

Rhetorical Strategies and Ideological Constructs in Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's June 12, 2024 Democracy Day Speech

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Article History	Abstract	
Original Research Article	<i>This paper investigates the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs that feature in the Democracy Day address delivered by Nigeria’s President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Anchored in discourse analysis and critical discourse studies, the study sets out to identify the linguistic and rhetorical resources the President draws on to influence public opinion, communicate his political ideology, and articulate his governing agenda. The analysis illuminates what the discourse implies for power relations, the construction of identity, and the wider socio-political ideologies at play in Nigeria. Among its findings, the study shows that President Tinubu drew on the classical rhetorical appeals — logos, ethos, and pathos — to communicate with his audience, while linguistic resources such as parallelism, metaphor, and inclusive pronouns were used to articulate his ideological stance and his expectations of Nigerians in nation-building. These findings deepen current understanding of how rhetoric functions in political communication and offer insight into the ideological underpinnings of President Tinubu’s approach to governance and policy in Nigeria.</i>	
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Introduction

Democracy Day occupies a significant place in a nation's journey from arbitrary rule toward a government answerable to its people. Nigeria has marked this day since the return to civilian rule in 1999, using the occasion to reflect on the country's social, economic, and political gains and setbacks. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's address on June 12, 2024, commemorated twenty-five years of uninterrupted democratic governance in the country. In democracies still consolidating after periods of authoritarian rule, political speeches do more than transmit information — they function as deliberate acts of storytelling, identity-building, and ideological justification. This is especially true in Nigeria, where memories of military dictatorship and an ongoing struggle to entrench democratic norms remain part of the national consciousness, making presidential speeches important sites where national unity is reinforced and state authority is legitimised.

Rhetorical strategies cover the various linguistic and persuasive tools speakers rely on to shape how an audience thinks and feels (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). President Tinubu's Democracy Day address offers a rich case for examining such strategies, as he draws deliberately on several rhetorical devices to get his message across. Studying these strategies offers a window into how the President attempted to influence public opinion and rally support for his political programme.

Beyond this, political speeches do not simply voice a speaker's personal thoughts; they also carry the broader ideological frameworks that shape political convictions and policy goals. Critical discourse analysis provides a useful lens for uncovering the ideological content embedded in a speech (Fairclough, 1995). Reading the address through this lens makes it possible to surface the implicit ideological assumptions shaping President Tinubu's political choices and, more broadly, Nigeria's socio-political environment.

Nigeria's socio-political context is shaped by its history as a multi-ethnic nation with a layered socio-cultural makeup. Since independence from British rule in 1960, the country has moved through a volatile political history marked by alternating stretches of military and civilian rule, evolving from a federal system under military command to a federal presidential system. Corruption, ethno-religious friction, economic inequality, and governance challenges persist, yet Nigeria remains one of Africa's most populous and influential nations, with an active democracy and a vibrant civil society.

Examining the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs in President Tinubu's Democracy Day address allows for a clearer view of the power dynamics at work, the issues and themes the President treats as priorities, and the likely effects of his leadership on the structure of society. Such an examination can deepen understanding of how political rhetoric, ideology, and governance strategy intersect in President Tinubu's leadership.

Political actors rely on language and rhetoric to communicate effectively with their audiences and to sustain their political standing, which makes the study of political language a compelling scholarly pursuit. Scholars both within and beyond Nigeria have examined political discourse to uncover the meanings embedded beneath the surface of political texts (Abokoma & Alofa, 2015; Anderson, 2014; Gameli & Alofa, 2016; Lawan, 2016; Ayaawan & Opoku, 2020). Much of this work, however, has concentrated on the structural analysis of political texts, with comparatively little attention paid to the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs specific to Democracy Day addresses — a gap this study addresses.

The study sets out to examine the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's June 12, 2024 Democracy Day speech, with the following objectives: to identify and analyse the rhetorical strategies used in the speech; to examine the ideological constructs embedded within it and how they shape Nigeria's political ideologies; and to assess how effectively these rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs shaped public perception and built support for the President's political agenda.

Review of Related Studies

Ayaawan and Opoku (2020) approach inaugural speeches from a critical discourse analysis perspective, examining the discursive formations of governance found within them. Working within the dialectical-relational approach and drawing on concepts such as subject positioning, discursive agency, and intertextuality, their study analyses the ideological formations of governance that emerge in inaugural addresses, alongside questions of subject

positioning, agency, and ideological consequence. Their analysis finds that while a discourse of collectivism runs through the addresses to some degree, the way the subject is positioned within that collectivism varies. The study also notes differences in how principals from the two political traditions studied exercise agency within their speeches, with particular attention to ideology, word choice, and the discursive structures used to signal the speakers' positions.

Acheoah et al. (2023) conducted a speech act analysis of Bola Tinubu's election victory speech, contributing to scholarship on Tinubu's political communication by focusing on this specific address. The study analyses selected utterances to show how the speaker deployed speech acts suited to the psychological climate of the moment, shaped by opposition claims that the election had been rigged. Drawing on Bach and Harnish's Speech Act Theory alongside Stance and Engagement Theory, the study concludes that speech acts carry intentional content built on shared knowledge between speaker and audience, and that persuasive political language depends on strategies such as the careful selection and ordering of speech acts, use of personal pronouns, emotional appeals, invoking shared speaker–audience knowledge, and building rapport with the audience. This earlier study and the present one both centre on President Tinubu's speeches but diverge in framework and method: where the present study applies critical discourse analysis and rhetoric theory to the Democracy Day address, the reviewed study applies speech act analysis to examine the performative force of the election victory speech.

In a related vein, Akinrinlola (2016) undertook a rhetorical analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 inaugural speech, examining the rhetorical devices used to achieve persuasive effect. The study adopts Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis alongside rhetoric theory. Its analysis of Buhari's speech reveals discursive strategies used to communicate commitments, obligations, and promises regarding the welfare of Nigerians, with particular attention to word choice, pronoun use, metaphor, paradox, and historical allusion, all read against the speech's socio-political and ideological backdrop. Both this study and the present one focus on Nigerian presidential speeches and apply critical discourse analysis and rhetoric theory to uncover persuasive and socio-political dimensions of political address, though they examine different presidents and different speeches delivered in different years — Buhari's 2015 inaugural address versus Tinubu's 2024 Democracy Day speech — which allows for a more layered comparison of rhetorical strategy and ideology across Nigerian political leadership over time.

Addae et al. (2022) examine selected speeches by Ghana's Dr. Kwame Nkrumah through critical discourse analysis,

investigating how language builds ideology, sustains power, and structures political discourse ideologically. Using qualitative textual analysis grounded in Fairclough's CDA and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the study identifies linguistic expressions carrying ideological weight and explores discursive features such as evidentiality, pronoun use, agency, metaphor, intertextuality, rhetorical questions, and expressions of moral obligation, concluding that political speeches serve to establish, maintain, and reinforce power and unequal power relations.

This reviewed work offers useful insight into how language and rhetoric operate in political discourse, in this case through Nkrumah's speeches, showing how political actors use language strategically to shape public opinion and secure their position of power. The present study, by contrast, turns to a different political figure — President Bola Ahmed Tinubu — and a different occasion, his June 12, 2024 Democracy Day speech, extending the study of rhetorical technique and ideological construction to a new political context within Nigerian political discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Aristotle's rhetoric theory together offer a productive framework for examining the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Democracy Day address, each contributing a distinct lens on the speech's persuasive and socio-political dimensions.

Van Dijk's CDA treats language as a social practice that reflects power relations, social structures, and ideological formation (Van Dijk, 1995). This makes it well suited to analysing the linguistic choices and discourse strategies President Tinubu uses to shape public perception. For Van Dijk, language is never neutral but always carries ideological weight, and CDA allows researchers to surface the ideologies and power dynamics embedded within a text (Van Dijk, 2009). Applying CDA to the speech helps deepen understanding of Nigeria's socio-political landscape and of what President Tinubu's leadership agenda implies.

Aristotle's rhetoric theory, set out in *Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 350 BCE), offers a classical account of persuasive communication centred on ethos, logos, and pathos — appeals to credibility, logic, and emotion, respectively. President Tinubu's Democracy Day speech draws on these techniques to communicate his political ideology and leadership agenda. Aristotle's framework allows researchers to identify the specific rhetorical devices used in the speech, their intended effects, and their role in shaping public opinion, clarifying the persuasive force of the President's discourse and its likely impact on the audience.

Together, Van Dijk's CDA and Aristotle's rhetoric theory suit this study well: CDA supports a deep reading of the speech's broader socio-political implications, power dynamics, and embedded ideologies (Van Dijk, 2009), while Aristotle's framework offers a systematic way of analysing the persuasive techniques President Tinubu uses to shape public perception and build support (Aristotle, 350 BCE).

Combining these two theories allows for a comprehensive examination of the speech's linguistic features, rhetorical devices, and ideological constructs. This layered approach supports a fuller understanding of the speech's discursive elements, its persuasive effect, and how it aligns with President Tinubu's political agenda, with both frameworks supplying the conceptual tools needed to capture the complexity of persuasive communication, ideological construction, and power dynamics in political speech.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach centred on a single case study — President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Democracy Day speech — drawing on critical discourse analysis and rhetoric theory as its combined theoretical framework for examining the speech's rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs. The primary data consist of the transcript of the address. The analysis closely examines the rhetorical devices, linguistic choices, and discursive patterns used to communicate political ideology and shape public perception, with findings grounded in the researchers' interpretation and critical reading of the speech text within its socio-political context.

Data Presentation and Discussion

This section presents a detailed analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's June 12, 2024 Democracy Day speech, identifying and examining the rhetorical strategies deployed and the ideological constructs conveyed. Through linguistic and content analysis, the discussion draws out the persuasive techniques and ideological themes that shaped the discourse of this significant political occasion.

Rhetorical Strategies

Logos

Logos draws on sound reasoning, evidence, and rationality to appeal to an audience's intellect. This appeal may be direct or indirect depending on the audience's prior knowledge of the context. The following excerpts illustrate its use in President Tinubu's June 12, 2024 Democracy Day speech.

Text 1: "Despite the lethal might of the military government, what appeared to be high and unyielding walls

of dictatorship came tumbling down. The dismal fortress exists no longer.”

This statement captures a fundamental truth about the nation: although military dictatorship once appeared insurmountable, it eventually collapsed. In the Nigerian context, this logical appeal carries real weight. Nigeria is a country of considerable potential, rich resources, and a dynamic population, yet it lived under military rule until pro-democracy activists secured the nation’s transition to democracy. The statement reaffirms that Nigerians possessed the strength needed to bring down the structures of dictatorship.

Text 2: “The power of an idea, the power of the people proved more potent than all the guns and ammunition, and the threats of the strongmen.”

This excerpt makes a strong logical appeal, building an argument around the resilience and strength of Nigerian society under difficult circumstances. By stressing the capacity to withstand and overcome hardship, the statement appeals to reason and reinforces the idea that Nigerian society holds distinctive qualities. In doing so, it implicitly asserts the strength, fortitude, and resourcefulness of its members, offering evidence of the society’s capacity to endure and persevere. The logical appeal here is designed to instil pride and confidence in the collective ability of Nigerians to face and overcome challenges.

Applied to Nigeria, or to any society that has faced comparable difficulty, this line of argument highlights the resilience of its people — acknowledging the hardships endured while affirming the capacity to move past them.

Text 3: “The nation exited the yoke of military rule in 1999 to become the most populous democracy on African soil, the beacon of democratic self-determination for the black race and one of the largest democracies in the world.”

This statement uses logos to build a case, in the Nigerian context, for the progress made in establishing the country as a democratic nation. The phrase “exited the yoke of military rule” marks the shift from the burdens of military dictatorship to becoming one of Africa’s most populous democracies.

The underlying logic here rests on the assumption that establishing Nigeria as a democracy is itself a worthwhile goal. Within Nigeria, democracy is widely regarded as a system that enables citizen participation, safeguards individual rights, and ensures accountable governance. By presenting Nigeria’s democratic progress in this light, the statement seeks to persuade the audience that the nation is moving in the right direction and has achieved meaningful gains.

Text 4: “Democracy is neither a foreign nor abstract concept devoid of real-life meaning for us. Neither can we afford to reduce or minimise it to being nothing but the mere holding of periodic elections where one candidate and party outdo another.”

This statement argues that democracy should not be reduced to an “abstract concept” confined to “periodic elections” where “one candidate outdoes another,” implying that democracy carries real-life significance beyond the contest for political power. Given how prominent election-related concerns have been in Nigeria, this argument speaks to the audience’s desire for stability, appealing to their sense of reason by urging that democracy be understood as a genuine democratic practice rather than merely a struggle for power at election time.

Text 5: “My dear compatriots, Nigeria faced a decision of untold gravity twenty-five years ago; whether to veer towards a better destination or continue aimlessly in the fog of dictatorship.”

This statement, too, employs logos as a persuasive strategy within the Nigerian context, framing the choice Nigerians faced before democracy took hold: continue under military dictatorship or embrace genuine freedom. It implies that the nation’s decision to pursue freedom is what secured its democracy.

Given that Nigeria’s experience of military dictatorship was marked by coups, oppression, and other hardships, this argument resonates with the audience’s aspirations for a better future.

Ethos

Ethos concerns the credibility, character, and trustworthiness of the speaker, all of which shape how an audience receives a message. In his Democracy Day address, President Tinubu spoke directly to his own character and credibility. Examples include:

Text 6: “I stand uniquely placed in this regard. I was among those who took the risk to midwife the birth of our democracy. I am now a direct and obvious beneficiary of the fruits of those historic efforts.”

Within the Nigerian context, this statement functions as an appeal to ethos. By acknowledging his own role in the struggle for democracy, President Tinubu establishes his credibility and moral standing as a speaker. The phrase “I stand uniquely placed” signals that he now benefits directly from that earlier struggle. In making this claim, he positions himself as someone with a deep understanding of Nigeria’s democratic history and the standing to lead, having “paid the price” himself — a move that reinforces his ethos by foregrounding his experience and standing in Nigerian politics.

Text 7: “As president of this nation, I am morally and constitutionally bound to preserve this precious form of governance. I vow to do my utmost best to protect your rights, freedoms, and liberties as citizens of Nigeria.”

This excerpt also draws on ethos. By framing himself as bound by both moral duty and constitutional obligation to preserve democratic governance, President Tinubu projects credibility and trustworthiness. The statement appeals to ethos by underscoring his commitment to inclusivity, fairness, and unity, positioning him as a leader who values equality and respect for all citizens regardless of political affiliation.

Text 8: “Even more than that, I pledge to do whatever is necessary to cement democracy as our way of life.”

Text 9: “I understand the economic difficulties we face as a nation.”

These excerpts also rely primarily on ethos. Here, President Tinubu pledges to do whatever is necessary to make freedom and liberty a lasting feature of Nigerian life, while also affirming his awareness of and empathy toward the nation’s economic hardships — positioning him as credible and capable of delivering the changes the economy requires.

Pathos

Pathos refers to the use of emotional appeal to persuade an audience. Aristotle held that emotion plays a central role in human decision-making, making emotional appeal an effective persuasive tool. The following excerpts illustrate pathos in President Tinubu’s Democracy Day address:

Text 10: “The sacrifices of General Alani Akirinlade, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, Professor Wole Soyinka, Chief Ralph Obioha, Chief Cornelius Adebayo, among many others, should never be forgotten. For at least six years, they bore the pains and difficulties of life in exile.”

Text 11: “The sacrifices they made, and the precious gift brought about by their selfless devotion can never be repaid neither shall it be forgotten.”

Text 12: “We could not have won the battle against military dictatorship without the irrepressible Nigerian journalists who mounted the barricades along with the pro-democracy activists.”

These excerpts appeal to pathos at several points, using language that evokes gratitude. They acknowledge the sacrifices of pro-democracy activists and others who opposed military dictatorship, underscoring the sacrifice, loyalty, and commitment of those who helped establish democratic governance, in some cases at the cost of their lives. Collectively, the statements emphasise gratitude,

honour, and a sense of indebtedness toward those who paved the way for Nigeria’s democracy.

Taken together, these statements appeal to pathos by naming some of the individuals who fought for democracy, keeping their contribution in the public consciousness, while also working to renew the audience’s trust in Nigerian governance.

Building Ideology through Inclusive Pronominals

Several ideological constructs in the speech are built through pronoun use, shaping the speaker’s vision and stressing unity, inclusivity, and shared purpose among Nigerians. Examples include:

1. **“We” and “us”:** The speaker consistently uses “we,” “us,” and “our” to construct a collective identity and sense of unity. By positioning himself as part of the Nigerian community, he signals his commitment to serving the nation alongside its citizens, reinforcing the idea that everyone has a part to play in the country’s progress.
2. **“My dear compatriots”:** This form of address builds a sense of camaraderie and equality, reinforcing the speaker’s positioning of himself as one citizen among many, bound by a shared goal and a shared responsibility to the nation.
3. **“Let us board this progressive train together”:** This call to unity uses “us” to stress the shared responsibility all Nigerians hold in building a better future, encouraging the audience to set aside differences for the collective good of the nation.

Building Ideologies through Parallel Structures

Parallel structure is a grammatical and rhetorical technique in which related ideas are expressed through a consistent pattern of words, phrases, or clauses, producing balance and symmetry that make a sentence both more pleasing to the ear and easier to follow. President Tinubu’s Democracy Day speech contains several parallel structures that help construct particular ideologies. Examples include:

1. *“The power of an idea, the power of the people proved more potent than all the guns and munitions, and the threats of the strongmen.”* This line builds an ideology that credits pro-democracy activists and the Nigerian people with the country’s exit from military dictatorship into democracy.
2. *“On this day, 31 years ago, we entered our rites of passage to becoming a true and enduring democratic society. Going through this passage was hard and dangerous.”* This statement acknowledges the difficulty of the nation’s transition to democracy.

3. “That we have established a tradition of holding transparent, open, and fair elections gives credence to our democratic bearing. That we experienced peaceful transitions of government affirms our democratic temperament.” This builds an ideology of steadfastness and resilience, positioning Nigeria as a genuinely democratic nation.

Constructing Ideologies through Metaphors

In discourse, metaphor refers to figurative language used to convey meaning beyond the literal sense of the words, creating imagery, evoking emotion, and communicating complex ideas by drawing comparisons between otherwise unrelated concepts. Metaphors appear across many forms of communication — speeches, everyday conversation, literature, advertising — allowing speakers and writers to communicate more effectively, engage their audience, and render abstract ideas more relatable. Several metaphors appear in the June 12, 2024 Democracy Day speech. Examples include:

1. The phrase “*fellow Nigerians, our Democracy is more than a historic fact. It is a living, breathing reality*” personifies democracy through a human metaphor, contributing to an ideology of growth and implying that Nigerians should regard democracy as a living entity rather than merely a historical event.
2. The phrase “*let us board this progressive train together. Together let us move Nigeria forward*” draws on a journey metaphor to convey progress and forward momentum, building an ideology of togetherness and urging Nigerians to embrace renewed hope and progress while remaining united.

Conclusion

This analysis of the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs in President Bola Tinubu’s Democracy Day speech offers valuable insight into the discursive dimensions of political leadership and the wider socio-political landscape of Nigeria. Drawing on discourse analysis and critical discourse studies, the study has examined the linguistic and persuasive techniques President Tinubu used to shape public perception, communicate his political ideologies, articulate his leadership agenda, and publicise his policy priorities. In doing so, it contributes to existing scholarship on discourse analysis and political communication, underscoring the importance of attending to the linguistic and rhetorical devices political leaders use in shaping public discourse and perception. The insights offered here can inform future research on rhetoric in political leadership, support the

development of more effective communication strategies, and contribute to a more informed and engaged citizenry.

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