

Tribalism: A Thorny Concern in Nigerian Politics—A Discursive Review and Appraisal

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This paper conducts a review and appraisal of discourse surrounding tribalism, which is deeply entrenched in Nigerian politics at different levels of government as the polity of the country has often experienced significant tension along tribal/ethnic lines. Using digital media data, with specific focus on discourses produced during the 2023 general elections in the country, this study reviews and analyses the discourse of tribalism in Nigerian political communication. In an election heavily contested by the All Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the Labour Party (LP), with candidates representing three major ethnic groups in Nigeria involving Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo respectively, the entrenched nature of the tribalism mindset in the country was fully exposed. Although tribalism in Nigerian politics has been in existence for a long time, it was only recently witnessed on a large scale on social media given that it is the first time that three popular presidential candidates have emerged from the country's three most popular ethnic groups. Through a multimodal discourse analysis, the study reveals instances of tribalist discourse in the country *vis-à-vis* the social context and implications for the democracy, national cohesion, and the development of the country.

Keywords: tribalism; Nigeria; online media; political discourse; ethnicity

Globally, political discourse is fraught with intentional use of language (Oparinde, et al., 2021). Rooted in the discursive devices used for political purposes are elements of persuasion, manipulation, misrepresentation, derogation, and promise. More dangerous are the instances of hate preaching discourse, such as those hinged around tribalism, ethnocentrism, and racism. In fact, it is the view of Kashif and Nusraf (2023) that political communications are often intricate, featuring double meanings, implicit structures, and elusive connotations. One of the thriving concerns in political matters is how disparities and differences are often exploited for political purposes in a manner that aggrandises stereotypes, hate, and disunity. In many instances political interactions are filled with societal tension springing up from unguarded political views and utterances often resulting in an ethnically divided nation, as in the case of Nigeria. Ethnic and tribal tensions have existed for a long time in Nigeria and politics is constantly used to reinvigorate existing tensions in unhealthy ways. A point conceded by Adenuga (2022) is that there exists a mismanagement of the ethnic diversity in Nigeria which has culminated in a spate of ethnoreligious conflicts in the nation.

Adenuga (2022) establishes a strong connection between the mismanagement of the nation's ethnic diversity and bad governance since politicians have often resorted to ethnicity as a tool for economic and political manipulation to cover up for their failures and, in turn, gain legitimacy with members of their own ethnic groups. The deployment of tribalistic language in political campaigns has exacerbated social division in the country, with several issues now being perceived as having ethnic undertones and, therefore, viewed through ethnic lenses. With over 300 tribal/ethnic groups, Nigeria is considered a hugely diverse country with many cultures and languages. Although this is one of the nation's unique strengths, the diverse nature of the country is

also one of its nightmares when interethnic or intertribal issues degenerate to hate or intolerance for other tribes. Recognising that tribal and ethnic tensions are a reality in Nigeria, politicians have often weaponised the situation as a way of satisfying their political interests and desires.

It is the argument of Tawiah *et al.*, (2021) that the tribal factor is one of the principal variables that often defines political contestations in Nigeria. The authors further claim that this is a common phenomenon in Africa and that even in the current era of democracy, many African countries have reverted to their tribal identities as a foundation for political competition. Hence the significance of tribal connections cannot be underrated, especially in the political environment of most African countries. In the current dispensation, tribalism can hardly be separated from Nigerian politics. To fully grasp the intertwined nature of tribalism and politics in Nigeria, recourse must be given to supporting the foundations of Nigerian political development, which many scholars link to colonialism. Akin to this line of thought, Chimee and Ojiakor (2021) opine that the material and ideological impact of colonialism serves as a springboard for the consequent emergence of ethnicity/tribalism in the political centre-stage of Nigeria. As a result, the elites see the powers inherent in the divide-and-rule mechanism of ethnicity, as implored by the colonialists in dealing with the indigenous groups in Nigeria, and quickly revert to same tactics in the aftermath of colonial rule.

Since the ethnic division mentality was already utilised by the colonial government, the formations of political parties in Nigeria were immediately entrenched in the tribalistic/ethnocentric framework already existent in the country. One common feature that cuts across the later-day parties in Nigeria at this time was their covert ethnocentric inclinations, with none of the political parties formed at the time holding pan-Nigerian sentiments and none holding widespread appeal or coverage across the nation, nor did any accommodate people from other ethnic groups at the time of their inception (Chimee and Ojiakor, 2021). This situation has laid the foundation for ethnocentric politics to spread its roots in Nigerian politics, so much so that decades after colonialism the country's political anatomy is still deeply rooted in tribalistic and ethnocentric outlooks, which has no doubt distorted the country's unity. This is a point further echoed by Chimee and Ojiakor (2021) who claim that the Nigerian political class pre- and post-independence distorted the political terrain using ethnicity and primordial mobilisation which occasioned deep-seated disharmony in the country; leading to 'we and they' syndrome and mutual discontent among various ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria.

Titus and Ogundiya (2023) also contend that the issue today is highly volatile and threatens the corporate existence and national unity of the country. They admit that one of the major social and political quagmires which has remained a thorn in the flesh of Nigeria's journey to nationhood, economic prosperity, and social cohesion is the ethnic conundrum which has continued to negatively influence development in Nigeria. As a result, this conundrum not only affects Nigerian national integration but also the level of harmony, patriotism, and loyalty to the legitimacy of the Nigerian state. Digging into the focus of this study, the sociopolitical narratives of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria gravitated heavily towards tribal and ethnic sentiments in manners that threatened the social cohesion and development of the country. In a way that has never been felt before, the proliferation of digital media exposed all the masked and disguised varieties of tribalism in Nigeria. Online media platforms were not only deployed for the purpose of political campaigns, but also for the spreading of tribalistic and ethnocentric sentiments, which have now become the thrust of this study.

The use of tribal and ethnic sentiments in Nigerian politics became fully-fledged, mainly due to the demographics of the leading presidential candidates in that supporters of certain candidates were instantly perceived as tribalistic, bigoted, or ethnocentric. In fact, the politicians as

well as several of their supporters demonstrated tribal views in a brazen and unapologetic manner, as observed from digital media posts which have now motivated the current study. Even more concerning is that these tribal messages that were disseminated were dangerously close to hate speeches, Nigerians must be vigilant to avoid the risks of the violent repercussions. It is within this context that this study intends to multimodally analyse tribalistic and ethnocentric discourse in Nigerian politics.

Theoretical and Conceptual Inclinations

This study is theoretically underpinned by the notion of multimodality. O'Halloran *et al.*, (2018) argue that multimodality has become a grand theory of all forms of communication. Therefore, the term 'multimodality' in this study is deployed to involve all online media meaning-making attempts motivated by tribalism. For O'Halloran *et al.*, (2018), the aim of multimodal analysis is, therefore, to develop abstractions which describe the underlying organisation of semiotic resources, the processes through which meaning is made through the interaction of semiotic choices, the unfolding of those semiotic interactions throughout the whole text in relation to the context, and changes in those configurations over time. As such, multimodal discourse analysts are typically interested in the text itself (however 'text' is defined) and the recontextualisations of that text.

Kress (2000) brings to fore the concern that there is a revolution in the landscape of communication which is drastically changing its configuration. Kress (2000) notes that it is now impossible to make sense of text, even their linguistic parts alone, without having a clear idea of what other features might be contributing to the meaning of a text. In so doing, it would be impossible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all the modes of communication that are concurrently present in any text. This notion motivates the need for multimodality, which is an approach that caters for the analysis of discourse through the examination of multiple modes. In essence, since communication is achieved using multiple modes, the analysis of discourses produced in the process should also be done multimodally.

Conceptually, the study draws from the notions of tribalism and its related nuances. Given the complexity of identities in Nigeria, being a multicultural, multireligious, multilingual country, other nuances become intertwined with tribalism, which include religion, ethnocentrism nepotism, partisanship, cronyism, among others. While some of these nuances are not particularly the focus of this study, their interconnected nature with the concepts of tribalism and ethnocentrism brings them into this discussion. Tikumah (2023) posits that tribalism has often been conceived as the biggest obstacle to peace and progress in Africa. This is more prominent since tribalism is considered to have damaging outcomes when it is utilised to exclude people or groups or to take away their privileges, independence, and status (Abdelrahim, 2023). Abdelrahim (2023) empirically connects tribalism to oppression and corruption, thus, advocating for the urgent need to educate and enlighten Africans on the dangers of tribalism, and in fact, ethnocentrism. It is worth noting that the earlier definitions of tribalism do not instantly suggest negative connotations. For instance, Waruta (1992:120) perceives the term 'tribe' as a social organisation or division comprising several local villages, bands, or lineages, or other groups sharing a common ancestry, language, culture, or name.

However, Dami (2022) admits that some of the assumptions that frame the phenomenon of tribalism in the past have not only changed, but the context in which tribalism arises in contemporary Africa and the framework within which it is perceived has acquired different facets. As of today, the practice of tribalism, especially in the political context of Nigeria, has grown to connote negative implications. Nwaigbo (2005) sees tribalism as involving tribal consciousness, character, and allegiance, particularly to one's tribe or a social group. Following on from here, one can argue that issues of allegiance in tribalism are sensitive and can easily be met with

overzealousness. Hence, Nwaigbo (2005) conceives that Africans now admit that the dynamics of their society have been dominated by the phenomenon of tribes/tribalism.

The multifaceted dimension of tribalism makes multimodality the suitable theory for the purpose of this study. This study aligns with Jewitt and Kress's (2010) proposition that multimodality focuses on the processes of making meaning through situated practices and interpretations, the design (selection, adaptation, transformation) of multiple modes, and the representational feature available through social actors in the environments and their daily lives. A multimodal approach, as in the case of this study where the researcher examines tribalism in the context of political discourse, investigates how the sociocultural world is realised through material representations in different modes and occasions of communication. For Jewitt and Kress, this is where the essential links between social conditions and the ways they are modally instantiated are created. This study is conceived with the notion that tribalism as a sociocultural issue has found a near dangerous place in politics, realised through discursive practices. Thus, using multimodality as a theory, this study conducts a review and appraisal of the discourse of tribalism in Nigerian politics.

Method

This is a qualitative study which deploys the techniques of inductive analysis in analysing multimodal tribalistic data in Nigerian political discourse. The data for this study were collected from digital media as this platform has generally become an open source of public information that can reveal people's views and perspectives. Online media is defined as web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organisations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build a community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible (McCay-Peet & QuanHaase, 2017). Toivonen *et al.*, (2019) state that online content and metadata contain useful information for understanding human nature and interactions in space and time. Specifically, data were collected from Twitter and Facebook which are the most popular social media platforms in Nigeria especially for political conversations.

The web scraping acquisition method, according to Toivonen *et al.*, (2019), was used in gathering the relevant information for this study where the researcher extracted data through the human copy-and-paste technique. Data were purposely collected from digital media platforms and then manually entered from these platforms to Microsoft Word for analysis. The suitability of the data was determined by whether it possessed tribalistic views regarding the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The text content and image content elements of the data, according to Toivonen *et al.*, (2019), were considered before their selection. Data involving short messages, captions, hashtags, memes, as well as images in relation to the objectives of the study were preferred as they gained wider circulation. Then, suitable data for this study were purposely selected and multimodally analysed in line with the propositions of Jewitt and Kress (2010) which allowed for a deep comprehension of the data beyond the surface level. This study focuses mainly on viral online tribal content and avoided revealing the identity of individual contributors of tribalistic content. The analysed data revealed a concerning discourse of tribalism in Nigeria which requires urgent attention.

Results and Discussion

A Multimodal Analysis of Tribalistic Discourse in Nigerian Politics

The intricate dynamics of Nigerian society have often been marked by the existence of identity divisions defined by the multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious nature of the country. These divisions of identity have also become a tool for politicians to achieve their selfish political objectives. As earlier established, a united Nigerian country does not benefit the manipulative and controlling techniques that several politicians revert to for electoral purposes. It is within this context that the researcher analyses political discourse in Nigeria which has been used to fuel and trigger tribal divisions for the sole purpose of political interest. The discussion around this concern specifically refers to the situations leading up to and after the 2023 presidential general elections.

Perhaps the most arguably popular tribal sentiment online during this period was the slogan *emi lo kan* (singular form referring to the actual speaker) or *awa lo kan* (plural form referring to the tribe/ethnic group of the speaker). The slogan was popular on both Twitter and Facebook. To interpret, the former means 'it is my turn' ('my' referring to the speaker) while the latter means 'it is our turn' ('our' referring to Yoruba people). An extension of this phrase in Nigerian political discourse also produced the saying *Yoruba lo kan* which is translated as 'it is Yoruba's turn'. The statement, which is credited the Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who was the APC Presidential Candidate, was meant to imply that after he has sacrificed for other politicians in the past, it is now his turn to become the president of Nigeria, and by extension, the turn of the Yoruba people to produce the president of the country. Since the presidential candidate made the statement at a political event during his campaign, the saying became widely accepted by several Yoruba people who agreed that it is the turn of Yoruba people to produce a president, since the last time a Yoruba man was a president was in 2007 when President Olusegun Obasanjo handed over to a northerner, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The rhetorical power of slogans in political and social campaigns cannot be undermined.

From time immemorial, slogans have been used for several purposes, among which include social movements, political campaigns, wartime propaganda, advertising purposes, among other. Like in many parts of the world, the use of slogans has a long history in Nigerian political expressions. In essence, slogans have become important aesthetic components in political campaigns in Nigeria. From emotive words/phrases to appealing appellations, Nigerian politicians are fond of using popular slogans that elicit reactions and support from the electorate. One such slogan is *emi lo kan* and its variants. Ogunjobi *et al.*, (2021) admit that the frequent use of slogans in the political sphere all over the world has become a pervasive exercise whereby most political aspirants employ the use of slogans as being representative of an alluring ideology to articulate their ideological standpoint and persuade their audience as well as drive a political action. Thus, this study argues that to create a political brand in Nigeria today, slogans have become a necessary ingredient in Nigerian politics. Ogunjobi *et al.*, (2021), however, also establishes that slogans can bring about positive or negative connotations depending on the usage. For this study, when slogans are employed to serve tribal sentiments, they are often for negative purposes, as is the case of *Yoruba lo kan*, with the sole purpose of garnering support from Yoruba people who equally believe that it is the time for a Yoruba presidency.

From a multimodal perspective, *emi lo kan*, *awa lo kan*, and *Yoruba lo kan* are all divisive and disharmonious sentiments. Notwithstanding that the slogans are fraught with a sense of entitlement for the speaker, and by extension the Yoruba people, the slogans quickly became popular nationwide and went viral amongst the supporters of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who positively welcomed the slogan with supporting views, especially on online media platforms. This is however not entirely surprising since Mbembe (1992; 2002) already perceived African politics as a form of mutual zombification, which refers to the impotence or powerlessness of the ruler and the ruled,

each of which having robbed the other of vitality, leaving both impotent. Mbembe's portrayal of African politics involves his depictions of presidential grandiosity, political sycophancy, tenacious corruption, flamboyant violence, and coercive ceremonialism. One can argue that Mbembe's views on political sycophancy and coercive ceremonialism are illustrated in the above slogans, where slogans tied to tribal sentiments became popular and are celebrated by many Nigerians. Such political slogans are devoid of rational arguments, thus, do not foster unity among diverse groups. A concerning fact in Nigerian politics is that tribal/ethnic-based slogans have completely eclipsed development-based and policy-based ones. This situation has continued to undermine the national cohesion of the country since tribal sentiments have become determining factors in selecting and supporting presidential candidates. Instances of such tribal sentiments are found almost daily in digital content, where users tend to approve or condemn issues based on ethnic consciousness.

Also arising out of the *emi lo kan* slogan is the inherent but inexplicit message of corruption which Wrong and Williams (2009) encapsulated in their book *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower*. In the book, Wrong and Williams (2009) outline the greed and corruption in governance where political leaders relegate national interest completely in favour of personal gain, which they have already made evident in their slogans. Judging by this, one can argue that the *emi lo kan* rhetoric was a statement against what is unsaid. The inexplicit content of the message easily refers to the fact that it is now the speaker's turn to eat from the national cake, just as *awa lo kan* would imply that it is now the Yoruba's turn to get closer to federal power and consume their portion of the national cake. Michaela Wrong (2009) aptly captures the danger of tribal sentiments in Nigerian politics stating that:

In Africa, one's entire life's chances are based on which ethnic group one belongs to. And there is the mentality that once your tribe gets into power, then state assets are yours to do with as you wish. And since the previous tenant had the same approach, then of course you are completely justified to be very greedy to compensate for how your group was treated in the past. So, "it is our turn to eat" really means, "it's our community's turn at the trough.

Another tribal expression arising from Nigerian politics emerged when a popular associate of the APC candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who is a Yoruba, popularly known as M.C. Oluomo, was caught on video threatening the Igbos ahead of the 2023 governorship elections in Lagos State. M.C. Oluomo, who is the chairman of the Lagos State Parks Management Committee, was quoted saying "we have begged them. If they don't want to vote for us, it is not a fight. Tell them, Mama Chukwudi, if you don't want to vote for us, sit down at home. Sit down at home" (Adeuyi, 2023). Chukwudi is a popular Igbo name. As such, any reference to the name Chukwudi only points towards the Igbo people. Although winning in many other states, the supposed Yoruba candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, lost the presidential election in his own Lagos State, which is also considered to belong to the Yorubas. Since Lagos is cosmopolitan, it was perceived that the large population of Igbos in the state dominated the Yorubas, thus resulting in Peter Obi (an Igbo candidate from Labour Party) winning in the state of Lagos ahead of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who is a Yoruba man. The common notion among many ethnocentric minded Nigerians at the time was that an Igbo person should not be defeating a Yoruba person in a state that ancestrally belongs to the Yoruba people.

Although the presidential election had been lost in Lagos by the APC candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the state governorship elections were scheduled for a few weeks after. This engineered all sorts of resistance by many Yoruba people in Lagos on several social media platforms as they feared that the presidential results repeating themselves in the gubernatorial

elections since the Labour Party chapter of the state has also presented a candidate many Yoruba people believed appealed more to the Igbo people. With their lesson learnt from the presidential elections, the available option was to disenfranchise the Igbo people, which in their thinking would help avoid losing the state to the Igbo people. It is for this reason that M.C. Oluomo, who is known to control most of the political touts in Lagos, made the threatening statement suggesting that any Igbo person who is unwilling to vote for the perceived Yoruba candidate should not appear at the polling booths for voting purposes during the governorship elections. A point which was taken seriously by many political thugs who eventually prevented Igbo people or perceived Igbo-looking people from voting on the election day in Lagos State. Not only was the election process marred with disenfranchisement, but it was also equally fraught with physical violence, often meted against those intend to vote against the Yoruba candidate.

The statement made by M.C. Oluomo, coupled with other tribal expressions such as: (i) *my Lagos not your Lagos, you are here because of business*; (ii) *Go back to your own states*; and (iii) *Lagos belongs to the Yorubas*, among others, saw the election period revolve solely around ethnicity more than the development of Lagos. These messages were all multimodally communicated through online media, posters, placards, and so forth. Evidently, political contestations have heightened ethnic sentiments in Nigeria by polarising the polity. As such, rather than champion causes that would advance peace and unity, the political class, because of the perquisite of office, reverted to ethnic appeal, incitement, or mobilisation (Chimee & Ojiakor, 2021). The ethnic factor in the 2023 presidential elections was extremely obvious. According to Titus and Ogundiya (2023), since the three leading presidential candidates represented the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, where they each anticipated to perform better than the other parties, the opposition party's members were subject to repression from both state and non-state actors.

A social media post by one of Nigeria's leading television states credited a statement to Atiku Abubakar suggesting that he deserved the votes of the northern people because he belongs to their ethnic group. In an interactive session where Atiku Abubakar was addressing mostly northerners, he was quoted saying "Northerners need someone from North, not Igbo or Yoruba" (Egobiambu, 2022). In what Egobiambu considered to be an 'inflammable rhetoric', it was clear that the statement was merely used to appeal to the ethnic sentiments of the northern people who are, in fact, the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, the Hausa. Prior to the statement, Atiku Abubakar has always been portrayed by members of his political party (PDP) as the perfect nationalists with no ethnocentric behaviours. In fact, his supporters have often described him as the 'unifier', insinuating that he is the only leader who can create a sense of unity among the three major tribes in Nigeria. However, this does not appear to be the case. The statement made by Abubakar Atiku could be traced to one of the defining issues of the presidential elections, where many Nigerians believed that the presidency needed to shift from northern to southern Nigeria, which housed perhaps Atiku's biggest nemesis. Having had a northern president for eight years, many Nigerians expected a southern presidency as a form of rotational balance. Since Atiku is the only northerner of the three leading candidates, while the other two are southerners, this was clearly a threat to his candidacy.

Closely related to the issue of tribalism is also the religious factor. Since Nigeria is multi-religious and multi-ethnic, certain religions tend to be more dominant within certain tribes/ethnic groups. As such, there is a continuous interplay between the tribes and the dominant religion in each ethnic group. For instance, Islam is the dominant religion in the northern part of Nigeria. The southern part of the country, especially the south-eastern part where the leading presidential candidate from the LP, Peter Obi, comes from, is dominated by Christians. The implication of this is that to support a tribe is also to indirectly support the dominant religion from the tribe. It is within this context that Peter Obi seemed to appeal to the emotions of Christians in the country. Although

he was not directly quoted for making tribal remarks, he made a religious remark that shared affinity with his ethnic group. Although Peter Obi himself denied the statement, the leaked viral audio recording published by a media outlet known as Peoples Gazette revealed Peter Obi purportedly begging a popular Pastor in Nigeria to convince the church members to vote for him as it is time for a religious battle (Olupohunda, 2023). In the leaked audio, Peter Obi was quoted saying “Thank you, Daddy. Daddy, I need you to speak to your people in the Southwest and Kwara. The Christians in the Southwest and Kwara. This is a religious war.” While this statement does not explicitly refer to a tribe, it represents Peter Obi’s religion, which is also the dominant religion in his ethnic group. Being the only Christian among the three leading candidates, support for Peter Obi is consequentially support for his ethnic group.

The tribalisation of the 2023 general elections has further driven Nigeria into inter-tribal tensions. Although not new to the Nigerian political space, the 2023 general elections further pronounced the tribal sentiments in Nigeria and confirmed what is already known to be a plague in the Nigerian political setting. Before now, Ebegbulem (2011) had already established that politicised ethnicity has been detrimental to national unity and socio-economic wellbeing since ethnic politics undermines the selection of responsible and responsive national leadership. The tension, according to Ebegbulem (2011), is further exacerbated by economic underdevelopment, marginalisation, and the struggle for resource control. Benibo *et al.*, (2021) similarly note that ethnicity and the crisis arising from it has been an object of political manipulation to achieve desired economic advantages and political objectives. A point also stressed by Omotosho *et al.*, (2020) is that there is a high level of competitive ethnocentrism in Nigeria which has discouraged the peaceful co-existence of the various cultural and ethnic groups in the country as some ethnic groups see themselves as superior to others. Thus, they recommend that every politically elected position and appointment should be based on meritocracy rather than ethnic considerations or a demeaning quota system which has created a lot of loopholes in the nation’s polity and undermined its national economic growth and development.

In their view, this will provide room for every tribe to have a taste of the dividends of good governance and reduce unhealthy competition that could result in ethnic tension or social conflict, especially when some tribes keep dominating strategic or key positions of authority. Benibo *et al.*, (2021) submit that the inability of the government to accommodate the diverse differences within and between the ethnic groups as well as the stakes and status of the elites and citizens has, in very many ways, impinged the historical process of ethnic formation and nation building. Indeed, recent political expressions from the 2023 general elections leaning heavily toward tribal sentiments are only confirmation that the country is riddled with interethnic tensions, which is unlikely to be dispelled anytime soon. Thus, to suppress this concerning challenge from a discursive perspective, Nigerian political messages, rhetoric, expressions, and all other politically motivated discourses must be entirely transformed. The dense reliance on intangible phenomenon in Nigerian politics that is reproduced through discourse is dangerous for national development and unity.

As such, Nigerian political discourse must begin to shift its attention to impact-based and policy-based slogans, rhetoric, and expressions without recourse against tribes, ethnicities, and religions. The current dominant discourse in Nigerian politics puts emphasis on representation at either an individual or group level, thus, ignoring issues of societal impact, unity, and development. Since politicians constantly exploit the differences amongst Nigerians, public discourse has also been centred around the politicians’ gimmicks. As such, since tribal consciousness is integral to the politicians’ messages, public discourse is also rooted in tribal consciousness and not progressive matters. To ensure national unity and development, public discourse in Nigerian politics must shift completely to conversations that reflect societal growth.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated the prevalence of tribalism in Nigeria's political landscape. The use of tribal elements to strengthen political support is popular in Nigerian political discourse. This article is provoked by the need to examine the social implications of tribalism in Nigerian politics. To fully understand tribalist discourse in Nigerian politics, data were retrieved from digital media and multimodally analysed. Such an approach to the investigation of tribalism allowed for a nuanced understanding of the concept within the sociocultural contexts of its usages. The findings of the study not only revealed the instances of tribalism discourse in Nigerian political discourse, but also underscored the effects of tribalist discourse in national development, cohesion, and unity. The analysis of the data, coupled with the review of existing literature, revealed the need to shun tribalistic discourse in Nigeria for the country to achieve national development. What is further important is the need to avoid unguarded statements that can trigger tribal or ethnic tensions amongst Nigerians.

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