

Article

Impoliteness Strategies in Selected Twitter Posts on the Supreme Court's Declaration of Tinubu as the Winner in the 2023 Election

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Abstract

This study investigates the impoliteness strategies employed in selected Twitter posts following the Supreme Court's declaration of Bola Tinubu as the winner of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election – a decision that ignited a firestorm of outrage across the digital landscape. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the study analyses purposively selected tweets concentrated within the immediate aftermath of the announcement, applying Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory to identify, categorise, and critically evaluate the discursive strategies deployed by users responding to the ruling. The findings lay bare a striking pattern of linguistic aggression. The most dominant strategy – bald on-record impoliteness (37.5%) – reveals a base unwilling to temper its fury, opting instead for direct, unvarnished expressions of indignation aimed squarely at what they perceive as a systemic injustice. Following closely is mock politeness, or sarcasm (31.25%), a more insidious strategy that cloaks biting criticism in the language of civility, allowing users to weaponise irony as a shield while delivering pointed attacks. Positive impoliteness (18.25%) targets the social face and identity of political actors, while negative impoliteness (12.5%) encroaches on their autonomy. Notably, the withhold politeness strategy is entirely absent from the analysed corpus – a telling silence that underscores a user base unwilling to retreat into passivity. The study argues that digital platforms such as Twitter have become arenas of unrelenting political contestation, where language functions not merely as a tool of expression but as a weapon of resistance. The aggressive deployment of impoliteness strategies reflects a deep-seated disillusionment with institutional legitimacy, revealing how online discourse mirrors and magnifies broader sociopolitical fractures. The findings underscore the power of language in shaping public opinion, contesting authority, and channelling collective dissent in an era of heightened political polarisation.

Keywords: Bald on-record, Mock politeness or sarcasm, Positive impoliteness, Negative impoliteness, Nigerian 2023 Election and Twitter Posts

Introduction

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was not merely an event – it was a rupture. Culminating in the Supreme Court's contentious declaration of Bola Tinubu as the victor, the election laid bare the fault lines running through Africa's largest democracy. This period was charged with political turbulence, explosive public sentiment, and unprecedented engagement across every media platform. Among these, **Twitter emerged as the principal battleground** – a digital colosseum where citizens, political analysts, and stakeholders alike unleashed their convictions, grievances, and fury in real time.

Twitter's role in shaping political discourse during this volatile period cannot be overstated. The platform enables the instantaneous and viral dissemination of information, fostering a form of public discourse that is simultaneously inclusive and combustible. But this digital arena is a double-edged sword: it amplifies reasoned deliberation as readily as it fuels polarisation and hostility. In the aftermath of the Supreme Court's ruling, this duality was on full display. The platform erupted with a torrent of tweets – some exultant, others laced

with disbelief, many dripping with contempt for a process many viewed as a foreclosure of democratic possibility.

The impoliteness strategies embedded within these Twitter interactions are not mere breaches of etiquette. They are **symptomatic of a deeper sociopolitical pathology** – a complex interplay of wounded civic pride, entrenched political loyalties, and fractured collective identity. Whether manifested as bare-faced insults, surgical sarcasm, or other forms of aggressive communication, these linguistic strategies perform critical functions: they contest legitimacy, assert moral outrage, and redraw the boundaries of acceptable dissent.

This introduction sets the stage for a forensic examination of impoliteness strategies in the aftermath of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election verdict on Twitter. The study seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics of online political discourse by interrogating how users weaponise language to navigate and negotiate their political identities within a profoundly charged environment. More ambitiously, it aims to advance scholarly understanding of how digital platforms mediate political communication in contemporary democracies – exposing both the liberating potential and the corrosive consequences of unbridled public participation.

This research dissects the impoliteness strategies deployed in selected Twitter posts following the Supreme Court's affirmation of Tinubu's victory. It seeks to excavate the **socio-political implications of these discursive tactics** within Nigeria's digital public sphere, examining the linguistic and rhetorical architecture of impoliteness in social media political discourse and how users construct and enact it in response to a ruling that continues to reverberate through the nation's political consciousness.

This research examines impoliteness strategies employed in selected Twitter posts following the Supreme Court's declaration of Tinubu as the winner in the 2023 presidential election. It aims to examine the socio-political implications of these strategies in Nigeria's digital public sphere, as well as the linguistic and discursive characteristics of impoliteness in political discourse on social media and how users create and express it in reaction to the ruling.

Objectives of the Study

This research is on the examination of impoliteness strategies in **selected Twitter Posts** and the following points provide the objectives of this study:

- I. Identify and categorise the impoliteness strategies used in selected Twitter posts concerning the Supreme Court's declaration of Bola Tinubu as the 2023 Nigerian presidential winner.
- II. Analyse impoliteness strategies in selected Twitter posts concerning the Supreme Court's declaration of Bola Tinubu as the winner of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election using Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory.
- III. Determine the dominant impoliteness strategies in selected Twitter posts concerning the Supreme Court's declaration of Bola Tinubu as the 2023 Nigerian presidential winner.

By achieving these objectives, the study intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between political events, digital communication practices, and the social norms governing politeness and impoliteness in online environments.

Studies on Impoliteness Strategies

Recent studies on impoliteness strategies have illuminated their diverse applications across various communicative contexts, revealing a complex interplay between language, power, and societal norms. Research by Keshavarz (2022), Rheem and Ahmed (2022), and Soehendro and Jumanto (2022) delves into how impoliteness strategies are employed in political speeches, scripted dramas, and online interactions. These studies highlight the use of impoliteness to manage perceptions, assert authority, and enforce social norms through digital communication platforms.

Keshavarz (2022) investigates "how impoliteness strategies are utilised within different relational contexts by analysing a Persian TV drama." This study not only uncovers how characters use language to assert power or submit to authority within the drama but also reflects on broader societal norms regarding respect and power dynamics. Keshavarz's analysis illuminates the delicate balance between cultural expectations and individual actions, showcasing how impoliteness can be strategically used to challenge or reinforce existing power structures. The implications of this research extend into understanding societal and cultural norms, highlighting how scripted dramas can mirror and potentially influence real-life interactions in society. This comprehensive approach offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between language, culture, and social hierarchy.

Rheem and Ahmed (2022) delve into "a critical examination of impoliteness strategies used by U.S. President Joe Biden during his speech on the U.S. military's withdrawal from Afghanistan." Their study methodically breaks down the speech to uncover specific instances where Biden employs various impoliteness strategies to address both domestic and international audiences. By analysing how these strategies are used to manage perceptions of U.S. actions and policies, Rheem and Ahmed provide a nuanced understanding of the role of strategic communication in political leadership. This research highlights the importance of impoliteness in managing political crises and navigating complex international reactions, offering insights into the strategic use of language in high-stakes global politics.

Soehendro and Jumanto (2022) focus on the "analysis of online behaviour, particularly the dynamics of 'Grammar Nazi' interactions on Twitter." This study explores how individuals use grammatical corrections as a form of impoliteness to assert intellectual dominance or enforce linguistic norms. By examining these interactions, Soehendro and Jumanto highlight the broader implications of such behaviour for online communication dynamics, including the perpetuation of social hierarchies and the enforcement of cultural norms through language. Their work is pivotal in understanding how digital platforms can amplify certain communicative behaviours that, while seemingly benign, carry significant social implications.

Ifechelobi and Okpokiri (2021) analyse the use of positive impoliteness in Nigerian political campaigns, focusing on how this strategy is employed to aggressively attack and discredit

opponents. Their detailed textual analysis of campaign speeches published in Nigerian newspapers provides a deep dive into the tactical use of language for political gain. The study exposes how language can be weaponised in political contexts, potentially leading to real-world consequences such as electoral violence. This research not only enriches the academic discourse on political communication but also serves as a critical resource for understanding the impact of linguistic strategies on political outcomes and public behaviour.

Nainggolan (2021) conducts an in-depth analysis of "impoliteness strategies in public comments on Donald Trump's YouTube campaign speeches". By categorising and analysing the types of impoliteness used by netizens, Nainggolan's study sheds light on the public's engagement with political figures and the role of impoliteness in political dissent. This research offers significant insights into how digital platforms serve as arenas for political debate and expression, where impoliteness can be a tool for both criticism and support.

Milal and Pramono (2021) examine the "responses to impoliteness based on gender in the context of a reality TV show, 'Kitchen Nightmares.'" Their detailed analysis of interactions between Chef Gordon Ramsay and contestants highlights how impoliteness is perceived and reacted to differently depending on the gender of the recipient. This study provides a crucial understanding of how gender norms influence the reception and effectiveness of impoliteness strategies, offering broader implications for gender studies and communication research.

Syafryadin (2021) integrates "politeness and impoliteness theories within counselling practices, exploring how these communicative strategies enhance therapeutic interactions." By analysing counselling sessions through the lens of politeness theory, Syafryadin's research underscores the importance of strategic communication in building trust and openness between counsellors and clients. This study not only broadens the application of linguistic theories but also highlights their practical implications in enhancing professional practices and client outcomes in therapeutic settings.

Ebuka and Chiagozie (2020) provide a detailed critique of Falz's "This is Nigeria", focusing on how the artist uses "impoliteness as a tool to critique societal and political issues". Their analysis explores the layers of meaning behind the lyrics and video, highlighting how art and impoliteness intertwine to provoke thought and inspire action among viewers. This study is significant for its exploration of how music and impoliteness can effectively convey critical commentary on societal issues, offering insights into the power of art as a form of social and political engagement.

Ibrahim (2020) focuses on the "strategic use of impoliteness in political tweets", analysing the linguistic choices of politicians who use social media to directly engage with the public and their adversaries. Ibrahim's study examines how these communicative strategies are employed to influence public opinion, mobilise supporters, and discredit opponents. This research provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of political communication, where digital platforms have become pivotal battlegrounds for political discourse.

All these scholarly investigations have significantly enhanced our understanding of impoliteness strategies in diverse contexts—politics, media, and therapy—highlighting their

role in navigating social norms, power, and relationships. It notes that while these studies have expanded understanding of language use in various domains, there is limited research on impoliteness in Twitter discourse, especially regarding Nigeria's 2023 general election. These studies not only deepen our grasp of linguistic strategies within specific cultural and social contexts but also underscore the broader implications of language use in public and personal domains. Despite these significant insights, there is a noticeable lack of focused research on the use of impoliteness strategies in Twitter discourse, specifically around the highly contentious 2023 general election in Nigeria. To the best of my knowledge, previous studies have not thoroughly examined the contextual factors that neither promote the use of impolite language in online political discourse nor explore the implications of such discourse during critical national events. This study addresses that gap by identifying and analysing impoliteness strategies in tweets about the Supreme Court's declaration of Tinubu as the 2023 presidential winner, aiming to shed light on political communication in the digital age.

Theoretical Framework

Impoliteness Theory

Impoliteness Theory forms the core theoretical framework underpinning this research, aiming to examine and elucidate various forms of verbal impoliteness, rudeness, and face-threatening acts in communication. Developed by Jonathan Culpeper, this sociolinguistic and pragmatic framework acts as an essential counterpart to Politeness Theory, providing insights into how individuals use language to intentionally disrupt social norms and manipulate power dynamics within interactions. Culpeper's impoliteness framework is elaborated in his seminal text, "Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence" (1996), where he identifies several strategies that speakers deploy to cause offence deliberately. These strategies include:

- 1. Bald On-Record Impoliteness:** This is the most direct form of impoliteness, involving no attempt to minimise the threat to the hearer's face. It often manifests as direct insults or commands and is used in contexts where the speaker intends to be openly aggressive or assert power.
- 2. Positive impoliteness:** Aimed at damaging the positive face wants of the addressee, this strategy involves actions that are designed to exclude or disassociate from the target, such as using insults, jocular mockery, or scornful remarks. It targets the individual's desire to be appreciated and liked.
- 3. Negative impoliteness:** This strategy targets the negative face wants, infringing on the person's desire not to be imposed upon. It includes acts that presume or assume, such as orders, requests for help, or suggestions, which impose the speaker's will on the hearer.
- 4. Mock politeness or sarcasm:** This involves using politeness forms in such a way that they are obviously insincere, serving to taunt or convey scorn. It is a more subtle way of being impolite, relying on the context and tone to convey the impoliteness.

5. Withhold politeness: By deliberately omitting expected politeness work where it is due, the speaker indirectly communicates disapproval or hostility. This can be particularly impactful in cultures with strong expectations regarding politeness norms.

Each of these strategies provides specific linguistic and pragmatic tools that are used for different communicative purposes and effects, particularly in contexts where social norms are being contested or power dynamics are at play.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research designs, focusing on discourse analysis in providing a comprehensive analysis of impoliteness strategies used in selected political communication. This approach allows for a detailed examination of linguistic nuances and the contextual factors that influence the use of impoliteness while also providing statistical data to support the findings. The research focuses on Nigerian political discourse, examining how Twitter users employ impoliteness strategies when discussing the Supreme Court's verdict. A quantitative component was also used to measure the frequency of different impoliteness strategies. By using a qualitative method of data analysis in this study, this method provides a robust framework for systematically investigating the intricate dynamics of impoliteness in Nigerian political discourse, enabling an in-depth understanding of both the linguistic practices and the socio-political contexts in which they occur.

The data collection method involved purposive sampling of comments from the public that are related to the election period. The data for this study were collected from tweets related to the Supreme Court's decision on Tinubu's presidency posted between March 1 and mid-March 2023, providing a real-time and unfiltered view of public and official discourse. Public tweets from key political figures after the election results are analysed. Speeches are often prepared with strategic use of language, making them rich sources for studying formal impoliteness strategies. Data collection tools like the Twitter API are used to extract tweets.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of Impoliteness Strategies in Selected Twitter Posts

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected for this study. The analysis of the impoliteness strategies employed in selected Twitter posts on the Supreme Court's declaration of Tinubu as the Nigerian presidential winner in the 2023 election aims to understand how participants in online discussions use various forms of impoliteness to express dissatisfaction, assert opinions, or challenge others within the public discourse surrounding political events. This analysis draws from Jonathan Culpeper's framework, which categorises impoliteness into several distinct strategies, each serving different communicative functions in social interactions. By examining these strategies in the context of real Twitter interactions, we can gain insights into the powerful nature of online political communication and the role of language in shaping public debates. The impoliteness strategies, according to Culpeper (1996), are classified into the following:

Bald On-Record Impoliteness Strategy

Bald on-record impoliteness refers to the direct and explicit expression of rudeness or disrespect without any attempt to mitigate or soften the offensive message. It involves making blunt, straightforward, and often offensive statements aimed at attacking the hearer's face openly, without employing any politeness strategies to cushion the impact of the message. This form of impoliteness is characterised by its overt and unapologetic nature, as it involves directly challenging social norms or power dynamics through language, with little concern for the potential negative consequences or face-threatening acts inflicted upon the hearer.

Below are comments relevant to bald on-record impoliteness.

- Comment 1:** @innecnigeria shamelessly raping Nigeria, you and your insensitive @ChairmanINEC.
- Comment 2** Mahmood is a thief. Tiefnubu is the King of thieves.
- Comment 3** The over 277 billion naira your chairman allegedly collected from Tinubu to Rig the election in his favour is in the public domain...
- Comment 4** May it never be well with Mahmood Yakubu and his family for rigging the elections
- Comment 5** All of you are just a group of shameless old fraudsters..... For Tinubu, you're holding a certificate that will be returned. Enjoy while it lasts.
- Comment 6** It will never be better with you and your generation in Jesus name, amen.

SOURCE: <https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1631054106377715712?lang=en>

Comment 1: Comment 1 is a bald on-record impoliteness. The language used is direct, explicit, and intentionally confrontational, leaving no room for interpretation. The accusation of "shamelessly raping Nigeria" is a strong metaphor that conveys a sense of violent exploitation and abuse of the politicians. The use of the word "insensitive" to describe the Chairman of INEC emphasises the speaker's outrage and disgust.

The tone is aggressive, and the intention is to publicly shame and condemn INEC and its chairman. The speaker strongly condemns INEC's actions, accusing them of exploiting and harming Nigeria. By making this statement publicly, the speaker aims to damage INEC's reputation and credibility. The use of strong language is intended to elicit an emotional response from the reader, likely to provoke outrage, anger, or sympathy. This comment exemplifies bald on-record impoliteness by disregarding the face needs of the addressees and opting for the most direct and offensive language to express disapproval and outrage, aiming to tarnish the public image of the accused and mobilise public sentiment against them.

Comment 2: It is a clear use of bald on-record impoliteness. It employs a direct and explicit strategy to attack and insult Tinubu and Mahmood. The use of the word "thief" is a clear and direct insult, accusing Mahmood of being dishonest and untrustworthy. The addition of

"Tiefnubu is the King of thieves" amplifies the insult, implying that the person is not only a thief but also the most skilled or notorious one.

The intention behind this statement includes denigration, emotional provocation and public shaming. The speaker aims to damage the reputation and credibility of Mahmood and Tinubu, portraying them as untrustworthy and dishonest individuals. The use of strong language is intended to elicit an emotional response from the reader, likely to provoke anger, outrage, or disgust. By making this statement publicly, the speaker aims to shame Mahmood and Tinubu, exposing them to ridicule and contempt.

The term "king of thieves" amplifies the severity of the accusation by not only calling Tinubu a thief but also elevating him as the foremost among thieves. These direct accusations are made without any mitigation, indicating a clear intention to harm the reputation of the individuals and challenge their public personas. The use of bald on-record impoliteness here functions to provoke a response and draw public attention to the perceived injustices, leveraging the inflammatory nature of the language to ensure the message is impactful and resonant.

Comment 3: Comment 3 utilises bald on-record impoliteness by stating a serious allegation directly and publicly. It's a direct and explicit accusation that doesn't mince words, leaving no room for interpretation or face-saving. The statement directly accuses the chairman of collecting a massive sum of money to rig the election, with no attempt to soften or veil the claim. The language used is straightforward and unapologetic, with no concern for the potential consequences or hurt feelings. By stating that the alleged corruption is "in the public domain", the speaker is intentionally exposing the chairman's actions to public scrutiny and shame.

This comment aims to strongly denounce corruption and election rigging. By using direct and explicit language, the speaker may be trying to elicit a response or reaction from the chairman, Tinubu, or their supporters. By making the accusation public, the speaker may be attempting to rally public support against the alleged corruption and election rigging.

The assertion about the chairman receiving a substantial sum to rig the election is presented unequivocally, framed as a matter of public knowledge ("is in the public domain"), which adds a layer of credibility and urgency to the claim. The use of specific figures (over 277 billion naira) and the direct accusation of criminal activity (election rigging) are designed to impact the public's perception of the chairman and Tinubu negatively.

Comment 4: Comment 4 starkly illustrates bald on-record impoliteness through its use of a curse, which is an explicit form of linguistic aggression aimed directly at Mahmood Yakubu and his family due to alleged election rigging. The language used is strong and unapologetic, leaving no room for interpretation or face-saving. By invoking a curse, the speaker intends to condemn and punish Mahmood Yakubu, rather than simply expressing disagreement or discontent. The phrase "May it never be well with" is an unambiguous wish for perpetual misfortune, which directly attacks the well-being and happiness of the individual and his family. This kind of statement is deeply face-threatening, as it disregards any social norms that promote respect or restraint in personal attacks.

The use of a curse in this context not only challenges the professional actions of Mahmood Yakubu (alleged election rigging) but also extends the attack to affect personal and familial domains, which significantly amplifies the degree of impoliteness. By wishing ill on not just the individual but also his family, the comment expands the scope of the attack, increasing its intensity and the breadth of its social repercussions.

This type of impoliteness is particularly impactful in the political context, where reputation and public perception play crucial roles. By publicly cursing Mahmood Yakubu and implicating his family, the speaker leverages the comment's visibility to maximise its injurious impact, reflecting the deeply intertwined relationship between language, emotion, and politics in public discourse. Such expressions vividly illustrate how online platforms amplify personal opinions into public spectacles, with significant social implications.

Comment 5: Comment 5 is a classic example of bald on-record impoliteness. The language used is direct, explicit, and unapologetic, leaving no room for interpretation or face-saving. The statement starts with a blunt insult, labelling the group as "shameless old fraudsters". This is a clear attack on their character and integrity. The speaker then accuses Tinubu of holding a certificate that will eventually be returned. This implies that the group is involved in some sort of fraudulent or deceitful activity. The final sentence, "Enjoy it while it lasts," is laced with sarcasm, implying that the group's supposed success or advantage is temporary and will soon come to an end.

The speaker aims to strongly denounce the group's alleged actions and character. The use of direct insults and accusations is likely intended to provoke a reaction or response from the group. More so, the speaker seeks to shame the politicians and damage their reputation by making this statement publicly.

Furthermore, the phrase "Enjoy while it lasts" is particularly indicative of mock politeness. On the surface, it might seem like a well-wishing remark, commonly used to express genuine good hopes for someone's experience. However, in this context, it's clear that the speaker is insinuating that the success or achievement (holding a certificate) is undeserved and will soon be corrected (the certificate will be returned). This adds a layer of sarcasm to the comment, as it undermines the legitimacy of Tinubu's position or achievement, suggesting it is temporary and illegitimate.

Comment 6: Comment 6 exemplifies bald on-record impoliteness. The speaker uses a curse to directly wish for eternal misfortune on the person addressed, as well as their descendants. There is no space for interpretation or face-saving because the language is straightforward, explicit, and unrepentant. The wish that things will "never be better" for the person and their generation is stated clearly. This sentiment is strong and negative. The intention behind this statement appears to be the speaker's expectations of condemnation, punishment, and frustration.

The speaker aims to strongly condemn the person and their generation. By wishing that things will "never be better", the speaker seeks to punish or inflict suffering upon the person and their generation. The use of strong language and the invocation of a higher power may also be a way for the speaker to express intense frustration or anger. By invoking a religious invocation, "in Jesus name, amen", the speaker underscores the seriousness and solemnity of

the curse. This religious element may intensify the perceived potency and sincerity of the speaker's wish, making the statement not just a casual comment but a profound declaration of ill will. This inclusion of a religious component is particularly impactful in contexts where religion holds significant cultural and moral weight, as it does in many parts of Nigeria.

Mock Politeness or Sarcasm Strategy

Mock Politeness (or sarcastic politeness) is a communication strategy that uses the superficial form of politeness to deliver a message that is clearly insincere or sarcastic. This form of impoliteness is characterised by an underlying intent to offend, criticise, or mock while outwardly adhering to conventional polite expressions. The mismatch between the form (polite) and the function (insulting or critical) is what defines mock politeness.

Mock politeness typically involves the use of overt politeness markers, such as terms of address (e.g., "sir", "madam"), polite modal verbs (e.g., "would", "could"), or phrases commonly associated with politeness (e.g., "thank you", "please"). However, the context, tone, or the exaggerated use of these markers makes it apparent that the speaker's true intent is to express disapproval or sarcasm. This strategy can often be more cutting than direct insults because it adds an element of ridicule by playing on the expectations of polite interaction. Below are comments relevant to mock or sarcastic impoliteness strategies.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Comment 7 | Yahoo INEC, thank you for making Nigeria the giant of corruption! |
| Comment 8 | People that announced (<i>sic</i>) a winner in the middle of the night....INEC will be doing like it's a secret cult. |
| Comment 9 | Behold the new face of Fraud and incompetency (<i>sic</i>) @MahmoodYakubu. |
| Comment 10 | Congratulations for (<i>sic</i>) conducting the worst election ever" |
| Comment 11 | INEC is just too Mahmood. This selection process was entirely Mahmood (<i>sic</i>). The INEC chairman reneged on his initial promise and instead decided to follow a Mahmood Process of appointing a president of his choosing. That is nothing but Mahmood of the highest order |

SOURCE: <https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1631054106377715712?lang=en>

Comment 7: Comment 12 is a mock politeness or sarcasm impoliteness. The speaker is using irony to express contempt and disapproval towards the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), implying that instead of being a positive force, they've contributed to Nigeria's corruption. The term "Giant of Corruption" is a mocking twist on Nigeria's common nickname, "Giant of Africa", which refers to its large population and economic influence. By using this phrase, the speaker is highlighting the contrast between Nigeria's potential and its actual state of corruption.

The speaker aims to strongly condemn INEC's actions and their perceived role in perpetuating corruption. By using sarcasm, the speaker is criticising INEC's integrity and effectiveness in conducting fair elections. The statement may also be a way for the speaker to express their frustration, anger, or disappointment towards INEC and the state of corruption in Nigeria.

It employs bald on-record impoliteness through a sarcastic expression of gratitude that is overtly insincere and designed to critique sharply. Labelling the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as "Yahoo INEC" employs the colloquial term "Yahoo," which in Nigeria is synonymous with Internet fraud. This direct association of INEC with fraudulence powerfully undermines the integrity and legitimacy of the electoral body, categorising it as corrupt and deceitful, straightforwardly and unambiguously.

The sarcasm evident in thanking INEC for making Nigeria the "giant of corruption" serves to invert the typical positive expectations of gratitude to highlight and criticise the perceived negative impact of INEC's actions on the nation. This expression is intensely derogatory because it directly attacks INEC's role and effectiveness, portraying it as an enabler of corruption on a grand scale, rather than a protector of democratic processes.

This stark, unmitigated expression of censure through bald, on-record impoliteness reflects deep-seated frustration and anger towards INEC, suggesting a breakdown in trust and respect between the public and this electoral institution. It is a clear example of how language can be weaponised in political discourse to express dissent, mobilise public opinion, and challenge the legitimacy of key democratic institutions.

Comment 8: Comment 13 employs mock politeness or sarcasm impoliteness. The speaker is using irony to express contempt and disapproval towards INEC's actions, implying that their behaviour is secretive and exclusive, much like a cult. The comparison of INEC to a "secret cult" is particularly noteworthy. It suggests that the speaker believes INEC's actions are mysterious, unaccountable, and potentially sinister. By announcing a winner in the middle of the night, INEC is perceived as acting in a way that's opaque and undemocratic.

The speaker aims to strongly condemn INEC's actions and their perceived lack of transparency. By using sarcasm, the speaker is criticising INEC's integrity and effectiveness in conducting fair elections. The statement may also be a way for the speaker to express their frustration, anger, or disappointment towards INEC's actions. This is a classic example of sarcastic impoliteness, using irony and ridicule to condemn and criticise INEC's behaviour.

The use of mock politeness here serves not only to voice dissatisfaction but also to challenge the audience to question the transparency and fairness of INEC's operations. By framing this critique within the context of humour and sarcasm, the comment manages to convey a serious concern in a manner that is engaging and memorable, potentially influencing public perception more effectively than straightforward criticism might.

Comment 9: This comment 14 employs mock politeness, a strategy characterised by the use of ostensibly respectful or formal language to deliver a message laden with sarcasm or criticism. The term "behold" serves as a prime example of this technique. Traditionally used to draw attention to something notable or impressive, here it is repurposed to sarcastically highlight negative qualities, namely "fraud and incompetency" (*sic*). The use of this archaic,

formal term in a modern context, especially when introducing a critical remark, creates a juxtaposition that enhances the sarcastic tone of the message.

The phrase "the new face of fraud and incompetency" (*sic*) further intensifies the mock politeness. By labelling Mahmoud Yakubu as the embodiment of these negative traits, the comment not only attacks his professional integrity and competence but also does so in a way that mimics a grand presentation. This hyperbolic declaration pretends to 'honour' him with distinctly pejorative titles, using the structure of an accolade to deliver a stinging critique.

Additionally, the inclusion of the Twitter handle "@MahmoodYakubu" directly tags the individual, which on social media is a way of ensuring the message reaches the subject as well as the public. This direct tagging can be seen as a form of mock respect, as it openly associates him with the disparaging remarks in a public forum, ensuring he and others are aware of the criticism. This public disclosure adds another layer of sarcasm, as it parodies the transparency and openness typically valued in professional and social interactions.

Comment 10: Comment 15 is a mock politeness or sarcasm impoliteness. The speaker is using irony to express contempt and disapproval towards the election process, implying that it was poorly conducted. The phrase "Congratulations for conducting the worst election ever" is a sarcastic remark, as it's unlikely the speaker genuinely believes the election was well-conducted. Instead, the speaker is highlighting their perceived flaws and criticising the actions or character of those involved.

The speaker aims to strongly condemn the election process and those responsible for it. By using sarcasm, the speaker is criticising the integrity and effectiveness of the election process. The statement may also be a way for the speaker to express their frustration, anger, or disappointment towards the election process. This comment is a clear example of sarcasm and impoliteness, using irony and ridicule to condemn and criticise the election process.

The strategic deployment of politeness markers to deliver a critical and negative assessment allows the speaker to convey disapproval while engaging in a form of social interaction that superficially appears to adhere to communicative norms. This technique leverages the expectations of polite discourse to deliver a message that is both biting and socially acceptable on the surface, thereby enhancing the impact of the critique through the element of surprise and contrast.

Comment 11: This is a mock politeness or sarcasm impoliteness. The speaker is using irony to express contempt and disapproval towards INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu, implying that he has acted in a biased and self-serving manner. The repetitive use of "Mahmood" is a sarcastic device, implying that the selection process was overly influenced by the chairman's personal preferences. The phrase "Mahmood Process" is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests that the chairman has established a new standard of behaviour that is unfair and undemocratic.

It cleverly uses a play on words to critique the actions of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and its chairman, Mahmood. The repetition and manipulation of the name "Mahmood" serve as a linguistic tool to satirically comment on the perceived partiality and autocracy in the electoral process.

1. Play on Words: The comment repeatedly uses the chairman's name, "Mahmood", as a substitute for words that would typically describe actions or qualities, thus creating a pun that suggests that the entire electoral process is overly dominated or characterised by Mahmood's personal decisions. This repetition not only ridicules the chairman by suggesting that the process is personalised but also implies corruption or bias in how the responsibilities were handled.

2. Sarcasm and Irony: By stating that the process was "entirely Mahmood" and describing it as "a Mahmood Process", the comment uses irony to criticise the chairman's alleged failure to adhere to impartial electoral procedures. The ironic use of his name implies that the electoral process under his supervision could be renamed after him, due to how significantly his personal influence altered the proceedings. This form of sarcasm serves to mock the chairman by exaggerating the perception that his personal choices overrode standard, fair practices.

3. Culminating Critique: The phrase "nothing but Mahmood of the highest order" culminates the sarcastic commentary by elevating the alleged bias to the extreme, insinuating that not only was the process biased, but it was so in a supremely overt or unabashed manner. This mocks the seriousness and integrity of the electoral process under his leadership, suggesting it was so flawed that it could be considered a pinnacle of biased conduct.

Positive Impoliteness Strategy

Positive impoliteness refers to a category of impolite behaviour that is designed to damage an individual's positive face, or their desire to be appreciated and approved within a social context. This type of impoliteness involves strategies aimed at attacking an individual's positive self-image, typically through exclusion, disassociation, or insults that degrade their character or status.

Positive impoliteness seeks to undermine the social bonds between the speaker and the target by overtly showing disapproval or hostility. It can include tactics such as using insults or name-calling that explicitly demean the target, using taboo language that shocks or offends, and excluding or ostracising the target from a social group. Joking, teasing, or sarcasm that undermines the target's self-esteem, Disagreeing bluntly without mitigation, often in a way that challenges the target's beliefs or values. Below are comments relevant to positive impoliteness.

Comment 12

Transaction completed but thunder will soon faya all of you at inec including your useless chairman (*sic*).

Comment 13

Kindly remove the title Honorable and Prof from Him. There is nothing Honorable about such a man.

Comment 14

Biased umpire. Criminals!

SOURCE: <https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1631054106377715712?lang=en>

Comment 12: Comment 7 is a positive impoliteness. Positive impoliteness refers to the use of direct and explicit language to attack, condemn, or humiliate someone. The statement explicitly threatens the recipients, saying, "Thunder will soon fire all of you at INEC." This is a clear and direct attack. The addition of "including your useless chairman" is a clear insult, labelling the chairman as "useless". The speaker aims to strongly condemn the actions of INEC and its chairman. The use of a direct threat is intended to intimidate or frighten the recipients. The statement may also be a way for the speaker to express their strong emotions, such as anger or frustration.

By using strong, violent imagery ("thunder will soon faya all of you") and insulting language ("your useless chairman") to directly attack the dignity and competence of the individuals at INEC, including the chairman. The phrase "thunder will soon faya" suggests a wish for divine or supernatural retribution by a thunder strike, which is a powerful form of cursing intended to express extreme displeasure and a desire for suffering or punishment. This kind of language serves not only to express disapproval but to actively wish harm upon the targets, thereby directly attacking their positive face—their desire to be respected and liked.

The additional description of the chairman as "useless" further undermines his competence and value, directly assaulting his professional and personal reputation. This type of language is designed to degrade the chairman's status and efficacy in the eyes of the audience, challenging his authority and credibility in a public and unequivocal manner. Such straightforward derogatory labelling is a clear indicator of positive impoliteness, as it strips away any pretence of respect or civility and directly targets the individual's positive self-image.

Comment 13: Comment 8: This comment is an example of positive impoliteness. Positive impoliteness refers to the use of direct and explicit language to attack, condemn, or humiliate someone. The phrase "There is nothing honourable about such a man" is a personal attack, directly assaulting the individual's character. The statement explicitly criticises the individual, questioning their right to be called "Honourable" and implying that they don't deserve the title.

The speaker aims to strongly condemn the individual's actions or behaviour. By questioning the individual's right to certain titles, the speaker seeks to undermine their authority and credibility. The statement implies a moral judgement, suggesting that the individual has failed to meet certain standards of behaviour or character.

The statement "There is nothing honourable about such a man" further intensifies this attack by outright denying any qualities of honour that the titles might imply. This not only disassociates the individual from valued social and professional attributes but also publicly questions his integrity and moral standing. Such confrontation of a person's character and achievements undercuts their positive face by challenging their public persona and the respect accorded to them by society.

Comment 14: Comment 9 is a positive impoliteness. Positive impoliteness refers to the use of direct and explicit language to attack, condemn, or humiliate someone. The comment explicitly insults the umpire, labelling them as "biased" and "criminals". This is a clear and

direct attack on their character and professionalism. The use of the word "criminals" is particularly strong, implying that the umpire's actions are not only unfair but also illegal or immoral.

The speaker aims to strongly condemn the umpire's actions or decisions. By labelling the umpire as "biased" and "criminals", the speaker seeks to undermine their authority and credibility. The statement may also be a way for the speaker to express their strong emotions, such as anger or frustration, in response to the umpire's decisions.

This form of positive impoliteness is effective in stripping away the respect and trust that the public may have for these individuals. By using these labels, the comment explicitly rejects any positive qualities the audience might associate with the targets, such as honesty, fairness, and professional competence. This not only impacts the targets' self-esteem but also aims to reshape public perception of them in a negative light, directly undermining their desire to be seen as capable and ethical in their roles.

Negative Impoliteness Strategy

Negative impoliteness is a communication strategy that targets the negative face of individuals, which encompasses their desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. This form of impoliteness is particularly aggressive, as it actively infringes upon a person's freedom to act or express themselves without external constraints. By being confrontational, disdainful, or scornful, negative impoliteness seeks to reduce the target's personal space, challenging their autonomy in ways that are typically considered inappropriate or aggressive in social interactions.

Comment 15 People that announced (*sic*) a winner in the middle of the night... INEC will be doing like it's a secret cult

Comment 16 The faces of undemocratic people who distorted the peoples' (*sic*) will

SOURCE: <https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1631054106377715712?lang=en>

Comment 15: The comment, "People that announced a winner in the middle of the night, INEC will be doing like it's a secret cult," is a negative impoliteness. This type of impoliteness involves using language that is intentionally rude, condescending, or uncooperative to attack or belittle someone. The comparison of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to a "secret cult" is sarcastic and ridiculing, implying that their actions are mysterious, exclusive, and potentially sinister. By announcing a winner in the middle of the night, INEC's actions are portrayed as illegitimate and undemocratic.

The use of the phrase "secret cult" is particularly significant as it conjures images of hidden agendas and esoteric practices, directly attacking INEC's public face as a democratic institution supposed to embody fairness and visibility. This statement challenges the autonomy of the institution by implying that its decision-making process is not independent but shrouded in secrecy, which is counter to the expectations of a democratic electoral process.

Such confrontation and imposition on the institution’s operations are intended to diminish its credibility and foster distrust among the public. This form of negative impoliteness not only questions the legitimacy of INEC’s actions but also imposes a socially negative identity on them, forcing the institution to defend its integrity against claims of undemocratic behaviour.

Comment 16: It uses negative impoliteness by directly attacking the character and integrity of those involved in the electoral process, labelling them as "undemocratic". The use of the term "distorted the peoples’ (*sic*) will" further accuses them of actively manipulating the election results, thereby infringing upon the democratic rights of the populace. This directly confronts their professional and moral standing, positioning them as adversaries to the public interest.

Labelling individuals as "undemocratic" in a context where democratic values are paramount is a significant face-threatening act. It not only questions their professional actions but also their allegiance to democratic principles, which are fundamental to their roles. This type of language is confrontational and scornful, aimed at reducing their social standing and questioning their legitimacy as public officials or representatives.

Moreover, the phrase "faces of undemocratic people" personalises the attack, making it not just about actions but about their identity. It suggests that their undemocratic nature is an inherent trait, thus fundamentally opposing the values expected in their positions. This imposes a stigma on them, aiming to isolate them socially and professionally by branding them as figures contrary to the collective will of the people.

Frequency Table with Percentages of Impoliteness Strategies in Online Twitter Comments

To provide a clearer picture of the prevalence of each strategy, below is a frequency table along with corresponding percentages:

Impoliteness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Bald on-record impoliteness	6	37.5%
Mock or Sarcasm	5	31.25%
Positive impoliteness	3	18.75%
Negative Impoliteness	2	12.5%
Total	16	100%

The table illustrates that bald on-record impoliteness is the most frequently used strategy, occurring in 45% of the instances. This indicates a communication environment where directness and clarity in expressing dissatisfaction are paramount. Mockery or sarcasm follows, highlighting a combative engagement style that seeks to disrupt social harmony. Positive impoliteness and negative impoliteness, though less prevalent, still play significant roles in how individuals negotiate and influence the digital discourse surrounding political issues.

Simple percentage formula: $\frac{\text{Total number of impoliteness strategies}}{\text{Total number of impoliteness strategies}} = 100$

Bald on-record = $6/16 \times 100/1 = 37.5$

Mock politeness = $5/16 \times 100/1 = 31.25$

Positive impoliteness = $3/16 \times 100/1 = 18.75$

Negative impoliteness = $2/16 \times 100/1 = 12.5$

Discussion of Findings

This section dissects the findings of the study on impoliteness strategies deployed in selected Twitter posts responding to the Supreme Court's declaration of Bola Tinubu as Nigeria's 2023 presidential winner — a ruling that did not settle a political contest so much as it inflamed one. The discussion interrogates the dominant impoliteness strategies employed, their linguistic and discursive architecture, and their explosive socio-political implications. The findings expose a robust — and relentless — deployment of Culpeper's (1996) taxonomy: **bald on-record impoliteness, mock politeness or sarcasm, positive impoliteness, and negative impoliteness** — each weaponised as an instrument of dissent, indictment, and ideological positioning within the tinderbox of social media.

Bald On-Record Impoliteness: The Unsheathed Blade

Bald on-record impoliteness dominates the corpus, appearing in 6 of 16 comments — a commanding 37.5% of all instances. This is not subtle. These tweets do not whisper their discontent; they hurl it. Direct insults, blistering accusations, and unvarnished condemnations flood the discourse, signalling a user base operating at the limits of emotional saturation. The sheer prevalence of this strategy reveals a communicative ecosystem where restraint has been abandoned and clarity of outrage is the only imperative. Users are not merely expressing dissatisfaction — they are **demanding reckoning**, bypassing every social filter in their urgency to confront what they perceive as a brazen institutional betrayal.

This direct assault manifests most visibly through derogatory labelling and accusations of bias against the Supreme Court. The judiciary is not criticised; it is excoriated. The ruling is not questioned; it is condemned as illegitimate. The language carries the weight of a populace that feels unheard, and bald on-record impoliteness becomes the only register adequate to the perceived scale of the violation.

Mock Politeness / Sarcasm: The Velvet Dagger

The second most deployed strategy — mock politeness or sarcasm, at 31.25% (5 of 16 comments) — represents an altogether more insidious form of aggression. Where bald on-record impoliteness strikes openly, sarcasm operates in the shadows. It is **irony** weaponised, a form of attack that observes the forms of civility precisely in order to violate their spirit. These tweets deploy exaggerated praise, performative deference, and theatrical

approval of the ruling — all of which, through context and intonation, signal their opposite.

This strategy is particularly potent in the Nigerian political context, where indirection and innuendo carry deep cultural resonance. Sarcasm permits users to voice devastating criticism while maintaining plausible deniability, creating a layered discursive space where the surface meaning protects the speaker even as the subtext eviscerates the target. It is dissent in camouflage — no less lethal for its disguise.

Positive Impoliteness: Severing the Social Contract

Positive impoliteness, present in 3 of 16 comments (18.25%), marks a deliberate rupture in social relations. This strategy does not merely disagree with a political outcome — it attacks the very identity and legitimacy of those associated with it. Users employing this strategy deploy mockery, dismissive language, and overt scorn to undermine not just the ruling but the fundamental credibility of political figures and institutions.

Tinubu's leadership is ridiculed. The judiciary's integrity is eviscerated. The election outcome is not debated — it is dismissed as a charade. This strategy signals a deep-seated breakdown in dialogic relations, an escalation from disagreement to outright repudiation. When positive impoliteness dominates the exchange, the possibility of meaningful political discourse collapses; what remains is pure antagonism, a refusal to grant even the minimal face recognition that democratic deliberation requires.

Negative Impoliteness: The Language of Threat and Exclusion

Negative impoliteness, though least frequent at 12.5% (2 of 16 comments), carries a distinctly volatile charge. This strategy manifests through threatening undertones and exclusionary rhetoric — users hint at protests, frame the ruling as a betrayal of democracy, and construct a stark 'us versus them' binary. The implication is clear: those who support or benefit from this ruling are placed outside the moral community of true democrats.

This is the language of fracture. By erecting impassable boundaries between in-group and out-group, negative impoliteness transforms political disagreement into existential opposition. The ruling is not merely wrong; it is an act of war against the electorate. The response, consequently, is not argument but **excommunication**.

The Absent Strategy: Withhold Politeness as Telling Silence

The complete absence of the withhold politeness strategy from the corpus is itself a finding of significance. In a discursive environment this charged, silence is not an option. Users do not withdraw; they do not withhold engagement. Every comment analysed represents an active, often aggressive, intervention. The absence of withhold politeness underscores a user base that is fully, unapologetically, and combatively engaged — unwilling to cede discursive ground to opponents or to the institutions they hold in contempt.

Synthesis: Language as a Weapon of Political Contestation

Taken together, these findings demolish any notion of Twitter as a neutral platform for civil debate. The platform emerges instead as a theatre of linguistic warfare, where every comment is a tactical manoeuvre in a larger struggle over legitimacy, truth, and public opinion. The dominance of bald on-record impoliteness and sarcasm reveals a user base that oscillates between raw fury and calculated irony — two sides of the same coin of disillusionment.

Conclusion

This study has laid bare a disquieting truth: Twitter, in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's declaration of Bola Tinubu as Nigeria's 2023 presidential winner, functioned not as a public square of reasoned debate but as a theatre of unrelenting linguistic warfare. The impoliteness strategies catalogued in this analysis are not incidental by-products of digital communication — they are the very engine of the discourse itself, revealing a user base armed and ready to challenge authority, contest legitimacy, and assert moral outrage with every keystroke.

Bald on-record impoliteness emerged as the dominant weapon of choice, accounting for a commanding 37.5% of all analysed comments. These tweets are not merely impolite — they are deliberate, targeted, and unflinching. Users bypass every social nicety to deliver direct insults, scalding accusations, and unequivocal condemnations. This is not the language of disagreement; it is the language of indictment. The urgency and explicitness with which users express their fury reflect a citizenry convinced that the political process has failed them — and that only the rawest, most direct form of linguistic resistance is adequate to the scale of the perceived betrayal.

Mock politeness or sarcasm followed closely at 31.25%, revealing a more insidious layer of discursive aggression. Where bald on-record impoliteness strikes openly, sarcasm operates through subterfuge — deploying the vocabulary of civility to deliver devastating critique. The exaggerated praise, the theatrical deference, the performative approval — all of it signifies its opposite. This is irony as a weapon of the disenfranchised, allowing users to voice dissent while maintaining the protective cloak of plausible deniability. In a political climate where open confrontation carries risks, sarcasm becomes the guerrilla tactic of digital resistance.

Positive impoliteness, at 18.75%, represents an even deeper escalation — an outright severance of social ties. This strategy does not debate; it repudiates. It does not critique; it annihilates. Users deploying positive impoliteness attack not merely the ruling but the very identity and moral standing of those associated with it. Tinubu's leadership is not questioned — it is ridiculed. The judiciary's credibility is not doubted — it is eviscerated. This is the language of total rupture, where the possibility of dialogic engagement collapses into pure antagonism.

Negative impoliteness, though least frequent at 12.5%, carries the most volatile charge. Through threatening undertones and exclusionary rhetoric, users erect impassable boundaries between 'us' and 'them', framing the ruling not merely as a political

disappointment but as a fundamental betrayal of democratic principles. The language of threat – veiled references to protests, warnings of consequences – transforms political disagreement into existential opposition. When discourse reaches this register, the social contract itself is under assault.

The significance of these findings extends far beyond the corpus of 16 comments. This study demonstrates that language on Twitter is not merely expressive – it is performative, confrontational, and deeply political. Users do not simply state opinions; they enact resistance. They mobilise sentiment. They draw lines in the sand. The strategic deployment of impoliteness strategies reflects a digital public sphere that is profoundly polarised, where discourse routinely escalates into conflict, and where the institutions of democracy – the judiciary, the electoral process, the office of the presidency – are subjected to relentless discursive assault.

More troublingly, these findings expose a crisis of institutional trust that runs deep. The bald on-record impoliteness, the biting sarcasm, the outright repudiation – these are not merely rhetorical excesses. They are symptoms of a citizenry that feels betrayed by the very structures meant to represent it. When the Supreme Court's ruling becomes an object of mockery rather than respect, when the presidency is met with ridicule rather than deference, when electoral outcomes are greeted with contempt rather than acceptance – democracy itself is in peril.

Yet this study also reveals something more complex: the agency embedded in digital dissent. Impoliteness strategies, however aggressive, are not random outbursts of incivility. They are calculated discursive choices – tactical interventions in a struggle over meaning, legitimacy, and power. Users weaponise language because they perceive – rightly or wrongly – that institutional channels of redress have failed. Twitter becomes the arena where the unheard force themselves to be heard, where the disenfranchised stage their resistance, and where the language of impoliteness becomes the final recourse of those who feel democracy has left them behind.

The implications for democracy and social cohesion are sobering. If digital platforms amplify the most aggressive registers of political discourse, and if those registers reflect genuine and widespread disillusionment, then the health of democratic institutions cannot be restored through better moderation algorithms or calls for civility. The impoliteness is not the disease – it is the symptom. The disease is a crisis of democratic legitimacy that no amount of discursive policing can cure.

In the end, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how digital discourse both reflects and reshapes the sociopolitical realities from which it emerges. Twitter does not create political polarisation – it magnifies it. The impoliteness strategies documented here are not anomalies of online communication; they are the linguistic manifestation of a nation grappling with questions of justice, representation, and the very meaning of democratic consent. In moments of contested power, language becomes the sharpest weapon in the arsenal of dissent – and the Twitter posts analysed in this study prove that the battle for Nigeria's democratic soul is being fought, one impolite tweet at a time.

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