# Stance in Media Reactions to the Declaration of 2023 Nigeria Presidential Election Winner

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## Abstract

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was replete with expectations and optimism about the rebirth of a democratic government on the 25th of February, 2023. This has generated several online political discourses in Nigeria. The present study engages attitude; an aspect of Martin/White's (2005) Appraisal Framework to analyze the discursive features of the media reactions to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), declaration of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election winner on Facebook. The research integrates both distant and close reading methods to study the data. The findings reveal that lexicons that align with the emotive state of the speakers and reveal the appraisal system of attitude, such as, affect, judgment, and appreciation predominate the discourse, with affect and judgment, deployed mostly to express negative emotions of unhappiness and retributions towards INEC for allegedly failing to conduct a free and fair election. The visualization of the study shows that the variegated responses of negative or positive affect and judgment expressed by Nigerians are indicative of the prevailing emotional surge of disappointment or excitement towards the conduct of the election and may be related to religious, tribal and ethnic sentiments.

## 1    Introduction

The 2023 Nigerian Presidential election, which occurred on the 25th of February, was rife with expectations and speculations on which political party's candidates would win the polls. The election promised to be unique owing to three major factors. First, the emergence of a "third force" (cf. Nigerian Civil Society Situationroom 2023: 5). In the recent past, the two most popular political parties in Nigeria are the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which have recycled the old order of political milieu and bankruptcy of genuine innovations in Nigerian politics. Consequently, this has left many Nigerians bored and desirous for a change. With such agitations and a wave of public outcry for a change, the way was paved for the evolution of Labour Party (LP), whose candidate, a middle-aged businessman and a former governor of Anambra State, Mr. Peter Gregory Obi emerged as the game changer; "the political saviour". Perhaps, owing to the assumption that he was not a member of the old order and had several trajectories of leadership success as a former governor. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who was later declared the winner of the 2023 Presidential election by the Independent Electoral Commission (hereafter, INEC), represented the ruling party, APC. While Atiku Abubakar, a former Vice President contested for the PDP.

These three candidates became a formidable force jostling for the post of Nigerian President, gathering millions of supporters across the country. Notable among the support given to the candidates was a growing social media-driven political movement, which also became a popular offline rally in support of the LP candidate, Mr. Peter Obi, known as "the Obedient" or "the Obi/Datti movement", whose titles were coined from the names of Mr. Obi and his vice contestant, Datti-Baba Ahmed. The movement was mainly piloted by Nigerian youths who craved to change the political order. Mukuye et al. (2023: 406) reveal that the movement comprised five factions; the intellectuals, the influential celebrities, ethnic bigots, activists, and Nigerians in the diaspora. The ideology of the movement was shaped by the ENDSARS protest in October 2020, in which Nigerian youths all over the country massively mobilized both online and offline to fight against police brutality (cf. Agbim/Etumnu/Iredibia 2023; Chukwurah 2022; Mokuye/Onwunyi/Okonkwo 2023; Udoumoh/Ogbonna/Bello-Osagie 2023). The success of the ENDSARS protest engendered a further quest for political inclusiveness, participation, and a strong resolve to spearhead political revolution among the Nigerian youths.

A second unique dimension and motivation for participation in the 2023 Nigerian election was the introduction of electoral reforms endorsed by the former President, Muhammadu Buhari, which contained the Electoral Act Amendment Bill, 2022. The bill promised to sustain a democratic process during the 2023 elections. The reforms birthed two exciting technological innovations. First, the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which was to be utilized for the electronic accreditation of voters, as well as the real-time transmission of election results. The second is the introduction of the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV), which would enable a transparent public viewing of the election results as they are uploaded from various polling units spread across the country in real time. The electoral reforms excited many Nigerians and promised to curtail all forms of rigging and results manipulations. Hope soared and hashtag campaigns, such as #gogetyourpvc, and #makeyourvotecount became trending in the Nigerian social media space. Amidst the soaring expectations, the failure of INEC to uphold the two important electoral reforms as anticipated by millions of Nigerians became a clog in the wheels of the 2023 Presidential election and dashed the hopes of many Nigerians (cf. Hoffmann 2023; Nigerian Civil Society Situationroom 2023). Acheampong (2023: 2) notes that the failure of INEC in keeping to electoral promises and reforms implies increasing public distrust and voter apathy.

Other controversies raised against the conduct of the election include: fraud, voter intimidation, and reports of thuggery and violence (cf. Hoffmann 2023; Okeaya-inneh 2023). Amidst these issues, INEC in the wee hours of the morning, on the 1st of March, 2023, when most Nigerians were barely awake, announced the election results, declaring the candidate of the ruling party APC, Mr. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the winner of the election with 36% votes cast, about 8.79million votes, while Atiku Abubakar of PDP, came second with 6.98million votes and Peter Obi got 6.1 million votes. Another striking controversy that trailed the results declaration by INEC concerned the issue of securing 25% votes cast in two-thirds of the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, as stipulated in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, Section 134 (2). Since Mr. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the declared winner of the 2023 Presidential election did not poll up to the 25% votes in FCT, there were open debates on the media as to the interpretation of the 25% FCT votes (cf. Ochei 2023; Umegboro 2023). Based on the

established background, the study aims to examine the attitudes and stances of Nigerian Facebook users on INEC verified Facebook page to the announcement of the election winner on March 1, 2023, and how the reactions have reflected the feelings of Nigerians towards the conduct of the election by INEC.

## 2          Social media and political discourse

Beyond the basic aim of communication and entertainment, social media has created an enabling environment for political interactions, affiliations, stance-taking ideological breeding, and cross-breeding grounds. The pervasiveness of social media has encouraged the versatility of political communication and the multiplicity of social movements (cf. Darshan/Suresh 2019; Dunivin/Yaojun/Ince 2022). The media has impacted democratic processes via information spread, media priming, and the framing of events, which have consequently influenced people's appraisal of situations (cf. Strömberg 2015; Zappettini/Kryzanowski 2019). Scholars have debated the existential plausibility of the proposition that social media use influences political participation, since such engagement may be incidental based on the trending political issues in the news (cf. Fletcher/Nielson 2018; Lee 2020; Lee/Xenos 2022). The proposition stems from the fact that most social media users engage in online activities for entertainment and not for political participation. Even so, political engagement via social media may be necessitated by the growing need to collectively and emphatically lend voices to issues of public interest. The media provides the platform for individual variegated stances and the appraisal of social events to form ideological fronts and clusters that are capable of impacting institutional policies and decision-making processes in the interest of the public.

Extant studies in linguistics have captured diverse aspects of political discourse. Some studies have sought to set boundaries on what comprises political discourse (cf. Amaghlobeli 2017; Chilton/Schaffner 2002; Randour/Perrez/Reuchamps 2020). Similar studies have examined the influence of social media on political opinions, analyzing citizens' engagement with politics (cf. Hameleers 2022; Rita/António/Afonso 2023; Rainie et al. 2012). Hameleers (2022) notes that social media projects populist views of politics, drawing a dichotomy between the experiences of ordinary people and the "expert sources" (ibd.: 210f.). Social media amplifies not only the voices of the masses but also their feelings, attitudes, belief systems, myths, ideologies, and cognitions on social and political matters. One of the ways this is achieved is via the utilization of social media as a platform for public outcry through the formation of online social clusters and movements. Kidd/Mclntosh (2016: 785–794), and Marchi (2018: 609–626) have examined the symbiotic association between social media and social movement, stratifying ways such relationships may be beneficial for partaking in political decisions and activities. Marchi buttresses that such mutual relations may reveal the underlying struggles that exist among various strata of modern society (ibd.: 609f.). Cases of social inequality and social justice may be challenged via the collective voice of the people.

## 3          Reviews of related literature

Related studies to the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election have examined the stance, ideology, and textual analysis of the political speeches of the 2023 Nigerian Presidential aspirants; Obi, Atiku, and Tinubu (cf. Amale/Ige/Muopshin 2022; Udoh/Ejiaso 2023; Anyanwu 2023). While

Amale/Ige/Muopshin (2023: 303), analyzing stance, reveal that self-mention was the most used strategy in political speeches of the aspirants, directive statements and personal aside ranked lowest. The study notes that the presidential seat was framed as a battle, which needs an experienced and powerful candidate to win. On the other hand, Udoh/Ejiaso (2023: 94) in the appraisal of ideology, found that the campaign speeches of the aspirants portrayed asymmetrical power relations between the powerful and the less powerful and that lexicons that show inclusiveness were predominant in the speeches. On the textual analysis of the acceptance speeches of the Presidential candidates, Anyanwu (2023) posits that cohesive devices performed the grammatical functions of assurance and that the clausal relations in the campaign speeches functioned as registral and generic coherence (cf. ibid.:116).

The closest works to the present study examined sentiments and attitudes of Nigerians toward the choice of political candidates for the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election, to predict who might win the polls (cf. Oyewola et al. 2023; Olabanjo et al. 2023). Both studies utilized Natural Language Processing (NLP) Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) and other models to investigate the reactions to the tweets of the political aspirants. While Oyewola, et al. (2023: 1–24) appraise the responses by Nigerians to the campaign tweets of the three most popular political candidates; Atiku, Obi and Tinubu and reveal that the study provides vital feedback for the campaign strategies used by the candidates. Olabanjo et al. (2023: 1–14) find that Peter Obi of LP had the highest positive sentiment, while Tinubu of APC, ranks first in the network of active friends and Atiku of PDP has the highest number of active followers.

The studies reviewed differ from the present study. First, the studies by (Amale/Ige/Muopshin 2022; Udoh/Ejiaso 2023; Anyanwu 2023) all focus on the political speeches of the aspirants from varied linguistic frameworks, which is not the focus of the present study. Again, the closest work (Oyewola et al. 2023; Olabanjo et al. 2023) is a pre-election assessment of the attitudes and stances of Nigerians towards the political candidates. No existing research has studied the stance and appraisal of Nigerians on Facebook towards the INEC declaration of the 2023 Presidential election winner, as post-election studies, incorporating both distant and close reading methods, which is the gap the present study aims to fill.

Hence, the objectives of the study are to:

a. identify the linguistic resources of attitude and emotions from the corpus by studying the word frequency, collocations patterns, phrasal contexts, and the Reader.
b. demonstrate how visualizations and other distant reading techniques may aid the technical nuances of close reading;

## 4      The Appraisal Theory

The phenomenon of "appraisal" is engaged in text and talk to explore varied personalized views and feelings of a speaker or writer about a given discourse and its context. Although, previously, scholars similarly referred to the Appraisal Theory using diverse appellations such as "attitude", "stance", and "evaluation" (cf. Halliday/Matthiessen [3]2004; Thompson 2008). The phrase is an extensive parlance that includes words, phrases, and structures utilized by speakers to express emotions, adjudge, and evaluate interlocutors, discourse, and its context. The Appraisal Framework proposed by Martin (2000); Martin/White (2005); and White (2015) provides the

theoretical evaluative standards for the present study. The studies account for how speakers or writers express meanings that portray their negative or positive personal judgment, assessment or evaluation of a given verbal or written discourse. The Appraisal Framework concerns itself with the linguistic resources speakers or writers engage in taking a stance towards the message of a text and the text participants (cf. Martin/White 2005: 14). Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistic (SLF) theory provides the structural background for the Appraisal Theory which classifies meaning into three meta-functions; "ideational meaning" in which language is utilized to interpret an experience, create identity, views and relationship; the "interpersonal meaning", engaged for social interactive purposes, while the "textual meaning" subsumes both the ideational meaning and interpersonal meaning. The trio merging into a blended meaningful text is useful for a given communicative situation. Martin/White drew focus away from Halliday's (1994) mood and modality clausal exegesis but argued the need to create interpersonal meaning in conversations. Wei/Wherrity/Zhang (2015: 235–239) remark that SFL cannot fully account for monologic discourses and that the theory did little to account for interpersonal meaning, feelings, and judgements towards a text. Hence, while Halliday (1994)examined the grammatical aspects of mood and modality in terms of clausal interpretations, the Appraisal Theory focuses on the lexical aspect of grammar that captures the speaker's or writer's positive and negative perspective, and feelings about a proposition. Martin/White (2005: 12), and White (2015: 1–3) divide the Appraisal Theory into three: "attitude", "engagement" and "graduation".

Attitude subsumes the overall feelings, emotional reactions, behavioural assessment or judgement of things. It is the writer's or speaker's expression of positive or negative emotions such as happiness or sadness, confidence or anxiousness, interest or boredom, and so on. Attitude is further divided into: "affect", "judgement", and "appreciation" (Martin/ White 2005: 42–56). Attitude is a subcategory of evaluative meaning by which speakers adopt a stance to present a positive or negative view of a phenomenon (cf. White 2015). The realizations of attitude spread quite across an array of grammatical structures.

a.  Affect may be realized as qualities describing participants' emotions, un/happiness, dis/satisfaction, in/security, and feelings of dis/inclination attributable to interlocutors in a discourse. Affect subsumes the positive or negative feelings of speakers in reaction to a phenomenon. (cf. Halliday 1994; Martin/White 2005; White 2015).

b.  Appreciation as attitude includes aesthetics, text evaluation, process and natural phenomena. Appreciation is the evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena according to how they are valued, e. g. flawless, impeccable, startling, compelling, and so on.

c.  Judgement consists of a personalized assessment of speakers in discourse; the way they behave, their character and how they measure up. Judgement is how speakers frame discourse actors' behaviour which they abhor or admire, criticize or praise e. g. civilized, progressive, kindly, humane, cruel, hypocritically condemned (White 2015: 2f.). Judgement is subdivided into "social esteem" and "social sanction". Judgement of social esteem includes: "normality"; how unusual someone is, "capacity"; how capable they are and "tenacity"; how resolute they are. Judgement of sanction includes, "veracity"; how truthful someone is, "propriety"; how ethical someone is (cf. Martin/White 2005: 50–52).

The remaining two aspects of Martin/White's (2005) Appraisal Theory are Engagement and Graduation. The present study engages only "attitude" to verify the stance in media reactions to INEC's announcement of the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election winner. It excludes the aspects of Engagement and Graduation.

## 5      Methods

The data for the research comprises 39, 918 word-corpus, derived from the comment threads on the Facebook account of INEC Nigeria, as reactions to the announcement of the 2023 Nigeria Presidential election winner, on the 1st of March 2023. The corpus was subjected to various word cloud visualizations, collocations analysis, keywords, and sentiment coding using Voyant Tools (Sinclair/Rockwell (2023) and Nvivo14 (Lumivero 2023) for the data analysis, integrating both mixed method approaches of distant and close reading, as well as the qualitative and quantitative research methods. Scholars of Digital Humanity have argued the place of "close reading", referring to the manual-traditional method of textual analysis and "distant reading", the use of computational methods in analyzing texts (cf. Morretti 2013; Dobson 2021; Farinola 2023). The idea of integrating both approaches into textual discourse aims to engage certain features of distant reading, such as data visualizations, word cloud, phrasal context, word correlation, terms or keywords, among other notable features of computational analysis "to offer a window for a microscopic view of the text" (Alhudithi 2021: 43). This is beneficial in doing a close reading, in which certain intrinsic aspects of a text, which otherwise may be overlooked are made bare utilizing digital tools.

## 6      Appraisal analysis

This segment demonstrates how Voyant Tools might be utilized as a group of distant reading tools to do a close reading of the corpus, engaging the appraisal theoretical framework. The Terms tool which shows word count in the corpus, aided the identifications of stance-related terms that indicate attitude in the corpus, e. g., *congratulations*, *good*, *punish*, *shame*, *evil*, among other lexical items, while engaging other tools like the Reader, Phrases and Context, which helped identify where exactly they are highlighted in the corpus. The Reader as a tool facilitated scanning through the entire corpus and highlighted certain queried aspects in a way that we can view the lexical item wherever it had occurred in the corpus, as well as its context. This is illustrated from the corpus in the figure below and has been utilized in doing a close reading of the corpus.
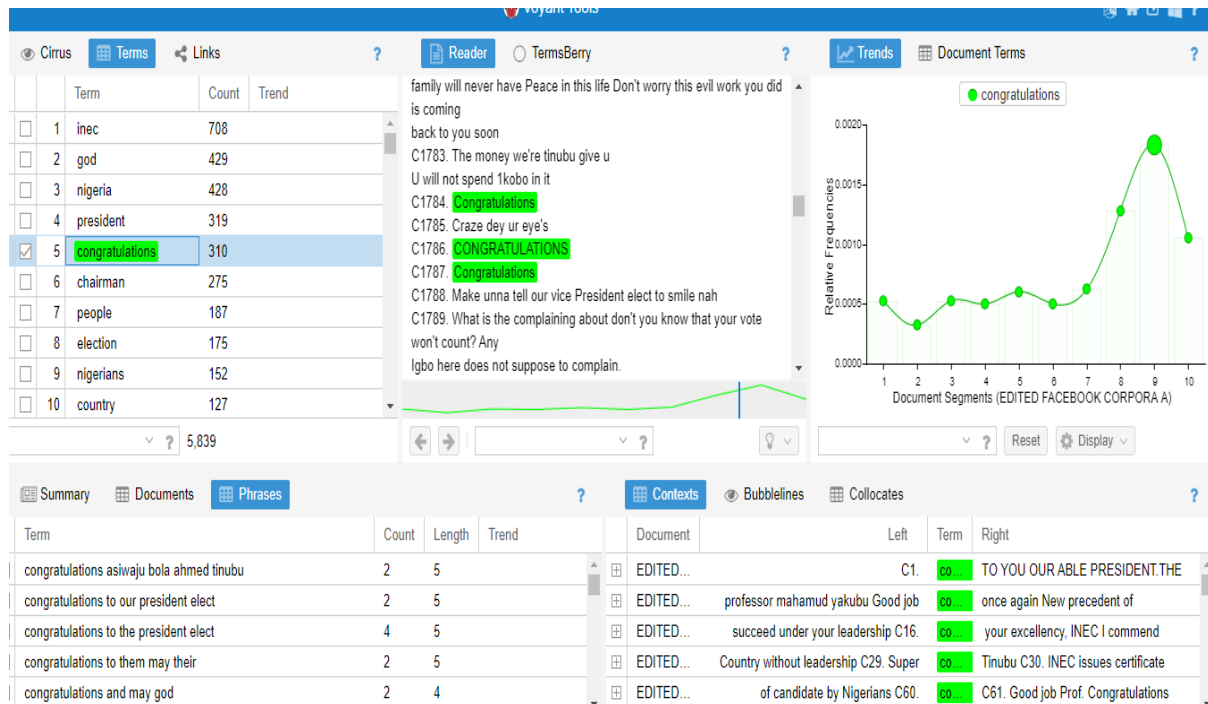
**Figure 1: Illustrating close reading via Voyant Tools**

## 7        Analysis of attitude in the corpus

For the appraisal of attitude below, some abbreviations have been used to express the emotive state of Nigerians towards INEC's conduct of the 2023 Presidential election. These abbreviations are adopted from Martins/White (2005). They include: "hap" for "happiness", and "sat" for "satisfaction" which are categories of affect and relay if a speaker is un/happy or dis/satisfied. "Prop" for "propriety", "cap" for "capacity" and "ver" for "veracity", which are under the Judgement category and appraise a social actor's behaviour. "Val" for "valuation" and "rea" for "reactions" are under the Appreciation typology. While "rea" relates to how speakers describe the quality of a phenomenon or an event, "val" is about how speakers evaluate the worth of things or processes.

### 7.1        Affect

Affect involves the use of lexical items that express a speaker's positive or negative feelings towards a phenomenon. In this vein, it refers to the expression of implicit or explicit feelings towards INEC's conduct in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election. White (2015: 50) describes it as emotional reactions and assessments towards a process or thing. Affect may be "inscribed" when the feelings expressed are explicit or "invoked" when the feelings are described implicitly by the way of implicature. The explanation of "inscribed" and "invoked" attitude applies to all the various types of attitude, e. g. judgement and Appreciation.

| Examples of Phrasal Contexts of Congratulations | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Term | Count | Length | Trend | |
| president of nigeria congratulations | 1 | 5 | 1 | (+hap. invoked) |
| **president make una dey play congratulations** | 1 | 7 | 1 | (–hap. invoked) |
| president have congratulations | 1 | 4 | 1 | (+hap. invoked) |
| president elect and his vice congratulations | 1 | 6 | 1 | (+hap. invoked) |
| **president god is watching congratulations** | 1 | 7 | 1 | (–hap. invoked) |
| congratulations to the newly elected president | 7 | 1 | 1 | (+hap. invoked) |
| **congratulations to the inec appointed president** | 1 | 6 | 1 | (–hap. invoked) |
| **congratulations for selecting you as nigeria president** | 1 | 1 | 7 | (– hap. invoked) |
| | | | | (Bold in the original.) |

While the use of the phrase *congratulations* applies to the feelings of happiness querying the collocations of congratulations and the phrasal context in the corpus on Voyant Tools proves that not all instances recorded are indicative of positive feelings. Such collocations with *congratulations, president*, *una*, *just*, *watching*, *stolen*, and *punish* express sarcasm and resentment towards the electoral process. It is worth noting that the highlighted context of *congratulations* above shows a negative valence of emotion. The context of the comments is sarcastic and resentful of the purported victory of a candidate the speakers do not want. It is important to also state that the mere division of the lexicons using the Terms or word list alone cannot identify the speech contexts of the word. Hence, the interpretation may be wrong. This is why it is vital that close reading, which involves the evaluation of the context of a word and the correlation with other words is integrated into distant reading.

Another instance of the manifestation of Affect in the Corpus is the feelings of anger and resentment through cursing and name-calling. Words like *peace*, *miserable*, *shame*, indicating feelings were queried by the Reader to see how they were used in the corpus. The findings show that some lexicons were used to address INEC via invoking curses and name-calling through a deliberate misspelling of address terms to the INEC chairman. In the data presented below, the abbreviation "C" in the numbering represents "Comment" and has been used to categorize the speakers.

C25    Inec **pains, agony** ND [sic] **regret will never** depart from ur [sic] generation for making a lot of people go through pains. God pass una[sic] His wrath is still cuming [sic] for all of you. God please fight this battle (-sat./inscribed).

C 40    Any INEC official that directly or indirectly participate [sic] in the rigging of this election will **not see peace and good health**, one by one you will beg for death (-sat./inscribed).

C49    God go judge una [sic]. **May tears of pain** never cease in ur [sic] household (-hap./invoked).

C50    You shall **not know peace** (-sat./inscribed).

C175    As many of you that have a hand or contributed in this rigging, you'll **never know peace**, for causing Nigerians pain, you'll all die **miserable deaths**! (-hap/inscribed).

C206    As you **took away joy** from millions of Nigerians today, so shall you **never find joy** all the days of your **miserable life**. May you **never experience peace** henceforth. May **the blood, sweat and tears** of millions Nigeria shed [sic] today **hunt you and your generations**. You made so many Nigerians **mourn** today, you will mourn all your life The voice of the people is the voice of God (-hap./inscribed).

C788   **Shame on you** INEC chairman shame (-hap./inscribed).

C899   What you did to Nigerians, **peace shall depart** from u [sic] & ur [sic] household. (sat./inscribed)

C807   This present INEC should **cover their heads in shame**. (-sat./invoked). a President... [sic] What you did to us,we'll never forget...that bribe u eat[sic] to rig this election **ga asa gi afo**. [Igbo expression for runny stomach]. (-sat. invoked)

C980   **Shame**! INEC Chairman (-hap./inscribed).

(Bold in the original.)

The majority of the comments categorized under affect show negative emotions of unhappiness, dissatisfaction and disappointment. Thus, such statements are filled with outbursts of cursing, anger, resentment and frustration as shown in the examples above. From the lexical items engaged by speakers above, there is a palpable expression of negative emotions directly communicated through the use of *never*, *may* and *will not*. The phrase, *never* appeared 206, while *may* occur 174 times in the corpus. In other cases of affect below, speakers have deliberately engaged in misspellings as forms of derisive name-calling to semantically reflect the tone of sarcasm and emotions of resentment. A word like INEC is spelled as *Eye-neck*, the name Mamudu, as *Manhood* and *Mamugu.*

C35   At the end, I never knew that **YAKUBU "MAMUGU's"** plan was to make me look like a MUGU (Nigerian slang for the word, 'fool'). Chai! [An Igbo exclamation] I have never ever felt so betrayed, deceived and used like I felt with the outcome of this election… (-hap./inscribed).

C586   **Manhood Yakubu** & ur [sic] dubious colleagues has [sic] perverted justice, you & ur [sic]unborn children shall regret playing with the defenceless masses emotions… (-hap./invoked).

C889   **Eye Neck** May you all not escape the Nigeria that will happen to you and your household Amen. (-hap./invoked).

(Bold and capital letters in the original.)

The deliberation of such misspelling is obvious from the accompanying resentful statements. There is a general implicature of sarcasm, disgust and irritableness of the speakers and anger towards INEC's conduct of the election.

## 7.2   Judgement

Judgement as a typology of attitude has been largely utilized in the corpus to assess the behaviour of discourse actors as right or wrong, evil or good, deserving of punishment or praiseworthy. Judgement is subdivided into "social esteem" and "social sanction". Judgement of social esteem includes: "normality"; how unusual someone is, "capacity"; how capable they are and "tenacity"; how resolute they are. Judgement of sanction includes "veracity"; how truthful someone is, "propriety"; how ethical someone is (Martin/White 2005: 50–52). In the corpus, INEC as an institution and its Chairman are the appraised, while Nigerians are the appraisers. Some recurring evaluative words associated with judgment have been queried in the corpus under "Terms and Reader" to see the contextual usage. These include: *bless, mad, looters, scamming, corrupt, injustice, reward, judge, punish, criminal, biased, wicked, greedy and thief*. These terms have been used to describe INEC or its representatives, such as the chairman. It is important to state that the lexical item *God* which occurred 429 times and ranks second in the corpus has been used with two attributes "retribution" and "appeal" as evaluative terms

introduced in Ononye/Chigbu/Nwankwo (2021) among the judgement category of attitude. It should be noted that these categories of retribution and appeal may be explored under the "propriety" division of judgment of social sanction which is concerned with how ethical someone is. It is obvious that the invocation of God as an appeal to intervene in the perceived wrongs INEC has committed or inviting God as a supreme and powerful being greater than INEC to avenge, judge and punish them indicates that INEC is perceived to be flawed; unethical and deserves to be punished. Hence, we shall classify such expressions under (-prop/invoked).

C49     **God go judge una** [sic]. May tears of pain never cease in ur [sic] household. (-prop/invoked)

C51     May **God punish** all of you there. **Senseless people**!!! You think you have won. Never you worry. The end justifies the means… (-prop/invoked, -cap/inscribed)

C58     I didn't vote for hardship! **Oh God! vindicate** me. (-prop/invoked)

C77     INEC Chairman with **419 results** declaration. You formulated your guidelines and protocols and refused to abide by them because of your **avaricious and corrupt tendencies**. (-ver./invoked)

C109    All of you guys are **mad INEC the worst fraud ever**. (-cap/inscribed, -prop/inscribed).

C120    You're a very **wicked man**. **God will judge** you all (-prop/inscribed)

C139    No man is clean in Nigeria until he died [sic]. So far Prof. Yakubu has **done his best**. (+prop/inscribed)

C141    **Horrible INEC** Nigeria **God will question you** and Ur [sic] commission **for rigging and enforcing** Tinubu on us. (-prop/inscribed).

C155    This is **so biased** of INEC to declare someone who obviously cheated his way to the position. (-ver/inscribed)

C265    **Useless INEC** that exchange their rights for money God will surely judge you! (-cap./inscribed)

C495    You guys are **all failures** (-cap./inscribed)

C650    **Evil and corrupt INEC Chairman**, don't worry nemesis will catch up with you all.... (-prop/inscribed)

C709    We voted our choice, **you selected your choice. #inecdecides** (-prop/inscribed).

C714    Una no serious [sic]. **Worse inec chairman ever** with a touch of **ma\*\*\*dnx** [sic]. (-cap/inscribed)

C887    **Nonsense...** Stomach infrastructure set of people (-cap./inscribed)

C879    Congratulations INEC 4 [sic] **Imposing** a so called president-elect ...All INEC staffs [sic] clap 4 ur sef [sic]. (-prop./inscribed)

<div align="right">(Bold in the original.)</div>

From the comment samples above, it can be deduced that many of the reactions under the judgement categories consist of "-propriety" and "-capacity", mostly inscribed because they are directly stated. Attributes given to INEC and its chairman which are highlighted in the excerpts above include: *thief, people with avaricious and corrupt tendencies, mad INEC*, *worst fraud ever, wicked, mad people, horrible INEC, useless INEC, biased* and *imposing*. These qualities project negative perceptions of INEC as an institution and the INEC chairman as a corrupt and flawed character. Ethically, INEC as an electoral body should not be associated with fraud, biases and evil. In a situation where this happens, it implicates INEC as being unethical and compromised and the electoral process flawed. Further, its description as *mad* communicates that the body lacks the capacity and the decorum to psychologically coordinate a free and fair election. Other commentaries which portray INEC as not being truthful, include: INEC

Chairman with "419 results" declaration. The expression, 419 is a popular Nigerian slang that ascribes a person as dubious, untrustworthy and deceitful. INEC is described in the comments as lacking veracity as a body.

## 7.3    Appreciation

This sub-category of attitude deals with the rightness or wrongness of a process, object, or state of affairs. It is the appreciation of artefacts and processes (cf. Bednerek 2006; White 2015). Appreciation may be further categorized into three; "valuation", which assesses the worth of a phenomenon or process; "reaction" assesses the impact, while "composition" examines the complexity of a process. Therefore, in this section, our focus is to explore both the positive and negative samples from the corpus which assess the 2023 Nigeria Presidential electoral process as being right or wrong. To achieve this, certain evaluative lexical entities from the Terms tool were queried in the Reader tool to investigate the lexical context of use. These include: *good*, *commend*, *worst*, *excellent*, *well done*, *scam*, *play*, *useless*, *robbery*, *nonsense*, and so on.

C16     Congratulations your excellency, INEC **I commend** your job. (+val./inscribed).
C145    Congratulations Sir, you have **done well** May God bless you for this good work. (+val./inscribed).
C152    **Good job** to INEC Chairman. (+val./inscribed).
C190    Congratulations INEC Nigeria. You did **a good job**. (+val./inscribed).
C13     This is **the worst election ever** conducted in the history of Nigeria (-rea/inscribed).
C140.   This institution is such an embarrassment to our country and Africa as a whole. However, this time is not going to be as usual, we won't take **this nonsense** you have just conducted. (-val./inscribed).
C303    To all whom I encouraged to get PVC and to vote, I'm sorry. The whole package was **a scam** after all. (-val./inscribed).
C482    The inec chairman and his cohorts, God will judge you all. **Dey play** [sic] soon devil will kiss you people. (-val./invoked).
C702    **Day light robbery**. I wonder how you all sleep at night with such wickedness and craftiness from so call [sic] elders. (-rea./inscribed).
C814    **Daylight robbery,** the most corrupt body in Nigeria (-rea./inscribed).

(Bold in the original.)

The 2023 Nigerian Presidential election has elicited varied emotional reactions from speakers, ranging from positive commendation of the electoral process by C16 to C190 as *good job*, *done well*, *commend* and *good work*, to the explicit condemnation of the entire process by C13 to C814 as *worst election ever*, *massive rigging*, *play*, *daylight robbery*, *scam* and *this nonsense*. The various ways speakers have described the event indicate the predominant overwhelming emotional state of the speech.

## 8    The visual analysis of the corpus

The visualization of data in qualitative research makes the data come to life and helps the researcher interact personally with the text via the visual patterns found in the corpus. Hence, this section is basically for the visualizations of the data and the close readings of the patterns thus discovered**.**
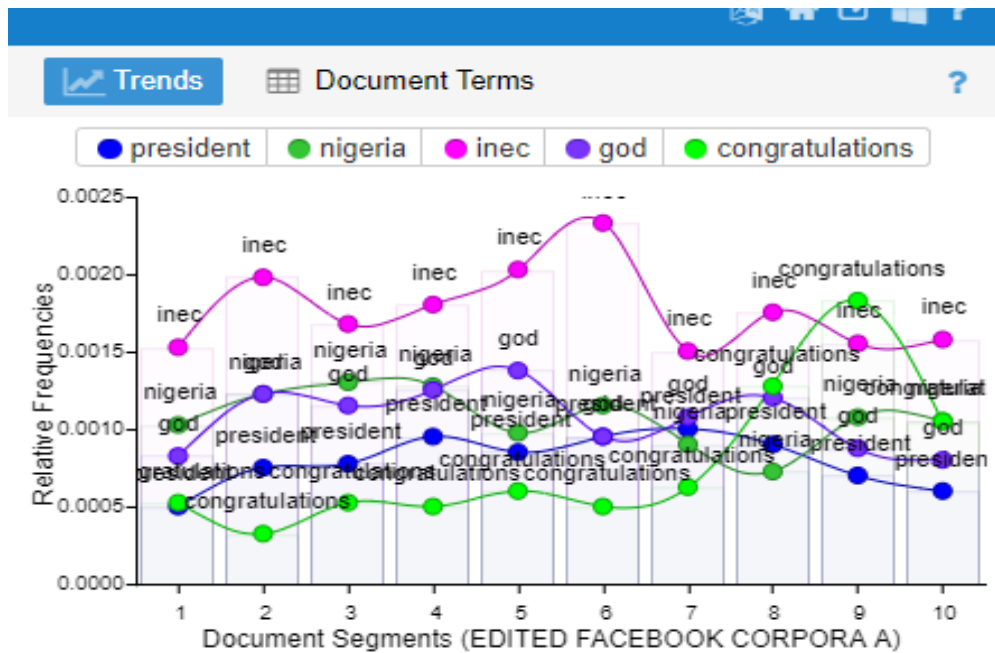
**Figure 2: Trends showing the five most frequent terms and the relative frequencies**

The trends show the graph of the five most frequent terms in the corpus, which are (number of occurences in brackets): INEC (708) god (429) Nigeria (428) president (319), and congratulations (310). The "frequency" emphasizes the focus of the corpus (cf. Hyland 2005; Scott 1999). From the graph, the main focus of the corpus is on the outlined words; *INEC*, *god*, *President*, *Nigeria* and *congratulations*. INEC is the most ranked entity which is not intercepted by other entities, except towards the right margin of the Trends where it is eventually intersected by the phrase, "congratulations". This may point to the realization that there is heightened, emphatical, emotional attachment to the mentions of INEC as the institution that determined the final outcome of the 2023 Nigeria Presidential election. The emotions consist of both positive and negative perspectivization of INEC, which many respondents emphasized. Perhaps, because they feel the institution did not measure up to the election standard it promised; from the use of BVAs and failure to transmit the voting in real time on the INEC portal, to various unresolved complaints from party agents and voters on result manipulations and irregularities (cf. Hoffmann 2023; Nigerian Civil Society Situationroom 2023). Further, a close examination of the Trends shows the intersections of the named entity, *god* with *Nigeria*, and *President*. The latter entities are also the collocates of INEC in the corpus. *God* anks second in the Corpus and has been mostly deployed to invoke retribution, appeal or invoke curses or blessings, as judgement forms towards INEC or persons representing INEC.
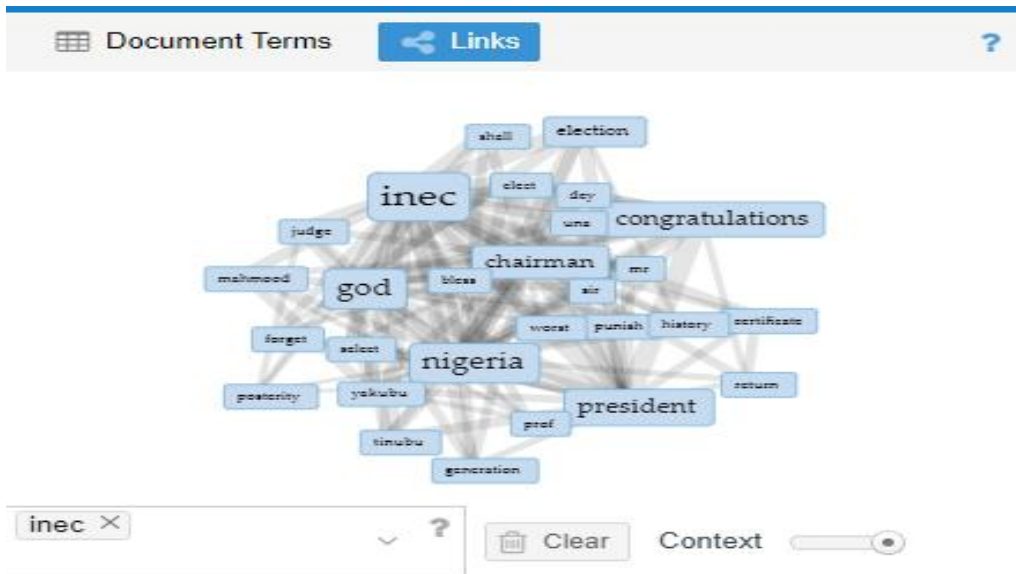
**Figure 3: The Links**

The pictorial diagram of the Links above was scaled by 30 in context and queried with the phrase "INEC". The Links show the discourse environment in which the salient terms co-occur with other terms. From the visualization of the links, the most ranked lexical item, *INEC*, which occurred 708 times in the corpus is surrounded by a network of contextually interlinked terms engaged in the discourse. It may be used to deduce how the speakers connect the institution INEC to specific personalities whom they deem to be the main actors behind INEC in the election. Such identifications and actor linkage are for two purposes, to blame, pass judgments, retributions and other negative emotions or to appreciate, praise or congratulate such actors, which shows positive judgment. Looking at the Links diagram above, the lexical items used by speakers can be categorized into two; name entities and deictic that mention the discourse actors, e. g. *INEC*, *una*, *Mahmood*, *Yakubu*, *President*, *Sir* and evaluative terms that link the actors to the sentiments of the speakers, e. g. *worst*, *bless*, *select*, *elect*, and *judge*. These are verbs and adjectives that either describe the conduct of the election or express an affective stance towards the electoral actors.

| Actor-Related Collocates | | | Religious-Oriented Collocates | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Term** | **Collocate** | **Count** | **Term** | **Collocate** | **Count** |
| *Inec* | *Chairman* | 226 | *inec* | *god* | 77 |
| *Inec* | *Nigeria* | 135 | *god* | *inec* | 71 |
| *Inec* | *President* | 83 | *god* | *punish* | 64 |
| *President* | *Inec* | 72 | *god* | *judge* | 56 |
| *Inec* | *Inec* | 61 | *nigeria* | *god* | 48 |
| *Nigeria* | *Inec* | 60 | *god* | *nigeria* | 40 |
| *president* | *President* | 52 | *god* | *bless* | 39 |
| *Nigeria* | *President* | 44 | *god* | *congratulations* | 38 |
| *Chairman* | *Inec* | 39 | *congratulations* | *god* | 38 |
| *Inec* | *tinubu* | 37 | *god* | *god* | 33 |
| *President* | *Nigeria* | 36 | *god* | *watching* | 28 |

| Term | Collocate | Count | | Term | Collocate | Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *President* | *Tinubu* | 33 | | *chairman* | *God* | 26 |
| *Nigeria* | *Election* | 29 | | *god* | *una* | 25 |
| *Inec* | *Nigerians* | 28 | | *god* | *president* | 24 |
| *Nigerians* | *Inec* | 28 | | *president* | *god* | 24 |
| *Election* | *Nigeria* | 27 | | *people* | *god* | 23 |
| *people* | *Inec* | 26 | | *god* | *people* | 2 |
| *Election* | *Inec* | 23 | | *god* | *almighty* | 20 |
| *Inec* | *People* | 22 | | *god* | *chairman* | 18 |
| *Nigeria* | *Nigeria* | 22 | | *god* | *help* | 15 |
| *Inec* | *Election* | 22 | | *god* | *wrath* | 14 |
| *President* | *Chairman* | 21 | | *god* | *ur* | 14 |
| *Chairman* | *President* | 21 | | *god* | *surely* | 13 |
| *Inec* | *just* | 20 | | *god* | *dey* | 13 |
| *Nigeria* | *chairman* | 20 | | *god* | *just* | 12 |
| *Congratulations* | *mr* | 20 | | *Nigerians* | *god* | 11 |
| *Inec* | *yakubu* | 19 | | *god* | *sir* | 10 |
| *Inec* | *sir* | 19 | | *god* | *nigerians* | 10 |
| *Inec* | *job* | 19 | | *god* | *mahmood* | 10 |
| *Nigeria history* | *history* | 19 | | *election* | *god* | 10 |
| *Chairman* | *yakubu* | 18 | | | | |
| *Country* | *inec* | 18 | | | | |
| *Inec* | *una* | 17 | | | | |
| *President* | *obi* | 17 | | | | |
| *Chairman* | *sir* | 17 | | | | |
| *Chairman* | *nigeria* | 17 | | | | |
| *President* | *peter* | 16 | | | | |
| *chairman* | *nigerians* | 16 | | | | |
| *Inec* | *mahmood* | 15 | | | | |
| *Inec* | *country* | 15 | | | | |
| *Inec* | *certificate* | 15 | | | | |

**Speaker-Evaluative Collocates**

| Term | Collocate | Count |
|---|---|---|
| *President* | *elect* | 80 |
| *Congratulations* | *president* | 68 |
| *President* | *congratulations* | 65 |
| *Congratulations* | *inec* | 65 |
| *Congrats* | *congrats* | 64 |
| *Inec* | *congratulations* | 62 |
| *Congratulations* | *sir* | 54 |
| *President* | *select* | 37 |
| *Nigeria* | *congratulations* | 34 |
| *Congratulations* | *nigeria* | 33 |
| *Inec* | *Shame* | 26 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Congratulations* | *elect* | 26 |
| *Inec* | *Good* | 19 |
| *Inec* | *Thank* | 18 |
| *Inec* | *know* | 18 |
| *Inec* | *judge* | 17 |
| *President* | *Selected* | 16 |
| *Congratulations* | *tinubu* | 16 |
| *Chairman* | *congratulations* | 16 |
| *Election* | *Free* | 16 |
| *Inec* | *Punish* | 15 |
| *Inec* | *elect* | 22 |
| *Congratulations* | *Chairman* | 15 |
| *Congratulations* | *Asiwaju* | 15 |
| *Inec* | *select* | 14 |
| *President* | *elected* | 14 |
| *congratulations* | *Una* | 14 |
| *Congratulations* | *Jagaban* | 14 |
| *Inec* | *Selected* | 12 |
| *Inec* | *Bless* | 12 |
| *Inec* | *Apc* | 12 |
| *Nigeria* | *Worst* | 12 |
| *Nigeria* | *Judge* | 12 |
| *Congratulations* | *Ur* | 12 |
| *congratulations* | *nigerians* | 12 |
| *election* | *rig* | 12 |
| *Inec* | *Choice* | 11 |
| *Congratulations* | *Vote* | 11 |
| *Congratulations* | *excellency* | 11 |
| *Congratulations* | *Bola* | 11 |
| *Chairman* | *Judge* | 11 |

**Table 1: Collocates**

## 8.1 Collocates analysis

The 2023 INEC election corpus contains 7,465 contexts with collocates recurring up to six times in the data. Samples of the first most frequent collocates, occurring about 11 times are categorized in Table 1. above, consisting of about 110 collocates. Collocates are pairs of words that often co-occur in a semantic environment. Udoumoh (2023: 105) notes that collocates comprise the amalgams of words with a unique blend that are grammatically, semantically and contextually compatible, often occurring repeatedly together in a text. A close reading of collocative terms in discourse reveals the semantic prosody. Collocations unveil the salient attitude speakers have towards a given discourse and its actors (cf. Baker 2006). Such attitudes may be positive, negative or neutral (cf. Aluthman 2018). As instantiated from the lists of collocates in the corpus, a close reading reveals the thematic patterns recurring in the collocations found in

the corpus. Hence, the collocates have been categorized into three. First, the actor-related collocates; second, the religious-oriented collocates and third, the speaker-evaluative collocates. The actor-related collocates mainly comprise nouns, which nominate the perceived discourse actors by the speakers. It is obvious from the table above that the emphasis of the actor-related mentions is INEC. For instance: *inec chairman*, *inec Nigeria*, *inec president,* and *inec inec*. Such mentions are not unconnected to the overwhelming emotions arising from the speakers' positive or negative cognitions about the role INEC played in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential elections. On the other hand, the religious-oriented collocates emphasize God as a supreme deity, who is above all for appeals; *inec god*, *god inec*, *retributions; god judge*, *god punish* or *for the invocation of goodwill*; *god bless*, *god congratulations*. The third category; the speaker-evaluative collocate is dominated by antonymous words that project certain ironically polarized ideological evaluations of the conduct of the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election. For instance, the collocates; *president-elect*, and *president elected*, which semantically communicate a meritorious election victory are at polarity with the collocates; *president select*, *inec elect*, and *inec select*, which portray the election as manipulated by INEC. Another instance is the collocates; *congratulations president*, and *president congratulations* are antonymously opposed to, *inec congratulations*, and *congratulations inec*, which convey a tone of sarcasm. This is because INEC did not contest the election, nor did INEC win the election. INEC ought to be incorruptible; a non-partisan body and hence, should not be congratulated.
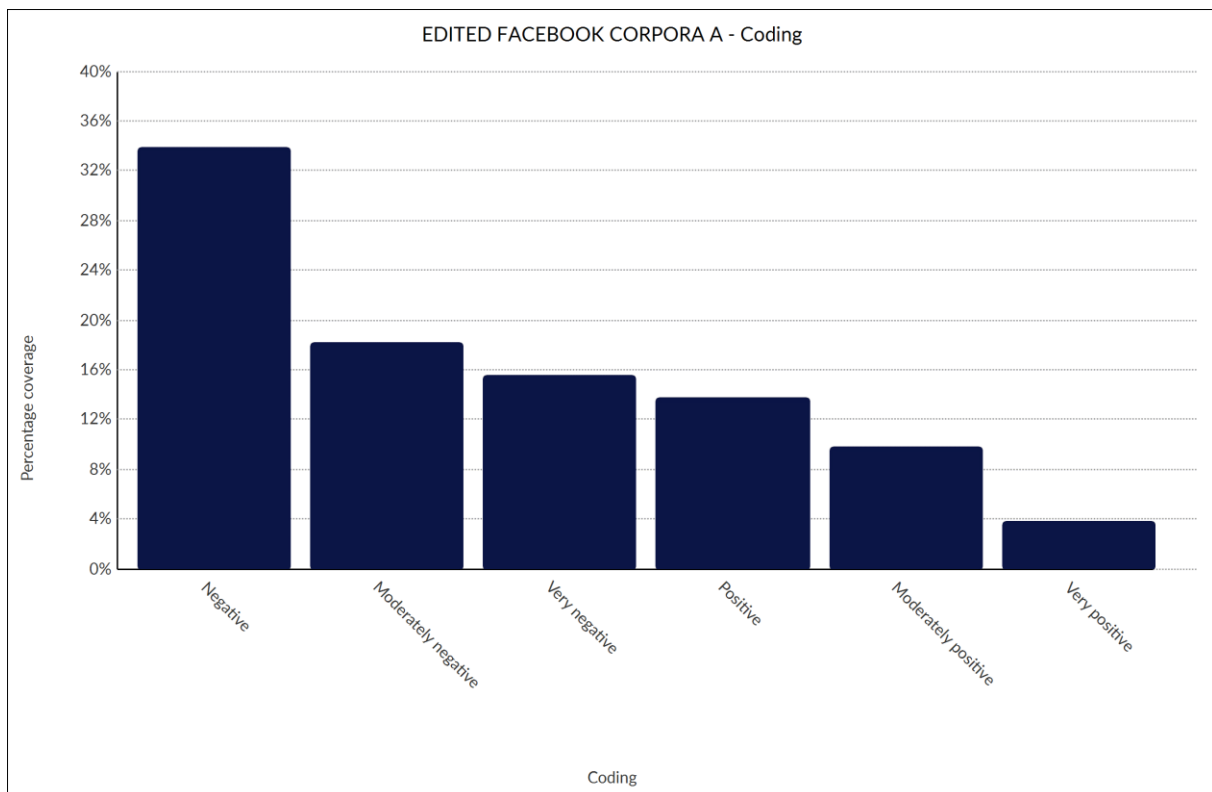


**Figure 4: Sentiment Percentage Coding**

The figure above shows attitude percentage coding. Negative attitude ranks highest with 33.84%, Moderately Negative ranks 2nd with 18.24%, Very Negative, 3rd with 15.61% while Positive attitude ranks 4th, Moderately Positive, 5th and Very Positive, 6th with 13.75%, 9.86% and 3.89% respectively.

**Figure 5: The dreamscape**

## 9      The dreamscape of spatial locations in the discourse

The dreamscape captures the spatiality mentioned in the discourse which is not unconnected to the sentiments and biases of some respondents towards the conduct of the electoral process by INEC and other related elements. Some of the geographical locations mentioned in the corpus include: Lagos, Bauchi, Gombe, Kano, Abuja and Borno. Some respondents also made references to the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, as well as religious affiliations. A scrutiny of the contexts of the mentions in the corpus reveals some vital clues. First, it points to the fact that most of the regions mentioned are Muslim-predominated areas in Nigeria. It is also vital to note that the supposed winners of the 2023 Presidential election; President Tinubu and his Vice, Mallam Shettima are both Muslims. While Tinubu is from Lagos, Shettima is from Borno State, as well as the INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, a Muslim and a Northerner from Bauchi State. These are reflected in some reactions and may have whipped up positive or negative sentiments.

C79      MKO ABIOLA will rejoice in heaven because Jagaban has re-write [sic] the history of 1993 election. **MKO ABIOLA a Muslim from Ogun choose a Vice Baba Gana Kingibe a Muslim from Borno**. I believe this congratulation shouldn't just go to Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu but to the **entire Yorubas** and the **people of Borno** as a whole. Because history has re-writeit self to reclaim the victory of the June 12, 1993.

C582    **Muslim Muslim tickets finally pays.** Congratulations, Malam Tinubu and Malam Kashim

C768    Alhamdulillah (An Arabic word, which means, 'praise be to God') **Muslim Muslim ticket activated.**

C567    U [sic] will reap the fruit of ur bad deed. God is still on the throne. This man needs [sic] 8yrs recovered from the money he has spend u [sic] people will suffered [sic] for another 8yrs for **selling Nigeria to Muslim Muslim ticket** Oh! God.

C678    This would be my first and last time voting. **Since Nigeria forbids an Igbo man to be the president** even when he won? **Yoruba and Hausa** should continue rotating this position?

(Bold and capital letters in the original.)

## 10     Conclusion

The general findings of this research reveal that both the distant reading method of data visualizations and the close reading technique of a painstaking analysis of the data, engaging a theoretical framework, complement each other. The study adds methodologically by demonstrating how close reading can be done using distant reading tools as explored in the work, deploying the Appraisal Theory and Voyant Tools. Particularly, the use of the Links, Trends, Collocates, and the Dream Scape reveals the foci of the corpus and the implicit and explicit types of emotions embedded in the data. The Collocates give relevant insight into the varied categories of the corpus themes. Three collocate types were discovered; the actor-related collocates; the religious-oriented collocates and the speaker-evaluative collocates. The analysis of the Dream Scape indicates that some sentiments expressed by some speakers are not unconnected to religious, tribal and ethnic (dis)affiliations to the political actors mentioned in the discourse. Further findings of the work show that the respondents predominantly expressed negative emotions of unhappiness and dissatisfaction as Affect typology towards INEC for the conduct of the election while deploring retribution and appeal as Judgment forms to invoke punishment on INEC for allegedly failing to conduct a free and fair election. This is further complimented by the sentiment coding percentage run with Nvivo, which shows that negative attitude predominates the reactions analyzed.

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