

# DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF DEMOCRACY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU'S JUNE 12, 2025 DEMOCRACY DAY SPEECH

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## Abstract

This paper critically examines President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2025 Democracy Day speech through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with the objective of uncovering the linguistic strategies employed to construct political legitimacy, promote national unity, and frame economic reforms. It also aims to explore how the speech manipulates historical memory and rhetorical devices to mask underlying socio-political contradictions. The central problem addressed is the gap between political rhetoric and the lived experiences of citizens in a context marked by inequality, contested democracy, and socio-economic hardship. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA textual analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural context the analysis reveals a complex interplay between inclusive language, historical intertextuality, euphemistic expressions, and reformist lexical fields. Key findings show that the speech deploys inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" to create a false sense of national cohesion, while references to democratic icons such as MKO Abiola are used to legitimise the current administration by linking it to Nigeria's democratic past. Euphemistic language downplays the negative impacts of controversial policies like fuel subsidy removal, while reformist vocabulary constructs a visionary leadership persona. These discursive strategies obscure social exclusion, suppress dissent, and reinforce dominant power structures. The paper concludes that

Tinubu's speech exemplifies how political discourse in Nigeria functions as an instrument of ideological control. It calls for increased critical engagement with political texts to foster accountability, transparency, and a more participatory democratic culture.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Democracy Day, Political Rhetoric, Ideology

## Introduction

Language use in political discourse is never neutral. It is a carefully orchestrated act that constructs realities, shapes ideologies, and reinforces power structures. As Fairclough (1995) asserts, "language is a form of social practice, and not merely a reflection of reality" (p. 73). In the context of politics, especially in democratic or democratising societies like Nigeria, the language of the state is loaded with ideological meaning. Political leaders employ strategic rhetorical patterns to define national identity, project legitimacy, and frame political action (Chilton, 2014). President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2025 Democracy Day address exemplifies how political actors use discourse to narrate history, invoke loyalty, manage dissent, and sustain control.

Political speeches are strategic rhetorical acts through which leaders shape public perception, legitimise authority, and reinforce ideological narratives. In transitional democracies such as Nigeria, these speeches are particularly significant as they function not just as tools of communication but as instruments of power, ideology, and symbolic control. The 2025 Democracy Day speech delivered by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu presents a critical opportunity to examine how language is used in political discourse to construct national identity, manage public sentiment, and articulate institutional dominance.

Democracy Day in Nigeria is commemorated on June 12 each year in honour of the annulled 1993 presidential elections, widely regarded as the freest and fairest in the country's history. This day also serves as a platform for political office holders to reaffirm their commitment to democratic values, recall the sacrifices of past heroes, and project their administrations as legitimate successors of Nigeria's democratic struggle. Tinubu's 2025 speech, however, occurred in the

context of growing public dissatisfaction with economic hardship, perceived centralisation of power, and allegations of executive overreach. In this speech, Tinubu deployed various rhetorical strategies to consolidate authority, appeal to national memory, and discredit political opposition, all of which make it a compelling text for critical discourse analysis.

According to Fairclough (1992), discourse is “a form of social practice” that both shapes and is shaped by the structures of society (p. 63). This perspective implies that language is not just reflective but constitutive of social reality. As such, President Tinubu’s speech can be seen not merely as an expression of democratic values but as a means of constructing a particular version of democracy that aligns with his political and ideological interests. For instance, his repeated declaration that “I will be the last person to support a one-party state” (Tinubu, 2025) is not simply a reassurance but a discursive move aimed at neutralising growing accusations that his administration is stifling political pluralism. This form of rhetorical denial serves as a strategy to manage perceptions of authoritarian tendencies while projecting a democratic ethos.

Furthermore, the speech is deeply embedded in the symbolic capital of historical references. Tinubu invoked the memories of MKO Abiola, KudiratAbiola, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and other national figures associated with the struggle for democracy. van Dijk (1998) notes, “elite discourse often draws on shared national memory to legitimise contemporary political actions and reproduce dominant ideologies” (p. 45). In doing so, Tinubu positions himself as a legitimate heir to the democratic struggle and frames his leadership as a continuation of a historical movement rather than a rupture.

What is also notable in the speech is the strategic use of omission. While the president celebrated Nigeria’s legislative achievements and granted posthumous pardons to the Ogoni Nine, there was a conspicuous silence on pressing socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, inflation, insecurity, and youth disenchantment. This aligns with Chilton and Schaffner’s (1997) argument that political

discourse is “selective and exclusionary” (p 212). It often omits or minimise issues that may threaten the legitimacy of the ruling elite. Thus, the speech reveals how power operates not only through what is said but also through what is strategically left unsaid.

The ideological undertones of the speech further become apparent when examining how opposition parties were characterised. Rather than acknowledging their criticisms or policy alternatives, Tinubu described them as “in disarray,” (Tinubu, 2025) a phrase that diminishes their democratic function and delegitimises their role in a multiparty system. This use of derogatory framing reflects Wodak’s (2001) view that “discourse can marginalise or exclude actors and perspectives that challenge dominant ideologies” (p. 12).

Given these discursive dynamics, this paper seeks to critically examine President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s 2025 Democracy Day speech using Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. This model analyses the text (linguistic features), discourse practice (how the text is produced and interpreted), and social practice (the ideological and power structures the text is embedded in). The goal is to uncover how Tinubu’s speech functions as a site of power negotiation, ideological reproduction, and democratic performance in contemporary Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The gap this paper addresses is the lack of critical engagement with the ideological and discursive strategies embedded in such high-profile political addresses. Scholarly attention has also been given to political speeches as instruments of persuasion and ideological construction. For instance, Charteris-Black (2011) examines how political leaders use metaphor and rhetoric to shape public opinion and legitimize authority. Studies of speeches by Martin Luther King Jr., such as Lucas (1998) and Leff and Utley (2004), highlight how rhetorical devices like repetition and presupposition construct shared meanings and mobilize audiences toward social change. These works demonstrate that political language is carefully crafted to influence perception and

reinforce ideological positions. However, these studies predominantly focus on rhetorical effectiveness and persuasion, with insufficient emphasis on how such rhetorical strategies may conceal or downplay structural inequalities, reframing them as individual or abstract issues. Thus, the masking function of political rhetoric remains underexplored.

Without such analysis, the public risks consuming politically charged rhetoric without questioning the power relations and ideological interests it represents. This paper, therefore, seeks to critically examine the linguistic and rhetorical strategies in Tinubu's Democracy Day speech to uncover the deeper ideological messages, power dynamics, and political motivations that underpin its content.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model with insights from van Dijk and Wodak. CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to studying language and discourse that emphasises the relationship between language, power, and ideology. It goes beyond surface-level linguistic analysis to explore how discourse structures enact, reproduce, or resist social inequality and dominance (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2019). Fairclough (1992) proposes that discourse should be analysed on three levels:

- i. **Textual Analysis** – focusing on the linguistic features of the speech such as vocabulary, grammar, syntax, rhetorical devices, metaphors, and modality.
- ii. **Discursive Practice** – examining how the text is produced, distributed, and consumed, including how meaning is negotiated by both the speaker and the audience.
- iii. **Social Practice** – situating the discourse within broader socio-political and historical contexts to reveal the ideological work it performs.

This theoretical model is suitable for analysing political speeches because it captures the interrelationship between language and power. According to Fairclough (2001), political language does not merely

communicate policies or opinions; it “serves to shape perceptions, construct ideologies, and reinforce authority” (p. 30). In the case of President Tinubu’s 2025 Democracy Day speech, the model allows us to explore how he constructs democratic legitimacy, invokes national memory, and marginalises opposition all through specific linguistic and rhetorical choices.

Moreover, Teun van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach to CDA complements Fairclough’s model by stressing the role of shared knowledge, mental models, and societal beliefs in discourse interpretation. Van Dijk (2016) posits that political discourse often operates through implicit ideologies embedded in everyday language use, which help to maintain elite dominance and influence public opinion (p. 734). For example, Tinubu’s use of phrases like “I will be the last person to support a one-party state” subtly responds to political critiques without engaging them directly, using discourse to control perception.

Also relevant is Ruth Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which emphasises the importance of context and historical references in understanding discourse. Wodak and Reisigl (2021) argue that historical narratives, such as those referencing democracy martyrs or national struggle, are often mobilized in elite discourse to legitimise current political actions and delegitimise others (p. 44). In Tinubu’s speech, the repeated invocation of Moshood Abiola and Ken Saro-Wiwa fits within this framework of using history to construct authority. Therefore, by combining Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA model with insights from van Dijk and Wodak, this study undertakes a multilayered analysis that captures both the textual intricacies and the broader ideological functions of Tinubu’s Democracy Day speech.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis as its primary method. The goal is not to quantify language patterns but to interpret how discourse is used to construct meaning, wield power, and propagate ideologies within a

specific socio-political context. The methodology is thus interpretive, analytical, and reflective of the socio-semiotic functions of language in politics.

The primary data source is “President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s Democracy Day Speech delivered on June 12, 2025”, published by the official Nigerian Presidential Press Office. The full speech transcript was accessed from the official government website and relevant reputable news outlets to ensure authenticity and completeness. Secondary data include academic texts on political discourse, CDA frameworks, and media commentary on the speech’s reception. The analysis followed the three-step model developed by Fairclough (1995):

**Step 1: Textual Analysis (Description):-** This involved a close reading of the speech to identify significant linguistic features—lexical choices, metaphors, modality, pronouns, passive/active constructions, intertextual references, and rhetorical figures such as repetition and parallelism.

**Step 2: Discursive Practice (Interpretation):-** The production and consumption of the speech were analysed, including the political context of June 2025, the target audience (Nigerian citizens, opposition parties, international observers), and how the media and civil society interpreted and responded to the speech.

**Step 3: Social Practice (Explanation):-** This stage examined the wider ideological and socio-political structures underpinning the speech. Key issues such as democratic backsliding, economic crisis, national memory, and elite legitimacy were interpreted in relation to the language used in the address.

Since the paper is a case study of a single, significant political speech, purposive sampling was adopted. The June 12, 2025 speech was selected for its symbolic weight, ideological richness, and strategic timing amid socio-political challenges in Nigeria.

## Textual Analysis

The textual analysis of President Tinubu's June 12, 2025, Democracy Day speech focuses on lexical choices, syntactic constructions, modality, pronouns, and rhetorical strategies. These linguistic elements are not merely ornamental but carry deep ideological significance and political intention.

### Use of Inclusive Pronouns

One of the most prominent features of the speech is the use of inclusive pronouns such as “we,” “our,” and “us.” Inclusive pronouns especially *we*, *our*, and *us* are powerful linguistic tools in political discourse. They are often used by political leaders to construct a sense of unity, shared responsibility, and collective identity between themselves and the public. These pronouns are referred to as inclusive because they suggest the speaker is part of the same group as the audience.

Inclusive pronouns create a rhetorical bond between the speaker and the audience. When a leader says “*we are building a better nation*”, it implies that both the government and the people are equally involved in and responsible for the process. This fosters a feeling of togetherness and shared purpose. As Fairclough (2001) argues, “the use of personal pronouns in political speech is a strategy for positioning oneself ideologically and emotionally close to the audience” (p. 125). For example, Tinubu stated that:

We have endured together, and we shall thrive together. Democracy is not merely a system of government; it is a promise of inclusion, justice, and shared prosperity. We must continue to work hand in hand to build a nation where every citizen has a stake. The sacrifices of our past heroes remind us that unity is the foundation of our strength. Together, we will overcome our challenges and build a future worthy of our aspirations. (Tinubu, 2025, p.12)

The above linguistic device constructs a sense of unity and shared purpose. According to Fairclough (1995), pronouns in political

discourse serve to align the speaker with the audience, reinforcing solidarity and reducing the perceived distance between the ruler and the ruled. However, this constructed unity masks the social divisions and exclusions in Nigeria's political reality.

While the pronouns suggest equality, the reality is often different. In many contexts—such as Nigeria there is a clear gap between the ruling elite and the masses. By using “we,” politicians can blur the lines between authority and citizen, effectively masking social inequalities and political hierarchies (van Dijk, 2016). This use of “we” and “together” constructs a narrative in which the speaker (the president) and the Nigerian people are cast as sharing common struggles and aspirations. According to Fairclough (1995), pronouns are powerful tools in political discourse because they build synthetic solidarity, creating the illusion that the speaker and the audience are equally invested in and affected by national developments. In essence, inclusive pronouns flatten hierarchies and conceal differences.

This rhetorical unity is deliberate and conceals real, entrenched exclusions. In reality, Nigeria is marked by ethno-religious tension (marginalisation of minority groups), regional economic disparities, youth disenfranchisement and unemployment, widespread poverty and elite corruption, and political suppression of opposition and protest movements.

By saying “we,” the president implies equal participation and shared burden in the democratic process. Yet, in practice, access to power and national resources remains disproportionately in the hands of political elites and the ruling class. This is what van Dijk (2016) refers to as discursive manipulation, where language is used to obscure power asymmetries and to maintain dominance by shaping public perception. Moreover, the inclusive “we” in Tinubu's speech avoids acknowledging the dissenting voices civil society actors, opposition parties, marginalised ethnic groups, and youth-led movements like EndSARS who often feel excluded from governance and democratic benefits. Wodak and Reisigl (2021) argue that such discursive homogenisation

simplifies complex social identities and serves to marginalise those who challenge the status quo.

While inclusive pronouns may seem unifying, they can be ideologically manipulative. They promote a version of national identity that aligns with the speaker's goals and downplay diversity of opinion, opposition, or inequality. In contexts like Nigeria where issues of ethnicity, class, region, and religion are deeply divisive such pronouns can create a false sense of cohesion, suppressing awareness of marginalisation and discontent. Therefore, while the pronouns in Tinubu's speech are deliberate and appear to unify, they discursively erase dissent, minimise inequality, and suppress difference, reinforcing a hegemonic version of democracy where the appearance of inclusion masks the reality of exclusion.

### **Use of Allusions as Intertextuality**

Another feature is strategic historical referencing. Tinubu frequently invoked democracy martyrs like MoshoodAbiola, KudiratAbiola, and others when he declared:

We lost great heroes and heroines along the way. In this struggle, the winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, Chief MKO Abiola, the most significant symbol of our democratic struggle, his wife, Kudirat, General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and Pa Alfred Rewane, among others sacrificed their very lives. They bravely surrendered their futures so that our nation might have a better one. (Tinubu, 2025, p.7)

Such allusions function as intertextuality, a strategy that connects the current regime to a revered past to derive legitimacy. As Wodak and Meyer (2015) argue, the intertextual invocation of historical figures can "authenticate political narratives by embedding them in culturally accepted memories" (p. 67).

The intertextual invocation of historical figures; that is, referencing well-known individuals or past events within a new discourse is a powerful strategy in political communication. It works by embedding the speaker's message within culturally accepted memories,

thereby authenticating the narrative and aligning it with shared national values, struggles, and moral frameworks. According to Wodak and Reisigl (2021), intertextuality in political discourse allows speakers to "borrow credibility from the past" by invoking emotionally resonant figures or events that carry symbolic weight in the collective consciousness. When President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in his June 12, 2025 Democracy Day speech, referred to democracy heroes like Chief Moshood Abiola, Kudirat Abiola, and Ken Saro-Wiwa, he was not merely acknowledging history he was actively constructing a political identity for his administration.

Through this technique, Tinibu attempts to first achieve moral legitimisation. By associating his government with revered democratic martyrs allows Tinubu to cast his presidency as a continuation of their struggle. For example, referencing Abiola who is widely viewed as a symbol of Nigeria's stolen democratic mandate positions Tinubu not just as a political leader, but as a moral inheritor of a democratic legacy. This move legitimises his authority and aligns him with the "right side" of history (Wodak et al., 2019).

Secondly, there is also an attempt for national unification. These historical references in Tinibu's speech evoke shared suffering and collective memory especially of Nigeria's battle against military rule. By recalling figures that are honoured across ethnic and regional lines, the speech seeks to rally the public around a common national identity, despite ongoing divisions. This aligns with Fairclough's (1992) notion that intertextuality in political speech helps to "recontextualise historical values into present ideologies" (p. 119).

Furthermore, through the technique of strategic historical referencing (intertextuality) Tinubu also attempts to silence dissent voices by moral framing. When a leader aligns their governance with celebrated figures, any critique can be implicitly framed as an attack on the very heroes of democracy. This subtly delegitimises opposition voices, as questioning the regime may seem like disrespecting those who "paid the price" for freedom. In essence, invoking historical figures intertextually helps embed new political messages within old, culturally

sacred narratives, giving them the aura of legitimacy, moral righteousness, and inevitability. This discursive strategy is especially effective in societies like Nigeria where historical memory remains a potent emotional and political tool.

### **Evaluative Modality and Hedged Optimism**

The speech also deploys evaluative modality and hedged optimism. For example, phrases like “we are on the right path” and “though challenges remain, we are making progress” (8) suggest commitment without certainty. These modal verbs and qualifiers serve to reframe Nigeria’s socio-economic crises as transitional rather than structural. This technique is identified by Chilton (2004) as “discursive deflection,” which redirects attention from negative realities toward a projected hopeful future (p. 22).

Moreover, lexical choices were carefully selected to present the administration as reformist and democratic. Words such as “inclusiveness,” “progress,” “reconciliation,” and “liberty” recur frequently. Yet, absence of words like “inflation,” “corruption,” “insecurity,” and “civil unrest” is telling. As van Dijk (2016) emphasises, “what is omitted from a political speech can reveal more about ideological positioning than what is included” (p. 734). In political discourse, lexical choices; the specific words a speaker selects play a vital role in constructing ideologies, asserting authority, and shaping public perception. In President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s June 12, 2025 Democracy Day speech, the diction was carefully curated to present his administration as reformist, progressive, and aligned with democratic values. This strategic use of language is a hallmark of political communication, especially when legitimacy, popular support, or national unity is at stake.

Throughout the speech, Tinubu employed reformist lexicon; words of change and progress. He deployed verbs and nouns associated with transformation, renewal, and sacrifice. Terms like “Reform,” “Revive,” “Restructure,” “Sacrifice,” “Transform,” “Rescue,” “Rebuild,” and “Renewed Hope” (a phrase tied to his campaign

manifesto). These words were repeatedly used to cast his government as actively working to overhaul dysfunctional systems. According to Fairclough (1992), such lexical framing builds a discourse of optimism and forward motion, anchoring the speaker's authority in a promise of betterment. By emphasising action-oriented, optimistic language, Tinubu subtly distances his administration from the failures of past regimes, even though he emerged from the same political class. This lexical distancing helps construct a new political persona: not as part of the elite status quo, but as a reformer within the system. For example, in saying, "We are undertaking the difficult reforms necessary to reposition our economy for sustainable growth," Tinubu positions his leadership as proactive, visionary, and ready to make hard decisions.

Furthermore, Tinubu also employed democratic lexicon: words of freedom and legitimacy. He uses vocabulary that evokes democratic values and moral authority. For instance, words like "Liberty," "Justice," "Constitutional," "Rule of law," "Civil rights," "Patriots," "Sacrifice for democracy," "Electoral mandate," and "People's will" are deliberately designed to affirm the legitimacy of his rule and connect it to Nigeria's democratic struggles—especially the historic June 12, 1993 election annulment and its symbolic importance. Such lexical choices anchor his governance in national memory and moral continuity. This aligns with Wodak et al.'s (2009) theory of discursive legitimation, where political actors use familiar national symbols and ideologies to justify their authority.

### **Use of Euphemistic Language and Obfuscation**

There is a clear deployment of euphemistic language; softening harsh realities. Tinubu's speech also employed euphemisms deliberate softening of hard truths to frame economic hardship in a palatable, reformist light. Instead of using terms like "austerity," "poverty," or "fuel price hikes," he spoke of "Necessary adjustments," "Subsidy removal for long-term gain," "Short-term pain for long-term benefit" (9). It is hoped that these choices can help to minimise public

resistance, encouraging citizens to see current hardship as part of a noble democratic sacrifice.

In political discourse, euphemistic language refers to the use of mild, indirect, or vague terms to express harsh, painful, or controversial realities. Politicians use euphemisms to deflect criticism, minimise public anxiety, and frame unfavourable policies in a positive light. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's June 12, 2025 Democracy Day speech is a clear example of how euphemistic language functions as a discursive tool to mask socio-economic hardship while presenting government action as rational, necessary, and benevolent. As van Dijk (1997) observes, euphemism in elite discourse functions to "manage face" and maintain public trust during controversial policies. One of the most notable euphemisms in the speech is the repeated reference to "necessary reforms" and "sacrifice for the good of the nation." These expressions are employed to describe the removal of fuel subsidy, the sharp rise in inflation, and the devaluation of the naira measures that have caused significant suffering for the average Nigerian. He reframed pain as sacrifice such that instead of calling it economic hardship or crisis, Tinubu states, "These reforms may be painful, but they are necessary sacrifices we must all make to guarantee a better future" (Tinubu, 2025, p.9).

The use of "sacrifices" implies heroism and collective patriotism, softening the bitter reality of rise in the cost of living, job losses, and social unrest. As van Dijk (2006) notes, such language is a form of "semantic management" that helps politicians "retain control over public opinion while avoiding the full brunt of accountability" (p. 738).

### **Strategic Silence and Selective Emphasis**

One of the critical observations made by this paper is the use of strategic silence and selective emphasis in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2025 Democracy Day speech. These discursive strategies involve the deliberate omission or downplaying of contentious issues, as well as the overemphasis on themes that support the administration's ideological agenda. This practice is not accidental; it is a calculated form

of discursive control intended to frame public perception and limit critical engagement.

Strategic silence refers to the intentional avoidance of topics that might delegitimise authority, expose governance failures, or incite public dissatisfaction. In Tinubu's speech, issues such as widespread insecurity, youth unemployment, electoral violence, police brutality, and corruption, which remain significant concerns in Nigeria, were either glossed over or omitted entirely. By excluding these topics, the speech presents a curated version of national reality, one that highlights progress and unity while concealing systemic dysfunction (Fairclough, 1995). This aligns with Wodak's (2001) argument that political texts often function ideologically by focusing only on what serves dominant power interests and silencing what challenges them.

Selective emphasis, on the other hand, involves repetition or prioritisation of certain themes, such as national unity, economic reform, and democratic heritage, to shape the ideological focus of the speech. Tinubu repeatedly emphasises his "renewed hope" agenda, positions economic hardship as "necessary sacrifice," and evokes democratic heroes like MKO Abiola to create moral legitimacy (Tinubu, 2025). These choices direct the audience's attention to symbolic victories and promises while diverting scrutiny from present realities.

Van Dijk (1998) explains that "control over discourse is a form of power, particularly when it involves control over topics of discussion." In Tinubu's speech, control is achieved not only through what is said but significantly through what is unsaid a silence that speaks volumes about the priorities and anxieties of the political leadership. By manipulating what is foregrounded and backgrounded, the speech subtly disciplines public interpretation, limits oppositional thinking, and promotes compliance.

Therefore, strategic silence and selective emphasis in political discourse are powerful tools of ideological framing. They contribute to the normalisation of hardship, the erasure of dissent, and the reinforcement of hegemonic narratives, especially in fragile

democracies like Nigeria's. This underscores the necessity of critical engagement with political texts to uncover the hidden power structures embedded in their construction

## Findings

The findings of the Critical Discourse Analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2025 Democracy Day speech reveal that the language employed is a deliberate tool for constructing a specific political image and shaping public consciousness. The study found that the speech relies heavily on inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" to create a rhetorical sense of national unity. While this promotes the illusion of collective identity, it simultaneously masks the deep-seated ethnic, political, and socio-economic divisions within Nigeria.

Additionally, intertextual references to democratic figures such as MKO Abiola serve as legitimising strategies that tie the current administration to Nigeria's historical struggle for democracy. This move effectively draws moral authority from the past to justify present leadership, regardless of ongoing controversies surrounding electoral credibility.

Furthermore, the speech is rich in reformist and visionary language, using terms like "renewed hope" and "progress" to present Tinubu's government as forward-thinking and people oriented. However, this is undercut by the euphemistic framing of unpopular policies such as fuel subsidy removal, which is portrayed as a "necessary sacrifice" rather than a source of immediate economic hardship. The study also highlights the exclusion of dissenting voices and critical issues through strategic silence and selective emphasis. By omitting pressing national problems like insecurity and unemployment, the speech constructs a sanitised version of Nigeria's reality that aligns with the government's desired image. Overall, the findings confirm that political discourse in Nigeria operates as a sophisticated instrument of power, persuasion, and ideological control

## Conclusion

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 Democracy Day speech stands as a compelling case study in the strategic use of language for political legitimization and ideological positioning. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, it becomes evident that the speech does more than commemorate a symbolic national event; it actively constructs a particular vision of Nigeria's democratic journey, leadership, and citizen identity. The use of inclusive pronouns such as "we," "our," and "us" functions rhetorically to present the administration as part of a unified national collective. While this fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, it also conceals underlying fractures within Nigerian society, especially ethnic, religious, class, and regional disparities. As Wodak (2001) and van Dijk (2006) have noted, such linguistic choices are not innocent but ideologically loaded. They create a "fiction of unity" that silences dissenting voices and marginalizes those who feel excluded from the national project.

Moreover, the speech's intertextual references to democracy icons like MKO Abiola serve to legitimise the Tinubu administration by embedding it within a revered national history. This rhetorical alignment with democratic struggle allows Tinubu to appropriate a legacy of resistance, even as critics question the democratic integrity of the 2023 elections. Such intertextual strategies underscore how political figures strategically invoke collective memory to authenticate their narratives and mask controversies. The deployment of euphemistic language, especially in relation to harsh economic policies like the fuel subsidy removal, illustrates how language can obscure rather than clarify reality. Describing hardship-inducing decisions as "necessary steps" and "bold reforms" shifts the discourse away from the suffering of citizens and frames such policies as rational and inevitable. This not only softens the emotional impact of governance decisions but also forecloses critical debate on alternatives or dissent. Tinubu's use of lexical fields centred around progress, reform, and hope further reinforces a narrative of renewal and visionary leadership. However, such vocabulary often functions as performative optimism, painting a future-oriented picture that distracts from present material and

institutional deficits. As Fairclough (1995) reminds us, discourse plays a key role in “producing consent” by representing social reality in ways that favour dominant power structures.

In summary, Tinubu’s Democracy Day speech exemplifies how political language operates as a tool of ideological engineering constructing desirable identities, manufacturing consent, and sustaining power relations. While it appears to be inclusive and reformist on the surface, the deeper analysis reveals a pattern of discursive strategies that suppress opposition, veil inequality, and legitimize authority. For a truly inclusive democracy to thrive, citizens must develop critical literacy that allows them to interrogate not only what is said but also what is omitted, obscured, or reframed. Ultimately, this analysis reaffirms that political speeches are never neutral. They are crafted acts of persuasion that shape public consciousness and civic imagination. In a fragile democracy like Nigeria’s, CDA can play a vital role in holding leaders accountable, demystifying political rhetoric, and fostering an informed and critically engaged citizenry.

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