

FACE-THREATENING ACTS AND (IN)CIVILITY IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FEDERAL EXECUTIVE RESPONSES TO CRITICISM

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Abstract

This paper examines how Nigerian federal executive spokespersons respond to opposition criticism through face-threatening acts and (in)civil linguistic strategies. Focusing on two high-profile exchanges (between Atiku Abubakar and Bayo Onanuga, and between Osita Chidoka and Festus Keyamo) the study analyzes public statements sourced from X (Twitter) and online media using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework combined with the notion of face and face-threatening acts. The analysis identifies recurrent grammatical and discursive features such as complex sentence structures, rhetorical questions, evaluative and pejorative lexis (e.g. “fallacy packaged as truth,” “warped statement,” “desperate attempt”), and accusations of hypocrisy and lack of patriotism. These features perform direct and indirect threats to the critics’ positive face (their desire to be respected and seen as credible) and, at times, to their identity as patriots. While the responses maintain a formal tone and institutional register, they are underpinned by hostility and adversarial positioning that foreground personal attacks over substantive policy engagement. The paper argues that these patterns exemplify a form of “formalised incivility,” where official discourse retains surface politeness while normalising antagonistic and delegitimising moves. It concludes that such discursive practices erode democratic civility, deepen polarization, and calls on public office holders to re-centre their responses on issues and evidence rather than ad hominem attacks.

Keywords: Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs); Political (In)Civility; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Nigerian Political Communication; Delegitimation Strategies

1. Introduction

Political discourse is a central arena in which democratic contestation, policy debate and public persuasion are enacted. In democratic societies, it provides a platform for political actors to communicate policies, respond to criticism and engage with the electorate. In Nigeria, these processes increasingly unfold in highly mediated spaces, particularly on social media and televised platforms, where prominent political figures exchange criticisms and rebuttals before large, polarized audiences.

Federal executive spokespersons and other government-aligned figures play a crucial role in these exchanges, as they are tasked with defending the administration while simultaneously constructing and managing the public image of their principals and opponents.

Nigeria's political landscape is marked by fierce rivalry for resources and power, as well as a complex web of ethnic, religious, and regional identities. Key political parties, notably the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), frequently engage in fierce struggles both within their ranks and against each other. These struggles are driven not only by ideological differences but also by personal ambitions, patronage networks and the desire to control state resources. Political manoeuvres, including strategic alliances, defections and the instrumental use of state institutions, contribute to a climate of suspicion and rivalry. Religious and ethnic cleavages further complicate the landscape, as politicians routinely mobilize identity-based sentiments to gain or consolidate support, often at the expense of national cohesion.

This charged political context is mirrored in the linguistic practices of political actors. Nigerian political discourse is marked by a blend of formal and informal registers that reflect the country's diverse sociocultural realities. In recent years, interactions between key political figures have become notably confrontational, with responses to criticism frequently characterised by sharp lexical choices, ad hominem attacks, and accusations of hypocrisy, incompetence or lack of patriotism. Statements that dehumanize or demonize opponents, or dismiss them as "enemies" of the nation, are not uncommon. Such language practices do not merely express disagreement; they also normalize incivility, deepen political polarization and risk inflaming existing religious, ethnic and partisan divisions.

Of particular concern is the conduct of federal executive spokespersons and high-ranking government officials in responding to criticism. These actors occupy positions that confer institutional authority and symbolic power. Their utterances are widely circulated and are often taken as the official voice of the state. When such responses are laced with personal attacks, delegitimizing labels and face-threatening acts, the implications extend beyond individual disputes: they affect public trust, the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions and the overall tone of national political communication. The erosion of civil and respectful dialogue has, in turn, fostered a media environment that prioritizes sensationalism over substantive discussion, making it more difficult to sustain issue-based debates on governance, policy and accountability.

Despite the critical importance of civility in political discourse, there is a paucity of detailed, micro-linguistic analyses of how Nigerian federal executive actors respond to criticism and how their language performs face-threatening acts (FTAs) within ostensibly formal, institutional discourse. Much of the existing commentary on Nigerian political discourse highlights "toxic" or "harsh" language in general terms, but offers limited systematic examination of the grammatical structures, evaluative lexis and rhetorical strategies through which incivility is enacted. Similarly, while there is growing work on hate speech and political rhetoric in Nigeria, relatively few studies focus specifically on the interactional dynamics of executive responses to opposition figures in concrete communicative events.

This paper addresses these gaps by examining how linguistic choices in federal executive responses to criticism construct face-threatening acts and (in)civility in Nigerian political discourse. It focuses on two emblematic exchanges: (i) Atiku Abubakar's formal criticism of President Tinubu's administration over the Lagos–Calabar coastal road project and the rebuttal by presidential aide Bayo Onanuga, and (ii) Osita Chidoka's emotive criticism of the return of Emirates Airlines to Nigeria and the response by Minister Festus Keyamo. In both cases, opposition figures raise substantive concerns about governance and national interest, while the federal executive representatives respond in ways that simultaneously defend policy decisions and attack the critics' credibility, motives and patriotism.

To interrogate these interactions, the study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework combined with the notion of face and politeness. CDA provides tools for linking micro-linguistic features (such as lexical choices, syntactic complexity, rhetorical questions and evaluative constructions) to broader discursive practices and sociopolitical structures. The concept of face and face-threatening acts, drawn from politeness theory and subsequent work on impoliteness and incivility, helps to illuminate how these responses manage the government's institutional image while threatening the positive face (desire for approval and respect) and identity of critics. The concern here is not only whether language is "rude" or "polite" in a superficial sense, but how it contributes to a wider culture of antagonistic or civil political engagement.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. What grammatical and discursive strategies are used by federal executive spokespersons in responding to political criticism in the selected cases?
2. How are face-threatening acts constructed and performed in these responses?
3. In what ways do these responses exemplify civility or incivility within the broader context of Nigerian political discourse?

Focusing on concrete case studies and attending closely to linguistic detail, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language is used by powerful political actors to defend institutional interests, delegitimize opponents and shape public perception in contemporary Nigeria. It also aims to highlight the broader implications of these discursive practices for democratic communication, public trust and the prospects for more respectful and constructive political engagement in a deeply divided society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Face, Politeness, and Political (In)Civility

Scholarly work on politeness and face has been foundational for understanding interpersonal meaning in political discourse. Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of **face**—positive face (desire for approval) and negative face (desire for autonomy)—remains central to the analysis of **face-threatening acts (FTAs)**. FTAs occur when a speaker challenges an interlocutor's competence, credibility, morality, or identity, often through accusations, ridicule, presuppositions of wrongdoing, or confrontational rhetorical strategies.

Contemporary work on impoliteness and incivility extends Brown and Levinson's ideas by emphasizing deliberate antagonism in public communication. Culpeper (2011), Locher and Bousfield (2008), and other scholars argue that political actors increasingly use **strategic impoliteness**, where the goal is not to maintain face but to attack it. Political incivility includes ad hominem attacks, accusations of hypocrisy, delegitimization of opponents, questioning of patriotism, and language designed to trigger negative evaluations of targeted individuals. In contexts of polarization, such strategies become tools for identity construction, political positioning, and dominance rather than collaborative meaning-making.

These frameworks offer a strong basis for analyzing how federal executive spokespersons in Nigeria employ language that simultaneously maintains a formal register yet performs potent face attacks on political opponents.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Power in Political Communication

Critical Discourse Analysis provides a broader ideological lens through which FTAs and political incivility can be understood. CDA examines how language enacts, reproduces, or resists power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). Fairclough's three-dimensional model (text, discursive practice, and social practice) allows researchers to connect micro-linguistic features (e.g., lexical choices, sentence structure, rhetorical questions) to broader institutional and sociopolitical structures. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model extends this by focusing on how discourse shapes shared mental models, social biases, and ideological alignments.

CDA studies highlight the role of evaluative lexis, metaphor, nominalization, and argumentation strategies in constructing dominance or marginalizing alternative positions. In political discourse, such features are often mobilized to legitimize policy decisions, delegitimize critics, and manage public perception. CDA therefore provides the tools to analyze how formal, institutionally styled responses can contain embedded hostility, ideological framing, and strategic face attacks beneath a veneer of civility.

2.3 CDA in Nigerian Political Discourse

A growing body of Nigerian scholarship applies CDA to political communication, underscoring the ideological tensions and power struggles reflected in language use. Agbedo (2011) demonstrates how discourse around fuel subsidy removal encodes elite interests and frames public resistance, revealing the ideological contestations between state actors and civil society. In another study, Agbedo (2012) analyzes power manifestations in traditional councils, showing how linguistic strategies such as politeness forms, evaluative statements, and topic control construct hierarchical authority.

Obiora, Aboh, and Dioka (2021) examine hate speech in Nigerian political contexts and reveal how pejoratives, incitement, and identity labels function as discursive weapons. Ebekue (2024) explores gubernatorial debates in Abia State using Fairclough's model and finds that pronominal selection, argumentation patterns, and ideological framing reinforce unequal power relations. These studies collectively highlight how Nigerian political discourse frequently blends formal institutional language with underlying antagonism, strategic delegitimization, and ideological positioning.

This scholarship establishes a relevant foundation for the present study, which narrows its focus to federal executive responses to criticism – a specific but influential subgenre of Nigerian political discourse. By combining CDA with the concept of face-threatening acts and political incivility, the current paper contributes to this expanding body of work by offering a micro-linguistic analysis of how government spokespersons construct hostility, defend institutional power, and undermine opponents through ostensibly formal and civil language.

2.4 Speech Act Theory (SAT)

Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin (1962) and later refined by Searle (1969), highlights the performative nature of language—how utterances do not merely convey information but also perform actions such as asserting, accusing, commanding, or apologising. Although SAT offers a useful foundation for understanding political communication as action, it is not the primary analytic lens for this study.

In the context of Nigerian political exchanges, SAT is relevant mainly in showing how official responses operate as acts of accusation, denial, defence, and delegitimation. These actions are central to the construction of face-threatening acts (FTAs), which this study analyses in depth through

politeness theory and CDA. Therefore, SAT is referenced only as a conceptual background that reinforces the performative dimension of political utterances.

2.5 Ethnography of Speaking

Hymes' (1962, 1974) ethnography of speaking emphasizes that language use must be understood within its sociocultural context. The SPEAKING model demonstrates how factors such as participants, goals, norms, and genres shape communicative behaviour. Although insightful for mapping communicative events, the model is not applied systematically in this study.

Its relevance here lies in foregrounding the cultural expectations, interactional norms, and political context within which Nigerian executive spokespersons operate. These contextual insights support the CDA framework by highlighting how discursive choices reflect broader sociopolitical norms and power relations. However, the core analysis relies on CDA and face theory, as they more directly address how power, incivility, and FTAs are linguistically enacted in political rebuttals.

2.5.1 Note on Empirical Applications

Studies such as Philipsen (1975), Saville-Troike (2003), and Bauman & Briggs (2003) illustrate how communicative practices embed social hierarchies and cultural expectations. These works collectively reinforce the idea that political discourse in Nigeria cannot be separated from its cultural and institutional context. Nonetheless, they serve only as background orientation. The operational analytical tools for this study remain CDA and face-threatening acts, which more precisely capture the strategic deployment of incivility and power in executive responses.

While Speech Act Theory and the Ethnography of Communication provide useful background for understanding language as action within sociocultural contexts, this study does not apply their models systematically. Instead, it draws more directly on the notions of face and face-threatening acts, and on Critical Discourse Analysis, which together offer a more targeted toolkit for examining (in)civil, power-laden responses in political discourse.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its overarching framework, drawing primarily on Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. CDA views discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations and ideological structures. Fairclough's model distinguishes between the textual level (vocabulary, grammar, cohesion), discursive practice (production and interpretation of texts) and social practice (broader sociopolitical context). Van Dijk's work further emphasizes how discourse both derives from and contributes to shared mental models, including stereotypes, attitudes and ideologies.

To capture the interpersonal and evaluative dimension of the data, CDA is combined with the notion of face and face-threatening acts as developed in politeness theory. Brown and Levinson's distinction between positive face (the desire to be approved of and respected) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom of action) is particularly useful here. Accusations of hypocrisy, incompetence or lack of patriotism attack positive face, while attempts to silence or delegitimize critics may threaten negative face. More recent work on impoliteness and incivility extends this perspective by highlighting how political actors intentionally deploy FTAs to challenge or humiliate opponents in public settings.

Within this combined framework, the analysis focuses on how lexical choices (e.g. “fallacy”, “desperate attempt”, “warped statement”), syntactic structures (complex sentences, rhetorical questions), and discourse strategies (direct rebuttals, accusations, delegitimization) are used by federal executive spokespersons to manage their own face and institutional image while threatening the face of their critics. These micro-linguistic features are then related to broader issues of (in)civility and democratic communication in Nigeria.

2.6.1 Empirical Application of CDA

Agbedo (2011) deploys the CDA methodology to the contentious discourse of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. This investigation delineates the ideological contestations between the federal government and oppositional entities, such as labor unions and civil society groups. By framing the discourse of oil subsidy removal as a pivotal component of economic reform, Agbedo highlights the dichotomy between the capitalist-driven economic agenda of the federal government and the adverse ramifications for the impoverished populace. This work underscores the dialectical relationship between discourse and power, elucidating the hegemonic endeavors of the dominant group and the resistance articulated by the subaltern.

Agbedo, Obiora, and Ahamefula (2016) undertake a critical examination of gender-regulating proverbs within the African, particularly Igbo, cultural context. Utilizing a CDA lens, they scrutinize proverbs that perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and manipulate societal perceptions of women's roles. For instance, the proverb "Nwanyi leda di ya anya, Ike akpo ya nku" (When a woman despises her husband, she loses favor from him, and she suffers) exemplifies how linguistic constructs are employed to reinforce gender inequality. The authors argue that such proverbs embed oppressive norms within cultural discourse, advocating for a transformative shift in societal attitudes towards women.

In another seminal work, Agbedo (2012) explores the manifestation of power dynamics within the interactive discourses of the Ezikeoba Elders Council. Through a CDA approach, he identifies the linguistic mechanisms that perpetuate power imbalances, including the strategic use of politeness forms, address terms, proverb utilization, topic control, evaluative statements, and turn-taking negotiations. Agbedo's analysis reveals the nuanced ways in which these discursive strategies sustain hierarchical power structures, offering insights into the interpretative frameworks that govern traditional judicial interactions.

The study by Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2024) meticulously investigates the ideology of tolerance as articulated in the speeches of HM King Abdullah II, employing Fairclough's CDA framework. The analysis reveals a sophisticated deployment of semantic features, such as presupposition, metaphor, modality, lexical choice, and repetition, to construct and promulgate an ideology of tolerance. This discourse strategically counters narratives of extremism, advocating for mutual respect, peace, equality, and anti-terrorism. The findings underscore the potency of tolerance discourse as a form of ideological persuasion, highlighting its role in fostering a positive global perception of Islam and contributing to the broader discourse on peaceful coexistence. This study provides invaluable insights for researchers, linguists, and students engaged in the critical interpretation of discursive practices across various genres.

Ebekue (2024) explores the relationship between language, politics, and ideology in Abia State's 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial debates. Using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Theory, van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Theory, and Systemic Functional Theory, the study provides a thorough analysis of the debates' discursive elements. The tripartite theoretical framework allows for a comprehensive examination of text, discursive practice, and social practice. The multi-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, enhances the study's validity and helps unpack the nuanced ways power and dominance are expressed in political discourse.

The findings reveal that the debates are not merely political communication platforms but are laden with power dynamics and ideological agendas. The use of pronominal selection to enforce viewpoints highlights language as a tool of dominance, aligning with CDA's view of language as a social practice reflecting and shaping power relations. Ebekue concludes that the debates promote unequal power relations and sustain social structures of domination.

Ebekue's (2024) study is a valuable contribution to Critical Discourse Analysis and political discourse, offering insights into the power dynamics of Abia State's gubernatorial debates. It advances academic discussions and provides practical insights for political communicators and analysts in understanding and navigating the complex interplay of language and power in political contexts.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design and employs textual analysis within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The data consist of public statements produced in the course of two prominent political exchanges:

1. Atiku Abubakar's criticism of the Lagos–Calabar coastal road project and Bayo Onanuga's response on behalf of the presidency.
2. Osita Chidoka's criticism of the return of Emirates Airlines to Nigeria and Festus Keyamo's response as Minister.

The statements were obtained from X (Twitter) posts and reports on major Nigerian online media platforms, specifically Channels TV and Arise News. For the purposes of this paper, the analysis focuses on segments of the responses by Bayo Onanuga and Festus Keyamo that directly address and evaluate the critics (Atiku and Chidoka), rather than on the full policy content of the debates.

The texts were subjected to close reading and coded for:

- grammatical and syntactic features (e.g. complex and compound sentences, rhetorical questions);
- evaluative and pejorative lexis (e.g. "fallacy packaged as truth," "warped statement," "desperate attempt");
- explicit and implicit face-threatening acts (accusations of hypocrisy, questioning of patriotism, dismissal of claims as "unfounded," etc.);

- markers of civility and incivility (formal register, institutional tone vs insults, delegitimisation).

These micro-linguistic features are then interpreted using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model and the concept of face-threatening acts, with attention to how they reflect and reinforce broader patterns in Nigerian political discourse.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the linguistic data and examines how federal executive spokespersons respond to political criticism using grammatical structures, evaluative language and face-threatening acts (FTAs). Guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and politeness theory, the analysis focuses on how formal, institutional language is combined with antagonistic rhetorical strategies to challenge critics' credibility and moral standing.

Two cases are analysed: Atiku Abubakar's criticism of the Lagos–Calabar coastal project and Bayo Onanuga's response, and Osita Chidoka's reaction to the return of Emirates Airlines and Festus Keyamo's rebuttal. For each case, the analysis highlights (i) key grammatical and syntactic features and (ii) the face-threatening acts and markers of (in)civility embedded in the responses. A brief comparative subsection identifies recurring strategies across both cases.

Together, the analyses demonstrate how official political communication in Nigeria blends formal register with adversarial content, resulting in what may be described as *formalised incivility*.

4.1 Case 1: Atiku Abubakar vs Bayo Onanuga

Atiku Abubakar publicly accused the Tinubu administration of conflict of interest and lack of competitive bidding in awarding the Lagos–Calabar coastal road project. His criticism was framed in a formal, institutional register that foregrounded procedure, transparency and public interest. Bayo Onanuga's response, while equally formal on the surface, systematically sought to delegitimize Atiku's claims and character.

4.1.1 Grammatical and syntactic features

Onanuga's response frequently employs complex sentences, which allow him to link policy defence with character attacks within a single construction. For example, in a sentence such as "Atiku's accusations are not only unfounded but also hypocritical, considering his own history of manipulating the system for personal gain," the coordination "not only...but also" and the subordinate clause introduced by "considering" pack multiple propositions into one unit: the alleged falsity of the claim, Atiku's hypocrisy and a negative account of his political past. The formal register and structured syntax lend an air of authority and rationality to what is effectively a highly adversarial move.

Onanuga also uses direct rebuttals ("There is no conflict of interest, and the awarding process was transparent and competitive") coupled with dismissive formulations ("Atiku's narrative is nothing more than a fallacy packaged as truth"). The latter expression combines a nominalization ("narrative") that downgrades Atiku's claims to mere storytelling, and the metaphor "packaged as truth," which suggests deliberate deception.

4.1.2 Face-threatening acts and incivility

Onanuga's language performs multiple face-threatening acts targeting Atiku's positive face—his desire to be seen as honest, competent and credible. Accusations of hypocrisy and “self-serving objectives” undermine Atiku's moral standing, while dismissing his statements as “fallacy” challenges his competence or sincerity. By characterizing the criticism as “a blatant attempt to distort the truth and mislead the public,” the response positions Atiku not simply as mistaken but as intentionally deceptive, thereby intensifying the FTA.

These FTAs are embedded in a **formal and institutional tone**, which creates what may be described as *formalized incivility*: the absence of overt insults or slang is counterbalanced by strong delegitimizing moves that attack the person rather than engage substantively with all aspects of the critique. The response thus maintains an official veneer while normalizing an antagonistic mode of engagement.

4.2 Case 2: Osita Chidoka vs Festus Keyamo

Osita Chidoka's criticism of the return of Emirates Airlines to Nigeria was couched in emotive language that framed the decision as a national humiliation and an affront to Nigeria's dignity. Festus Keyamo's response sought both to defend the government's decision as pragmatically beneficial and to discredit Chidoka's stance and person.

4.2.1 Grammatical and syntactic features

Keyamo's response is notable for its use of rhetorical questions, such as “Is this the same Chidoka who once praised the very policies he now criticizes?” Such questions do not genuinely seek information; rather, they presuppose inconsistency and invite the audience to view Chidoka as unreliable or opportunistic.

The language is also sharp and direct, with evaluative expressions like “Chidoka's warped statement is a clear display of his hypocrisy” and “a desperate attempt to remain relevant in the political arena.” These phrases fuse description with judgment: “warped” and “desperate” are pejorative adjectives that frame the criticism as irrational and self-serving.

4.2.2 Face-threatening acts and incivility

Keyamo performs FTAs by:

- accusing Chidoka of hypocrisy, pointing to supposed inconsistencies in his positions;
- questioning his patriotism, implying that his criticism is not aligned with national interest;
- dismissing his relevance, suggesting that his intervention is motivated by a desire to “remain relevant” rather than by genuine concern.

These moves target Chidoka's positive face (his image as a principled statesman) and his identity as a patriot. The challenge to patriotism is especially powerful in a polarized context, as it implicitly aligns Chidoka with “anti-national” interests. As with Onanuga's response, the formal register and rationalizing references to “practical benefits for Nigeria” coexist with strongly pejorative characterizations, producing a discourse that is institutionally styled yet substantively uncivil.

4.3 Common strategies across both cases

Across both exchanges, several recurring features emerge:

- maintenance of a formal, institutional tone combined with underlying hostility;
- frequent use of complex and compound sentences to integrate policy defence with personal attacks;
- reliance on evaluative and pejorative lexis (e.g. “fallacy”, “warped statement”, “desperate attempt”, “self-serving objective”);
- recurrent accusations of hypocrisy and inconsistency;
- deployment of rhetorical questions to put critics on the defensive.

These strategies function collectively as face-threatening acts that challenge the critics’ integrity, competence and patriotism while legitimizing the administration’s positions.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the two case studies shows that federal executive responses to criticism in Nigerian political discourse are characterized by a distinctive blend of formal register and antagonistic content. While the spokesmen adopt institutional grammar and syntax, their lexical and rhetorical choices perform strong face-threatening acts that attack the critics’ credibility, moral standing and patriotism.

Rather than engaging primarily with the substantive policy issues raised by Atiku Abubakar and Osita Chidoka, the responses repeatedly shift attention to the critics’ alleged hypocrisy, self-interest and inconsistency. This personalization of political disagreement aligns with broader concerns in the literature on political incivility, where *ad hominem* attacks and delegitimation have been shown to erode public trust, deepen polarization and weaken democratic norms.

The notion of *formalized incivility* captures this paradox well: language that is grammatically polished and institutionally framed is used to perform hostile FTAs, thereby normalising an adversarial and combative style under the guise of official communication. In the Nigerian context, where ethnic, religious and partisan divisions are already pronounced, such patterns risk amplifying tensions and crowding out issue-based debate.

The study therefore calls for greater restraint and responsibility in official political communication. Federal executive spokespersons and other public office holders bear a particular duty to uphold standards of civility, not only by avoiding overt insults but also by refraining from systematically attacking the personhood and patriotism of critics. Re-centring responses on evidence, policy arguments and institutional accountability would contribute to a more constructive political environment and strengthen democratic culture in Nigeria.

While the study is limited to two high-profile exchanges, it illustrates how detailed linguistic analysis can illuminate the subtle ways in which power, face and (in)civility are negotiated in contemporary Nigerian political discourse. Future work could extend this approach to a larger corpus of interactions across different media and political actors.

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