home and abroad.

Valdai Club experts believe that Russia faces a choice: whether to join one of the existing technological platforms (American or Chinese) or build its own, competing with the two already established ones[30]. The authors consider building a domestic "technoecosystem" a priority for maintaining genuine independence. This should be done with the support of national leaders, developed digital services (Yandex, VK, Sber), and a strong cybersecurity school (Kaspersky Lab). This strategy envisions transforming Russia into a technological core for the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union and the CIS, offering them independent digital solutions as an alternative to American and Chinese products. At the same time, import substitution should take place: gradually reducing critical dependence on foreign software and complex equipment (although the authors acknowledge that this is a formidable task in the microelectronics and semiconductor manufacturing sector). If resources are insufficient to create a fully closed ecosystem, the report proposes a strategy of flexible maneuvering: preventing the dominance of any single player in the domestic market (diversification of partnerships) and imposing strict conditions on foreign platforms (data localization, technology transfer, and compliance with Russian digital legislation).

If digital sovereignty can be considered an indicator of “empire”, then in this sense, Russia has ambitions as a strong state, reducing its dependence on imported technologies and striving to expand its sphere of digital influence. However, this is happening on a fundamentally different basis, not connected to the rigid dictate of one's position or the extraction of resources, but rather on the basis of open, temporary alliances, mutual interests, and resistance to neocolonialism, which resonates with countries of the Global South. This is changing the very system of relations of dominance and subordination in the digital space, where only the actors change, but which continues to reproduce itself. And here, the reasons for Russia's proposal of such a model (the lack of common borders and a colonial past, or the difficulties of Russia's technological development) are irrelevant. The main thing is that the countries of the Global South do not see Russia as a threat, and therefore, such a model is attractive to them. Russia does not need these countries to be its digital colonies, but it does need them not to be the digital colonies of its enemies with “imperial” ambitions. In other words, Russia is more of a digital “anti-empire”.

Russia is increasing its presence in the digital space of countries in the Global South, offering cybertechnologies as an alternative to Western solutions and expanding its own cyber presence. A turning point was the meeting in St. Petersburg, attended by heads of security agencies from several countries. Moscow declared its readiness to assist foreign governments in establishing control over the information environment. Russian cybersecurity companies promise protection from Western surveillance, which could be

[30] Безруков А.О., Мамонов М.В., Сучков М.А., Сушенцов А.А. Международная конкуренция и лидерство в цифровой среде. Доклад Международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай». Фонд развития и поддержки Международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай», январь 2021. 28 с. [эл. доступ]. URL: https://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/36581/ (дата обращения: 01.08.2026).

perceived as a tool against color revolutions via social media. Many countries, distrustful of the US and striving for technological sovereignty, see Russia as a partner with advanced technologies. Under sanctions, Russian IT exports are being redistributed to Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East. At economic forums, Russia promotes its digital exporters and builds a global network of partners. The fundamental idea remains technological sovereignty: if a country is unable to create its own digital platforms, it can turn to Russian solutions. This gives Russia access to these countries' critical infrastructure and data to counter Western intelligence agencies[31].

In June 2026, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "major states face a historic choice: either they create their own 'platform and technological contours,' or they become digital peripheries"[32]. According to him, Russian platform solutions are becoming a real driver of development for partner economies.

But the main risk for Russia's strategy is the lack of scale in its domestic market. For the Russian digital ecosystem to remain competitive, it is critically important for it to scale up to external markets (the countries of the EAEU, the Global South, and the Middle East), offering them the concept of "digital non-alignment"[33] and freeing them from the "dilemma of digital choice" (the West or China).

Conclusion

This article has examined three sectors – digital technology and e-governance, cybersecurity, and atomic industry – in which Nigeria's development needs and Russia's demonstrated capabilities plausibly intersect. In each case, the specific, bounded forms of cooperation available are more modest, and more achievable, than the broad partnership language common in the existing literature. Nigeria's substantial innovation and infrastructure gap relative to Russia, illustrated across the article's figures, means that cooperation is more likely to succeed where it is narrowly targeted – a defined cybercrime information-sharing protocol, technology transfer, and discrete atomic sector investments – than where it is framed as a general-purpose technology or development partnership. Nuclear cooperation at Geregu is a genuine but numerically modest contribution to Nigeria's electricity deficit, better paired with transmission-infrastructure investment than treated as a stand-alone solution. The recurring obstacle is not a lack of complementary capability but a lack of institutional follow-through, a pattern already visible in the still-unrealised Ajaokuta steel project and in bilateral trade volumes that both governments' own statements describe as falling short of potential [19; 21]. Future work with access to bureaucratic or archival sources could usefully examine why specific agreements in each of these sectors have or have not moved from signature to implementation, extending the sector-level mapping offered here into an account of implementation itself.

[31] Soldatov, A., Borogan, I. Putin's New Cyber Empire. How the Kremlin Is Embedding Russian Technology Around the World. 25.08.2025 // Foreign Affairs: [сайт]. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/putins-new-cyber-empire (дата обращения: 01.08.2026).

[32] Как не стать цифровой периферией – президент России. 08.06.2026 // Ежедневное онлайн-издание D-russia.ru: [сайт]. URL: https://d-russia.ru/kak-ne-stat-tsifrovoy-periferiey-prezident-rossii.html (дата обращения: 01.08.2026).

[33] Карасев П.А. Цифровой колониализм vs. цифровое неприсоединение. 08.11.2021 // Российский совет по международным делам (РСМД): [сайт]. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/tsifrovoy-kolonializm-vs-tsifrovoe-neprisoedinenie/ (дата обращения: 01.08.2026).

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