

Aristotelian Appeals for (De)legitimation: A Re-examination of Buhari-Atiku Clash on X during the 2019 Presidential Election Campaigns in Nigeria

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Abstract

Although Nigerian political rhetoric is well-studied, previous research appears to have overlooked how leaders use the Aristotelian appeals of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* to legitimise or delegitimise ideas, policies and actions. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate how President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, utilised these appeals to construct (de)legitimation in their campaign tweets during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Therefore, while drawing on the classical theory of Rhetoric and Critical Discourse Analysis, the study applied Van Leeuwen's framework of Legitimation in Discourse and Communication. The data analysed comprised a total of 200 tweets collected from the official X handles of the two contenders published during the 2019 campaigns – October, 2018 to February, 2019. The results indicate, first, that while Buhari's rhetoric relies on projecting *ethos*, Atiku's emphasises on creating *pathos*. Secondly, while Buhari exploits his *ethos* to legitimate himself and his decisions/policies through *authorisation* and *rationalisation*, Atiku manipulates *pathos* to delegitimize Buhari and his decisions/policies through *moral evaluation*. Ultimately, the study concludes that rhetorical appeals critically shape legitimation and delegitimation in Nigerian political rhetoric. It also recommends that future research adopt a multimodal approach to explore how these appeals are created through audiovisual elements in (de)legitimising political agendas.

Keywords: *Aristotelian Appeals; Election Campaign Rhetoric; (De)legitimation; Nigeria's 2019 Election; Muhammadu Buhari; Atiku Abubakar; X (formerly Twitter)*

1 Introduction

The Greek philosopher Aristotle provided the first scientific approach to persuasion in his Rhetoric, which is concerned with the practical art of eloquent language use - specifically, the ability to discern the available means of persuasion in any given case (Braet, 1992; Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 1992; Ramage et al., 2016). Aristotle theorized that persuasion arises from three primary rhetorical appeals: *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. *Ethos* refers to the credible image, character, or authority projected by the speaker. *Logos* concerns the proofs, logical reasoning, and evidence presented to support an argument. *Pathos* involves

appealing to the audience's emotions to create favorable conditions for persuasion (Charteris-Black, 2009; Malah et al., 2025a; Perloff, 2010).

Aristotle further asserted that these appeals are the primary technical modes of persuasion employed across political, judicial, and ceremonial genres of rhetoric (Charteris-Black, 2011; Rapp, 2022). Empirical studies in political communication have consistently substantiated Aristotle's foundational claims, demonstrating how ethos, logos, and pathos are strategically deployed in contemporary political discourse. For instance, research has shown how American Presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump manipulated these appeals to justify military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran (Bibi et al., 2025; Raissouni, 2020; Seifi, 2014). Similarly, French presidential candidates Chirac and Sarkozy deployed these appeals to persuade voters in campaign speeches (Mshvenieradze, 2013). In Nigeria, presidential contenders Atiku, Tinubu, and Obi harnessed these modes to construct competing political ideologies during the 2023 campaign (Agho, 2025). Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir utilized them to construct anti-corruption rhetoric in international addresses (Fauzi & Ting, 2025), while Namibian President Geingob leveraged them in his 2021 State of the Nation Address to project charismatic leadership during the COVID-19 crisis (Nanyeni, 2023).

Furthermore, as political communication increasingly migrates to social media (Jensen, 2017; Perloff, 2014), digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook have emerged as key arenas where political actors exploit rhetorical appeals. For example, US presidential candidate Mitt Romney deployed all three appeals in his 2012 tweets to build an emotional connection with voters and justify replacing Obama (Johnson, 2012). In Malaysia, political leaders Syed Saddiq and Hannah Yeoh relied on pathos and ethos, respectively, to construct persuasive messaging managing public response to the December 2021 Taman Sri Muda floods (Ab Manan & Sham Shul Shukri, 2023).

Despite the growing body of research on rhetorical appeals in digital political discourse, the tweets of Nigerian political leaders remain under-researched. Consequently, it remains unclear which of these modes function as central persuasive devices in Nigerian election campaigns. For example, despite the intense rhetorical exchanges on X between President Muhammadu Buhari and his chief challenger, Atiku Abubakar, during the 2019 campaign, their deployment of these appeals remains unexplored. Given the contentious nature of the 2019 election - where both candidates routinely characterized actions and policies as either appropriate or inappropriate, acceptable or unacceptable, to win public support - there is a clear need to examine how rhetorical appeals are leveraged to construct legitimation and delegitimation. How exactly did Buhari and Atiku exploit these appeals to justify or criticize key political decisions, policies, and the actors implementing them?

A compelling aspect of this election was how several of President Buhari's major policies became key flashpoints between him and Atiku. These included his anti-corruption campaign (which the opposition criticized as a political weapon), executive orders, the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA), his refusal to sign the Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2018, the suspension of Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen, and the postponement of the national elections. On each issue, the President employed legitimizing discourse to frame his actions as necessary, proper, and in the public interest, while Atiku used delegitimizing discourse to frame them as authoritarian, dishonest, and unacceptable.

However, the precise relationship between the candidates' rhetorical appeals and their (de)legitimation strategies has not yet been systematically analyzed. An earlier attempt to investigate (de)legitimation in this campaign was conducted by Malah et al. (2025b), but their study focused primarily on speech acts across a smaller sample size. Therefore, a more robust investigation using a larger dataset is necessary to re-examine how these two political leaders constructed (de)legitimation through Aristotelian appeals.

To address these empirical gaps, this study applies the framework of Aristotelian appeals to systematically analyze the (de)legitimation strategies deployed by Buhari and Atiku in their 2019 campaign tweets to frame their own actions as rational and justified while presenting those of their opponent as irrational and unacceptable. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following two research questions:

- I. What are the dominant Aristotelian appeals deployed by President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar in their campaign tweets during the 2019 elections?
- II. How do the two candidates utilise these appeals to construct (de)legitimation?

1.1 Nigeria's 2019 presidential election campaigns on Twitter

According to Bamigbade and Dalha (2020), Ojukwu et al. (2019), and Sule (2019), the 2019 general election campaign was one of the most highly contentious in the history of Nigeria's democracy. It was characterized by intense rhetoric involving accusations and counter-accusations, propaganda, and voter manipulation, especially between the incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), and his main challenger, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP was a dominant force that held Nigeria's presidency from 1999 to 2015, whereas the APC was a coalition party that brought this 16-year reign to a dramatic end. In this election, President Buhari was seeking re-election, while Atiku was running to secure victory and orchestrate a PDP comeback. Buhari's campaign was focused on persuading Nigerians to reject the PDP's return and grant the APC another mandate. Similarly, Atiku framed his

messaging to convince voters why the APC should be ousted and why the PDP deserved to be elected (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020; Ojukwu et al., 2019).

Furthermore, because the 2019 election coincided with peak social media adoption for political discourse in Nigeria (Bello et al., 2019; Olowokere & Audu-Bako, 2019), both Buhari and Atiku made extensive use of Twitter for campaigning. Consequently, the high-stakes persuasion strategies deployed by both candidates continue to attract scholarly interest. Existing studies have investigated how these political actors set public agendas (Ahmad et al., 2020), constructed processes of *othering* (Auwal et al., 2020), employed figurative language and propaganda (Amali, 2024), and utilized speech acts to project ethos (Mlah et al., 2025a). However, despite the fact that many of the President's key policy decisions - such as his anti-corruption measures, the suspension of Nigeria's Chief Justice, and the postponement of the Presidential and National Assembly elections (see Section 1 above) - generated fierce rhetorical debate during the campaign, little is known about the specific strategies both figures employed to (de)legitimize those policies and decisions.

1.2 Legitimation

Legitimation is a discursive practice, a linguistic enactment of rightness (Cap, 2008). It is about expressing justifications or answering the question 'why', about providing plausible grounds for social practices, decisions, or policies, so that they appear correct, appropriate, acceptable and even necessary, in the eyes of discourse recipients (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). On the other hand, delegitimation is about accusing, criticizing and raising doubt in order to establish that certain social practices, policies or decisions are inappropriate, unjustified and unacceptable (Vaara, 2014). Consequently, (de)legitimation has been a recurring feature of political discourse, as political leaders always aspire to get themselves and their actions/policies approved and accepted, while their adversaries and their actions rejected by citizens (Chilton, 2004; Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997).

Currently, the literature on political (de)legitimation strongly indicates that political leaders perform (de)legitimation in different genres in attempts to address different discursive problems, manage the minds of their citizens, save their political survival, or pursue other goals. Three critical genres feature prominently in the literature as popular for political (de)legitimation. First, *parliamentary speeches*, especially in Europe where racism prevails, have been a popular avenue for delegitimising immigrants and legitimising strict anti-immigration policies. We have seen this in Spanish authorities' parliamentary speech that legitimised their forceful expulsion of immigrants by portraying them as deviants whose actions constituted threat to public order, and by referring to laws

and appropriate agencies/professionals that carried out the exercise (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997). Similar strategy was observed from parliamentary speeches given by British and Italian Prime Ministers. Both Prime Ministers delegitimised immigrants as a threat and a burden, while legitimising their migration externalisation policies by invoking securitisation and deterrence (Zappettini, 2025).

Secondly, another vital genre for pursuing political (de)legitimation is *pro-war speeches*. Such speeches are delivered by political leaders in order to win their citizens' support and approval for unleashing violence abroad as a necessary action. In recent decades, especially after the September 11 attacks in the US, this type of speech was mostly made by American Presidents who desired to obtain the approval and support of the American people for retaliatory military operations against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Thus, (de)legitimation studies concerned with post-9/11 pro-war speeches have revealed how US Presidents Bush, Obama and Roosevelt mobilised fear to legitimised war as necessary and the best prevention against imminent attack by dangerous enemies 'who are already planning'. Their discourses justified violence by persuading all Americans who did not wish to see a repeat of 9/11 to support preventive measures (see Cap, 2006, 2008; Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011).

Thirdly, *election campaign discourse* has also been a very important genre for political (de)legitimation. In campaign discourse, electoral candidates and their parties aim to woo voters and get them to vote in their favour. They carefully design their discourse with the aim of building trust, encouraging confidence and hope for more prosperous future, establishing their legitimacy and winning the voters' support and goodwill. Conversely, they discredit opponents by intensifying their negative qualities and downplaying their positive values (see, for example, (Perloff, 2013; Perloff, 2014; Reisigl, 2008). They often achieve this, for example, by creating two sides, the Us-group (which involves the candidate, his party, and voters) versus the Them-group (which involves only the opponent and his party); by referring to their own competence and earlier achievements, which contrast with the failures of the opponents; by making promises that would 'transport' voters to a pleasant future; and by highlighting good policies/decision and actions intentionally tailored in the interest of the voters and the whole nation. Therefore, one way of swaying the voters through campaign discourse is how candidates legitimate their policies/actions, framing them as morally right, appropriate, and even necessary. It is also a powerful way of discrediting an opponent when his actions or policies are delegitimised by being framed as morally wrong, inappropriate, or unnecessary.

We have seen this, for instance, in President Trump's 2020 campaign tweets where he legitimised his US-Mexico border wall policy in attempts to persuade voters by

projecting himself as the best candidate who cared about their safety (Rivers & Ross, 2020; Ross & Rivers, 2020). Trump emphasised how this policy intended to shield the American people against violent criminals, and how Democrats' refusal to fund the wall showed their neglect of Americans' lives. Moreover, another instance of this is how the same Trump in his tweets delegitimised the Iran Nuclear Deal (the JCPOA) and legitimised his unilateral withdrawal of the US from the deal (Nourani et al., 2020). He framed his decisions as morally right and rational, as previous leaders who participated in this deal did it for personal interest, not minding the deal's harmful potential for America and her allies in the Middle East. Thus, his decisions were portrayed as corrective, which projected him as a better leader.

Therefore, considering how Nigeria's President Buhari in his 2019 campaign discourse defended his decisions/policies in attempts to promote himself and how his opponent Atiku Abubakar challenged them in his campaign discourse, the Buhari-Atiku rhetoric on X makes good case for (de)legitimation analysis.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study draws on Aristotle's classical theory of *Rhetoric* and the framework of *Critical Discourses Analysis* (henceforth CDA). On the one hand, Aristotle in this theory argues that persuasive communication involves three crucial ingredients that contribute to persuasion in specific ways: the persuader, the message or subject being treated in the message, and the persuadee(s). Accordingly, he argues that there are three rhetorical appeals which serve as technical means of persuasion – the *ethos* (persuader's credible image), *logos* (plausible reasons, cogent arguments or logic presented in discourse), and *pathos* (persuadee's emotional state) (see 1 above). This theory is, therefore, appropriately applied to address the first research question, which focuses on identifying these appeals in the campaign tweets.

On the other hand, CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis that utilises linguistic theories as well as social theories in its interpretation of discourse patterns (Wodak, 2001; Jones, 2012). It is a *social approach* which views discourse as a 'social practice' (Jones, 2012, p. 45), focusing on the relation between language resources and the social notions of identity, ideology, gender, dominance, racism, and resistance etc. According to Van Dijk (2001), effective CDA research: (a) employs multidisciplinary tools to focus more on social problems and political issues than linguistic structures, (b) does not merely describe discourse structures but explain them in terms of social interaction and social structures, (c) explores how discourse structures enact, legitimate, or challenge relations of power and dominance in the society.

Specifically, the study utilises Van Dijk's *socio-cognitive approach* to CDA (see Flowerdew, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008; Van Dijk, 2014; Wodak, 2001). This approach is concerned with the cognitive study of discourse, exploring the relation between *discourse*, *society* (context) and *cognition* (the mind). It considers both discursive interaction and context as mental and social phenomena, thus it examines how discourse production in specific social contexts attempts to control the mind and shape perception. Consequently, practitioners of socio-cognitive approach often investigate how discourse producers like politicians, journalists, and scholars attempt to exert power by controlling public discourse, shaping perceptions and understanding. In exploring campaign discourse, for example, this model can be employed to investigate how candidates attempt to control the voters' minds and influence their perceptions in ways that justify their agenda. Arguably, therefore, by analysing Aristotelian appeals through this model, we can examine how candidates' rhetoric not only persuade voters but actually attempt to reprogram the mental structures they use to judge what is politically right or wrong, so that certain actions/policies are legitimised or delegitimised. This is applied to address the second research question, which focuses on examining how the two candidates utilise these appeals to construct (de)legitimation. Table 1 below illustrates the integration of these appeals and the socio-cognitive model:

Table 1: The integration of Aristotelian Appeals and Legitimation through Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive CDA

Aristotelian Appeals	Cognitive Target	Discursive Goal
Ethos	To shape the voters' mental representation (context model) of Self as trustworthy, competent, or benevolent; while the opponent as dishonest, incompetent and malevolent	Legitimise own actions or policies/decisions as right and acceptable; Delegitimise the opponent's actions or policies/decisions as wrong and unacceptable
Logos	To shape voters' perceptions of specific political issues (event model) as logical, reasonable, rational and right, or otherwise	Legitimise own actions or policies/decisions as rational and acceptable; Delegitimise the opponent's actions or policies/decisions as logically flawed, wrong and unacceptable
Pathos	To activate the voters' emotions, shared values, beliefs, ideologies and in-group attitudes (Social Cognition)	Legitimise own actions or policies/decisions by evoking emotions, shared values and ideologies that work to normalize them; Delegitimise the opponent's actions or policies/decisions by evoking emotions, shared values and ideologies that are manipulated to portray them as wrong and unacceptable

Therefore, while drawing on both classical *Rhetoric* and the CDA, this study investigates how ethos, logos, and pathos are manipulated to construct (de)legitimation in the campaign tweets of President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Its attempt is to uncover the hidden discourse tactics Buhari employed to explain and justify himself and his decisions/policies and the strategies Atiku used to criticise Buhari and frame his decisions/policies as wrong, unjustified, and unacceptable.

2 Literature review

In recent decades, there has been a revival of academic interest in Aristotelian appeals in political rhetoric. Discourse analysts working on both offline and online genres continue to report fascinating findings on how political leaders manipulate these modes of persuasion in ways that aim to influence the recipients of their discourse. Thus far, the literature strongly indicates that preference and use of these appeals among politicians are determined by context and goals of their discourse. For instance, after the 9/11 attacks on the US and Presidents Bush and Obama were seething with vengeance, they utilised *pathos* and *ethos* to frame their pro-war rhetoric. Their main speech goal was to justify military operations on Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and later on Saddam Hussein in Iraq for his alleged WMD (Raissouni, 2020; Seifi, 2014). Their pathos manifested when the presidents

mobilised *fear* by claiming that unless ‘preventive measures’ were taken against the group and those giving them safe haven (Taliban regime and Pakistan), Americans will see a repeat of 9/11 incidents. Their ethos (especially *goodwill*) was seen when the presidents portrayed themselves as acting to secure the American people from further aggression and to liberate the Afghan people, especially women and girls, whose basic human rights were being violated by the Taliban regime. Similar findings were reported from the analysis of Trump’s discourse on US-Iran conflict in 2025 (Bibi et al., 2025). Trump presented himself as acting for the security and freedom of the American people, and against the evil state of Iran who posed nuclear threat to the US.

Besides justifying violence, political leaders also exploit the appeals for swaying the opinion of voters during elections. This was seen, for instance, in the campaign speeches of Nigerian presidential candidates Awolowo and Abiola (Akinwotu, 2016), Atiku, Tinubu, and Obi (Agho, 2025). Awolowo and Abiola in their campaign speeches utilised these appeals to achieve *tact* in emphasising the need for change and encouraging continuous support. Atiku, Tinubu and Obi, in their 2023 campaign speeches, communicated ideologies of patriotism and competence through the appeals. Similarly, American presidential candidate Romney (Johnson, 2012) and French presidential candidates Chirac and Sarkozy (Mshvenieradze, 2013) took advantage of these strategies in their campaign tweets/speeches. Romney in his 2012 campaign tweets relied on the pathos of patriotism to connect with the voters and convince them about the need for change, and to vote for him as someone who identified with them. Thus, in an attempt to contribute in this direction, the present study explores these appeals in the campaign tweets of Nigerian presidential candidates during the 2019 elections. This would yield some insight into how tweeting candidates in Africa take advantage of these appeals to construct persuasion.

After electoral success, new presidents focus on uniting the citizens and obtaining/strengthening their support and goodwill, which is pursued in the Inaugural Address (see Alimole, 2004; Campbell & Jamieson, 1990; Malah, 2021). Consequently, studies have revealed how debut speeches of US President Biden (Nurkhamidah et al., 2021) and Nigeria’s President Tinubu (Eze & Nwasogwa, 2023) relied on *pathos* to build confidence/hope and encourage acceptance of their new administrations. Biden’s pathetic appeals derived from his portrayal of himself as a competent president who can move America forward, and who intended to be fair to all Americans. Tinubu’s strategy was to display the ideology of a patriotic and competent leader.

While governance is continuing, political leaders frequently deliver speeches with the aim of re-asserting their legitimacy, exercising authority, and consolidating their

dominance. In this case too, the Aristotelian appeals have been shown to be vital tools harnessed by leaders in their speeches. Alkhirbash et al. (2014) discovered how Malaysia's Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir, embedded both pathos and logos to highlight his ethos of a homiletic leader who rejected the Western unfair dominance of the developing world. Fauzi and Ting (2025) showed how the same Dr. Mahathir manipulated logos to construct anti-corruption discourse on the global stage. In another finding similar to Alkhirbash et al.'s, Ghazani (2016) reported how US Presidents Bush and Obama enhanced their manipulative rhetoric by resorting to logos of biblical quotations to reinforce their ethical qualities.

Other times, political leaders would have to discursively manage one crisis or another. They would have to successfully address their subjects and come across as reliable leaders. The literature shows that Aristotelian appeals are key strategies that leaders rely on in their rhetoric aiming to manage crisis situations. For instance, Namibian President Geingob applied these appeals in his State of the Nation Address to construct the persona of a charismatic leader, which he exploited to manage the COVID-19 crisis (Nanyeni, 2023). In another finding, Malaysian leaders Yeoh and Saddiq deployed ethos and pathos in their social media posts to manage the Taman Sri Muda flood crisis in December, 2021 (Ab Manan & Sham Shul Shukri, 2023). Yeoh's ethos manifested when she referred to her practical involvement in giving humanitarian assistance at the scene of the flood, while Saddiq's creation of pathos was seen in his discourse framed to motivate the public to provide support to the victims.

In conclusion, this review has given us enormous insight into how the Aristotelian appeals are utilised to enact persuasion in different genres by political figures. However, it has also revealed some limitations or gaps left by previous research. First, we have seen that researchers mostly concentrated on offline speeches despite the increasing popularity of Twitter as an avenue for political rhetoric. Secondly, despite the persuasive potentials of the three persuasive modes, their role in constructing (de)legitimation still appears unexplored. Thirdly, while Nigerian/African presidential candidates embed Twitter for campaigns, their discourse is still under-researched. So far, rhetorical studies on campaign tweets have focused more on US and Asian politicians. Hence, in an attempt to fill these gaps in research, the current study explores the use of these appeals to construct (de)legitimation in the campaign tweets of Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, during the 2019 election campaigns.

3 Methodology

This study adopted *qualitative discourse analysis*, which allows for in-depth analysis and researchers' creative interpretation of language-in-use in specific contexts (Creswell, 2012; Dornyei, 2007). The approach was considered suitable as the data analysed were text-based tweets produced for campaign by candidates during national elections. Additionally, the approach of CDA enabled the uncovering of hidden discourse structures and strategies that the two candidates deployed to manipulate Aristotelian appeals and construct (de)legitimation. Moreover, in keeping with qualitative research, the study employed *purposive sampling*. This sampling technique was adopted because it allows researchers to intentionally select typical samples that are information-rich and can best help in understanding the phenomenon of interest, to answer the research questions (see Matthews & Ross, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, the samples collected were tweets published by President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar at their official X (Twitter) handles during the 2019 election campaigns period (from October, 2018 to February, 2019; see Ahmad et al., 2020; Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020; Kadija et al., 2020). Ultimately, the study followed ideas of Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009) that in conducting qualitative research, the data can be collected and/or analysed manually because the researcher is the primary instrument. Hence, a total of 200 tweets was manually collected and analysed, with 100 each from Buhari's (https://twitter.com/MBuhari/with_replies) and Atiku's handles (https://twitter.com/atiku/with_replies).

For data analysis, it was conducted in two phases, based on the research questions the study set out to address. First, Aristotelian appeals in the tweets were identified using a revised framework based on Alkhirbash (2016) and Ramage et al. (2016). This framework not only identifies the three appeals of *Ethos (E)*, *Logos (L)*, and *Pathos (P)*; it also gives specific linguistic devices and tactics used in creating them. In addition, analytic rigor was enhanced by utilising Van Dijk's (1998, 2011) Rhetorical Discursive Strategies like *hyperbole (HYP)*, *metaphor (MET)*, *number game (NUM)*, *authority (AUT)* and *actor description (ACD)*.

Secondly, for examining how the identified appeals are exploited to construct (de)legitimation, the analysis applied Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework of Legitimation in Discourse and Communication. Van Leeuwen identifies four major strategies as Authorisation (AUT), Moral Evaluation (MOE), Rationalisation (RAT), and Mythopoesis (MYT). Figure 3.1 below illustrates the study's conceptual framework of how ethos, logos, and pathos construct (de)legitimation in Buhari-Atiku campaign discourse on Twitter during the 2019 elections:

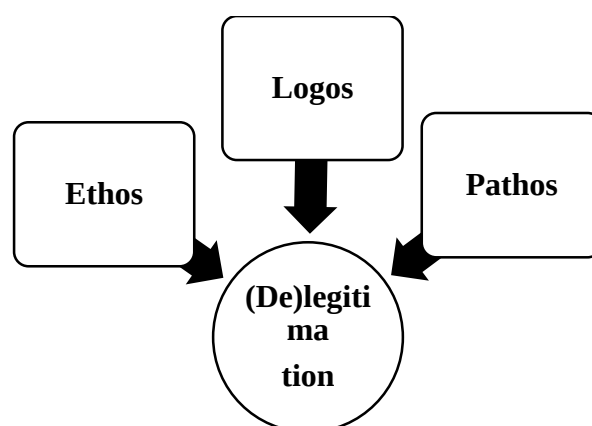


Figure 3.1: How Aristotelian Appeals construct (de)legitimation in Buhari-Atiku Tweets

4 Results and discussion

The analysis finds that President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar differ regarding their preference for Aristotelian appeals in their 2019 campaign rhetoric on Twitter. President Buhari's rhetoric mostly projects *ethos*, while Atiku's concentrates on *pathos*. The President leverages giving the impression of credible image through his discursive display of the three pillars of intrinsic ethos: *trustworthiness*, *competence*, and *goodwill*. This portrays him persuasively as a good leader worthy of re-election. His trustworthiness manifests in his display of positive values of honesty, patriotism, adherence to God, obedience to the rule of law, and rejection of corruption. His competence derives from his alluding to the impressive performance of his administration in tackling Nigeria's challenges of insecurity, corruption, the economy, unemployment, infrastructure, etc. His goodwill emanates from his exhibition of deep concern about Nigerians' welfare, his intention to ameliorate their predicaments, and to eliminate vices like electoral fraud, biased utilisation of resources, looting and embezzling of public funds, which impede Nigeria's prosperity for decades. See excerpt 1 below, which illustrates Buhari's goodwill towards Nigerians:

Excerpt 1:

We are resolved to build a country in which the resources are utilized for the benefit of the largest number, and not appropriated by a privileged few in their never-ending quest to satisfy their greed. Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 1, 2019	MET, VIC, PSP, POP	E
We are on this mission together, and I assure you of a firm commitment to the ideals of a safe, secure, fair, just and prosperous country. Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 1, 2019	MET, PSP, POP, LEX	E

In excerpt 1 above, President Buhari's discourse projects goodwill, his image of a benevolent leader who, unlike the previous administrations led by the opposition, intends to utilise the country's resources *for the benefit of the largest number* of citizens. Buhari supports his discourse with the rhetorical strategies of metaphor, victimisation, lexicalisation, and populism. Through the use of metaphor, he portrays himself as a leader on a *mission* to *fight corruption* and *build a country* in which the *resources are utilized for the benefit of the largest number* of citizens. This positive impression persuasively contrasts him with the implied opposition who victimised Nigerians by appropriating the country's resources to a *privileged few* rather than the general public. This positive image is further enhanced through lexicalisation of positive words in the context of governance, which amplify his good intentions to make Nigeria *safe, secure, fair, and prosperous* for all citizens. Ultimately, Buhari's discourse exhibits populism, in the sense that it conveys the impression of the corruption-free candidate worthy of support as against corrupt politicians.

On the other hand, Atiku's rhetoric intensifies on creating pathos through its deployment of devices like *specific examples and illustrations, vivid descriptions, narratives, repetitions, inclusive pronouns, figurative language, words carrying strong emotional connotations, and appeal to shared values (especially democracy)*. Through its utilisation of these tools, the rhetoric attempts to arouse negative emotions such as despair, doubt, suspicion, distrust, disgust, and fear towards President Buhari and his policies/decision/ideas. The same tools are manipulated by Atiku to mobilise positive emotions such as hope, confidence, and trust towards himself and his party PDP. Excerpt 2 below features Atiku's tweets on President Buhari's postponement of Presidential and National Assembly Elections in which he obviously aims to trigger negative emotions towards the president and his decision:

Excerpt 2:

This postponement is obviously a case of the <i>hand of Esau but the voice of Jacob</i>. By instigating this postponement, the Buhari administration hopes to <i>disenfranchise</i> the Nigerian electorate in order to ensure that turn out is low on the rescheduled date. Atiku Abubakar, Feb 16, 2019	AGY, NOP, LEX, MET,	P
Their plan is to provoke the public, hoping for a negative reaction, and then use that as an excuse for further <i>anti-democratic acts</i>. Atiku Abubakar, Feb 16, 2019	AGY, NOP, LEX, PSP,	P

From Excerpt 2 above, it is clear to see how Atiku's discourse concentrates on emotional appeals rather than projection of credible character. The discourse is enacted to stir negative emotions, especially doubt, suspicion and distrust, towards President Buhari's decision to postpone elections. This is achieved through a number of rhetorical techniques of *agency*, *lexicalisation*, *metaphor*, *negative Other-presentation*, and *positive Self-presentation*. The use of agency enables Atiku to represent Buhari negatively as a leader actively involved in negative actions of dishonestly postponing elections for his political agenda. This bad impression is also verbalized by Atiku through the metaphor of *hand of Esau but the voice of Jacob*, which emphasises the conflict between the president's words and his actions. To further heighten emotional impact, he also deploys lexicalisation, which allows the employment of negative words in the context of democracy, to portray Buhari as a leader who engages in *disenfranchising voters* and *anti-democratic acts*. Consequently, the overall rhetorical tactics displayed in these tweets are negative Other-presentation, and positive Self-presentation. The negative-Other tactic is exploited to frame Buhari and the postponement as untrustworthy and unacceptable; while the positive-Self tactic is exploited to project the image of a knowledgeable politician who understands the trick and rationale behind the postponement.

Moreover, further analysis discovers that both President Buhari and Atiku utilise these appeals to construct (de)legitimation. That is, they both take advantage of these appeals to discursively frame certain actions/policies as justified or unjustified. The president exploits ethos of *trustworthiness* and *goodwill*, which portray him as a leader whose ideas and actions are always right, appropriate, in the interest of and for the benefit of Nigerians, to legitimate his policies and decisions through *authorisation* and *rationalisation*. On his part, Atiku takes advantage of *pathos* to delegitimize Buhari's policies and decisions through *moral evaluation*. This is discussed and shown below.

4.1 Authorisation

Authorisation or *Authority Legitimation*, according to Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008), is when social practices, actions, or decisions are legitimised by reference to the authority of custom, tradition, laws, experts, or persons in whom particular institutional status or roles are vested. Specifically, this study observes that President Buhari utilises his ethos of *trustworthiness* to legitimate his policies and decisions through *impersonal authority*. Impersonal authority is when social practices or decisions are legitimised by reference to laws, rules, and regulations. According to Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 96; 2008, p. 108), the implicit or explicit answer to the spoken or unspoken ‘Why’ question in this type of legitimation is ‘because the laws (the rules, the policies, the guidelines, etc.) say so’. Thus, the President’s rhetoric, while exhibiting the persona of an honest and law-abiding leader, legitimates his decisions by referring to the rule of law, the constitution, the Code of Conduct Tribunal, the policy of fighting corruption, and the policy of infrastructure development. Consequently, the decisions are framed as acceptable ‘because they are appropriate, constitutionally right, and in line with accepted laws and approved policies’.

This strategy is used by Buhari to legitimate many of his political decisions. First, he uses it to legitimate his signing of Executive Order (EO 008), the Voluntary Offshore Assets Regularization Scheme (VOARS), on the 10th of October, 2018. This order *mandated Nigerians who hold offshore assets and incomes to voluntarily declare those assets and pay taxes on them* before a stipulated time. Secondly, it is also used to defend his implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) on 7th August, 2015, which mandated all federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to consolidate all revenues by closing their multiple accounts with commercial banks and transferring all funds to a single account at the Central Bank of Nigeria, for effective management and monitoring. Although the TSA was enforced in 2015, Buhari still defends his decision during the 2019 campaign. Thirdly, he still employs the impersonal strategy on the 25th of January, 2019, to legitimate his sudden suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, CJN Walter Onnoghen. On all of these decisions, the president invokes his *anti-corruption policy* to frame them as acceptable for being in line with a vital policy he promised Nigerians during the 2015 campaigns.

Moreover, Buhari’s expression of *impersonal authority* sometimes employs dual tactics of referring to *the law* and the *policy of fighting corruption* at the same time. For instance, his rhetoric on CJN’s suspension reminds the audience that *the fight against corruption is one of the tripod of policies promised to Nigerians by this administration*. At the same time, he refers to an *Order of the Code of Conduct Tribunal* which warrants the

suspension for CJN's involvement in corruption and refusal to declare his assets accurately as required by the Nigerian constitution. See excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 3:

In line with this administration's avowed <i>respect for the Rule of Law</i> , I have wholeheartedly <i>obeyed the Order of the Code of Conduct Tribunal</i> dated 23rd January 2019. Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 25, 2019	PSP, EVI, LEX, POP,	E	AUT
<i>Accordingly</i> , I hereby <i>suspend</i> the Honourable Mr. Justice Walter Nkanu Samuel Onnoghen, GCON as the Chief Justice of Nigeria pending final determination of the case against him at the Code of Conduct Tribunal. Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 25, 2019	PSP, EVI, POP,	E	AUT

In excerpt 3 above, Buhari's *ethos* manifests from his persona of a trustworthy leader who acts in accordance with the rule of law. This credible image is highlighted through *logos* when Buhari refers to his *policy of fighting corruption*, his *avowed respect for the Rule of Law*, and how he *wholeheartedly obeyed the Order of the Code of Conduct Tribunal* to suspend the CJN. Hence, this credibility-building *logos* functions discursively as *evidentiality* that substantiates the impersonal nature of the suspension. Furthermore, through the use of *lexicalisation* (*law, order, obey, accordingly*), the decision is framed positively as an obedience to the rule of law rather than a violation of it. Consequently, the audience are left with no other plausible choice than to accept the decision as well justified. The anti-corruption policy is a well-accepted one to Nigerians. They voted for Buhari because he promised to rid Nigeria of these social vices.

4.2 Rationalisation

Rationalisation is how social practices, actions or decisions are legitimised by reference to (1) their goals, usefulness, or effectiveness (Instrumental Rationality) or to (2) the natural order of things (Theoretical Rationality) (Van Leeuwen 2007, 2008). Thus, the implicit or explicit answer to the spoken or unspoken 'Why' question in *instrumental rationality* is not 'because the laws (the rules, the regulations, the policies) say so', but 'because doing X will yield Y results,' or 'I do X in order to do (or be, or have) Y' (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 102; 2008, p. 114). Hence, this type of legitimation is typically realized through expressions of purpose, which explain the 'why' behind decisions/actions.

The analysis of this study observes that President Buhari takes advantage of his *ethos* of *goodwill* to construct *instrumental rationality*. He tactically connects many of his decisions to his personality of a leader concerned about the welfare of Nigerians. He frames

the decisions as having specific positive goals that derive from his altruistic intentions towards Nigeria and Nigerians. First, he rationalises his decision to seek re-election by insisting that it is in order to *keep on building a new Nigeria* and to *continue to deliver good governance, devoid of corruption*. Secondly, his signing of Executive Order 008, the VOARS, is legitimised by referring to its goals of *fighting corruption, targeting money laundering and tax evasion among Nigerians who hold offshore assets and incomes*. Thirdly, Buhari legitimises his enforcement of the TSA by emphasising how it *makes a lot of sense in ensuring accountability, such that government institutions must have to give account for whatever comes in and goes out*.

Fourthly, the same strategy is used by Buhari to justify his Executive Order 7, the Road Infrastructure Development and Refurbishment Investment Tax Credit Scheme of January 25th, 2019. This executive order, which involved *companies* (and state governments) to *spend their own funds on constructing roads and recover their costs by paying reduced taxes over a period of time*, is signed *so as to close Nigeria's road infrastructure gap*. Fifthly, Buhari rationalises his suspension of CJN Onnoghen by emphasising how the decision aims to tackle corruption in the Nigerian judiciary, rescue the reputation of Nigerian justice system, restore Nigerians' faith in the judiciary, and promote obedience to the rule of law and the constitution. Let us take excerpt 4 below, which illustrates Buhari's *rationalisation* of Executive Order 008:

Excerpt 4:

I have signed a new Executive Order (EO 008), the Voluntary Offshore Assets Regularization Scheme (VOARS), mandating Nigerian taxpayers who hold offshore assets and incomes to, within a period of 12 months, voluntarily declare those assets and pay taxes on them. Muhammadu Buhari, Oct 10, 2018	PSP, EVI,	E	RAT
We are stepping up the fight against corruption, targeting money laundering and tax evasion. The new Executive Order takes effect from Monday, October 8, 2018. Muhammadu Buhari, Oct 10, 2018	PSP, EVI, MET	E	RAT

As seen from excerpt 4 above, Buhari utilises different discursive strategies in rationalising the EO 008. Most preponderant among these strategies include *positive Self-presentation*, *evidentiality* (logos), and *metaphor*. Through the use of positive Self, the rhetoric portrays the president and his executive order as corrective, goal-oriented and aimed to serve the interest of Nigerians. The executive order is represented as an instance of *stepping up the fight against corruption, targeting money laundering and tax evasion*. Consequently, based on how it is framed, the order itself functions as evidentiality that proves Buhari's

positive intent towards the country. The metaphor of *fight against corruption* makes it appear as both necessary and objective-driven.

4.3 Moral evaluation

Moral evaluation is when social practices, actions and decisions are legitimised or delegitimised by reference to discourses of value. It is a discursive practice that represents decisions or actions as morally appropriate/inappropriate, right/wrong, good/bad, and acceptable/unacceptable (Van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). According to Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008), this type of (de)legitimation is performed through any of the three persuasive techniques of *evaluation*, *abstraction*, or *analogy*. Evaluation manifests in the deliberate use of morally evaluated lexis such as adjectives, nouns, and verbs to refer to the social practices or decisions being (de)legitimised. The attempt is to influence the perception of the audience to evaluate the practice as such. Abstraction expresses moral evaluation by referring to the social practices or actions being (de)legitimised in abstract manner that presents them positively or negatively through the discourse of moral values. Analogy achieves moral evaluation by comparing the practices or actions being (de)legitimised to another activity or practice which is associated with positive or negative values in another social context.

The analysis of this study discovers that Atiku Abubakar utilises *pathos* to construct moral evaluation delegitimation. It observes that Atiku's rhetoric deploys emotional appeals to steer the voters' perception and judgement of President Buhari's decisions and policies as morally reprehensible. This is particularly seen in how his discourse obviously attempts to stir negative emotions of doubt, suspicion, distrust, anger, disgust, and fear towards many of the President's decisions/policies. For instance, when Buhari declined to assent the Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2018 on 7th December, 2018, Atiku emphasises that the president has refused to practise what he preaches on ensuring electoral credibility, and for this, *assurances that [his] administration will conduct a free, fair and credible elections cannot be taken seriously*. He attempts to mobilise doubt by amplifying the discrepancy between what the president says and what he actually does, which strongly indicates insincerity and immorality of actions. Secondly, when Daily Trust Newspaper headquarters in Abuja was sealed by the Nigerian military on 6th January, 2019, he accuses that Buhari is *resorting to the jackboot* and *compromising freedom of the press*. This obviously aims to trigger disgust and fear for the future of press freedom/human rights in Nigeria, as the president is portrayed as engaging in abusing his power to reach his political goals.

Thirdly, when Buhari suspends Chief Justice Onnoghen on the 25th of January, 2019, Atiku accuses that *this act of desperation is geared towards affecting the outcome of the 2019 Presidential elections*. Thus, the discourse, which frames the decision as dishonest and ill-intentioned, arouses the voters' emotions of suspicion and distrust. Fourthly, when the Presidential and National Assembly Elections were postponed on the 16th of February, 2019, Atiku accuses that it is a *desperate plan by Buhari to provoke the public, hoping for a negative reaction, and then use that as an excuse for further anti-democratic acts*. His attempt is to work on the emotions of suspicion, anger, and fear for the future of democracy and constitutional human rights in Nigeria under Buhari. Fifthly, when Buhari invokes his anti-corruption policy to explain many of his decisions, Atiku counters that the policy is just *a pretext for the subversion of democracy and its institutions*. He employs this strategy to mobilise doubt, suspicion, and distrust towards this policy. In sum, Atiku's rhetoric mobilises emotions to frame Buhari's decisions as politically motivated, unscrupulous, and bad for Nigeria and Nigerians.

Ultimately, Atiku's moral evaluation is performed through two major techniques of *evaluation* and *analogy*. On the one hand, the challenger's rhetoric delegitimises President Buhari's decisions through *evaluation* when it employs morally evaluated words and phrases that carry strong emotional connotations. These include, especially, *nouns*, *adjectives*, and *verbs* that Atiku intentionally uses to refer to these decisions. Among the nouns (and noun phrases) include, for instance, *dictatorship*, *tyranny*, *breach of our constitution*, *pretext*, *violation of constitutionally guaranteed human rights*, and *threat to democracy*. The adjectives include *dictatorial*, *unlawful*, *unconstitutional*, and *anti-democratic*. The verbs include *disenfranchise* (Nigerian voters), *violated/suspended* (the constitution), and *provoke* (the public). Consequently, these evaluative lexis function as *lexicalisation* that Atiku utilises to construct discourse of value, which he exploits to frame Buhari's decisions as morally inappropriate, wrong, and unacceptable. The discourse communicates the impression that these decisions are a clear demonstration of how the president is making democratic principles, the rule of law, and morality itself secondary to his political agenda. See excerpt 5 below, which features Atiku's negative *evaluation* on Buhari's anti-corruption policy:

Excerpt 5:

As a democrat, I must say, without equivocation, that no mission or goal, no matter how noble or well-intended, should be used as a <i>pretext</i> for the <i>subversion of our democracy</i> and our democratic institutions. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 28, 2019	IMP, AGY, NOP, LEX,	P	MOE
History is replete with <i>odious dictators</i> whose <i>path to dictatorship</i> started with statements of good intentions. We must therefore remain vigilant in defense of our democracy. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 28, 2019	IMP, NOP, AGY, LEX,	P	MOE

From excerpt 5 above, we can see how Atiku in his tweets uses evaluative words to construct the discourse of value which portrays Buhari's anti-corruption policy as an immoral act disguised 'in a silver lining'. The discourse is well supported by *implication*, which is used to convey negative impression about the policy even without mentioning it verbatim – how *noble or well-intended missions* and *statements of good intentions* are used as *pretext for the subversion of democracy*. Furthermore, the strategies of *agency* and *negative Other-presentation* are used to frame the policy negatively as appearing moral but actually a *path to dictatorship*, which is persuasively immoral and unacceptable.

On the other hand, the technique of *analogy* manifests in Atiku's rhetoric when he uses comparison to emphasise the reprehensible nature of Buhari's actions. He does this by importing negative terms from non-political contexts and refer to these actions as *rape* (of our nation's democracy), *war* (against the judiciary), *assault* (on our democracy), and *attack* (on the judiciary). It is morally believed that each of the terms *rape*, *war*, *assault*, and *attack* denotes action that happens without the consent and wish of their victims. Equally, the doers of such actions are socially and morally considered as engaging in reprehensible behaviours. In a similar manner, Atiku's use of these analogies conveys the impression that Nigeria's democracy and its institutions, which are founded on trust, consent, and the constitution, are being forcefully undermined by Buhari's actions that are authoritarian and illegitimate. This framing is obviously an attempt to arouse negative emotions that would steer the audience's perception of these actions as non-consensual violations and abuse of democratic principles. Thus, the discourse function of these analogies is to delegitimize Buhari's actions by constructing the implicit message that such actions are immoral 'because they are like other activities which are associated with negative values' (see Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 99; 2008, p. 112). In excerpt 6 below, I show Atiku's use of *rape* analogy to delegitimize Buhari's suspension of CJN Onnoghen:

Excerpt 6:

This brazen <i>dictatorial act</i> is the latest action in the ongoing <i>rape of our nation's hard earned democracy</i> by those who dined with <i>anti-democratic</i> forces, & is symptomatic of the increasing desperation that <u>@MBuhari</u> & the cabal pulling the strings have as Feb 16, 2019 draws near. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 25, 2019	NOP, LEX, MET, IMP, AGY,	P	MOE
The fact that the <i>unlawful suspension</i> of Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen was announced just as it became public knowledge that the CJN was constituting the election petition tribunals is not lost on discerning Nigerians and the international community. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 25, 2019	LEX, AGY, NOP, POP	P	MOE

4.4 Discussion

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it endeavours to identify the major rhetorical appeals deployed by President Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, in their campaign rhetoric on Twitter during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Second, the study goes further to examine how these appeals are exploited by the two contenders to construct (de)legitimation in their discourses. On the first research question, the analysis discovers that while Buhari's rhetoric mostly projects *ethos*, Atiku's rhetoric concentrates on creating *pathos*. On the second research question the study finds that while Buhari utilises *ethos* to construct *authorisation* and *rationalisation* legitimation, Atiku exploits *pathos* to construct *moral evaluation* delegitimation. Specifically, the president takes advantage of *trustworthiness* to legitimate himself and his official decisions/policies through *impersonal authority*. He does this by assuming the persona of a trustworthy leader to frame these decisions as impersonal, appropriate, and according to accepted laws and policies. In addition, Buhari applies *goodwill* to legitimate his decisions through *instrumental rationality*. This is seen when he discursively connects these decisions to his good intentions of eliminating corruption, ensuring accountability and judicious management of public funds, restoring public faith in the judiciary, tackling tax evasion etc. He emphasises that the decisions are goal-oriented, that they have specific objectives that are in the interest of Nigerians, that they are made in order to benefit Nigerians.

On his part, Atiku utilises *pathos* to delegitimise President Buhari and his decisions/policies through *moral evaluation*. This is seen when he manipulates emotional appeals to steer the voters' perception and judgement of Buhari and his decisions/policies as morally reprehensible. It is particularly observed in the way his rhetoric attempts to stir negative emotions of doubt, suspicion, distrust, anger, disgust, and fear towards Buhari and his decisions/policies. Moreover, Atiku's moral evaluation manifests from *evaluation* and

analogies. *Evaluation* is realised when he employs morally evaluated words and phrases, constructs discourse of values, and frame these decisions/policies as morally inappropriate, wrong, and unacceptable. *Analogy* is observed when Atiku uses comparison to amplify the reprehensible nature of Buhari's actions. He does this by importing negative terms from other contexts to describe the decisions/policies, which tactically conveys the impression that they are immoral 'because they are like other activities which are associated with negative values'.

Therefore, although this study adopts novel approach in its analysis, its findings seem to corroborate those of many past studies on the kinds of discursive strategies leaders employ to (de)legitimation political decisions/policies/actions. First, President Buhari's strategy of invoking laws and ethics to legitimate his decisions/policies through *authorisation* is quite similar to that of Spanish leaders in their parliamentary speech that legitimised their forceful expulsion of 'illegal' immigrants (Rojo & VanDijk, 1997). *Impersonal authorisation* manifested when these leaders presented themselves as law-abiding and the forced expulsion as lawful and appropriate, taken to rid the nation of the threat being posed by the immigrants. This strategy is also seen in the forms of legitimation expressed by Austrian immigration authorities in their family re-union rejection letters issued to immigrant workers (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). They quoted immigration laws and housing regulations as justifications for the rejections. Secondly, Buhari's strategy of legitimising his decisions by referring to their goal-orientedness (*instrumental rationality*) is similar to the one employed by Iraqi President Barham Salih in his tweets legitimising peaceful co-existence between different ideological and religious sects in Iraq (Al-Manaseer & Fouad, 2021). Both presidents legitimised decisions by referring to the specific objectives they would achieved.

Thirdly, Atiku's strategy of employing discourse of values to delegitimize Buhari and his decision through *moral evaluation* appears similar to President Trump's rhetoric delegitimising the Iran Nuclear Deal (the JCPOA) (Nourani, et al., 2020). In a similar manner that Atiku framed Buhari's decisions/policies as dishonest and inappropriate, Trump framed the JCPOA as an act of treason spearheaded by Obama and the Democrats who personally benefit from trade with Iran, despite the deal's harmful potentials to the US and her allies. Fourthly, Atiku's deployment of morally evaluated lexis to construe Buhari and his decisions/policies as morally unacceptable appears consistent with that of US presidents Roosevelt and Bush in their call-to-arms rhetoric that legitimised war against their enemies (Oddo, 2011). That is, in a similar manner that these presidents used negatively valued words to delegitimize their enemies and their actions in attempts to

legitimate violence against them, Atiku uses words with negative connotation to delegitimize Buhari and his decisions.

5 Conclusion

This study has attempted to extend the current state of knowledge regarding the utilization of Aristotelian appeals in political rhetoric, specifically on Twitter. Its findings have crucial implications for Nigerian and African campaign tweeting, as well as political discourse generally. The study has demonstrated how President Buhari, in his 2019 campaign tweets, exploited ethos to legitimize himself and his policies through authorization and rationalization; and how his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, applied pathos to delegitimize the President and his policies through moral evaluation. These findings imply that rhetorical appeals are useful for constructing (de)legitimation in Nigerian and African election campaign discourse. Moreover, we can infer from these results that while a political leader's ethical qualities are vital for legitimizing their ideas and decisions, emotional manipulation is equally effective for delegitimizing them. However, the study has some limitations that future research could address. First, the analyzed data were restricted to text-based tweets, without incorporating images, videos, audio, or interview data to triangulate the findings. Future research could, therefore, adopt a multimodal approach to explore how multiple semiotic resources interact to construct rhetorical appeals and (de)legitimation on Twitter. Additionally, future studies could adopt a cross-generic framework to investigate how generic constraints determine the choices of rhetorical appeals and (de)legitimation strategies in political discourse.

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