Comparative Discourse Analysis of Buhari and Atiku's Twitter Campaigns during Nigeria's 2019 Presidential Election

Zubairu Malah
Yobe State University, Nigeria
zubayrmalah@yahoo.com
https://doi.org/10.24071/ijels.v12i2.574
received: 18 February 2026; accepted: 17 September 2026

Abstract
The incumbent-versus-challenger lens offers a vital comparative approach to understanding how asymmetric rhetorical burdens shape electoral campaign discourse. However, in the Nigerian context, existing enquiries have largely concentrated on offline speeches, neglecting the increasingly popular domain of online campaigning. Furthermore, previous analyses relied on one-dimensional thematic categorisations that fail to capture the vertical trajectory linking multiple rhetorical concepts – ultimately treating campaign discourse as static rather than as multi-layered rhetorical acts. Therefore, this study compares the Twitter campaign discourses of President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, during Nigeria's 2019 general elections. The comparison focuses on (a) identifying 'Us' vs. 'Them' ideology construction, (b) examining how Us/Them boundaries are exploited to project ethos, and (c) examining how dimensions of ethos are utilised to perform legitimation and delegitimation. To achieve this, the study draws on Aristotle's Rhetoric and van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse 140 campaign tweets, split equally between the official handles of Buhari and Atiku. The frameworks utilised include van Dijk's (1998, 2011) Ideological Square, Beason's (1991) Strategies for Establishing an Effective Persona, and Reyes' (2011) Strategies of Legitimation in Political Discourse. The results indicate that while the incumbent leveraged his built-in legitimacy to construct defensive discourse using fewer strategies, the challenger relied heavily on rhetoric to convince voters of the need for systematic change and to demonstrate his qualifications.

Keywords: campaign discourse, challenger, (de)legitimation, ethos, ideology, incumbent, Twitter.

INTRODUCTION

Political campaign discourse is fundamentally centred on building trust and confidence among prospective voters (Perloff, 2014; Reisigl, 2008). It involves the strategic manipulation of language (and other semiotic resources like images and music) by electoral candidates and their parties to enact discourses in ways that legitimise them and their agendas while delegitimising their opponents (Chilton, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2011). Consequently, electoral candidates and parties consistently orient their discourse to demonstrate that their competence, moral character, intentions, actions, ideas, and ideologies are trustworthy, while systematically casting doubt on those of their rivals. By designing their discourse this way, these actors deliberately aim to influence the voters and steer their judgments in their favour at the ballot box.

This work is licensed under CC BY-SA.
Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Moreover, recent developments in smartphones and mobile internet have afforded electoral candidates and parties the opportunity to adapt Social Media platforms for campaigning. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp facilitate direct, real-time engagement between candidates and constituencies, serving as critical tools for voter mobilisation, agenda-setting, and opposition defamation (see Hemphill et al., 2013; Kreiss, 2016; Larsson & Moe, 2014). Accordingly, Nigeria's 2019 election campaigns saw presidential candidates deploying Twitter on an unprecedented scale (Bello et al., 2019; Momoh, 2019). This was particularly evident between the sitting president, Muhammadu Buhari, running for re-election under the All Progressives Congress (APC), and his closest challenger, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

President Buhari and Atiku were not only the most popular candidates in this election; they were also the most active on Twitter (Opeibi, 2019; Kadijat et al., 2020). The President campaigned under the slogan *Next Level*, arguing that the PDP should not be trusted again and that he should be re-elected. Atiku, a former Vice President of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007, whose presidential candidacy this cycle received strong support from many Nigerians, campaigned under the slogan *Let's Get Nigeria Working Again.* He argued that Buhari did not deserve another vote and that he should be elected to replace him. Consequently, the intense rhetoric displayed by the two contenders on Twitter continues to trigger multi-disciplinary studies from which intriguing findings continue to emerge. For example, studies show how their discourses were designed to *mobilise supporters* (Fakunle, 2019; Mano, 2020). They were also found to deploy tweets to *build agendas* by influencing media coverage (Auwal et al., 2020). Findings have also revealed how they employed *Otherisation* in tweets to influence voters (Auwal & Ersoy, 2020). Their tweets also use *figurative devices* and *propaganda* (Amali, 2024). We have also seen how they used specific *speech acts* for *(de)legitimation* (Malah et al., 2025a) and *other forms* for *ethos projection* (Malah et al., 2025b).

However, despite substantial research on this campaign, previous studies have seemingly failed to employ an incumbent-versus-challenger perspective to explore how Buhari and Atiku's asymmetric rhetorical burdens are reflected in their Twitter discourse. The two held completely different political positions, a dynamic that actively manifests in campaign discourse (Gyasi & Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021; Khajavi & Rasti, 2020; Petrocik, 1996; Rahro et al., 2024; van Dijk, 1997). Thus, there remains a need to compare the strategies Buhari, the incumbent, deployed in his defensive rhetoric seeking continuity, with those mobilised by Atiku, the challenger, in his offensive rhetoric seeking to challenge the status quo to self-justify. This comparison broadens our understanding of how incumbent-challenger asymmetries operate in Nigerian digital campaigns, addressing a gap left by offline-focused studies which concentrated on conventional speeches (see, for example, Asogwa, 2025; Oamen, 2020).

Furthermore, past studies on Nigerian incumbent-challenger campaigns have reported valuable findings, they still suffer from methodological limitations that need to be addressed. Their analyses were flat, one-dimensional thematic categorisations that examined political discourse from only one isolated perspective at a time. Consequently, they failed to capture the dynamic, vertical trajectory linking multiple interacting rhetorical concepts. For instance, Asogwa's (2025) study on televised campaigns of the APC versus the PDP during the 2019 elections focused strictly on the functional and topical sorting of content into 'acclaims', 'attacks', 'defences', 'policy' and 'image', without exploring the interplay between these categories. By leaving the relationships between variables like 'attacks' or 'defences', and 'image' unexamined, such frameworks treat rhetorical devices as fragmented elements rather than a coordinated system. Similarly, Oamen's (2020) study demonstrated how candidates performed resilience through *argumentation*, *Self-Other categorisation*, and *issue ownership*, without moving on to show the connection between

resilience and *voter manipulation* or *Aristotelian appeals* (ethos, logos, pathos)—frameworks heavily present in Nigerian campaign discourse (Agho, 2025; Akinwotu, 2016). Unfortunately, these methodological gaps mean that previous literature has treated campaign discourse as static statements rather than dynamic, multi-layered rhetorical acts.

Therefore, the current study endeavours to bridge these gaps by introducing an incumbent-versus-challenger lens to compare the Twitter campaign discourses of Buhari and Atiku based on positive-Self and negative-Other ideologies (the 'Us' vs. 'Them'), projection of ethos, and discursive (de)legitimation. This study begins by investigating how the candidates' polarised discourses construct Us-group/Them-group boundaries to present themselves positively and the opponent negatively – a crucial persuasive technique pervasive in campaign discourse (see Cabrejas-Peñuelas & Díez-Prados, 2014; Masroor et al., 2019). Secondly, it goes further to explore how discursive construal of Us/Them boundaries is exploited by the contenders to project specific dimensions of ethos – which serves as another powerful weapon in campaign rhetoric by presenting a candidate as the right person for the job (see Coles, 2025; Perloff, 2014; Vigsø, 2017). Finally, because the speaker's credibility is a vital means for discursive legitimation and delegitimation (Cap, 2006; Oddo, 2011; van Leeuwen, 2007), the study examines how the candidates mobilised ethotic elements to justify their own policies, actions, decisions, proposals, and right to hold power, while simultaneously delegitimising those of their opponent. To achieve this, the study applies a three-tiered theoretical framework designed to address the following objectives:

Objectives of the study

This study aims to investigate and compare the construction of 'Us' versus 'Them' ideologies in the Twitter campaign rhetoric of incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger Atiku Abubakar during the 2019 elections. It also examines and compares how 'Us' versus 'Them' boundaries are exploited by the contenders to project specific dimensions of ethos in their discourses. Further, the study examines and compares how dimensions of ethos are utilised by the contenders to perform discursive (de)legitimation.

Theoretical framework

This study employs Aristotelian Rhetoric and van Dijk's socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 2008; van Dijk, 2014) to pursue its objectives. To begin with, Aristotle's Rhetoric identifies three rhetorical appeals: Ethos (the character, image, or credible persona of the persuader), Logos (proofs, evidence, and cogent arguments), and Pathos (the arousal of an appropriate emotional climate in the persuaded). The philosopher argues that these three are the primary modes of persuasion deployed in political, judicial, and epideictic genres (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 1992; Perloff, 2010; Rapp, 2022). Moreover, multidisciplinary scholars working on political rhetoric have consistently emphasized the dominance of ethos (see Charteris-Black, 2011; Perloff, 2014). This finding is corroborated by many studies that reveal how political persuaders embed both logos and pathos to highlight their ethos (see Alkhirbash et al., 2014; Charteris-Black, 2009; Ghazani, 2016). Thus, the current study draws on Aristotle's theory to analyse the projection of ethos in the Buhari-Atiku Twitter campaigns of 2019.

On the other hand, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA focuses on the cognitive study of discourse, examining the connections among discourse, society (context), and cognition (the mind). It treats both discursive interaction and context as mental and social phenomena; thus, it examines how discourse production in specific social contexts seeks to control the mind and shape perception (Van Dijk, 2008; Van Dijk, 2014; Wodak, 2001). In exploring campaign

discourse, this model can be used to investigate how candidates attempt to control voters' minds and influence their perceptions in ways that justify their agenda.

In this study, the socio-cognitive model is first mapped onto Van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998, 2006, 2011) to analyse how President Buhari and Atiku created two opposing sides of 'Us' versus 'Them' in their campaign rhetoric. Specifically, it examines how their polarised discourses construct ideological boundaries between the positive self and the negative other. Second, the model examines how the contenders exploit this Us/Them binary to project ethos. They manipulate ethos not only to persuade voters but also to reprogram their mental structures to judge what is politically right or wrong, thereby legitimizing or delegitimizing certain actions and policies.

In other words, this study postulates that before the contenders can project credible character or (de)legitimate policies, they must first construct binary socio-political realities of who 'we' are and who 'they' are. Then, taking advantage of this macro-structure, they deploy specific character traits to frame themselves as good and the opponent as bad. Ultimately, the final rhetorical destination is (de)legitimation, where they leverage their established ethos to justify or condemn actions, policies, and their right to hold power. Table 1.1 below illustrates this integration of Self-Other ideology, Ethos and (De)legitimation through Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive CDA:

Table 1.1. Analytical Matrix Integrating Ideology, Ethos and (De)legitimation through van Dijk's CDA

Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Triad	Role in Nigerian Presidential Campaign Discourse	Analytical Focus on Twitter Campaign Data
1. Social Cognition *(Ideology)*	- Forms the foundational **Group Schema**. - Dictates the macro-structures of polarised political camps of 'Us' vs 'Them'. - Relies on historically stored societal knowledge of Nigerian governance, corruption, unemployment, poverty, etc.	- **Us-group Favoritism:** Emphasise Positive Things about Us; De-emphasise Negative Things about Us. - **Them-group Derogation:** Emphasise Negative Things about Them; De-emphasise Positive Things about Them.
2. Personal Cognition *(Ethos)*	- The candidate constructs a specific **Situation Model** of himself within the election context. - Translates abstract ideology into personal traits: **Expertise** (competence), **Similitude** (relatability to the masses), **Goodwill** (intention-towards-receiver), **Inclination to Succeed (**future potential**)**, **Trustworthiness,** etc.	- **Expertise:** Tweets projecting candidate's competence, intelligence, and capability to govern; or emphasising opponent's incompetence. - **Similitude:** Tweets demonstrating shared values, identity, and mass relatability to cognitively align candidates with the voters, while emphasising the opponent's disconnection. - **Trustworthiness**: Displaying moral authority, while exposing the opponent's lack of moral integrity. - **Inclination to Succeed:** Tweets referring to past/present achievements to prime voters' mental models of strong future potential of the candidate. - **Goodwill:** Projecting the image of a candidate with good intentions towards the voters. etc

3. Discursive Practice *(Legitimation & Delegitimation)*	- The surface-level communicative act - The strategic deployment of language to make the mental models created via Ethos seem natural, legal, moral, and urgent to the voter.	- **Emotions (Fear/Hope):** 'If they win, insecurity and poverty continue; If we win, corruption, insecurity, and poverty get eliminated.' - **Rationality:** Deploying legal grounds, regulations, moral appropriateness to justify Self and actions/ policies/decisions, or to criticise opponents and their actions/policies/decisions. - **Altruism:** Claiming that certain actions/policies/decisions are driven out of one's goodwill towards the voters (e.g. running to 'save Nigeria and Nigerians from economic challenges'). **- Authorisation:** Invoking the authority of shared customs, laws, norms and values, or established personal image within the Us-group to justify actions or decisions. - **Moral Evaluation:** Referring to moral grounds in framing Self and actions as right, necessary, and acceptable, while the opponent and their actions are deviant, wrong, and unacceptable.

Literature review

Discourse analytic research on political campaigns on Twitter has established how electoral candidates deploy different rhetorical strategies in their attempts to skew the opinions of followers and influence their voting decisions (see, for example, Elliott-Maksymowicz et al., 2021; Malah et al., 2025b; Marzuq et al., 2024; Ramanathan et al., 2018; Tawiah, 2025). Specifically, strategies like the 'Us' versus 'Them' ideological construction (Rojo, 1995; Van Dijk, 1998, 2011), projection of ethos (Beason, 1991; Charteris-Black, 2009; McCroskey & Teven, 1999), and enacting (de)legitimation (Cap, 2006; Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011; Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997; Van Leeuwen, 2007) have been shown to feature prominently in campaign discourse on Twitter. However, existing scholarship predominantly ignores the potential interaction between these strategies, treating them as isolated components of political discourse. Consequently, this one-dimensional approach has still left a significant gap in our understanding of the complex nature of digital campaign rhetoric. Therefore, this review focuses on these three strategies and the specific gaps left by previous research.

'Us' versus 'Them' ideologies in campaign tweets

First, the 'Us' versus 'Them' ideological construction, as theorised by Van Dijk (1998, 2011), involves creating two opposed groups: a positively evaluated in-group ("Us") and a negatively evaluated out-group ("Them"). Ideological discourse producers strategically position themselves and their audience within the "Us" category, highlighting shared values, past/present achievements, and future capabilities. Conversely, they relegate their adversaries to the "Them" category, casting them negatively through critical depictions of their identity, past/present failures, and future risks (see Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Studies of political campaigns on Twitter have shown how candidates employ this strategy to discredit opponents and advance their own agendas.

This was seen in President Trump's 2016 campaign tweets, where he presented Hillary Clinton and the Democrats as incompetent politicians who naively sympathised with minority

groups like Mexican immigrants, Syrian refugees, and Muslims who posed a perpetual threat to the American people. He then portrayed himself and other Republicans as competent politicians who had a vision for keeping the US safe from the atrocities of 'foreign criminals' (Bachar & Bouakaz, 2022; Eichler, 2021; Kazzaz, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). In their campaign tweets leading up to the 2018 elections in Pakistan, Imran Khan presented Nawaz Sharif and his party PMLN negatively as looters and guilty of citizens' plight, but himself as a personification of goodness; while Maryam Nawaz responded by presenting Khan as lacking credibility and immoral (Masroor et al., 2019). During the 2022 elections in Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro, in his tweets, presented Lula da Silva as corrupt and associated with drugs, while presenting himself as a moral leader. In his response, Lula presented Bolsonaro negatively as a liar and a threat to democracy, while presenting himself positively as the only hope for democracy (Recuero & Soares, 2025).

Therefore, while previous research on Us/Them binary construction in campaign tweets has yielded valuable insights, a significant analytical gap remains. As candidates emphasise core attributes, such as *competence* and *morality,* that are inherently ethotic, studies must investigate the link between group-based identities and micro-level personal ethos that candidates project. Past scholarship has largely overlooked this macro-to-micro trajectory, failing to explore how candidates exploit ideological boundaries to craft specific personal images. Ideological polarisation does not just establish who 'we' and 'they' are; candidates can further manipulate these boundaries to inhabit positive character traits while projecting negative ones onto opponents. To bridge this gap, the present study examines how the Us/Them boundary connects to the ethos projected in the 2019 Nigerian presidential campaign tweets of incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar.

Projection of ethos in campaign tweets

Ethos is the credible image or persona that persuaders project in discourse (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Rapp, 2022). Since Aristotle's classical era, persuaders' projected image has been central to the study of persuasion across various genres and discourse types (Charteris-Black, 2009; Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 1992). Consequently, researchers working on political persuasion on Twitter have recently focused on how electoral candidates mobilise different dimensions of credible character to woo voters. Specifically, the US presidential candidate Mitt Romney was found to utilise ethos in his 2012 campaign tweets to present himself as the most capable candidate who cared about American lives and welfare (Johnson, 2012). Philips (2018) demonstrated that Trump failed to achieve appropriate US presidential rhetoric because he failed to project any of the pillars of ethos, namely *wisdom, moral character,* and *goodwill*. Bernie Sanders' tweets during his 2015- 2016 primary election campaign relied more on ethos than on *pathos* and *logos* to sway voters (Hills, 2019). Malah et al. (2025b) found that Nigerian 2019 presidential candidates Buhari and Atiku similarly relied on *assertive* speech acts, but used them to project different credible images: the former as a *relatable* candidate, and the latter as a *competent* one.

Therefore, although political candidates employ ethos as a vital tool on Twitter to persuade voters, existing literature remains heavily concentrated on US candidates. In addition, while a speaker's credibility is crucial to building (de)legitimatory discourse (see Cap, 2006; Oddo, 2011; Van Leeuwen, 2007), the precise interaction between ethos and political (de)legitimation on Twitter remains under-explored. In particular, research must be taken further to examine how campaign tweeters leverage dimensions of credible character to (de)legitimate policies, actions, or their right to hold power, while denying that right to their opponents. Hence, the current study aims to broaden this knowledge by exploring how President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar utilised ethos to perform (de)legitimation in their campaign tweets during Nigeria's 2019 presidential election.

(De)legitimation in campaign tweets

Legitimation involves expressing justifications or answering the question 'why' by providing plausible grounds for particular actions, decisions, or policies to appear correct, appropriate, and acceptable to discourse recipients (Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; van Leeuwen, 2007). Delegitimation is its opposite, involving accusations, criticism, and doubt to establish that certain actions or decisions are inappropriate, unjustified, and unacceptable (Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; Vaara, 2014). Consequently, (de)legitimation has been a recurring discursive practice among political leaders while seeking approval for themselves and their actions/policies, while citizens reject adversaries and their actions (Cap, 2006; Reyes, 2011; Oddo, 2011).

Recently, research on political discourse has established how electoral candidates during their campaigns on Twitter mobilise different strategies of (de)legitimation to justify themselves and their actions while discrediting their opponents and their actions. In the context of the US, for example, President Trump in his campaign tweets used the strategy of *appeal to emotions* to legitimate his US-Mexico border wall and to delegitimate the Democrats who rejected this policy. He invoked fear of the US future being invaded by gangs, drugs, and criminals if the wall was not put in place. He also mobilized anger against the Democrats who refused to support this policy (Ross & Rivers, 2020). Trump also justified this wall policy through *conformity legitimation* by arguing that it was receiving 'great support from all sides' (Rivers & Ross, 2020). Nourani et al. (2020) reported that Trump, in his tweets, used *moral evaluation* to delegitimate the Iran Nuclear Deal (the JCPOA) and to legitimate his unilateral withdrawal of the US from it. He argued that the JCPOA was an immoral decision spearheaded by Obama and the Democrats for their selfish interests of benefiting from trade with Iran, despite its harmful tendency to the security of the US and its allies in the Middle East.

In other countries besides the US, Iraqi President Barham Salih on Twitter deployed *authority* to delegitimate terrorism and *rationalise* legitimate peaceful coexistence across ideologies in the country (Al-Manaseer and Fouad, 2021). In an analysis of Nigeria's 2019 presidential discourse, Malah et al. (2025a) revealed how candidates deployed distinct speech acts for political maneuvering; specifically, Buhari utilised assertives for legitimation, while Atiku employed expressives for delegitimation.

Therefore, the literature on (de)legitimation shows that electoral candidates use Twitter to discredit opponents and their actions, justify themselves and their policies, and advance their agendas. However, while previous research has concentrated heavily on Western contexts – often focusing on US anti-migrant electoral discourse – it has largely ignored the connection between (de)legitimation and candidates' projected ethos. Consequently, how (de)legitimation strategies displayed by tweeting candidates in Africa derive from their personal character remains underexplored. Specifically, Nigeria represents a vital case study as a growing democracy where presidential candidates adopt Twitter as a critical campaign tool; yet investigations into how these candidates manipulate ethotic forms to support their agendas remain far from comprehensive. Hence, the present study attempts to bridge these gaps by comparing President Buhari's and Atiku's 2019 campaign discourses on Twitter to determine how their respective (de)legitimation strategies are supported by their ethos.

In conclusion, this review has captured the current state of knowledge regarding 'Us' versus 'Them' ideology construction, the projection of ethos, and (de)legitimation in electoral candidates' campaign discourses on Twitter. However, while appreciable advances have been made in this field, the existing literature still leaves significant gaps. First, previous studies have largely ignored incumbent-versus-challenger asymmetries, which significantly shape candidates' rhetorical tactics. Examining these dynamics through this lens reveals how opposing rhetorical burdens are reflected in candidates' digital campaign discourse. Second, past studies analysed these strategies

in isolation, failing to establish how they interact. As a result, it remains unclear how Us/Them boundaries could serve as a foundation that fuels candidates' ethos, and how the projection of ethos is deployed as a tool for performing (de)legitimation. Third, the literature is overwhelmingly skewed toward Western and American data, even though digital campaigning is a well-established practice among African candidates.

Therefore, the current study bridges these gaps by shifting the focus to African/Nigerian candidates and employing a three-tiered framework that explores the interconnection between the *Us/Them binary, ethos,* and *(de)legitimation in incumbent-challenger campaigns. Specifically, this study* compares the Twitter discourses of Nigerian Presidential contenders – incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari and his toughest challenger, Atiku Abubakar – during the 2019 general elections.

METHODOLOGY

Research approach

This study adopted a *qualitative discourse analysis* approach, allowing the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis and creative interpretation of language in use in specific contexts (Creswell, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007). This approach was considered suitable as the data sets analysed in the study comprised text-based tweets produced for campaigns by candidates during national elections. The aim was to employ CDA to uncover the hidden discourse structures and strategies that reflect the incumbent-versus-challenger rhetorical asymmetry in Nigeria's 2019 digital electoral campaign discourse.

Data sampling and collection

The study applied *purposive sampling* for its data collection. In keeping with this non-probability sampling approach (see Creswell, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007), the study did not attempt to build a statistically representative sample. Rather, following the frameworks by Merriam (2009) and Matthews and Ross (2010) on purposive sampling, it intentionally selected information-rich cases that would best enable an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of interest and address the study objectives. Specifically, sample selection was guided by five inclusion criteria: (a) tweets published exclusively by President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar; (b) tweets published during the 2019 election campaign period (October, 2018 to February, 2019); (c) content featuring the core campaign issues of security, economy, corruption, employment, and electoral credibility; (d) text-based tweets only, excluding standalone audiovisual elements; and (e) primary tweets only, excluding replies. Finally, to ensure an adequate sample size for qualitative analysis as suggested by Merriam (2009), the study collected 70 tweets from each candidate's official Twitter handle (@MBuhari and @Atiku), resulting in a total of 140 tweets for analysis.

Data analysis

In line with the three objectives the study set out to address, three types of analysis were conducted manually and consecutively. The analysis followed a distinct three-tiered yet interconnected, macro-to-micro trajectory: (a) identifying 'Us' versus 'Them' ideological boundary constructions, (b) examining how these boundaries are mapped on specific dimensions of ethos (personal character traits), and (c) examining how these dimensions of ethos are exploited to perform legitimation and delegitimation (See Table 1.1).

Accordingly, the first analysis, which addressed objective 1, applied Van Dijk's (1998; 2011) Ideological Square model and its rhetorical discursive strategies. This model identifies four categories through which ideological discourse producers construct Us/Them boundaries. These are: emphasising "our good things", de-emphasising "our bad things", emphasising "their bad

things", and de-emphasising "their good things". Through these, they construct a positive 'Us' versus negative 'Them' binary. Thus, using this model, the analysis focused on how the candidates discursively construct macro ideological boundaries of 'Us' versus 'Them'. Analytic moves followed the frameworks of Dörnyei (2007) and Creswell (2012) by starting with *pre-coding reflections* (repeated readings), *coding,* and *re-coding* of thematic patterns to enhance interpretive accuracy. Tweets were ultimately coded for 'positive-Self' (PS) or 'negative-Other' (NO) themes, and discursive strategies such as Metaphor (MET), Lexicalization (LEX), Polarization (POL), Hyperbole (HYP), Victimization (VIC), Authority (AUT), Number Game (NUM), Evidentiality (EVI), Counterfactuals (CTF), etc.

Secondly, the analysis for objective 2 moved on to examine how the candidates crafted their specific micro-level personas to fit the macro-level Us-group boundaries earlier established, and those of the opponent to fit the Them-group. It drew on Aristotelian theory of ethos and applied Beason's (1991) Strategies for Establishing an Effective Persona. This framework identifies 5 dimensions of ethos, namely Similitude (SIM), Deference (DEF), Self-criticism (SCR), Expertise (EXP), and Inclination to Succeed (INC).

Thirdly, the analysis for objective 3, which focused on examining how the contenders exploited dimensions of ethos to construct (de)legitimation, was done using Reyes' (2011) Strategies of Legitimation in Political Discourse. Reyes identifies 5 strategies as Appeal to Emotions (APP), A Hypothetical Future (HYP), Rationality (RAT), Voices of Expertise (VOI), and Altruism (ALT). This analysis looked at how the tweeters use their established ethos, such as Expertise or Similitude, to legitimate their own right to power, while delegitimising the opponent and his specific actions and policies.

Finally, to enhance rigor and to gain deep insight into how the candidates manipulated language resources, Van Dijk's discursive strategies were analysed across the three analyses. Figure 1.1. below illustrates the conceptual framework on how *'Us' versus 'Them' ideology construction, projection of ethos,* and *(de)legitimation* work together in constructing Buhari-Atiku campaign discourse on Twitter:

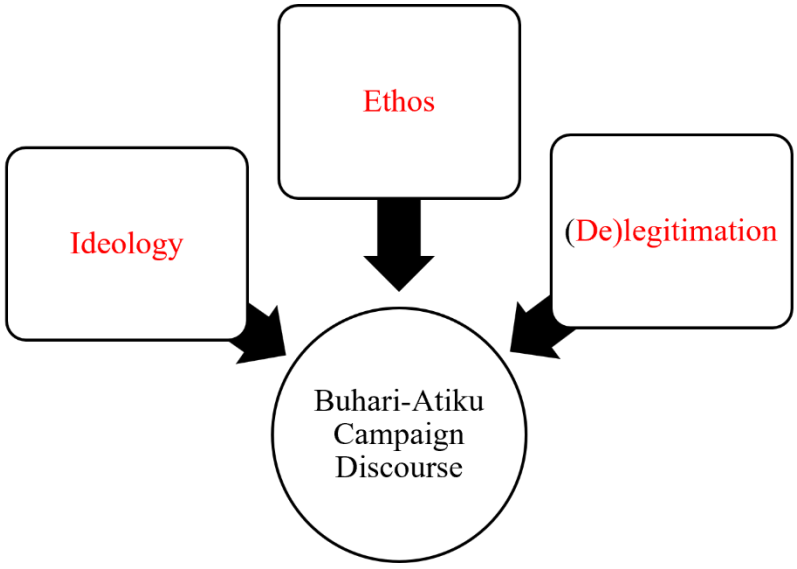


Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework on how ethos, (de)legitimation and ideology interact in constructing Buhari-Atiku Twitter campaign discourse

Inter-coder reliability

To minimise researcher bias, ensure analytic rigor, and enhance the reliability of findings, this study followed Cornish et al. (2014), Halpin (2024), and Saldaña (2009), utilising percent agreement to establish inter-coder reliability. Accordingly, the researcher, who served as primary coder and codebook editor, employed a second coder. The two independently coded 16% (23 tweets each) of the data and achieved an acceptable threshold of 76%. Moreover, they met to resolve discrepancies, and the codebook was subsequently calibrated for the main analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

President Buhari and Atiku's discourses compared based on 'Us' versus 'Them' ideological boundary construction

The study observed that the 2019 campaign tweets of President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar presented significantly dissimilar ideological discourses. On the one hand, Buhari's discourse presents the election as a battle between moral values and moral bankruptcy, establishing two opposing groups competing for power. One group was a morally sound "Us" group, which included him, his party, the APC, and the voters. The other group was the morally bankrupt "Them" group, which included only Atiku and his party, the PDP. Ultimately, the president's polarised rhetoric constructed the identity of reformers seeking to correct wrongs.

In contrast, Atiku's campaign framed the election as a contest between competence and incompetence, as well as pro-democracy and anti-democratic forces. It similarly formed two opposing groups vying for dominance. One group, where Atiku positioned himself and his party (the 'Us'), comprised competent, forward-thinking technocrats capable of making Nigeria work again. Conversely, the other group, which included only President Buhari and the APC (the 'Them'), was portrayed as a faction of incompetent, failed politicians who stagnated the country's progress. Additionally, the discourse represented the Us-group positively as pro-democracy, while representing the Them-group negatively as anti-democratic. Ultimately, Atiku's polarised rhetoric displayed the *discourse of competent politicians who came to rescue Nigeria.*

Across the two data sets, moreover, the study observed that the construction of positive 'Us' versus negative 'Them' ideological boundaries was similarly supported through numerous discursive strategies. These include *polarisation, metaphor, evidentiality, agency, actor description, hyperbole, lexicalisation* (especially the *inclusive* pronouns 'we', 'us', 'our' and the *exclusive* pronouns 'they', 'them', 'their'). However, the candidates differed in that while the president's ideological Othering concentrated on moral values, the challenger's focused more on competence and democratic values. Let us examine these discourses closely:

President Buhari's discourse of reformers who came to correct wrong

As highlighted earlier, President Buhari's ideologies mostly relate to issues of morality and credibility. His ideological Othering centred more on the stunning moral bankruptcy exhibited by his opponents, the PDP. In his attempt to develop the idea of moral decadence among the PDP politicians who ruled Nigeria from 1999 to 2015, the president employed different strategies of negative Other-presentation to portray them as corrupt and bad politicians who looted Nigeria's wealth, rigged elections, brought unemployment, and squandered the country's resources without utilising them to impact positively on the lives of Nigerians. He designed his discourse to persuasively suggest that Atiku and his party, the PDP, due to their lack of necessary moral discipline and patriotism, effectively ruined Nigeria's chances to develop and prosper. The discourse then emphasised that Buhari should be elected to correct this wrong.

This negative-Other-presentation rhetoric was enhanced through several micro discursive strategies such as *agency* and *actor description*, which were utilised to emphasise the PDP's active

role in manipulating election results, mismanaging resources, refusing to act on the vital needs of Nigerians like employment and infrastructure, and working to frustrate Buhari's anti-corruption efforts. *Victimisation* was used to emphasise how the PDP treated Nigerians unfairly by denying them their constitutional rights of choosing their preferred electoral candidates. *Lexicalisation* was employed for repetition of negative lexis like looters, corrupt, and unpatriotic, to highlight the negative properties and actions of the PDP. Counterfactuals were also utilised to suggest that if the PDP were brought back to power, *Nigeria would go back to its tainted past*; but if the APC were re-elected, the country would *progress to the next level of prosperity, strength and stability*.

Conversely, President Buhari's Positive-Self ideologies contrasted him and his party as morally decent politicians, reformers who were purposely elected to correct the wrong perpetuated by the PDP in their 16 years of governance. This was echoed in his discourse, where the president asserted that *fighting corruption is non-negotiable for our administration … It is one of the reasons we got elected.* Different positive Self-presentation strategies were deployed by Buhari to establish this ideology, including that the Self is a good politician who: fights corruption, manages Nigeria's resources prudently, promotes patriotism, ensures credible elections, respects the constitution and the rule of law, and whose self-discipline manifests in the tremendous achievements seen in the last four years. The president's ideologies, generally, persuasively portrayed him as a righteous leader who possessed desirable ethical values that made him worthy of being trusted again. See excerpt 1 below, where Buhari's ideological discourse projects the persona of a reformer who is determined to correct wrong by eliminating corruption and looting in Nigeria:

Excerpt 1:

Let me **reiterate** that fighting **corruption** is **non-negotiable** for our administration. It is one of the **reasons** we got elected, and we cannot afford to let Nigerians down. When we tackle **corruption,** we free up resources for investment in infrastructure and development. Muhammadu Buhari, Oct 4, 2018	**PSP, POP, LEX**

Atiku's discourse on competent politicians who came to rescue Nigeria

Unlike President Buhari's ideological stance, which mostly emphasised Atiku and his party's moral failure and Buhari's good moral qualities, Atiku's ideology relied on highlighting Buhari and his party's incompetence and Atiku's competence. Atiku's discourse, which lamented Nigeria's persistent setbacks across various domains, including the economy, security, job creation, and poverty eradication, argued that the challenges facing the country resulted from the incompetence of Buhari and the APC. But it conversely portrayed Atiku and the PDP as highly competent politicians whose capabilities enabled them to not only enumerate specific areas of failure but also to propose intelligent *policies and plans that, when implemented, will get Nigeria going in the right direction again.* Atiku persuasively claimed that his decision to contest in the 2019 election actually derived from his goodwill towards Nigerians, his selfless intentions to utilise his expertise and rescue Nigeria.

Thus, Atiku's ideological discourse drew on a number of negative Other-presentation strategies that sought to establish President Buhari and his party's incompetence. These include, particularly, that the incumbent's poor policies were responsible for the surging rates of *unemployment* in the country, and that he lacked the appropriate skills to grow the *economy*, create *jobs*, and lift millions of Nigerians out of *poverty*. These strategies were realised through several micro discursive strategies. Through the use of *evidentiality* and *number game*, Atiku deployed statistics and figures to convey a disturbing impression of how Nigeria's population was speedily growing without proportionate growth in the GDP, the economy, and employment under the

current administration. Atiku's use of *hyperbole* exaggerated that the economic setbacks the country was seeing under Buhari made it *the poorest country in the world today* and *the world HQ for extreme poverty.* From his use of *metaphor* and *number game*, we saw unemployment being depicted as *the only boom industry, with over 13 million people joining the ranks of people without a job, which now totals 21 million;* the severity of the growth in unemployment was heightened through the *metaphor of* a *time bomb* waiting to explode.

Moreover, Atiku's discourse also displayed many positive self-presentation strategies that emphasised his In-group competence and good intentions of rescuing Nigeria. They include, particularly, that they were capable of creating jobs, growing the economy, and lifting Nigerians out of poverty. These strategies were realised through a number of rhetorical tactics and discursive strategies that emphasised his camp's (the PDP) expertise in these areas. On creating job opportunities and eradicating poverty among Nigerians, for instance, Atiku's discourse referred to how the PDP *designed [their] policies to help young people grow … and many returned to Nigeria to start successful businesses*. Conversely, it lamented how *young people are leaving again today for Canada, etc.,* because the incumbent APC was unable to create opportunities.

On growing the economy, the discourse alluded to how the PDP *gave Nigeria its highest and most consistent GDP growth of over 6% per annum.* These are forms of evidentialities the challenger deployed to validate his claims of PDP competence. Other strategies include the number game, which was used to encode the impressive number of Nigerian youths that returned home; and counterfactuals, which emphasised how similar achievements will be recorded if the PDP is elected again. Through *populism* and *hyperbole*, Atiku claimed that they currently had good plans and policies – #TheAtikuPlan and #TheAtikuVision – that would *create the best environment Nigeria has ever seen for creating jobs.*

Therefore, Atiku's ideological discourse did not only emphasise President Buhari's incompetence and how this incompetence negatively resulted in unemployment, poverty, and a bad economy; it most importantly emphasised their own competence in these areas. To illustrate this, let us take excerpt 2 below. In this excerpt, Atiku's discourse persuasively suggests the PDP's expertise in growing the economy. It displays the use of evidentiality, which alludes to how the PDP made Nigeria *the largest economy in Africa and the one with the fastest growth rate on the continent*. It is clear to see the challenger deliberately employs superlative adjectives 'largest' and 'fastest' to construct hyperboles that heighten a positive impression about this competence, which yielded concrete results. This impression is further verbalised through the metaphor of growth, which also conveys a pleasant impression about the economy under PDP:

Excerpt 2:

Let us not forget that in the last three years of the last PDP administration, Nigeria had become the **largest economy** in Africa and in each of those years, we had the **fastest growth rate** in our continent. Atiku Abubakar, Feb 19, 2019	**EVI, PSP, MET, LEX, POP, HYP**

Therefore, based on the ideologies communicated by President Buhari and Atiku in their campaign tweets, this study observed that the two contenders' discourses prioritised dissimilar issues. Buhari's discourse prioritised moral values, while Atiku's leveraged competence and democratic values. Consequently, they differed in that while Buhari's campaign concentrated on amplifying Atiku and his party's moral failure and his own moral discipline, Atiku's campaign stressed the incompetence of Buhari and his party, APC, and how he possessed the desired competence. Hence, Buhari's ideological discourse portrayed Atiku and his party, PDP, negatively

as doers of corruption, looting, and electoral manipulation, and contrasted himself as a morally disciplined politician who fights corruption, manages Nigeria's resources judiciously, and ensures credible elections. On his part, Atiku's discourse represented Buhari and his party, APC, negatively as incompetent, whose poor policies had brought unemployment, poverty, and a bad economy, and contrasted Atiku and his party, PDP, as competent politicians who were capable of creating opportunities, lifting Nigerians out of poverty, and growing the economy. Hence, based on their established ideologies, Buhari and Atiku's discourses differed by emphasising dissimilar issues.

Therefore, the findings of this study appear to corroborate those of many past studies on ideologies in campaign discourse on Twitter. Especially, the finding on Buhari's negative portrayal of Atiku and his party, PDP, as immoral and corrupt while presenting himself as moral seems consistent with those reported by Masroor et al. (2019) and Recuero and Soares (2025) from their analysis of campaign tweets in Pakistan and Brazil. Masroor et al. showed how Imran Khan presented Nawaz Sharif as a looter and corrupt, and how Maryam Nawaz responded by presenting Khan as a liar and immoral. This consistency of findings means that moral values feature prominently in campaign discourse, which suggests that they are strategic tools for building trust with the electorates. Moreover, similar to Atiku's representation of Buhari as incompetent, numerous studies also found that Trump, in his 2016 campaign tweets, presented Hillary and the Democrats as incompetent but himself and other Republicans as competent (see Bachar & Bouakaz, 2022; Eichler, 2021; Kazzaz, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). However, while in Atiku's discourse competence was interpreted in terms of leaders' ability to create jobs, eradicate poverty, and grow the economy, in Trump's discourse, competence was about the leaders' ability to be tough on minority groups like immigrants, refugees, and Muslims. This clearly highlights the socio-political issues and circumstances that prevail in different countries, and how they are exploited for campaigns. Arguably, while issues like economic crisis, poverty, and unemployment feature prominently in campaign discourses produced in developing countries, other issues like racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia also dominate European and American campaign discourse.

President Buhari and Atiku's discourses compared based on utilising Us/Them boundaries to project ethos

In an attempt to vividly understand the results of this analysis and to see clearly the connection between *Us/Them boundaries* and *projection of ethos* in Buhari-Atiku campaign discourse, we need to briefly recap the findings of the first analysis. We have seen in the first analysis that the two contenders' rhetoric exhibited contrasting Us/Them boundaries. President Buhari's discourse, which framed this election as a moral battle, portrayed the Us-group as morally sound politicians, while the Them-group as morally bankrupt. On its part, Atiku's discourse construed the election as a confrontation between competence/pro-democratic values (of the Us-group) and incompetence/anti-democratic values (of the Them-group).

Therefore, working further on these results, the second analysis discovered how both President Buhari and Atiku similarly exploited the established macro-level identities to craft their own micro-level ethos. That is, they both took advantage of the Us/Them boundaries drawn to build their own authority and their specific character traits. However, while the incumbent's Us/Them boundary manipulation mainly concentrated on projecting a single ethos of *similitude* (SIM), the challenger's displayed two ethoses of *similitude* (SIM) and *expertise* (EXP).

Similitude ethos, according to Beason (1991), is when a persuader aligns himself with the persuadees by highlighting his similarities with them in terms of shared goals, values, traits, beliefs, language, concerns, or background, so that he earns their trust. The results of this study

indicate that both Buhari and Atiku aligned themselves with the electorate through Us/Them boundaries (or values). While emphasising their similarities with the voters, they additionally portrayed the opponent as an aberrant politician whose properties and actions were against those accepted and adhered to by (the majority of) society.

However, the two discourses were dissimilar in the ways this ethos was projected. While the president's similitude manifested in terms of moral values and patriotism, the challenger's similitude derived from his democratic values. Buhari's discourse constructed him as a leader with desirable moral discipline, like the voters. Atiku's discourse projected him as a candidate who believed in the core principles of democracy, like the voters. Observed carefully, the two deployed this ethos in their attempt to eliminate all differences and build a sense of community with the voters. This explains why similitude was the most predominant ethos across the two datasets analysed.

Furthermore, the ethos of expertise is about discursive exhibition of competence, experience, or credentials regarding specific issues by the persuader (see Beason, 1991). The analysis found that Atiku leveraged Us/Them boundaries – specifically those constructing the PDP as competent and well-performing while the APC as incompetent and failed – to project the persona of a competent candidate who was capable of growing the economy, creating employment, and eliminating poverty in Nigeria.

Ultimately, the study observed that based on the most dominant dimensions of ethos discovered, the two campaigns displayed specific types of discourses. While the President utilised similitude to construct a *discourse of patriotism and good moral values*, the challenger's similitude displayed a *discourse of a democrat*. These two forms of discourse exhibited dissimilar strategies of identifying with the voters and dissimilar rhetorical techniques. Let us take a close look as they are discussed, illustrated, and compared as follows:

President Buhari's discourse of patriotism and good moral values

President Buhari's similitude ethos aligned him with the voters in terms of patriotism and good moral values such as honesty, fairness, obedience to law and order, rejection of corruption, and justice. These are values that most Nigerian voters would adhere to; hence, the discourse presented Buhari positively as 'one of us', a leader worthy of being trusted again. His discourse was enhanced by discursive strategies of *populism*, which emerged from his good values and ideas that naturally command respect. There was also *lexicalisation*, which allowed the use of the inclusive pronouns *we, us,* and *our*, which were employed to include the voters in his discourse. There were *metaphors,* which were mobilised to verbalise his patriotic mission of *building a Nigeria we can all be proud of*, or his morally accepted policy of *fighting corruption*.

To take an example, excerpt 3 below features Buhari's tweets addressed to the Interfaith Initiative for Peace, an organisation of religious leaders that worked to ensure peaceful co-existence between different faiths and encourage conflict-free elections in Nigeria. Currently, they were working towards the forthcoming 2019 General Elections. So, in his discourse, Buhari assumes a president-preacher tone and the strategy of *norm expression* to encourage Nigerians to exercise their voting rights as responsible citizens. He also utilises *lexicalisation* to employ inclusive language (*we, us, our*), which enables him to involve all politicians in his discourse and to urge them to conduct themselves with integrity during and after elections, as they would one day explain their actions before God Almighty. This is irrespective of party affiliations.

Thus, the president is not only encouraging the exercise of civic responsibility of voting; he is also encouraging the fear of God Almighty. His discourse exhibits the strategies of *positive Self-presentation* and *populism*. This populism emanates from Buhari's projection of Self as a morally disciplined and likeable leader who, despite his re-election ambition, still remembers God and

believes that one day we will all account for our deeds before Him. By being designed this way, the discourse is not only highlighting Buhari's shared values of patriotism; it is also creating the impression of a morally sound candidate. Hence, the discourse frames him as similar to the voters in terms of patriotism and moral values. These are truly values the voters would identify with, considering how most Nigerian politicians are being accused of showing no patriotism and immorality, especially regarding election rigging and electoral violence. See excerpt 3 below:

Excerpt 3

To all of **us** politicians, I ask that **we** discharge **our** political responsibilities with integrity, bearing in mind that **we** will one day give an account to God, the Almighty. Muhammadu Buhari, Oct 13, 2018	**NEX, LEX, PSP, POP** / **SIM**

Moreover, Buhari's discourse leveraged these shared values to emphasise how his self-discipline had guided him to act appropriately and perform well in his last four years in office. Using discursive strategies of *implication, negative Other-presentation,* and *victimisation*, the discourse communicates that previous administrations of the PDP had treated Nigerians unfairly by being partial and unjust in resource utilisation. Conversely, it communicates the President's determination to continue being just and honest in managing and utilising Nigeria's resources. It presents him positively as a leader who has demonstrated a high degree of positive values by managing resources well and by performing well in addressing critical concerns of Nigerians: corruption, insecurity, infrastructure, unemployment, the economy, poverty and electoral credibility. See excerpt 4 below, on seeing Nigeria's resources *work for all the people of Nigeria*:

Excerpt 4:

We will continue to focus on ensuring that the resources of Nigeria work for all the people of Nigeria, especially those forgotten over the years by successive governments. The wealth of Nigeria belongs to all Nigerians, not to a greedy and selfish minority. Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 3, 2019	**PSP, IMP, VIC, NOP, POP** / **SIM**

Atiku Abubakar's discourse of a democrat

Atiku, through his most-featured ethos of similitude (SIM), displayed the *discourse of a democrat.* This discourse identified him with the voters in terms of supporting and defending democracy and its institutions. This was especially seen in his tweets on the Nigerian military's sealing of the Daily Trust Newspapers' offices in Abuja and Maiduguri on 6th January, 2019; on Buhari's sudden suspension of CJN Walter Onnoghen on 25th January, 2019; and on the unexpected postponement of the Presidential and National Assembly Elections on 16th February, 2019. In each of these incidents, Atiku's discourse displayed *populist anger* and a *disapproving tone* through emotive diction and metaphors to present Buhari as an eccentric leader whose actions were at odds with democracy and the rule of law. He manipulated this *anger* to align himself with the voters in terms of rejecting these *anti-democratic* and *dictatorial acts*. His defiant rhetoric created the persona of solidarity with the voters who were being victimised by Buhari, denying them a decent democratic atmosphere in the country. Through this manipulative rhetoric, Atiku managed to portray the image of a democrat who was firm in upholding and defending Nigeria's democracy. Thus, through *positive Self-presentation*, the discourse presented him as a candidate who should be voted for *in defense of democracy and the rule of law*.

Other discursive strategies that supported Atiku's *discourse of a democrat* include, especially, *agency*, which was used to accuse the president of being responsible for the deviant actions of violating the constitution, attacking democracy, attacking the judiciary, and suppressing freedom of speech. There was also the use of *lexicalisation*, which enabled the employment of the inclusive pronouns *we, us,* and *our,* that Atiku utilised to signal his affinity with the voters. The same strategy was used to encode negative lexis such as *dictatorship, jackboot, unconstitutional act,* and *act of desperation,* and *assault on our democracy,* that portrayed Buhari as being at odds with our democratic values. *Victimisation* was used to emphasise how he violated people's constitutional rights of free speech and franchise. *Counterfactuals* were employed to communicate that unless he was removed from office, Nigeria's democracy would continue to be under threat. There was also the use of *norm expression*, which urged the voters to defend democracy by voting for Atiku. See excerpt 5 below, which features Atiku's tweets on Nigerian soldiers' shutting down of Daily Trust Newspaper offices in Abuja and Maiduguri:

Excerpt 5

I have received **with concern** news of the sealing of Daily Trust corporate headquarters in Abuja. **Freedom of the press** is the **bedrock** of **our democracy,** and nothing should be done to compromise it. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 6, 2019	**LEX, IMP, MET, NOP, POP,** **SIM**

Therefore, the comparison of Buhari-Atiku's campaign discourses based on their projection of ethos revealed that although both contenders relied on *similitude*, they differed in that while Buhari utilised this ethos to align himself with the voters through his *discourse of patriotism and good moral values*, Atiku utilised it to align himself with them through his *discourse of a democrat*. In other words, while Buhari emphasised his shared values of patriotism and good moral values, Atiku emphasised the idea of being a democrat and defender of democracy in their campaigns.

Moreover, the findings of this study on Buhari and Atiku identifying with their voters and creating a sense of community in their campaign tweets seems to corroborate the findings of Kazemian et al., (2015; US Pressident J. F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address), Basuki (2017; Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo's Facebook posts during Indonesia's 2014 Presidential Election campaigns), Mwetulundila and Mlambo (2021; Namibian President Hage Geingob's 2020 Inaugural Address), Rikkonen et al., (2022; US and China diplomats' tweets on Covid-19), and Herman (2022; President Trump's January 6th 2021 tweets that incited insurrection at US Capitol). These studies consistently showed how the political figures analysed identified with their audiences through strategies that emphasised *common ground* such as shared values, beliefs, interests, challenges, and achievements; and through the use of *inclusive language* that manifested in their employment of inclusive pronouns *we, us,* and *ours*.

Hence, Buhari and Atiku's Twitter discourses were found to be similarly in line with the common nature of offline political discourse in terms of the speakers' attempt to identify with their audiences as a way of influencing them. However, while past studies took a one-dimensional approach in analysing identity construction, the current study has attempted to introduce a new approach by establishing how candidates' identification with voters emanates from the macro Us/Them boundaries.

President Buhari and Atiku's discourses compared based on utilising ethos to perform (de)legitimation

This study found that both President Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, similarly utilised their established ethos as tools for building legitimation and delegitimation.

(De)legitimation requires authority. Especially, political speakers cannot successfully legitimate or delegitimize a policy or decision unless they have already established moral authority and a credible voice (Cap, 2006; Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011). Thus, Buhari's discourse drew on *similitude* ethos – the moral values that identified him with the electorate – to legitimate his policies, decisions, and his right to keep power, and to delegitimate the opposition and their policies. Through this ethos, the president's policies and decisions were framed to be in line with the moral values the voters adhered to. The policies were therefore appropriate, honest, legal, and morally acceptable, while those of the opposition were represented as inappropriate, dishonest, illegal, and morally unacceptable. They were portrayed as corrective rather than dictatorial, as claimed by the opposition.

On the other hand, Atiku leveraged an ethos of *similitude* – positioning himself as a fellow democrat – alongside an ethos of *expertise* to delegitimise the incumbent's policies, decisions, and mandate. By projecting a persona shared with the voters in upholding democratic values, the challenger's discourse constructed the president's actions as dictatorial, anti-democratic, and constitutionally unacceptable. Simultaneously, through the ethos of competence, Atiku's discourse framed the incumbent's policies and decisions as flawed and inappropriate, while positioning Atiku's own proposals as meticulously designed, legally sound, and pro-democratic.

However, the two contenders' discourses were dissimilar in terms of the number of dominant (de)legitimation strategies featured. While President Buhari's discourse displayed a dual strategy of *appeal to emotions* (APP) and *rationality* (RAT), the challenger's discourse relied primarily on *appeal to emotions* (APP). A closer examination of these prominent strategies reveals deep *frame contestation* (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993), with both candidates promoting contrasting interpretations and moral evaluations of the same events. This contestation was most visible regarding the president's anti-corruption policy and during two key incidents: the unexpected suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, CJN Walter Onnoghen, on the 25th of January 2019, and the sudden postponement of the presidential and National Assembly elections on the 16th of February 2019. To legitimise his policies and decisions, Buhari's discourse mobilised positive emotions of trust and confidence while simultaneously deploying rationality to frame his actions as appropriate, impersonal, and constitutional. Conversely, the challenger deployed negative emotions – such as *suspicion, doubt, distrust,* and *fear* for the future of Nigeria's democracy – to delegitimise them.

Ultimately, the most crucial dissimilarity between the two discourses is that while Buhari's strategies constructed *the discourse of decency against moral bankruptcy*, Atiku's strategy constructed *the discourse of a democrat against a dictator*. In either case, the contenders' discourses exploited these strategies in ways that attempted to shape the voters' understanding, evaluation, and response to the incidents in question. The two discourses are discussed, compared, and illustrated below:

President Buhari's discourse of decency against moral bankruptcy

As highlighted earlier, President Buhari's *discourse of decency against moral bankruptcy* was achieved through (de)legitimation strategies of *appeal to emotions* and *rationality*. Using these strategies, the president justified his anti-corruption policy, his decision to suspend CJN Walter Onnoghen, and the postponement of the Presidential and National Assembly Elections as correct, morally acceptable, and in line with the laws and values adhered to by Nigerians.

On the one hand, Buhari's appeal to emotions was discerned when he used the discursive techniques of *negative Other-presentation, agency, actor description,* and *evidentiality* to portray Onnoghen as a morally bankrupt Chief Judge who was not only involved in corruption by refusing to *follow the spirit & letter of the law in declaring his assets* accurately as required by the Nigerian

constitution, but also by using his position to *serially set free persons accused of the most dire acts of corruption, often on mere technicalities.* He and his actions were, thus, presented negatively as going against the constitution and the accepted norms and values of the society. This negative light projected on the CJN was obviously a tactic aimed to delegitimate him and his actions by triggering negative emotions of disgust, distrust, disappointment, and disillusionment. The voters were intended to perceive him negatively as morally insolvent, a threat to Nigeria's justice system, someone who did not deserve sympathy or solidarity, and whose removal was actually a welcome decision. Conversely, the discourse persuasively presents Buhari and his actions positively as decent and corrective rather than dictatorial and anti-democratic, as argued by the opposition.

On the other hand, President Buhari's strategy of *rationality* was exhibited when he tried to establish that the decisions were actually honest and impersonal. He insisted that the suspension was *ordered by the Code of Conduct Tribunal*, which had constitutional powers to do so. He employed *evidentiality* to refer to an *Order from the Code of Conduct Tribunal* that directed the suspension. Leveraging further on this claim, Buhari utilised *lexicalisation,* through repetition of the words *order, directing, obey,* and *comply,* to perspectivise that the decision was actually a *compliance* with the *directive* contained in this *Order*, and this highlighted his *avowed respect for the Rule of Law*, not a violation of it. Another *evidential strategy* that rationalised this suspension was Buhari's reference to *the fight against corruption as one of the tripods of policies promised to Nigerians by [t]his administration*. Through these discursive strategies, therefore, President Buhari portrayed his decision as impersonal, correct, and in keeping with decent values of the society, hence acceptable. See Excerpt 6 and 7 below:

Excerpt 6

It is no secret that this government is **dissatisfied** with **the alarming rate** at which the Supreme Court of Nigeria, under the oversight of Justice Walter Onnoghen, has **serially set free** persons accused of the **direst acts of corruption,** often on mere technicalities, ... Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 25, 2019	**ACD, EVI, IMP, NOP POP, AGY, LEX** / **APP**

Excerpt 7

It is against this background that I have received the **Order** of the Code of Conduct Tribunal **directing** me to suspend the Chief Justice pending final determination of the cases against him. Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 25, 2019	**PSP, EVI, POP, LEX** / **RAT**

Atiku's discourse of a democrat against a dictator

Through its pervasive display of appeal to emotions, Atiku's *discourse of a democrat against a dictator* counter-framed Buhari's *discourse of decency against moral bankruptcy*. In Atiku's delegitimising discourse on President Buhari's anti-corruption policy and decisions of suspending CJN Onnoghen and postponing the Presidential and National Assembly Elections, Buhari and his party APC were represented as the negative Out-group, as dictators whose actions went against democracy, the rule of law, and the ethical values expected of a leader. This was seen in Atiku's accusatory discourse that argued that both decisions were actually made by Buhari in his *desperate plan* to achieve his re-election agenda, come what may.

Consequently, Atiku's discourse saw the deployment of several discursive strategies that were utilised to delegitimise President Buhari and his decisions by arousing the negative emotions

of anger, suspicion, fear (for the future of Nigeria's democracy), and disappointment. These strategies also contributed to legitimising Atiku and his party, the PDP, through positive emotions of trust, confidence, and hope. Through the use of *negative Other-presentation* and *agency*, Atiku's discourse portrayed Buhari as dishonestly behind plans to *affect the outcome of the 2019 Presidential elections.* The strategy of *lexicalisation* allowed the achievement of Atiku's accusation that the election postponement was actually a deliberate plan by Buhari to *disenfranchise* Nigerians, and to negatively portray the CJN's suspension as an *anti-democratic act, unlawful, an attack on the judiciary/democracy, and dictatorship.* The strategy *implication* was used to establish that the suspension was *not in accordance with the processes specified by the Nigerian constitution*; while the use of *actor description* enabled him to insist on how Buhari had *repeatedly violated the constitution and failed to uphold the rule of law*. There was also the metaphor of the *hand of Esau but the voice of Jacob,* which argued Buhari's hidden involvement in the election postponement.

Therefore, from the perspective of Atiku's framing, both the suspension of CJN Onnoghen and the postponement of the presidential elections were actually forms of dictatorship meted out to Nigerians by Buhari. The discourse framed both decisions as outright violations of Nigeria's constitution and not in compliance with it, as claimed by the president; this portrayed Buhari as a leader who trampled on the constitution, acting against it and not respecting it as he claimed (see Excerpt 8 below). It also presented the suspended CJN positively as a victim of unfair treatment, an innocent Nigerian whose constitutional rights were denied, and who deserved our sympathy and solidarity.

Excerpt 8

This brazen **dictatorial act** is the latest action in the ongoing rape of **our** nation's hard-earned democracy by those who dined with **anti-democratic forces**, & is symptomatic of the **increasing desperation** that @MBuhari & the cabal pulling the strings have as Feb 16, 2019 draws near. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 25, 2019	**NOP, NTO, LEX, MET, AGY** / **APP**

Therefore, based on the strategies of (de)legitimation discovered in their campaign tweets during the 2019 elections, President Buhari and Atiku constructed contesting discourses. The two contenders' discourses strongly displayed *frame contestation*. President Buhari employed *appeals to emotion* and *rationality* to construct his *discourse of decency against moral bankruptcy*, while Atiku concentrated on *appeals to emotion* to counter Buhari's legitimations through his *discourse of a democrat against a dictator*. From the framing of President Buhari's *discourse of decency*, his official decisions of suspending CJN Walter Onnoghen and the postponement of Presidential and National Assembly Elections were both morally and constitutionally appropriate, taken by appropriate authorities and in the interest of the Nigerian public. But from the counter-frame displayed by Atiku's *discourse of a democrat*, both of these decisions were pure dictatorship. The discourse represented both decisions negatively as unlawful acts, attacks on democracy and its institutions, violations of constitutional human rights and the rule of law, perpetuated by President Buhari, who desperately planned to accomplish his political agenda of getting re-elected.

Furthermore, the appeal to emotion strategy shows similarities between my findings from this comparison and those of many past studies. These studies include, for instance, those exploring political speeches delivered by US Presidents George W. Bush, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Barack Obama, and Ronald Reagan (Cap, 2006, 2008; Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011; Maru, 2013), those on Ghanaian presidents' inaugural speeches from 1993 to 2009 (Boakye, 2014), and even those on

President Trump's tweets on his US-Mexico Border Wall policy (Ross & Rivers, 2020). These studies have consistently shown how leaders appealed to emotions such as happiness, security, satisfaction, fear, anger, despair, revenge, confidence, and hope to obtain their voters' support and approval. In a similar manner, both Buhari's and Atiku's discourses displayed this strategy. Buhari referred to Nigeria's unfortunate past under the PDP and her fortunate present under his party, the APC, in an attempt to build confidence and hope in his administration. Atiku referred to Nigeria's prosperous past under his party, the PDP, her present setbacks under Buhari and the APC, and then forecast how his own competence and plans would yield another desirable future for the country if he were elected. He attempted to build confidence and hope in his presidency.

However, while findings of previous research mostly reveal how incumbent US presidents exploit offline speeches to legitimise war or strict anti-migrant policies, the current study's findings reveal how an African incumbent president and his challenger employed Twitter campaigns to mobilise categories of (de)legitimation strategies in attempts to dominate the opponent. Hence, (de)legitimation is a recurring feature of political discourse in both offline and online genres.

CONCLUSION

This study adopted an incumbent-versus-challenger approach to compare the Twitter campaign discourse of President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. In an attempt to depart from the dominant one-dimensional analysis that treats incumbent-challenger asymmetric discourse as static rather than multi-layered rhetorical acts, this study applied a three-tiered framework to investigate the interaction between 'Us' versus 'Them' ideologies, projection of ethos, and (de)legitimation.

Thus, across the three objectives, the results demonstrate that the incumbent and the challenger mobilised contrasting discourses. First, based on 'Us' versus 'Them' ideologies, President Buhari emphasised morality versus moral bankruptcy to display *the discourse of reformers who came to correct wrong*. On his part, the challenger emphasised dual issues of competence and pro-democratic values to exhibit *the discourse of competent politicians who came to rescue Nigeria.* Secondly, the President exploited the Us/Them boundaries to project the ethos of *similitude*, which enabled the construction of the *discourse of patriotism and good moral values*. Conversely, Atiku's manipulation of the Us/Them boundaries deployed dual ethoses of *similitude* and *expertise*, which enacted the *discourse of a democrat*. Thirdly, President Buhari utilised his similitude ethos to legitimate himself and his policies/decisions through *rationality* and *appeal to emotions*, which ultimately crafted *the discourse of decency against moral bankruptcy.* On his part, Atiku utilised his ethos of similitude and expertise to delegitimate the president and his policies/decisions through *appeal to emotions*, which culminated in *the discourse of a democrat against a dictator*.

Therefore, these findings have a number of implications for incumbent-versus-challenger asymmetric rhetorical goals. First, by revealing how President Buhari's discourse deployed fewer rhetorical strategies (of 'Us' versus 'Them' and ethos) than Atiku's discourse, these findings indicate that while the incumbent took advantage of his built-in legitimacy and automatic institutional backing to construct defensive discourse, the challenger, who knew he lacked these privileges, worked harder to build authority from scratch while actively dismantling the established order. He had to over-index on rhetoric to convince voters that the current system must change and to prove he was qualified. That is, the challenger's higher volume of strategies means that he, unlike the incumbent who additionally drew on administrative power, relies solely on discursive power (persuasion).

Secondly, by establishing how President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar exploited specific macro-level Us/Them boundaries to craft their micro-level ethos and then utilised those ethoses to perform (de)legitimation, this study implies that macro-level political ideologies are not merely abstract rhetorical stances. Instead, they actively construct micro-level strategies. In addition, these findings imply a deeply integrated paradigm: a candidate's broader political ideologies and their perceived moral image (ethos) serve as the literal vehicles through which their institutional authority (legitimation) is made digestible on social media.

Thirdly, these discursive asymmetries reflect and reproduce the macro-level power struggle within the Nigerian online political landscape, demonstrating that Twitter not only hosts campaigns but also actively shapes the socio-cognitive representations of reality. However, the analytic approach in this study has two limitations that can be addressed by future research. One limitation is that the data analysed consisted of text alone, without images, videos, or audio. Second, no interviews were conducted to triangulate the findings. Therefore, it is recommended that future research adopt a multimodal approach, focusing on images, videos, and voice messages. Interviews with voters can also be conducted to support the findings.

REFERENCES:

Agho, J. O. (2025). Influencing voters behaviour: Language and ideology of selected Nigerian political campaign speeches. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and Translation*, *11*(1), 26–34. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijalt.20251101.13

Akinwotu, A. (2016). Rhetoric in selected speeches of Obafemi Awolowo and Moshood Abiola. *Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies*, *8*(2), 36–58. https://scispace.com/papers/rhetoric-in-selected-speeches-of-obafemi-awolowo-and-moshood-4wt525yn03

Al-Manaseer, F. A. J., & Fouad, S. (2021). Legitimization strategies in the tweets of President Barham Salih from January to October, 2021. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, *8*(4), 66–74. https://jcreview.com/archives/volume-8/issue-4/9061

Amali, E. J. (2024). Political rhetoric, social media, and 2019 Nigerian presidential election: Candidates use of social media. *Journal of Political Discourse*, *2*(2), 244–259. https://jopd.com.ng/index.php/jopdz/article/view/171

Asogwa, F. N. (2025). Between six and half a dozen: A comparative functional analysis of televised political advertisements of incumbent versus challenger in the 2019 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. *British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research, 5*(1), 110–124. https://doi.org/10.52589/bjmcmr-wyzs5rxh

Auwal, A. M., & Ersoy, M. (2020). Peace journalism strategy for covering online political discourses in a multipolar society and the new public sphere. *Information Development*, *38*(1), 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666920967056

Auwal, A. M., Ersoy, M., & Dambo, T. H. (2020). Influence of political tweets on campaign coverage: Building the news agenda in Twittersphere. *Journalism Practice*, *16*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1805793

Basuki, D. S. S. (2017). *Using social media to foster identification in Indonesia's 2014 Presidential Election: An examination of Facebook politics from Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, Clemson University). TigerPrints. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/1880

Beason, L. (1991). Strategies for establishing an effective persona: An analysis of appeals to ethos in business speeches. *International Journal of Business Communication (1973)*, *28*(4), 326–346. https://doi.org/10.1177/002194369102800403

Bello, B. S., Inuwa-Dutse, I., & Heckel, R. (2019). Social media campaign strategies: Analysis of the 2019 Nigerian elections. In *2019 Sixth International Conference on Social Networks*

Analysis, Management and Security (SNAMS) (pp. 142-149). IEEE. https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/8931869

Cabrejas-Peñuelas, A. B., & Díez-Prados, M. (2014). Positive self-evaluation versus negative other-evaluation in the political genre of pre-election debates. *Discourse & Society*, *25*(2), 159–185. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513515601

Cap, P. (2006). *Legitimisation in political discourse: A cross-disciplinary perspective on the modern US war rhetoric*. Cambridge Scholars Press.

Cap, P. (2008). Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *40*(1), 17–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2007.10.002

Charteris-Black, J. (2011). *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230319899

Charteris-Black, J. (2009). Metaphor and political communication. In *Metaphor and discourse* (pp. 97–115). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230594647_7

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203561218

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Cockcroft, R., & Cockcroft, S. (1992). *Persuading people: An introduction to rhetoric*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Coles, W. J. (2025). The right people for the job? Projections of ethos in British and Norwegian political rhetoric. *Global Discourse*, *15*(2–3), 198–216. https://doi.org/10.1332/20437897Y2025D000000051

Cornish, F., Gillespie, A., & Zittoun, T. (2014). Collaborative analysis of qualitative data. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 79–93). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n6

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.

Eichler, J. (2021). Trump vs Trudeau: Articulation of national identity on Twitter. *Academic Journal of Modern Philology*, *14*, 131–141. https://bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/publication/142030

Elliott-Maksymowicz, K., Nikolaev, A., & Porpora, D. (2021). How much can you say in a tweet? An approach to political argumentation on Twitter. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *8*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00794-x

Fakunle, R. O. (2019). Heuristic cues and contextual features of selected tweets of Atiku Abubakar: A multimodal perspective. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, (6), 129–146. https://jolledu.com.ng/index.php/joll/article/view/99

Gyasi, R. B., & Sarfo-Kantankah, K. S. (2021). A functional analysis of Ghanaian presidential debates. *Drumspeak: International Journal of Research in the Humanities*, *5*(3), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.47963/drumspeak.v5i3.843

Halpin, S. N. (2024). Inter-coder agreement in qualitative coding: Considerations for its use. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, *8*(3), 23–43. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/14887

Hemphill, L., Otterbacher, J., & Shapiro, M. (2013). What's congress doing on Twitter? In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 877–886). https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/2441776.2441876

Herman, T. (2022). Ethos and pragmatics. *Languages*, *7*(3), Article 165. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages7030165

Hills, S. A. (2019). *Persuasion in the digital age: A theoretical model of persuasion in terse text* (Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University). Loughborough University Repository. https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.8307323

Johnson, J. (2012). Twitter bites and Romney: Examining the rhetorical situation of the 2012 presidential election in 140 characters. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, *2*(3/4), 54–64. https://contemporaryrhetoric.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/johnson5_1.pdf

Kadijat, K. K., Ayotunde, K. A., & Haroon-Sulyman, S. O. (2020). Twitter discourse on the pre-presidential election campaign in Nigeria. *Jurnal The Messenger*, *12*(2), 134–151. https://doi.org/10.26623/themessenger.v12i2.2457

Kazzaz, M. (2020). Investigating the Syrian "Other" in Donald J. Trump's Twitter campaign rhetoric. *Open Linguistics*, *6*(1), 601–610. https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2020-0032

Khajavi, Y., & Rasti, A. (2020). A discourse analytic investigation into politicians' use of rhetorical and persuasive strategies: The case of US election speeches. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *7*(1), Article 1740051. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1740051

Khan, M. H., Qazalbash, F., Adnan, H. M., Yaqin, L. N., & Khuhro, R. A. (2021). Trump and Muslims: A critical discourse analysis of Islamophobic rhetoric in Donald Trump's selected tweets. *SAGE Open*, *11*(1), Article 21582440211004172. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211004172

Kreiss, D. (2016). Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New media & Society*, *18*(8), 1473–1490. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814562445

Larsson, A. O., & Moe, H. (2014). Triumph of the underdogs? Comparing Twitter use by political actors during two Norwegian election campaigns. *Sage Open*, *4*(4), Article 2158244014559015. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014559015

Malah, Z., Tan, H., & Rashid, S. M. (2017). Evaluating lexical cohesion in Nigerian newspaper genres: Focus on the editorials. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *6*(1), 240–256. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.1p.240

Malah, Z., & Taiwo, D. S. (2020). Conceptual metaphors in President Muhammadu Buhari's political rhetoric. *International Linguistics Research*, *3*(4), 27–45. https://doi.org/10.30560/ilr.v3n4p27

Malah, Z., Paramasivam, S., Halim, H. A., & Mansor, N. S. (2025a). (De)legitimation on Twitter: The case of speech acts in Buhari-Atiku campaign rhetoric during Nigeria's 2019 elections. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, *31*(1), 31–46. http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2025-3101-03

Malah, Z., Halim, H. A., Meganathan, P. M., & Paramasivam, S. (2025b). Presidential contenders' ethos: The case of speech acts in Buhari-Atiku campaign rhetoric on Twitter during Nigeria's 2019 elections. *Journal of Language and Communication*, *12*(2), 265–286. https://doi.org/10.47836/jlc.12.02.06

Maru, M. G. (2013). Jeremiad Frames in Reagan's inaugural addresses. *Humaniora*, *25*(1), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.1810

Marzuq, F. G., Listiani, T., & Suyatman, U. (2024). The analysis of President Biden's Twitter account's Representative illocutionary act. *JELITA: Journal of Education, Language Innovation, and Applied Linguistics*, *3*(2), 145–156. https://doi.org/10.37058/jelita.v3i2.4690

Masroor, F., Khan, Q. N., Aib, I., & Ali, Z. (2019). Polarization and ideological weaving in Twitter discourse of politicians. *Social media + Society*, *5*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119891220

Matthews, B., & Ross, L. (2010). *Research methods: A practical guide for the social sciences*. Pearson Higher Ed.

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communications Monographs*, *66*(1), 90–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759909376464

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Momoh, Z. (2019). Influence of social media on electioneering campaign in Nigeria's 2019 general elections. *Cogito-Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, (3), 160–181. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377766989

Mwetulundila, R., & Mlambo, N. (2021). An analysis of rhetoric of identification and consubstantiality in President Hage Geingob's 30th Independence Day anniversary and inaugural speech. *JULACE: Journal of the University of Namibia Language Centre*, 6(2), 22–29. https://journals.unam.edu.na/index.php/JULACE/article/view/1625

Nourani, H., Danesh, A., Nouri, M. R., & Latifi, F. (2020). Discursive (de)legitimization of the Iran nuclear deal in Donald Trump's Tweets. *Strategic Analysis*, *44*(4), 332–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2020.1809205

Oamen, F. (2020). Resilience discourse: A critical study of Nigeria's incumbent and opposition political campaign speeches. *Covenant Journals Language Studies*, *8*(1), 1–19. https://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/index.php/cjls/article/view/2416

Opeibi, T. (2019). The twittersphere as political engagement space: A study of social media usage in election campaigns in Nigeria. *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, *9*(1), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.16995/dscn.292

Perloff, R. M. (2014). *The dynamics of political communication: Media and politics in a digital age*. Routledge.

Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, *40*(3), 825–850. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111797

Rahro, H. R., Jebelli, P., & Azimfard, F. (2024). Critical discourse analysis of presidential candidates TV debates between Ebrahim Raisi and Abdolnaser Hemmati in Iran's 2021 presidential election. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *10*(4), Article 101040. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101040

Ramanathan, R., Hoon, T. B., & Paramasivam, S. (2018). Metaphors in political tweets during national elections. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, *26*(2).

Rapp, C. (2022). Aristotle's rhetoric. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 ed.). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/aristotle/

Recuero, R., & Soares, F. (2025). "How does the other half tweet?": Analyzing the construction of "otherness" during the 2022 Brazilian presidential campaign. In R.A. Novais & R. Christofoletti (Eds.). *The Palgrave handbook on right-wing populism and otherness in global perspective.* (pp. 315–334). Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-77868-1_6

Reisigl, M. (2008). Analyzing political rhetoric. *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, 96–120. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-04798-4_5

Reyes, A. (2011). Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society*, *22*(6), 781–807. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511419927

Rivers, D. J., & Ross, A. S. (2020). Authority (de)legitimation in the border wall Twitter discourse of President Trump. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *19*(5), 831–856. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.19105.riv

Rojo, L. M. (1995). Division and rejection: From the personification of the Gulf conflict to the demonisation of Saddam Hussein. *Discourse & Society*, *6*(1), 49–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926595006001004

Rojo, L. M., & Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). "There was a problem, and it was solved!": Legitimating the expulsion of 'illegal' migrants in Spanish parliamentary discourse. *Discourse & Society*, *8*(4), 523–566. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926597008004005

Ross, A. S., & Rivers, D. J. (2020). Donald Trump, legitimisation and a new political rhetoric. *World Englishes*, *39*(4), 623–637. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12501

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publication.

Tawiah, A. (2025). Social media campaign strategies: A case study of political issue framing by 2024 presidential candidates in Ghana. *Journalism and Media*, *6*(2), Article 72. https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6020072

van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage Publication.

van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Discourse, ideology and context. *Folia Linguistica*, *35*(1–2, Special issue), 11–40. https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.2001.35.1-2.11

van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, *17*(3), 359–383. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250

van Dijk, T. A. (2011). Discourse and ideology. *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction,* 379–407. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068

van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, *1*(1), 91–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986

van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimizing immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies*, *1*(1), 83–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445699001001005

Vigsø, O. (2017). The visual construction of personal ethos in election posters. *The Poster*, *4*(1–2), 31–57. https://doi.org/10.1386/post.4.1-2.31_1

Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63–94). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028020.n4