

“The youths are wiser now”

A positive discourse analysis of resistance in Nigeria’s 2023 electoral rhetoric

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This study examines several Nigerians’ resistance to the two major political parties and their presidential candidates using positive discourse analysis. Additionally, the study critically investigates Nigerians’ support for the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) during the build-up to the 2023 Nigeria’s general elections. Data for the study comprise 1000 tweets with the hashtags #Obidients, #Atikulated, #Tinubu and tweets that mentioned Peter Obi, Atiku, Atikulated, Jagaban, Tinubu, Emilokan, PDP, APC and LP between June and October 2022. The analysis reveals that tweeps construct resistance via three discursive strategies: critiquing and resisting the APC and PDP, portraying Peter Obi of the Labour Party as a political saviour, and positioning Nigerians as politically wiser. This study provides a fresh perspective on analysing Nigeria’s electoral rhetoric by identifying social media as sites for atypical resistance, social change, and revolution.

Keywords: resistance, elections, social media, positive discourse analysis, Nigerian politics

1. Introduction

Choosing a leader is an intrinsic aspect of all democratic societies. The election of a credible leader can change an age-long negative narrative and guarantee, to a great extent, the possibility of achieving overall socioeconomic growth. In Nigeria, over the last decade, elections have been between two major political parties – the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) – yielding almost predictable political results. In these years, Nigeria and Nigerians have suffered major economic setbacks, leaving Nigeria in a state of consumption



with total dependency on developed countries rather than on internal production (National Bureau of Statistics 2022). The issue of low production along with poverty, corruption, and insecurity stimulated Nigerians to resist the PDP and APC during the build-up to Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections on social media. The use of progressive language to challenge mainstream political ideologies in Nigeria is a generative activity geared towards discourses that motivate, boost, and energise social change (Martin 2004). However, the employment of progressive discourses does not in any way suggest the absence of constraining structures "but more fully recognising moments of agency" (Rogers and Wetzel 2013, 90). Martin (2004, 196) notes that it is possible to overcome power and privilege "as long as people know their rights and stand by them".

Previous research on resistance in Nigeria has focused on (de)legitimation in Biafra online discourse (Chiluwa 2012), media-instigated polarised ideological expressions in the 2003 and 2007 Nigerian elections (Oyeleye and Osisanwo 2013), discourses between ruling and opposition parties in Southwestern Nigeria (Adegoju and Arua 2016), and online radio broadcasts of Nnamdi Kanu, the Supreme Leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Igwebuike and Akoh 2022). These studies examined how minority groups use discourse structures such as codeswitching, coinages, propositions, presuppositions and implicatures and social media to construct victim-aggressor membership categorisation. Chiluwa's (2012) study illustrates how Biafrans use verbal war and legitimation strategies such as authorisation, moralisation, and rationalisation to resist their portrayal as slaves and prisoners in Nigeria and the harassment they received from the northern political elites. Although we acknowledge the plausibility of these studies, it is pivotal to note that none explored how Nigerian youth constructed resistance during the 2023 Nigeria's general elections. To fill this gap, this study examines the discursive strategies used to construct resistance during the 2023 Nigeria's elections. This study contributes to the burgeoning research on the construction of resistance by less powerful groups and extends the application of positive discourse analysis to the Nigerian context.

2. 2023 Nigerian general elections

The 2023 general election is of great significance to Nigerians, as it serves as an opportunity for them to elect credible leaders. To demonstrate the commitment of Nigerian youth towards this democratic process, over 70% of new registrants are under the age of 34, resulting in 39.65% youth, 35.75% middle-aged, 18.94% elderly, and 5.66% old (Okodili 2023). This shows the importance of this election to many Nigerians, who hope to bring about positive changes by participating in the elec-

toral process. By turning out to vote, they would perhaps elect officials that would address issues such as poverty, poor infrastructure, insecurity, or unemployment.

Eighteen candidates from different political parties contested for the presidency. As expected, each candidate was confident that he and his party can turn the country's fortunes around if voted into power. However, opinion polls suggest that three candidates lead the race for the popular vote. One of the key contenders was Bola Ahmed Adekunle Tinubu, the candidate of Nigeria's incumbent political party, the APC. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, popularly known as Tinubu or “*Jagaban*” among Nigerians, is a seventy-year-old (as at the time this research was carried out) two-term former governor from 1999 to 2007 of Lagos State, one of the most populous states in South West Nigeria, where he is acclaimed to be a political godfather and kingmaker (Orjinmo 2023).

The second major candidate was Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), born on 25th November 1946. He studied at Ahmadu Bello University and Anglia Ruskin University (Onwumere 2019). Atiku was Adamawa State's governor-elect in Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone after winning the gubernatorial election in 1998 (Tukur 2017). He also served as the Vice President of Nigeria for eight years (1999–2007).

Peter Gregory Obi of the Labour Party (LP) was the third major candidate in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. He was a two-term former governor of Anambra State in South-East Nigeria. The supporters of Peter Obi are referred to as *Obidients* in Nigeria. The presidential election was scheduled for 25th February 2023 while the governorship election took place on 18th March 2023.

3. Resistance in political discourse

Pardo-del-Val and Martínez-Fuentes (2003) argue that resistance is not a negative concept in general, given that change is not inherently beneficial for organisations. Individuals and organisations react differently to change and whatever may instigate change, such as resistance. The reaction to change depends on how valuable the result of the change is to an individual or organisation. Nevertheless, resistance can affect the change process by delaying or slowing its initiation, obstructing or hindering its implementation, and increasing costs (Ansoff et al. 2018). Any attempt to maintain the status quo may be considered resistance. In other words, resistance is equivalent to inertia, a body of mass capable of resisting any change (Maurer 1996). There are steps to successfully challenging the status quo to achieve social change. This underscores Macgilchrist's (2007) five dominant resistance discursive strategies: logical inversion, parody, complexification, partial reframing, and radical reframing. They are used to present a problem in

reverse sequence in order to directly refute it; apply renowned proverbs or maxims to create shared knowledge while seeking common ground; complicate issues so as to make entry into the higher circulation mainstream media; construct an issue within an alternate repository of knowledge and move it partially away from its traditional location; and subvert the status quo and completely change how a problem is reported, respectively.

From a subcultural perspective, resistance is conceived as either a deviation, which Leong (1992) argues, draws on a conflict model in which youths' seemingly resistant responses are strategies to deal with the socio-economic problems they encounter. It is natural for humans to react to uncomfortable situations around them, for which they may be constructed as rebels. In the present study, we adopted Leong's perspective on resistance. The resistance of Nigerian youth during the 2023 elections is a product of their experiences with previous governments. Over the past decade, Nigeria and its citizens have been faced with insecurity, unemployment (Kayode, Arome, and Anyio 2014), and poor medical facilities (Aregbeshola and Khan 2017). According to the United Nations Development Programme (2019), Nigeria battles a myriad of economic and security problems, ranging from fuel and cash shortages to rising terror attacks, high inflation, and plummeting local currency. The failures of a government propel citizens to resist the status quo and demand social transformation (Aboh 2023; Nartey 2022).

Before the 2023 Nigerian general elections, Nigerians were perceived to vote with inadequate knowledge of what political parties and their candidates had to offer (Kohnert 2023). As a result, they were believed to cast votes based on the regional affiliations of the candidates and not on their competence or political ideology. However, there has been atypical sociopolitical development as the chain of events of insecurity, unemployment, and socioeconomic downsizing, characteristic of the current administration, appears to have promoted unity among Nigerian youth in the face of the 2023 Nigerian general elections. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Nigerian youth clamour for significant change through the *#Obidient Movement* on Nigerian social media, a force by which the total restructuring of the Nigerian educational, political, and economic systems is envisaged.

4. Framework: Positive discourse analysis

Positive discourse analysis examines the discourses that inspire, motivate, and support positive thinking and attitudes. Positive discourse analysis (henceforth PDA) was first proposed as a complement to critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) (Martin 2004). It focuses on the progressive/positive aspects of dis-

course that can affect an individual or an organisation's conduct and make the world more inhabitable for any social class. Although CDA sets out to investigate both oppressive and progressive aspects of discourse (Fairclough 1992; van Dijk 2001), emphasis has been mainly on “hegemonic discourses and their negative impact on society” (Hughes 2018, 193). A horizontal relationship exists between PDA and CDA. Hughes (2018) notes that the relationship between PDA and CDA is dialectical, given that both investigate different issues from different points of view but still form the *truth* through rational arguments. Another difference between PDA and CDA is that PDA-related analysis tends to affect the social world more than CDA does (Martin and Rose 2003). It is worth noting that PDA is not a replacement of CDA; rather, it is a necessary complement to “negative” studies aimed at progressive social change (Hughes 2018; Martin 2004). PDA is invaluable because it helps to understand how power and power relations are produced and reproduced.

Highlighting the analytical merits of PDA, Martin (2004) remarks that PDA as a branch of CDA aims at “studying the subversion of power and developing understandings which can energise social change” (p.7). Thus, when a sect desires to counter any traditional discourse and initiate a social change, they take on a dominant position “embedded in a frame or story line that organises them and gives them coherence....” (Gamson 1989, p.157). The implication as it relates to social power and resistance is that social relations of power have no inherent meaning apart from the discourses that aid our understanding of the circumstances and that the system (e.g., society, politics, organisation, etc.) can never attain complete closure because meaning is a purely contingent phenomenon that is still elusive (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Thus, without PDA, “our understanding of how change happens, for the better, across a range of sites is hampered” (Martin 2004, 7). Hughes (2018) maintains that for emancipation from any form of domination or subjugation to be achievable, analysts need to advance progressive discourses and broaden their understanding of resistance and empowerment. The foregoing bolsters the present study, which employs the positive and progressive aspects of PDA to situate, explore, and connect the language use of Nigerians in the 2023 general elections with their newfound progressive political ideology.

5. Method

The data for this study comprised tweets, retweets and mentions bordering on the 2023 Nigerian elections, which adopted the hashtags #Obidients, #Atikulated, #Tinubu or mentioned Peter Obi, Atiku, Atikulated, Jagaban, Tinubu, Emilokan,

PDP, APC and LP. The tweets used in this study were collected between June and October, 2022. This period was selected because it was a period of intense rhetoric during the 2023 election. Two hundred tweets were randomly selected in each month. A total of 1000 tweets were collected using the rtweet package in R and saved as a spreadsheet. The tweets were numbered sequentially and the discursive strategies used to construct resistance in the tweets were identified using thematic analysis. Owing to the qualitative nature of the study and the focus on the linguistic analysis of the tweets, the sample tweets were considered adequate for discursive analysis (see Aboh 2023). The tweets were mainly written in English, except in a few instances where expressions in Nigerian languages, such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and Nigerian (Pidgin) English, were used. The translation of any of these indigenous lexical usages is provided in the analysis. Grammatical errors and lexical coinages in the tweets were preserved to ensure authenticity and because the errors did not significantly impact the overall analysis of the data.

The analysis examined the discursive strategies employed in constructing resistance in the tweets bordering on the 2023 Nigeria's general elections, recognising that the interpretation of meanings occurs at the junction of individuals, culture, and media technology. The investigation considered the specific language used in the tweets; the connections between textual and discursive aspects; the situational frameworks encompassing the tweets' production (such as objectives, participants, and intended audience); and the broader sociocultural, political, and historical contexts referenced by the tweets. The analysis also explored linguistic resources, including indexicality, contrasts, and argumentation, to elucidate their impact on comprehending the discursive practices performed with the tweets. The authors' knowledge of the Nigerian electoral and political landscape supplemented the analysis of primary data.

6. Analysis and discussion

This study identified three discursive strategies employed in the tweets to construct resistance. These strategies perform a social activism function, which the tweeps used to criticise the two dominant Nigerian political parties. The online and physical activism can be described as dialectical, which implies that the resistance constructed on Twitter is also constructed during the political rallies of the political parties. These discursive strategies are presented and discussed in turn.

6.1 Critiquing and resisting the APC and PDP

To show that the APC and PDP are Nigeria’s anti-progressives, the tweeps highlight the failures of the APC and PDP during their 16-year and 8-year rules, respectively, and foreground the reasons why they should not be re-voted into power, as shown in the tweets below:

- (1) They like to gloss over their incompetence & gaslight the public. The APC failed to honour their social contract with the people. Failed in all indices of economic growth & human capital development. That’s why I don’t listen to idiots.
- (2) APC FAILED WOEFULLY’ 2015–2022’ KICK THEM OUT. DO NOT REWARD FAILURE!! This is the campaign 👉
- (3) The 2023 will be a referendum on the failed policies of both pdp/apc administrations from 1999 to 2022 that have only delivered misery, despair, hopelessness and disorientation to d Nigerian masses. Both parties have failed Nigerians, Nigerians should not fail themselves in 2023.
- (4) PDP failed us before 2015 while apc failed woefully between 2015 and 2022. So, apc and PDP are like six and half dozen. They should back out honourably and allow vibrant, honest, healthy and energetic Nigeria to take over.
- (5) Why all this threat from APC, can you eat your cake and still want to have it back. They know they have failed Nigerians. They have injured Nigeria. They know they won’t get people to vote for them again and the only option left for them is thuggery, bribery, Malpractice and so on

In these extracts, the tweeps use nomination strategies such as “PDP” and “APC” to explicitly mention the political parties bringing calamity to Nigeria and Nigerians. Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that nomination can be done as a basis for categorisation. Thus, the tweeps use the pronouns such as “they, their”, and “us” to perhaps create a strict “us” versus “them” distinction, which implies that the APC and PDP are Nigeria’s enemies, a strategy used to distinguish the politicians and the masses. Having established the APC and PDP as anti-progressives and enemies, the tweeps use verb phrases such as “failed policies”, “failed woefully”, “failed Nigerians”, “injured Nigeria”, and “gaslight the public” to underscore the negative actions of these political parties. Phrases such as “misery”, “despair”, “hopelessness”, “thuggery”, “bribery”, and “malpractice” reinforce the devastating state which the PDP and APC have allegedly left Nigerians. These expressions can be argued to show the incompetence and inattentiveness of several politicians, and the psychological and emotional effects of their actions on Nigerians. This name-and-shame mechanism confirms the view that “naming and shaming serves the

purpose of publicly identifying a person, group or organisation that is guilty of some criminal or anti-social behaviour so as to expose them to public shame” (Nartey and Yu 2023, 4). By representing the government as insensitive, the tweeps call for them to allow “vibrant, honest, healthy and energetic Nigeria to take over” (4).

The contrast between the use of negative phrases such as “misery” and “despair” and positive phrases like “vibrant” and “honest” suggest that the tweeps are resisting the desperate and corrupt practices of the PDP and APC and calling for a shift from bad to good leadership. This underscores previous research findings that recognising an enemy not only identifies a target of criticism, but also creates the necessity for group action (Bhatia and Ross 2022). The tweeps construct resistance in these tweets by criticising and rejecting the APC and PDP and proposing alternative solutions. They use language that portrays the parties as corrupt and inhumane, thereby resisting the dominant discourse that they are best for Nigeria. The timeframe used in (3) and (4) (i.e., 1999 to 2022) shows the duration (23 years) Nigerians have been governed by the perceived incompetent and failed leadership of both the APC and PDP. This joint failure criticism signalled by merging the years of PDP leadership (1999–2015) and those of APC (2015–2022), as seen in (3) and (4), implies that the tweeps view both parties’ *modus operandi* as the same and whose achievements have been to fail Nigerians in all spheres. Following Macgilchrist’s (2007) counter-discursive strategies, these tweets adopt the strategy of inversion by contesting APC’s and PDP’s view that they brought positive change in Nigeria.

The criticism and resistance of the APC and PDP politicians were also extended to their supporters who have overlooked their failures to campaign for their re-election into public offices, as demonstrated in the following tweets:

- (6) Bokoharam and bandits is failure of federal government and APC government, but unknown gun men in South East is the failure of Igbo people. The last time I remember no Igbo man is heading any security agency. Hypocrisy of some people
- (7) Na slaves dem be 😂😂, see grown men rushing for noodles in this day and age. APC the failed party they weaponise poverty so they will keep ruining the state, Useless lots!!.
- (8) In 2014, 210-\$1 was a campaign issue, our debt profile, fuel price/subsidy was a campaign issue. Insecurity, Inflation, unemployment & others, in these areas, APC has failed. But in 2022/23 we shouldn’t consider these issues anymore, because you want to vote Tinubu, hypocrites.

- (9) This is not the flex you thought it was Bashir. This is 2022 and not 1922. That 97% of APC supporters are offline means APC and their supporters are still 100 yrs behind. We can't afford to go backwards with you guys. We reject APC and backwardness.

In these tweets, the tweeps use the predication strategies “hypocrites”, “slaves”, “unrealistic Nigerians”, and “backwards” to qualify APC supporters. These phrases describe the double standard of APC supporters as being dishonest and insincere in their assessment of the APC-led government, probably resulting from the personal gains they receive. The description of APC supporters as “slaves” and APC politicians as inflictors of harm performs an intensification and emotionalisation function aimed at drawing the attention of APC supporters to their foolishness and inviting them to look beyond the little things they benefit from APC. The use of laughing emojis (7) could be argued to be a case of mocking the mentality of APC supporters and a strategy to deride them for allowing themselves to be manipulated by the APC. By highlighting the blame-shifting and identity politics used by APC supporters to attribute the unknown gunmen menace in the Southeastern part of Nigeria to the failure of the Igbo people instead of the government (6), and portraying APC supporters as enslaved people who rush to eat noodles (7), the tweeps suggest that APC supporters are incapable of making rational decisions.

In (9), the tweep reacts to the tweet of one of the spokespersons of the APC, Bashir Ahmad, where he stated, “More than 97% of APC voters are offline.” Bashir’s tweet implies that despite the agitation and online campaign against APC, it would have little or no effect since APC voters are not privy to the agitation because many of them are offline, indicating the party’s failure to engage with the modern world. In response, the tweep radically reframes Bashir’s glorification of the *offlineness* of APC supporters, provides an alternative frame, and describes this act as an ancient practice obtainable a century ago while expressing his resistance to APC’s plan to take Nigerians backward. The use of “we” creates an inter-group differentiation between those who criticise the APC government and their supporters. It also re-orientates the tweep’s criticism and rejection of the APC to include other critiques of the APC government, which gives an impression that despite that he is the animator of the criticism, his criticism is representative of the positions of other APC critiques. The tweets suggest that the current political situation in Nigeria is one of disappointment and frustration, which no sane person should support or be proud of. The use of name-calling such as “useless”, “retarded”, and “mad man” suggests that the tweeps are passionate about their beliefs and are not afraid to express their opinions.

6.2 Portraying Peter Obi of the Labour Party as a political saviour

After criticising and resisting the APC and the PDP, the tweeps portray Peter Obi of the Labour Party as a political saviour that will liberate Nigerians from the catastrophe caused by the APC and PDP. Nigerians' portrayal of Peter Obi as a saviour echoes the findings of previous research on social media activism, which indicates that protesters or activists position themselves as victims who need emancipation from an aggressor (Bhatia and Ross 2022). This construction of a political saviour is shown in the following tweets:

- (10) Even Femi falana is acknowledging it that Peter Obi is the real deal. The man is agile, healthy competent, eloquent, frugal, brilliant! Oh! Menh! There's nothing like supporting a candidate that doesn't have baggages.
- (11) A vote for @PeterObi is a vote to stop incessant ASUU strikes. A vote for Peter Obi is a vote to stop insecurities. A vote for peter obi is a vote to stop joblessness in the country. A vote for PO is a vote from consumption to production. Vote wisely.
- (12) This is where you completely miss the point, Nobody calls Peter Obi a Messiah, there is no Messiah anywhere But among all the leading candidates, he is the best to stop the rot in this country and steer us onto a better part This is not even rocket science
- (13) No amount for intermediation will stop me from voting Peter Obi. He is the right man to rescue Nigeria from the cabal.
- (14) The type of welcome that Peter Obi received @DunamisGospel 2022 Mid Year Praise and Worship Night, that is exactly the feeling of over 80% of Nigerians today, about the glorious incoming of Peter Obi in the scheme of plans to save our dear country. God bless Nigeria.
- (15) I am supporting Peter Obi, because I am tired of praying to God to change Nigeria, I am supporting Peter Obi because my salary can't even keep me up till next month, I spend half of my salary buying fuel to power generator, the economy is dead, Naira is valueless, no security.

The tweeps view Peter Obi as someone who will change the status quo and emancipate Nigerians from the woes caused by their adversaries. In the tweets above, the tweeps, after naming Peter Obi, used predication strategies, such as "agile, healthy, competent, eloquent, frugal, brilliant," and "intellectual firepower" to establish that he is *the* saviour of Nigeria. The reference to Femi Falana's (a respected Senior Advocate of Nigeria) acknowledgement of Peter Obi as "the real deal" (10) could be interpreted as a legitimisation strategy to add objectivity to the tweep's support for Peter Obi (Van Leeuwen 2008). The positive evaluation of

Peter Obi is intensified by using the two interjection markers “Oh!” and “Mehn” to express admiration and pride that s/he is supporting a candidate without “baggages”. Apart from stating the features Peter Obi embodies, (11) proceeds to appeal to voters’ interests and emotions on the importance of voting for Peter Obi because he will stop ASUU strikes (by academic staff of universities), insecurity, unemployment, and unproductivity. By stating that Peter Obi is not a Messiah, (12) minimises the extreme case formulation of Peter Obi as someone who will eradicate all Nigeria’s problems. He reiterates that compared to other candidates, “he is the best to stop the rot in this country and steer us onto a better part.” We argue that this might be a strategy to mitigate potential backlash and present a more realistic view of the candidate’s abilities, while still advocating for his positive impact on Nigeria’s future. The conviction that Peter Obi is the anticipated political saviour is demonstrated in (13), where the tweep asserts that no intimidation will deter them from supporting him.

The unwavering support for Peter Obi and personal commitment to his candidacy, despite possible intimidation and challenges, highlights the firm conviction of his supporters in his potential to bring about positive change and progress in Nigeria’s political landscape. Using the verb “rescue” and the named tormentor “cabal” demonstrates the victimhood narrative that frames Nigeria’s current political situation as dire and needing urgent intervention, which Nigerians believe Peter Obi can achieve. This belief is reiterated by the argumentation strategy in (14), where the tweep refers to Peter Obi’s welcome when he visited a 100,000 auditorium, demonstrating his popularity and the extent to which Nigerians see him as a saviour. It is notable that in (15), the tweep uses a five-point list to outline personal reasons for supporting Peter Obi, which border on his tiredness of praying to God for a changed Nigeria and the insufficiency of his salary to meet his basic needs owing to the high price of fuel, insecurity and poor economy. This indicates that Peter Obi’s supporters are motivated not only by his potential to bring about positive change but also by their dissatisfaction with Nigeria’s current political and economic situation. This framing of Peter Obi as a saviour is instrumental in rallying support for his campaign and inspiring a sense of hope among the Nigerian populace that better days lie ahead under his potential leadership.

The idea of Peter Obi being a saviour is reinforced by contrasting him with the perceived negative qualities of his opponents and those affiliated with APC and PDP, further solidifying his image as a viable candidate for change, as demonstrated in the tweets below:

- (16) Peter obi does not need a BH negotiator on his side. If Peter obi wins, people like sheikh gumi will be out of business. Gumi is a threat to national security.

- (17) Peter Obi is not your everyday politician. He is honest, sincere, straightforward, transparent, and above all, he is verifiable unlike Tinubu and Atiku.
- (18) PDP have failed from 1999–2015+corruption+insecurity+boko haram. APC have failed from 2015–2022 more corruption+insecurity+kidnappings+banditry+boko haram+hunger. Our hope Labour Party+security +economic stability+peace and prosperity.
- (19) Saudi Arabia just announced it has realised a budget surplus of \$4.3 billion thanks to spikes in crude oil prices in 2022. Meanwhile Nigeria. Just vote Peter Obi to save Nigeria
- (20) Nigeria would have been better than most of the countries in the world if we were managed by KIND leaders. Our leaders have truly been a disaster since 1999. This is 2022 and we are yet to get it right for once. We MUST get it right in 2023. Peter Obi is coming to save us. Yes

These tweets emphasise Peter Obi's perceived positive attributes and highlight the failures of his opponents, framing him as a competent and trustworthy candidate capable of bringing much-needed changes and progress to Nigeria. The first strategy evident in the tweets above is using negative association to contrast Peter Obi and other opponents such as Tinubu and Atiku, a strategy often used in relational ideological discourse (Zmigrod 2022). Not only was Obi contrasted with his opponents, but he was also contrasted with those seen as threats to national security, like Sheikh Gumi, who has been linked to banditry and kidnapping and accused of supporting APC to perpetrate crime and disorder (Ochieng and Kiriungi 2021). This negative association bolsters Peter Obi's credibility as a candidate and positions him as the best option for ensuring national security. By drawing attention to these connections, the tweets aim to demonstrate that electing Obi would represent a break from the current administration's perceived romance with perpetrators of violence. This polarisation strategy is also evidenced in (17), where the positive predications, "honest, sincere, straightforward, transparent, and verifiable", describe Peter Obi as an exemplary leader who embodies the qualities needed for effective governance. This framing approach is an effective way to appeal to the emotions of voters, as it presents Peter Obi as a strong and capable leader who can successfully address the nation's myriad challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and economic stagnation (18). This polarisation strategy can effectively galvanise support for a particular candidate or party, as it creates a sense of us-versus-them mentality among voters, ultimately leading them to rally behind the candidate they perceive as representing their best interests and shared values (Hong and Kim 2016).

The parallel structures of the positive (security, economic stability, peace and prosperity) and negative associations (corruption, insecurity, kidnappings, banditry, Boko Haram, hunger) crafted by these tweets create a compelling narrative that draws a clear distinction between Peter Obi and his opponents and reiterates the salvific nature of Peter Obi’s anticipated leadership. We argue that not only do politicians use polarisation as a strategy to emphasise their opponents’ negative actions, voters can also use a negative association strategy as a political tactic aimed at creating contrast and polarisation to gain support for a particular candidate (van Dijk 2004). The last two tweets compare the state of Nigeria under the leadership of the APC and other oil-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, highlighting the stark disparities in economic development and social welfare, further driving home the point that Nigeria desperately needs a transformative leader like Peter Obi to maximise Nigeria’s resources for public good fully. The apodosis “Nigeria would have been better than most of the countries in the world” and protasis “If we were managed by KIND leaders” of the first sentence in (20) re-echoes Achebe’s (1984) view that the problem with Nigeria is that of bad leadership. These tweets convey that Peter Obi is the best candidate and a saviour to champion the changes that Nigeria need. The tweeps tap into a sense of urgency, hope for a better future, and desire for honesty, competence, and transparency in leadership. The tweets portraying Obi as a saviour utilise Macgilchrist’s (2007) radical reframing strategy, where there is a defocusing away from dominant political parties to a non-dominant one. The dominant discourse that politicians are dishonest and corrupt is countered by describing Peter Obi as an incorrupt and honest Nigerian politician.

6.3 Positioning Nigerians as being politically wiser

Another resistance strategy employed by the tweeps is positioning Nigerians as politically wiser, who cannot be easily deceived by the propaganda and ethnic politics of the APC and PDP. According to Macgilchrist (2007), individuals demonstrate resistance through inversion. Here, the tweeps contested the mainstream view that ethnicity is Nigeria’s major problem. One of the areas where the tweeps positioned themselves as being wiser was their resistance to using ethnicity to bring division among electorates, as illustrated in the tweets below:

- (21) ‘Igbo are good voters and supporters but when dey contest they’re IPOB. The youths are wiser!!!!’ So you’re confirming the youths supporters of Peter Obi are IPOBians? You’re competent indeed.

- (22) Presidential convoy was attacked and nobody pointed a finger at kwakwanso or atiku, but your hypocrisy allowed you to link ifeanyi ubahs attack to Peter obi. Common emilokans 🍌 you can do better
- (23) Peter Obi this, Igbo that, ipob this, Anambra that, has any Igbo man been president of Nigeria before? See how backward Nigeria is all your previous president failed the system, Nigeria is far behind did Igbo cause this haven't your brothers been president what did they do?
- (24) For the insecurity in the North and that in the West, you hold the Federal government responsible but for that in the East, Peter Obi should be held responsible. You claim he is not a Presidential material, isn't fit to be president but yet you ask him presidential questions 😊
- (25) See, let me tell you, roping IPOB and Biafra to Peter Obi is a finished juice in this campaign. Millions of Nigerians who are hungry and poor aren't interested in your lies and deceit again. They know that Peter Obi is the best candidate and will vote for him!
- (26) So because I'm Yoruba regardless of the eligibility of the candidate I must vote for the person. Well, I am a Yoruba man; unlike Pastor Genesis, I will never vote for Tinubu. I am voting for Peter Obi in view of a better Nigeria.

The noun phrases “IPOB(ians)”, “Peter Obi”, “Ifeanyi Ubah”, “Igbo man”, “Anambra”, “Biafra”, and “East” index the Igbo ethnic group. Phrases such as “Emilokans”, “Yoruba”, “West”, “Tinubu”, and “Pastor Genesis” index the Yoruba ethnic group, whereas “Kwankwanso”, “Atiku”, “North”, are referential strategies used to index the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. This use of indexical and referential strategies shows how the tweeps resist politicians' use of ethnicity to manipulate electorates. By resisting politicians' use of ethnicity to manipulate the electorates, the tweeps position themselves as politically astute and critical thinkers who can see through propaganda and recognise the need for unity in Nigeria, regardless of ethnic or tribal affiliations.

This emphasis on unity reflects a broader narrative in the discourse: Nigerians need to move beyond ethnic and tribal divisions and work together towards a peaceful and prosperous Nigeria. This idea is reinforced by tweets such as criticising the Strawman argument of APC supporters, which claim that the Igbo are only good for voting, not to be voted for, which refutes APC's plan to deter other ethnic groups from voting for an Igbo candidate (21). This resistance strategy also challenges the dominant discourse on ethnic politics and division, highlighting the need for a more inclusive approach to governance that considers diverse ethnic groups and their unique needs and perspectives. (21) also resists the plan to link any attack or kidnapping attempt in Igbo land to Peter Obi, thereby avoiding

stigmatising and scapegoating a particular ethnic group or individual for crimes committed by others. The use of “emilokans” with a corn emoji is instructive. “Emilokans” is an expression used to refer to supporters of Tinubu. The Yoruba phrase “Emi lo kan”, which means “It is my turn”, is an infamous statement made by Tinubu in one of his campaign trails in Abeokuta on 3 June 2022 to garner support for the APC’s primary elections (Oke 2022). Similar blanket statements to attribute Nigeria’s failed system and “insecurity in the North and [...] West” to Peter Obi and the Igbo people who have never been presidents were also resisted, as they perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce ethnic divisions (22, 23).

In addition to resisting APC’s and PDP’s ethnic politics based on being wiser, the tweeps also named the parties’ bad policies and practices as a reason for rejecting their political candidates because their campaign promises in 2022 were the same thing they used to deceive Nigerians in 2015. As wiser individuals, the tweeps indicate that they cannot be fooled by such bogus promises, as the tweets below show.

- (27) After renting fake bishops to deceive Nigerians? Apc this is 2022 Nigerians are wiser than you can imagine. Everything about APC are lies, fake and deceit. Evil party
- (28) ‘Tinubu and Peter Obi are no match for Atiku Abubakar’ ... Dino Melaye, Politics Today, Channelstv 12/08/2022 (7.36pm). Sorry Dino, Nigerians are wiser now. We are NOT going to vote for Atiku and Tinubu. #PeterObi all the way!
- (29) Can u, APC, BAT and your supporters beat your hand to your chest and with the Bible/Qur’an in your hands swear to yourselves that those people u hired are real and true bishops? This is 2022, Nigerians are way bigger and wiser than all these your lies.
- (30) Deceitful & senseless post, this is not 2015 APC & Tinubu made fake promises to Nigerians to grab power, this is 2022 the people are now wiser, Tell Tinubu that he can use Lagos money & take care of himself & look like Buhari, Nigeria’s presidency is not for old ailing individuals.
- (31) Many lies of Tinubu and APC. Baba Him Tu Lie. This is 2022 and not 2015. This is not business as usual. Nigerians are wiser NOW. Imagine the boldness to come and be campaigning after they did to Nigerians. #UnaTooLie APC.
- (32) The Youths in 2022 are different from those of 2011 and 2015. Youths are now awake, wiser, proactive, prepared to vote rubbish out of their lives. Youths who support failed parties are the problem. Youths who support unfit candidates are the problem of Nigeria #OBIdients

These tweets use hyperbolic expressions such as “Everything about APC are lies” (27) to emphasise the perceived dishonesty of the APC and how they have allegedly failed to fulfil their campaign promises from previous elections (30). Following their unorthodox Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket, which was criticised for promoting religious division, the APC allegedly hired fake bishops to paint a picture that bishops (Christians) supported their candidacy. This point is reinforced in (29), where the tweep challenges the APC and their supporters to swear an oath that it was genuine bishops who attended their event. The mention of the Bible and the Qur’an indicates that APC supporters could be both Christians and Muslims and demonstrates the tweep’s faith in the Holy Books as a revered and sacred object, which serves to highlight the emotional and moral significance that religious beliefs hold in the minds of Nigerians, and how this can be used as a point of leverage for political criticism and (de)legitimation. In essence, mentioning religious texts in political discourse can be seen as a rhetorical strategy that draws upon the cultural and symbolic capital of religious traditions and beliefs to reinforce political messages and delegitimise political and ideological opponents (Aboh 2023).

Using the fake-bishop discourse as an evidence-based criticism, (29) describes the APC as liars, fake, deceitful, and evil. This moral-based unfavourable membership categorisation intensifies the expression of the insensitivity and failure of the government. The use of the temporal deictic marker “this is 2022” and the use of “Nigerians are wiser” (27) position the tweep as an animator of Nigerians’ concerns and their knowledge of APC’s political prevarications in contemporary times. Drawing on intertextual and delegitimation resources, (28) debunks and resists Melaye’s proposition that the candidate of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar, is more sophisticated than the candidates of the APC and LP. Through the capitalisation strategy in “NOT”, the tweep emphasises Nigerians’ rejection of Atiku and Tinubu. The emphasis on the alleged lies the APC told Nigerians in 2015 during their electoral campaigns reinforces the tweep’s argument that Nigerians should not trust the APC and its candidates. We argue that by positioning themselves as wiser, the tweeps resist the alleged lies of the APC and PDP and seek to persuade other Nigerians to vote for Peter Obi.

7. Conclusion

This study used a positive discourse analytical framework to examine resistance in Nigeria’s electoral rhetoric on Nigerian X. It analysed the resistance strategies utilised by tweeps to criticise the two major political parties in Nigeria, APC and PDP and portray Peter Obi of the Labour Party as a saviour to Nigeria’s

woes. Three strategies were identified: (1) Critiquing and resisting the APC and PDP, (2) Portraying Peter Obi of the Labour Party as a political saviour, and (3) Positioning Nigerians as being politically wiser. These strategies were realised using contrast, evidence-based argumentation, polarisation, pronominalisation, intensification, and multimodal linguistic resources. These linguistic affordances enabled the tweeps to appeal to the emotions of other Nigerians to understand the imperativeness of retiring APC and PDP politicians and embarking on social action to ensure that Peter Obi is elected president. The potential significance of these strategies is that they may promote the unity of Nigerians given that the tweeps resist the use of ethnic divisions as an electoral strategy. Perhaps the support for Peter Obi will shift the balance of power in Nigerian politics, where non-dominant parties would have a chance to gain momentum.

The findings of this study align with those of previous studies that found that the discursive practices of non-dominant groups reflect the struggle for emancipation, empowerment, and transformation (Macgilchrist 2007; Nartey 2022). The membership categorisations (oppressed vs. aggressors, saviour vs. perpetrator) demonstrated by the counter-discursive strategies show how ideological positions shape political resistance. Additionally, this study demonstrates that social media has enabled Nigerians to engage with political issues and express their views, thus potentially influencing public perception. This aligns with Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) view that there is always a gap through which marginalised groups can challenge dominant views.

This study contributes to PDA as it highlights the discursive dynamics of non-dominant groups and illuminates how individuals can challenge mainstream views in an electoral context. Despite its contributions, one of the potential limitations of the study is that we did not consider post-election activities to ascertain the efficacy of the resistance on electoral outcomes. Further studies should look at post-election discourses to examine the effectiveness of Nigerians’ resistance. We only explored resistance on X, and further studies may examine the discursive practices of resistance on other social media platforms.

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