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**A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CRISIS-MANAGEMENT SPEECHES BY PRESIDENT
TINUBU**

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Abstract

Political leaders speaking under crisis conditions must simultaneously console an anxious public, assert command over unpredictable events, and justify the decisions they have taken. This paper adopts the Aristotelian triad as its central analytical framework, in analysing two exigent addresses delivered by Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu: the July 2023 national broadcast explaining the removal of the fuel subsidy, and the August 2024 address responding to the nationwide #EndBadGovernance protests. The study examines how the President, across the two texts, balances empathy, authority and logic, using a qualitative, content analysis of seventeen (17) purposively selected excerpts. The study finds that Tinubu's crisis rhetoric is anchored primarily on ethos and logos constitutional authority and cited economic statistics with pathos deployed briefly at the opening of an address before authority and justification take over. This pattern departs from the pathos-first sequencing that crisis-communication scholarship associates with effective acknowledgement of public suffering, a divergence that helps explain why the #EndBadGovernance protests continued despite the President's appeal.

Keywords: Aristotelian Triad; Bola Ahmed Tinubu Crisis Communication;; Political Discourse; Rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

When a nation faces economic hardship or civil unrest, citizens look up to their president for words that console the afflicted, assert control over the instruments of state actors, and offer a coherent account of why hardship is necessary and how it would end. These three functions correspond to what Aristotle identified as the three-principal means of persuasion: pathos (i.e., the appeal to emotion), ethos (i.e., the appeal to the speaker's character and authority), and logos (i.e., the appeal to reason) (Aristotle, 2007). The rhetorical challenge for any crisis leader is to hold these three appeals in balance: too much empathy without authority risks appearing weak; too much authority without empathy risks appearing indifferent to suffering; and too much argument without emotional acknowledgement risks appearing cold.

Nigeria, as a heterogeneous society, offers a demanding setting for this balancing act. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious federation of more than two hundred million people, a presidential address that leans too heavily on one appeal at the expense of the others risks deepening resentment rather than addressing it. President Tinubu assumed office on 29th May, 2023 on a mandate immediately tested by two overlapping shocks: the removal of the petrol subsidy and the unification of the foreign-exchange market, which together produced the sharpest cost-of-living crisis in a generation, and the nationwide #EndBadGovernance protests of August 2024, in which economic grievance spilled into civil unrest and, in several states, violence and the loss of life (Udousoro, Daniel, & Iton, 2024). Tinubu addressed the nation directly on both occasions. These two speeches form the corpus for this study.

This paper departs from earlier comparative works carried out by (Balogun, 2026) that examined how successive Nigerian presidents balance pathos, ethos, and logos, and instead concentrates the analysis on a single president across two distinct exigent moments of his own tenure. Narrowing the focus in this way enables the researcher to determine whether rhetorical strategies shift when the crisis is purely economic as opposed to when economic grievance has escalated into civil unrest, and in what order does he deploy empathy, authority, and reason within a single address? Rather than surveying several theoretical models, the study deliberately restricts itself to a single, well-established analytical lens using Aristotle's rhetorical triad applied consistently and in depth across both texts, a methodological choice explained further in the Methodology section below. The question matters beyond the two speeches themselves. Presidential crisis speech is not merely descriptive of government actions; it is one of the few

instruments available to a leader for shaping how citizens interpret hardship and unrest, and for signalling whether their grievances have been heard before policy is defended. A president who is perceived to move too quickly from acknowledgement to self-justification risks compounding the very unrest a crisis address is meant to calm, while one who dwells on empathy without asserting authority or offering a reasoned account of the way forward risks appearing unable to govern. Understanding how a sitting Nigerian president actually distributes and sequences these appeals, rather than how crisis-communication theory suggests, has practical relevance for political communication practice in Nigeria and in comparable multi-ethnic federations facing recurrent economic and security shocks, in addition to its contributions to the scholarly literature on Aristotelian rhetoric in African political discourse. To this end, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1: How does President Tinubu distribute pathos, ethos, and logos within a purely economic crisis address as compared with a hybrid economic-and-security crisis address?
- 2: What sequential pattern of pathos, ethos, and logos characterises each address, and how does that sequence compare with the pathos-first ordering recommended in crisis-communication scholarship?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of Nigerian discourse-analytic scholarship has examined President Tinubu's major addresses, though none of these works has applied Aristotle's triad specifically to a comparison of his civil-unrest crisis rhetoric (Abbas, 2026). Badmus and Kilani (2024), applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis to Tinubu's May 2023 inaugural speech, found out that the speech address was structured organised around themes of optimism, unity, and developmental ideology, with the President's 'Renewed Hope' mantra functioning as a recurring legitimizing device. Their analysis, however, is confined to ideological construction and stops falls short of asking how the speech distributes emotional, authoritative, and evidentiary appeals - a gap the present study's Aristotelian framework fills. In the same vein, Ejiro, Oghenoro, and Nyarks (2025) reached a similar conclusion in their discourse analysis of the same inaugural address, additionally noting the deployment of emotional and religious appeals alongside an emphasis on diplomacy and international cooperation; like Badmus and Kilani (2024), their study is thematic rather than appeal-specific, and neither engages with an address delivered under crisis conditions.

In reference to crisis-response rhetoric, Adelabu (2024) applied critical discourse analysis to Tinubu's national broadcast on the country's economic challenges the same broadcast examined in the present study and found out that the address attributed the crisis to the historic misappropriation of subsidy funds, thereby reinforcing existing power relations, while using affirmative, hope-oriented language and metaphor to project both short-term and long-term relief. The study thus leaves open the question of how much of that 'hopeful' register is attributable to pathos as opposed to ethos-driven reassurance or logos-driven projection. Most directly relevant is Stephen and Uge (2025), who conducted a paragraph-level and sentence-level analysis of Tinubu's #EndBadGovernance address using Johnstone and Andrus¹ (2024) discourse-strategy framework. They report that presentational persuasive strategy appeared in thirty-three of the address's thirty-eight paragraphs and eighty-two of its ninety-six sentences, while logos appeared in thirteen paragraphs and fifty-two sentences; they conclude that despite this dense deployment of rhetorical strategy, the protests continued largely unabated, which they attribute to the address's reliance on enthymemes that presupposed audience agreement which the protesters did not, in fact, share. Their quantitative counts provide a useful external check on the present study's qualitative classification of the same address, discussed further

below. A comparative context for Nigerian presidential crisis rhetoric is provided by Eniayo, Taiwo, and Moshood (2025), who analysed President Muhammadu Buhari's addresses on the 2020 #EndSARS protests using the same Aristotelian triad and discovered that Buhari's addresses combined persuasive strategies across all three appeals to perform distinct crisis-management functions. Although their study confirms the persuasive potency of the triad, especially in Nigerian crisis communication, it examines a different president and a single crisis type, so it does not confirm whether a leader's balance of the three appeals shifts as the crisis escalates; the specific question this paper asks of Tinubu. Taken together, this literature establishes that President Tinubu's speeches have been studied from different theoretical lens. What remains absent is a study that places two of Tinubu's own exigent addresses within the specific analytic frame of Aristotle's triad, and then asks how the balance and sequencing of pathos, ethos, and logos differs when a purely economic shock escalates into civil unrest. Existing studies of Tinubu's rhetoric are, individually, methodologically rich but analytically narrow: critical discourse analyses foreground ideology and power (Badmus & Kilani, 2024; Ejoro et al., 2025); the CDA study of the economic broadcast foregrounds register and framing without appeal-level classification (Adelabu *et al.*, 2024); and the rhetorical-strategy study of the #EndBadGovernance address foregrounds technique and audience effect without a comparative economic-crisis baseline (Stephen & Uge, 2025). None combines the Aristotelian triad with an explicit within-president comparison across two different crisis types. Without such a comparison, it is difficult to say whether Tinubu's rhetorical strategy is a fixed personal style or a context-sensitive response that shifts as a crisis escalates from economic hardship to civil unrest. This is precisely the gap the present study fills: this might be the first, to the researchers' knowledge, to apply a single, consistent Aristotelian coding scheme across two exigent addresses by the same Nigerian president, enabling a within-subject comparison that the existing literature spread across different presidents, different speeches, and different frameworks cannot offer. Beyond the Nigeria-specific literature reviewed above, the broader crisis-communication tradition on which this study also draws treats acknowledgement of suffering as a precondition for the effectiveness of any subsequent authority claim or policy justification. Seeger (2006), synthesising an expert panel on best practice in crisis communication, argues that the public judge a leader's credibility partly on whether emotional acknowledgement precedes, rather than follows, explanation and self-defence in his/her speech in response to crisis situation; a sequencing claim this study treats not as a second theoretical model to be applied alongside

Aristotle's triad, but as an external, non-Aristotelian benchmark against which the two addresses can be evaluated in the discussion section.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Aristotle's rhetorical triad as its sole primary analytical lens, without preference for combining it with additional discourse-analytic or pragmatic frameworks. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified three 'artistic proofs' available to a speaker: *pathos*, an appeal to the emotional state of the audience; *ethos*, an appeal grounded in the credibility, competence, and goodwill of the speaker; and *logos*, an appeal built on evidence, causal reasoning, and argument (Aristotle, 2007). Aristotle treated the three appeals as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive, with the most persuasive discourse weaving all three together rather than relying on any single mode. Fahnestock (2011) extends this classical account by showing how the stylistic realisation of an appeal: word choice, sentence rhythm, figurative language can itself be evidence of which appeal a passage is primarily performing; this stylistic sensitivity informs the sentence-level coding used here. Restricting the analysis to a single, internally coherent framework, rather than layering the triad onto a second or third theoretical model, keeps the coding scheme consistent across both addresses and makes the resulting comparison more tractable within the scope of a single study. † Seeger (2006) sequencing benchmark introduced above is deliberately excluded from this coding frame and is instead applied only afterwards, in the discussion, as an interpretive yardstick for the pattern the Aristotelian coding reveals, preserving the triad's status as the study's only analytical model while still allowing its findings to be evaluated against an established standard of crisis-communication practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), in which Aristotle's triad supplies the initial coding categories and the analysis remains open to sub-categories: presentational persuasion, enthymeme, quasilogical argument, metaphor that emerge from the text itself, following Johnstone and Andrus (2024). The corpus comprises two addresses by President Tinubu: (a) the National Broadcast on the removal of the fuel subsidy and the current economic challenges, delivered in July 2023 and previously examined by Adelabu et al. (2024); and (b) the address to the nation on the #EndBadGovernance protests, delivered on 4 August 2024 and archived in full by The Cable (2024). The unit of analysis is the paragraph, with

illustrative excerpts drawn at the sentence level and coded for primary rhetorical appeal: ethos, pathos, or logos.

A total of seventeen excerpts were selected purposively for close analysis across the two addresses: nine from the #EndBadGovernance address (three each illustrating pathos, ethos, and logos) and eight from the economic broadcast (one illustrating pathos, three illustrating ethos, and four illustrating logos). Excerpts were purposively selected through a close reading of the full transcript of each address against three inclusion criteria: (i) the passage contained language identifiable as a primary rhetorical appeal under Aristotle's (2007) definitions of pathos, ethos, and logos; (ii) the passage was self-contained enough to be coded and interpreted independently of its surrounding text; and (iii) where a passage had already been flagged as illustrative in prior studies of the same speeches (Adelabu et al., 2024; Stephen & Uge, 2025), it was cross-checked for consistency of appeal-classifications with those studies. Each address was read independently twice by the researchers, and passages on which the initial appeal-classifications diverged were resolved through discussion before the final excerpt set reported in Table 1 was fixed.

DATA PRESENTATION

In line with the study's content-analytical design, the full set of excerpts selected for analysis is presented in Table 1 before the detailed discussion that follows, with each excerpt numbered, its source address identified, and the rhetorical appeal it primarily illustrates indicated alongside it. This organisation is intended to improve the clarity of the study and to enable readers to identify at a glance the data being discussed in the subsequent, appeal-by-appeal analysis.

Table 1 Excerpts Analysed, by Source Address and Rhetorical Appeal

No.	Source Address	Appeal	Excerpt (abridged)
1	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Pathos	I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility, aware of the turmoil and violent protests unleashed in some of our states.
2	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Pathos	I am especially pained by the loss of lives in Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna and other states...
3	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Pathos	I commiserate with the families and relations of those who have died in the protests...
4	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Pathos	I understand the hardship you face....

5	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Ethos	As President of this country, I must ensure public order. In line with my constitutional oath...
6	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Ethos	...I hereby enjoin protesters and the organisers to suspend any further protest and create room for dialogue...
7	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Ethos	My vision for our country is one of a just and prosperous nation...
8	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Ethos	I had promised to reform the economy for the long-term good by fighting the major imbalances...
9	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Ethos	What I can offer in the immediate is to reduce the burden our current economic situation has imposed on all of us...
10	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Ethos	Earlier this month, I signed four (4) Executive Orders in keeping with my electoral promise...
11	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Logos	...our country spent 97% of all our revenue on debt service; we have been able to reduce that to 68%...
12	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Logos	We have also cleared legitimate outstanding foreign exchange obligations of about \$5 billion...
13	#EndBadGovernance (4 Aug 2024)	Logos	...45.6 billion Naira has already been processed for payment to students and their respective institutions.
14	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Logos	We are going to energise [the MSME] sector with N125 billion.
15	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Logos	...we will spend N50 billion on Conditional Grant to 1 million nano businesses between now and March 2024.
16	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Logos	We are also providing 225,000 metric tonnes of fertilizer, seedlings and other inputs to farmers...
17	National Broadcast on Economic Challenges (Jul 2023)	Logos	Our administration will invest N50 billion each to cultivate 150,000 hectares of rice and maize.

The excerpts in Table 1 have been then presented and analysed qualitatively according to the thematic preoccupation of each of the three appeals, and, within each appeal, according to the address in which it occurs. This design allows the researcher to examine how the selected leader weaponises pathos, ethos, and logos to navigate crisis and to balance empathy, authority, and face management, before turning, in the subsequent sub-section, to the order in which the three appeals unfold across each address.

DATA ANALYSIS

Below is the analysis and discussions of the sampled excerpts across the three appeals in each of the selected texts in response to the questions raised.

Pathos: Acknowledging Suffering

Pathos is about touching the audience's feelings to make them care. It seeks to persuade by creating an emotional response such as pity, anger, fear, joy, or sadness. The goal is to make people feel something strong so that they agree, since humans usually make decisions based on emotions and not just facts: a person made to feel sad about a problem is more likely to want to fix it. In the context of this research, excerpts numbered 1–4 in Table 1 illustrate how the President weaponises this appeal, alongside the other two, to navigate crisis and to balance empathy and authority. The #EndBadGovernance address opens not with policy but with feeling. Tinubu tells the nation that he speaks 'with a heavy heart,' aware of the 'turmoil and violent protests' unfolding across several states, and that he is 'especially pained' by the loss of life in Borno, Jigawa, Kano, and Kaduna (Excerpts 1–3). The vivid, affective vocabulary of these opening paragraphs is designed to invoke pity, shared grief, and solidarity before any policy defence is attempted precisely the acknowledgement-first move that crisis-communication scholarship treats as best practice (Seeger, 2006). Notably, however, this pathos is confined almost entirely to the address's first four paragraphs;

Ethos: Asserting Authority

Ethos, as a persuasive appeal, has to do with building trust through character, credibility, and authority. The audience must believe that the speaker is a person of good sense, good moral character, and goodwill that he or she is credible, ethical, and has the audience's best interest at heart. Ethos is usually built into a discourse by demonstrating expertise and competence, establishing good moral character and integrity, displaying goodwill towards the audience, and appearing balanced and reasonable; Excerpts 5–10 in Table 1 illustrate this appeal across the two addresses.

Ethos is the appeal on which both addresses ultimately rest. In the #EndBadGovernance address, Tinubu moves quickly from emotional acknowledgement to a direct assertion of constitutional authority: 'As President of this country, I must ensure public order,' invoking his 'constitutional oath to protect the lives and property of every citizen' as the basis for the government's refusal to 'stand idly by' (Excerpt 5). This is reinforced later in the address by a second ethos strategy the

citation of concrete government achievements, such as the ₦45.6 billion already disbursed through the student loan scheme, offered as evidence of goodwill toward the very youth demographic driving the protests (Excerpts 6–7). The economic broadcast establishes ethos differently: rather than invoking constitutional authority to justify a security response, it uses the language of painful but necessary stewardship, presenting subsidy removal as a decision only a leader with the nation's long-term interest at heart would take (Excerpts 8–10).

Logos: Justifying the Decision

Logos is a persuasive appeal to logic and reason. It persuades by using evidence, data, facts, and clear, rational reasoning, constructing a logical argument that the audience can follow; it is usually built through facts and statistics, causal reasoning, analogies and examples, and structured argument, and it strengthens arguments by appealing to rational judgement and making persuasion more concrete. Excerpts 11–17 in Table 1 illustrate this appeal.

Both addresses lean heavily on logos, though for different rhetorical ends. In the #EndBadGovernance address, Tinubu explains the subsidy decision through causal reasoning ‘for decades, our economy has remained anaemic... because of many misalignments’ before pivoting to statistical evidence of recovery: aggregate government revenue more than doubling to over ₦9.1 trillion in the first half of 2024 compared with the same period in 2023, foreign-exchange obligations of roughly five billion dollars cleared, and debt-service consuming a falling share of national revenue (Excerpts 11–13).

Sequencing of Appeals

Mapping the order of appeals across the #EndBadGovernance address's thirty-eight paragraphs shows a broadly pathos-then-ethos-then-logos structure: the opening paragraphs (1–4) are dominated by emotional acknowledgement, the middle paragraphs (5–8) pivot to constitutional authority and a call for dialogue, and the remaining two-thirds of the address (9–30) is given over almost entirely to logos-laden claims of economic achievement, before a brief closing return to pathos and unity in the final paragraphs. This sequence loosely matches the acknowledgement-explanation-authority ordering that crisis-communication scholarship recommends (Seeger, 2006), with one important deviation: authority is asserted before the explanatory case is made, rather than after it, and the address then spends far more of its length on logos-driven self-justification than on either of the other two appeals, consistent with RQ1's

finding that pathos is deployed more heavily, if still briefly, once a crisis has produced visible civil unrest and loss of life.

Discussion of Findings

The two addresses suggest that Tinubu's crisis rhetoric is organised around a consistent underlying persona: a self-styled steward whose authority rests on constitutional office and demonstrable economic stewardship, who opens with brief emotional acknowledgement when the crisis involves visible unrest, and who then devotes the bulk of an address to logos-driven justification of decisions already taken. This is broadly consistent with the optimism-and-unity persona identified in Tinubu's inaugural rhetoric by Badmus and Kilani (2024) and Ejiro et al. (2025), suggesting continuity in Tinubu's rhetorical style from inauguration through subsequent crises rather than a style improvised anew for each address. In answer to RQ1, the two addresses therefore differ mainly in the weight given to pathos present but minimal in the purely economic broadcast, and briefly but visibly foregrounded once the crisis had produced unrest and loss of life while ethos and logos dominate both texts regardless of crisis type. In answer to RQ2, both addresses broadly follow a pathos-ethos-logos ordering, but neither sustains the acknowledgement-first, pathos-heavy sequencing that crisis-communication scholarship (Seeger, 2006) associates with defusing public anger; logos, in particular, consumes a disproportionate share of both texts once authority has been asserted.

Therefore, the gap between the recommended pathos-first, sustained-acknowledgement sequence (Seeger, 2006) and the brief-pathos, extended-logos pattern documented here and by Stephen and Uge (2025) offers one rhetorical explanation, among the many political and economic factors at play, for why the #EndBadGovernance address did not achieve its stated goal of ending the protests. A crisis address that moves quickly from acknowledgement to a lengthy defence of policy risks signalling to an aggrieved audience that their grievances have been heard only briefly before being set aside in favour of self-justification.

For political communication practice, the implication is not that ethos and logos should be abandoned constitutional authority and economic evidence remain necessary components of any credible crisis address but that their proportion relative to sustained pathos may need to be reconsidered when a crisis has already produced visible unrest or loss of life. A pathos opening of three or four paragraphs, followed immediately by a pivot to authority and then an extended

run of statistics, risks being read by an aggrieved audience as acknowledgement performed rather than acknowledgement sustained. Speechwriters and communication advisers working on future Nigerian presidential crisis addresses might, on the evidence presented here, consider interleaving brief pathos returns throughout a logos-heavy middle section, rather than confining emotional acknowledgement to the opening and closing paragraphs alone, as a way of narrowing the gap between the sequencing this study observes and the sequencing crisis-communication scholarship recommends.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how President Bola Ahmed Tinubu balances pathos, ethos, and logos across two exigent addresses of his presidency: a purely economic crisis broadcast and a hybrid economic-and-security crisis address. Guided by RQ1 and RQ2, the analysis of seventeen purposively selected excerpts found that ethos and logos dominate both texts, with pathos confined largely to brief opening acknowledgement in the address delivered amid civil unrest, and that both addresses broadly follow a pathos-ethos-logos sequence that nonetheless departs from the sustained, pathos-first ordering recommended in crisis-communication scholarship. This divergence offers one rhetorical explanation, among several political and economic factors, for the limited persuasive success of the #EndBadGovernance address in ending the protests it addressed.

The study makes three contributions to the growing body of scholarship on Nigerian presidential political discourse. First, it offers a focused, single-president comparison across two distinct exigent moments one purely economic, one a hybrid economic-and-security crisis where prior studies have each examined a single Tinubu address or a single president in isolation. Second, it demonstrates, through a restricted single-framework design, that Aristotle's classical triad remains analytically productive for contemporary Nigerian crisis rhetoric when applied consistently and comparatively rather than combined with multiple competing frameworks. Third, by presenting the full set of coded excerpts in a single table before discussion, it offers a transparent, replicable basis on which future researchers can extend, contest, or re-code the classifications reported here.

The study is not without limitations. The corpus is restricted to two addresses by a single president, which limits the generalisability of its findings to Nigerian presidential rhetoric as a whole; the seventeen excerpts analysed, while purposively selected to illustrate each appeal,

represent a subset rather than an exhaustive coding of every paragraph in both addresses; Future research could extend the present framework to a larger corpus of Tinubu's addresses across his tenure, to other Nigerian and West African heads of state facing comparable economic-versus-security crises, or could combine the qualitative excerpt-based approach used here with a fuller quantitative content analysis of appeal-distribution across entire speech corpora. The study contributes a focused, single-president comparison across two distinct exigent moments to the growing body of scholarship on Nigerian presidential political discourse.

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