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# Discursive Strategies as Identity Construction Mechanisms in Selected El-Rufai's 2023 and 2025 Facebook Political Posts

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## *Abstract*

This study investigates the use of discursive strategies as mechanisms for political identity construction in selected Facebook posts by Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai in 2023 and 2025. Drawing on Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and supported by Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, the research explores how El-Rufai deploys language to position himself and others within Nigeria's evolving political landscape. Ten posts (five from each year) were purposively selected based on their relevance to key political events and their density of evaluative content. The analysis focuses on five core DHA strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation. El-Rufai constructs self-identity as a principled reformer and party loyalist through strategic naming and positive attribution, while delegitimising opponents through negative labelling and moral judgement. Argumentation strategies, supported by topoi of history, law, and morality, are used to justify political actions and critique institutional failures. Perspectivisation enables him to present his views as constitutionally and historically grounded. Intensification and mitigation are employed to adjust the emotional and rhetorical force of his claims, reinforcing ideological alignment and moral authority. Overall, the study reveals that El-Rufai's discourse functions as a calculated exercise in identity performance, shaped by political context, ideological positioning, and strategic linguistic choices. The integration of DHA and Appraisal Theory offers a nuanced understanding of how digital political discourse serves as a tool for self-representation and influence.

**Keywords:** political identity, discursive strategies, Discourse-Historical Approach, Appraisal Theory, Nasir El-Rufai, Facebook discourse, Nigerian politics.

## *Introduction*

In the evolving landscape of political communication, the strategic deployment of language has become a powerful tool for identity construction, particularly within digital contexts. Social media platforms, especially Facebook, have transformed from spaces of casual interaction into arenas where political actors craft, contest, and recalibrate their public personas. In Nigeria, where political discourse is often marked by volatility, strategic ambiguity, and performative rhetoric, social media has amplified the visibility and reach of political elites. Among such actors, Nasir El-Rufai (the immediate past governor of Kaduna State and a prominent voice in national politics) stands out for his prolific and rhetorically charged use of Facebook. His posts not only disseminate information but also function as discursive instruments for constructing political identity, legitimizing affiliations, and navigating shifting ideological terrains.

This study investigates the discursive strategies employed by El-Rufai in selected Facebook posts of 2023 and 2025, with a particular focus on how these strategies contribute to identity construction. Drawing upon the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), the paper situates El-Rufai's self-presentation and representation of others within the broader sociopolitical context of Nigeria's post-election discourse. By analysing linguistic features such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and mitigation/intensification, the study unpacks the ways in which El-Rufai aligns himself with certain values, discredits opposition, negotiates political transitions, and projects ideological consistency or transformation.

Through this lens, the research contributes to the growing body of scholarship at the intersection of discourse analysis and political communication in Africa. It reveals not only the performative dimensions of digital rhetoric but also the ideological undercurrents that inform the construction of political identity in an era increasingly defined by algorithmic publics and real-time audience feedback. By focusing on El-Rufai's posts during a politically sensitive period (pre- and post-2023 general election and 2025 realignments on political interest for 2027 election), the paper provides nuanced insights into the role of discourse in the maintenance, negotiation, and recalibration of political authority in contemporary Nigeria.

### Literature Review

#### Political Discourse

Political discourse is a specialised form of discourse that focuses on the language used in the practice of politics and governance. It is broadly defined as the discourse produced by political actors, institutions, or citizens with the purpose of influencing political processes, articulating ideological positions, legitimising authority, or challenging power structures (Van Dijk, 1997; Chilton, 2004). Political discourse is not limited to formal speeches or debates but encompasses any communicative act intended to negotiate power relations within a political context, including media interviews, manifestos, policy documents, and, increasingly, social media posts (Fairclough&Fairclough,

2012).Scholars agree that political discourse is inherently persuasive and strategic. According to Chilton (2004), one of its key features is its instrumental use of language to achieve specific political goals such as legitimisation, delegitimisation, mobilisation, and persuasion. Van Dijk (1997) explains that political discourse often draws heavily on ideological structures which shape how social actors, events, and actions are represented. Through discursive strategies, political speakers construct identities, frame issues, and manage group relations in ways that align with their ideological goals.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a useful lens for examining political discourse because it foregrounds relationship between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2011). It also exposes how political actors use language to maintain dominance, marginalize opponents, and legitimize authority (Fairclough, 2019; Abdulkadir, 2023). CDA scholars argue that political discourse is never neutral; rather, it reflects and reproduces underlying power structures and dominant ideologies. By analysing how linguistic choices serve to include or exclude, legitimise or challenge, and unite or divide, researchers uncover how political actors maintain or resist power (Wodak& Meyer, 2016).Political discourse is also closely tied to identity construction. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) note, political figures actively use discourse to negotiate their own identities and to position themselves in relation to various social groups. This aligns with Van Dijk's (2006) view that identity construction in political discourse is deeply embedded in ideological frameworks that shape group membership, solidarity, and opposition. Through rhetorical strategies such as nomination (naming actors), predication (assigning qualities), and argumentation (providing justification), political speakers define ingroups and outgroups and frame social realities in ways that advance their political interests (Reisigl&Wodak, 2001). This shows how political discourse strategies (e.g., "we vs. them" polarization, metaphors like "Emilokan") are used to construct political and ethnic identities. (Wodak, 2021; Akporokah & Ifechelobi, 2023).

Recent scholarship emphasizes the growing role of digital media and authenticity. Political communication increasingly relies on social platforms, influencers, and emotionally resonant language to connect with audiences (Kreis, 2019; Bennett 2020). This shift has made online spaces significant arenas for the performance and negotiation of political identities, the contestation of narratives, and the mobilisation of ideological support (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Online political discourse is characterised by immediacy, interactivity, and the blending of personal and official communication styles, which amplify how identities are constructed and contested in real time.In the Nigerian context, political discourse often reflects the country's complex sociopolitical landscape marked by ethnic, religious, and regional identities. Politicians frequently deploy discourse strategically to align themselves with specific groups, discredit opponents, and respond to controversies (Adetunji, 2006). Platforms such as Facebook have become key spaces where political figures like Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai engage directly with the public, using language to frame events, shape perceptions, and project shifting political identities.In sum, political discourse is a powerful tool through which political actors construct and contest identities, mobilise ideological support, and negotiate power relations. For this study, political discourse is understood as the strategic use of

language in El-Rufai's Facebook posts to perform identity work that is fluid and shaped by underlying ideological structures.

**Previous Studies**

In this section, some of the articles that focus on social media posts and those on critical discourse analysis of political posts are reviewed with a view to establish an existence of gap which the current study aims to fill. Of course, studies on discourse, identity, and ideology on social media have been conducted by scholars from several perspectives. These are reviewed to make bare the gap this study aims to fill.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) explore how celebrities on Twitter perform identity and manage authenticity through micro-celebrity practices. Using ethnography and discourse analysis, they show how humour, self-disclosure, and casual tone help celebrities appear accessible. Their concept of micro-celebrity also applies to ordinary users, illustrating how social media blurs public/private boundaries and makes identity audience-driven. However, they do not use CDA or address ideological implications, focusing instead on Western celebrity culture. This study, by contrast, applies CDA (specifically Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach) to examine how El-Rufai constructs political identity via Facebook, using nomination, predication, and argumentation to align with shifting ideologies and manage controversy.

Papacharissi (2015) explores how emotional expression on social media creates "affective publics" online communities unified by sentiment during political events. Using discourse analysis and digital ethnography, she shows how hashtags amplify collective feelings. Although insightful, her focus remains on audience emotions, not on how political elites construct identity through discourse. This study, however, applies CDA to examine how El-Rufai uses Facebook to perform ideological alignment and political identity work.

Odebunmi and Ayoola (2016) explore how Nigerian politicians use rhetorical strategies such as metaphors, pronouns, and naming to promote ideology in speeches. While insightful, their study is limited to offline discourse and does not explore digital platforms or apply CDA. The present study builds on their work by using DHA to uncover how El-Rufai's Facebook posts function as tools for digital identity construction and ideological positioning.

Adamu (2021) examines El-Rufai's use of Facebook for public engagement, focusing on narrative themes and emotional appeals. Though the study identifies patterns in storytelling, it lacks a CDA lens and does not address the construction of identity or ideology. This research extends his findings by using DHA to explore how El-Rufai's posts from 2023 and 2025 perform identity work through nomination, predication, and ideological framing.

While these studies contribute to understanding political discourse and online communication, few apply CDA to examine how political figures like El-Rufai construct identity through social media. By using Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, this study fills that gap, demonstrating how identity is discursively constructed and ideologically shaped through digital texts.

**Theoretical Framework**

Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this study, supported by Martins and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory. The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is one of the core strands of Critical Discourse Analysis. Developed by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues (Wodak& Meyer, 2016; Reisigl&Wodak, 2001), DHA is grounded in the principle that discourse must be studied in its historical, political, and social contexts. The approach argues that discourse both shapes and is shaped by social structures, power relations, and ideological struggles.DHA focuses on revealing how discursive practices are used to construct social reality through concrete linguistic strategies. Some of its main categories of analysis include:

1. Nomination: How social actors are named and referred to.
2. Prediction: How characteristics and attributes are assigned.
3. Argumentation: How speakers justify and legitimise claims.
4. Perspectivation: How speakers position themselves and their viewpoints.
5. Intensification or Mitigation: How language is used to strengthen or weaken statements.

These categories are directly applicable to El-Rufai's Facebook posts. For example, how he nominates himself (as a reformer or victim of unfair attacks), how he predicates qualities to opponents (as incompetent or corrupt), how he structures his arguments to justify political actions, and how he intensifies or softens certain statements to manage public perception.

**The Role of Appraisal Theory**

To deepen the analysis of how ideological structures influence attitude, Martin and White's Appraisal Theory (2005) will be employed. Appraisal Theory focuses on how language expresses and negotiates attitudes, feelings, judgements, and appreciation. It helps identify how speakers evaluate themselves, others, and events in discourse. This is relevant when examining how El-Rufai encodes approval or disapproval, sympathy, blame, or endorsement in his posts. This tool complements the DHA and van Dijk's ideological categories by detailing the evaluative force that gives ideological meaning its persuasive power.

Together, these frameworks enable this study to show that identity is not fixed but constantly shaped by discursive choices that reflect deeper ideological commitments and adapt to changing political contexts. This integrated approach demonstrates how El-Rufai's Facebook discourse constructs not only a public image but also reproduces ideological positions and social alignments in Nigeria's contemporary political landscape.

**Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore how discursive strategies function as mechanisms for political identity construction in Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai's Facebook posts from 2023 and 2025. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for a close, interpretive reading of naturally occurring texts, enabling the researcher to uncover how language constructs, negotiates, and contests identity within dynamic socio-political

contexts. Rather than seeking numerical generalisations, this method focuses on meaning-making, especially as discourse reflects and shapes ideological positions (Creswell, 2014).Anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study specifically draws on Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to account for how discourse is shaped by and contributes to broader socio-political and historical contexts. DHA allows for a layered analysis of linguistic features, argumentation strategies, and the political context in which the discourse occurs. To further understand how affective and attitudinal meanings contribute to identity construction, Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory is also employed. This framework supports analysis of how language encodes emotion, judgement, and alignment, thereby enriching the interpretation of ideological positioning within El-Rufai's digital discourse.

The data for this study consists of ten Facebook posts authored by El-Rufai, five from 2023 and five from 2025, selected from his official, verified Facebook page. These years were deliberately chosen because they mark critical political periods in Nigeria: the 2023 general elections and the 2025 emergence of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) as an opposition party. These moments are rich in ideological shifts and public image management, making them ideal for examining identity construction. The scope of the study excludes comments by followers, shared or reposted content, and purely visual material. The focus remains on El-Rufai's own textual posts as deliberate acts of political self-representation.

Purposive sampling was employed to select posts that are dense with discursive and evaluative features relevant to the study's objectives. The goal of this sampling technique is not representativeness but analytic richness (Patton, 2002). Selected posts demonstrate key CDA strategies such as nomination (how actors are named), predication (attributes and actions assigned), argumentation (reasoning and justification), and perspectivation (stance and viewpoint). Additionally, the sample includes a mix of posts with varied communicative functions, ranging from policy justifications to responses to controversy and efforts at mobilisation, while also prioritising posts rich in evaluative and emotional language, in line with Appraisal Theory.

Data was collected manually by copying the full textual content of each post, including emojis, hashtags, and punctuation, directly from El-Rufai's Facebook page. Each post was coded systematically (e.g., ERF_2023_01). The data analysis integrates CDA and Appraisal Theory. Using the DHA framework, each post was analysed for linguistic strategies that perform identity, such as how El-Rufai names himself and others (nomination), attributes traits or motives (predication), frames arguments (argumentation), and positions his stance (perspectivation). At the same time, Appraisal Theory guided the identification of evaluative language, helping to reveal how affect (emotion), judgement (morality), and appreciation (value) shape ideological alignment and identity claims. The analysis also considers intensification and mitigation strategies, uncovering how emphasis or restraint is used to frame certainty, deflect criticism, or reinforce authority.

**Data Analysis**

The various discursive strategies (as theorised within the Discourse-Historical Approach) deployed by El-Rufai to construct his identity and that of others in his selected posts of 2023 and 2025 are identified and discussed. The strategies (nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation) are complemented by a range of linguistic devices that help position him within specific ideological, regional, political, and historical narratives.

**Nomination Strategies in El-Rufai's Identity Construction in the Selected Posts**

The nomination strategies deployed by El-Rufai in his selected 2023 and 2025 Facebook posts are analysed in this subsection through the lens of Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). Within the DHA framework, nomination strategies refer to the ways in which social actors are named, described, and referred to in discourse. El-Rufai uses these strategies to construct various identities, including regional, political, and moral identities, as well as to delineate in-groups and out-groups. These strategies are supported by a range of linguistic devices, such as anthroponyms, deictics, presuppositions, metaphors, and value-laden attributions. These are discussed in each of the selected posts.

In ERF_2023_01, El-Rufai constructs a collective Northern identity by invoking historical continuity, moral values, and shared ancestry. The statement, "We are Northern Nigerians. We are proud of our humble origins and remarkable history," uses inclusive pronouns to create a sense of solidarity and belonging. The mention of revered figures such as Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sir AbubakarTafawaBalewa, and Murtala Mohammed serves as a discursive device to elevate the group identity through positive association with heroic and respected forebears. These anthroponyms function as ideological signifiers of leadership, sacrifice, and honour.El-Rufai also employs presuppositions and binary oppositions to establish normative behavioural standards. Statements such as "we are a civilized and cultured people" and "our word is our bond" assert moral superiority, while those who deviate are negatively nominated as "rootless prodigal sons" or "uncivilized and uncultured." This demarcation serves both to reinforce in-group cohesion and to delegitimise dissenters or political opponents. The overarching discourse constructs Northern identity as dignified, principled, and morally upright, while casting critics and outsiders as dishonest and dishonourable.

In ERF_2023_02 to ERF_2023_04, he engages in strategic nomination to affirm the legitimacy and inevitability of Bola Ahmed Tinubu's rise to power. The use of full anthroponyms and honorifics, such as "Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the APC Presidential Candidate and by the Grace of God, the next President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," combines political formality with religious legitimation. This framing positions Tinubu not only as a political leader but as a divinely sanctioned national figure.Furthermore, El-Rufai constructs collective identities using terms such as "our party," "the Nigerian people," and "the people of Kaduna State." These collectivising expressions are augmented by value-laden language (e.g. "dedicated effort," "titanic struggle," and "festival of democracy") which serve to frame the electoral victory as the result of virtuous labour and democratic engagement.

Opposition groups are implicitly excluded and delegitimised through references to "the most sordid aspects of backward governance," thereby reinforcing the moral and political authority of the APC and its constituents.

In ERF_2023_05, El-Rufai marks his transition from active governance to reflective observation. He nominates himself as an "objective bystander," invoking the qualities of contentment, wisdom, and generational responsibility. The narrative reflects on the absence of political stress, contrasted with a call to the younger generation to embrace civic engagement and public service. The phrase "to the older generation with experience, contentment and integrity" serves to nominate a morally grounded elder class whose knowledge should complement youthful energy. This dual nomination reinforces an intergenerational alliance aimed at national development, while positioning El-Rufai as a guiding moral voice.

ERF_2025_01 presentshis resignation from the APC, which marks a pivotal discursive shift in identity construction. Through self-nomination, he identifies as a "founding member," a "loyal party man," and a proponent of "progressive values." These nominations emphasise ideological commitment and personal sacrifice. By contrast, the APC is negatively nominated through metaphors and pejorative expressions such as "capricious trajectory," "castrated its organs," and "treated its membership with contempt." These linguistic choices signal betrayal and institutional decay.El-Rufai aligns himself with a new collective identity through his adoption of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), framed as a platform of hope and renewal. Expressions such as "we will focus on engaging with and persuading other opposition leaders" project a forward-looking and inclusive political vision. This re-nomination strategy serves both to rehabilitate his political image and to consolidate support among disenchanted stakeholders.

ERF_2025_02 and ERF_2025_03reveal a nomination strategy that frames El-Rufai's political camp as victims of state repression. Phrases such as "oppressive conduct of the Kaduna State government" and "misuse of federal security agencies" depict the state as authoritarian and unjust. Individuals such as JafaruSani and Bashir Saidu are positively nominated as "our colleague and versatile former commissioner" and "another colleague of ours," invoking camaraderie and loyalty.Meanwhile, the opposing actors are negatively nominated as "UbaSani's kidnapping gang" and "henpecked and compromised magistrates." These phrases combine criminalisation with moral degradation, constructing a narrative of persecution by illegitimate actors. The religious expression "Allah Ya Isa! Allah yaTsine ma su" intensifies the emotive dimension, reinforcing the moral gravity of the events described. The posts thus serve to rally sympathy and support by contrasting principled opposition with institutional corruption and abuse.

In ERF_2025_04, El-Rufai nominates himself as a constitutionalist and principled defender of democracy. His criticism of the President's decision to suspend elected governor in Rivers State is framed through legalistic and historical references. Terms such as "wanton aggression against democratic tenets" and "gross violation of the Constitution" nominate the act as illegal and antithetical to rule of law.Tinubu is nominated contrastively as a former "opposition

figure" who had previously resisted similar executive overreach. This strategic juxtaposition enhances the credibility of El-Rufai's critique while simultaneously appealing to historical consistency. The appeal to "all patriots and voices of reason" constructs a collective moral identity, tasked with defending democratic norms and institutional integrity.

In ERF_2025_05, a brief update, El-Rufai reports the appointment of David Mark as interim leader of the ADC, signalling a transitional phase in coalition politics. The phrase "the coalition transition has started" nominates a collective political movement, while the projection that "urban and rural banditry will be extinguished, by God's Grace, in 2027" conveys a vision of transformative governance. The statement invokes religious affirmation and future-oriented modality, linking the coalition's formation with national redemption and divine providence.

**Predication Strategies in El-Rufai's Identity Construction in the Selected Posts**

In the framework of the Discourse-Historical Approach, predication strategies concern how social actors, both individuals and groups, are attributed particular qualities, characteristics, and values. Predication answers the question: what traits are assigned to the nominated actors? Through this strategy, Nasir El-Rufai constructs evaluative portraits that either legitimise or delegitimise political identities and affiliations, often with the aid of moral judgements, ideological claims, and affective-emotive expressions. His posts between 2023 and 2025 reveal an ongoing use of positive self-presentation and group inclusion, as well as the negative other-presentation of political opponents, state actors, and institutional agents.

In ERF_2023_01, El-Rufai predicates Northern Nigerians with qualities of pride, humility, honour, and cultural refinement. Statements such as "We are a civilized and cultured people" and "Our word is our bond" function as assertive evaluative constructions. These positive attributions establish a morally superior in-group, marked by integrity, reliability, and tradition.In contrast, El-Rufai predicates non-conforming Northerners or critics with derogatory traits: "those that don't observe these are either not real Northerners or rootless prodigal sons." The phrase "uncivilized and uncultured" is deployed to describe dissenters, revealing an exclusionary ideological stance grounded in moral and cultural essentialism. The rhetorical polarity here intensifies the value-laden dichotomy between the righteous in-group and the deviant other.

El-Rufai's descriptions of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the APC Presidential campaign in ERF_2023_02–04 foreground traits such as perseverance, legitimacy, and moral fortitude. In ERF_2023_04, Tinubu's electoral triumph is described as "a much-deserved victory," "a tribute to the resilience of the Nigerian people," and "the connection between dedicated effort and reward." These predicates assign not only competence and diligence to the APC and its supporters but also ethical merit and collective achievement. Moreover, El-Rufai predicates the APC's efforts with descriptors such as "purposeful governance" and "progressive outcomes." The use of intensifying adjectives such as "resounding victory," "titanic struggle," and "monumental triumph" imbues the group's political actions with grandeur and heroism. Meanwhile, the opposition is not directly named but implicitly predicated as regressive and

morally inferior through contrastive references to “the most sordid aspects of backward governance.”

Following his exit from gubernatorial office, El-Rufaiin ERF_2023_05predicates his new status with peace and detachment. He refers to “the easiest day I can recall in nearly ten years” and “life is much easier as objective bystanders,” signalling relief and calm. Simultaneously, he predicates the youth with an imperative duty: “you don’t have the luxury of being excluded from politics and public service.” These predicates communicate a normative expectation of participation and sacrifice.Older citizens are also positively predicated as individuals with “experience, contentment, and integrity,” constructing them as moral guides who must contribute “wisdom and judgment.” Through these evaluative acts, El-Rufai performs an intergenerational call to action while legitimising his own transition into an advisory role.

ERF_2025_01contains a sharp reversal of prior predications of the APC. El-Rufai evaluates the party as having entered “a capricious trajectory,” “castrated its organs,” and “treated its membership with contempt.” These predicates mark a shift in his stance, characterising the APC as directionless, repressive, and ideologically bankrupt. The figurative language (e.g., “castrated its organs”) intensifies the delegitimisation by evoking images of institutional impotence.In contrast, El-Rufai predicates himself with attributes such as “pragmatic,” “loyal,” and “devoted.” His tenure is framed with evaluative expressions like “advancing human development,” “expanding infrastructure,” and “promoting equality of opportunity.” These function as a discursive self-legitimation strategy, aligning him with good governance and visionary leadership. The SDP is positively predicated as a platform for “progressive values,” “democratic engagement,” and “national flourishing,” thereby reframing his political realignment as a principled and visionary departure.

In ERF_2025_02 and ERF_2025_03, El-Rufai predicates the Kaduna State government and security operatives with oppression, illegality, and criminality. Terms such as “persecution of opposition leaders,” “abducted,” “kidnapping gang,” and “without any police first information report” serve to delegitimise institutional authority by associating it with lawlessness and abuse of power.The judiciary is similarly predicated in pejorative terms as “henpecked and compromised,” calling into question its independence and moral legitimacy. Conversely, victims such as JafaruSani and Bashir Saidu are positively predicated with attributes such as “versatile,” “our colleague,” and “proposed ministerial nominee,” positioning them as credible, loyal, and unjustly targeted. The post also closes with religious imprecation, “Allah Ya Isa! Allah yaTsine ma su”, which predicates the oppressors as spiritually cursed, adding theological weight to the moral indictment.

In ERF_2025_04, El-Rufai predicates the Federal Government’s suspension of Rivers State officials with phrases such as “clearly wrong,” “dangerous to our system,” and “a wanton aggression against democratic tenets.” These predicates communicate not just legal violation but a deep ethical and structural threat. By drawing on precedent (“the Supreme Court in 2006... declared the removal unlawful”), El-Rufai strengthens his critique through institutional intertextuality.He predicates President Tinubu with contradiction, recalling his past opposition to executive excesses and urging a “return to constitutionalism and the rule of law.”

Meanwhile, the phrase "slippery slope of replicating the events of emergency rule in the old Western Region in 1962" intensifies the warning through historical analogy. These predicates situate El-Rufai as a guardian of democratic tradition and constitutional fidelity.

In ERF_2025_05, El-Rufai predicates the new political coalition with optimism and transformative potential. The declaration that "urban and rural banditry will be extinguished, by God's Grace, in 2027" attributes future success to both human agency and divine support. This prophetic modality reinforces his role as a hopeful reformer, invested in national redemption through strategic political realignment.

**Argumentation Strategies in El-Rufai's Identity Construction in the Selected Posts**

Nasir El-Rufai's Facebook posts between 2023 and 2025 deploy a repertoire of argumentation strategies that work to both legitimise his political positions and delegitimise perceived adversaries. These strategies are anchored in topoi such as authority, history, law, threat, responsibility, and solidarity, often reinforced with linguistic devices that evoke emotion, appeal to shared values, and underscore a contrast between "us" and "them." The topoi are discussed below.

In post ERF_2023_01, El-Rufai invokes the memory of iconic Northern Nigerian leaders to establish historical continuity and ideological lineage. Through declarative structures like "We are the children of Late Sir Ahmadu Bello…" and "We are a civilized and cultured people," he constructs a communal identity grounded in moral uprightness and honour. The topos of history legitimises present claims by appealing to the past, while the topos of authority amplifies their weight through alignment with respected national figures.Linguistically, the post is marked by parallelism ("We have learnt... We have learnt…") and epanaphora, reinforcing thematic coherence and creating a rhythmic, declarative tone that signifies certainty. The moral distinction between "real Northerners" and "rootless prodigal sons" exemplifies exclusionary rhetoric, using evaluative adjectives ("uncivilized," "cultured") to demarcate insiders and outsiders, reinforcing ideological boundaries.

In ERF_2023_04, following the announcement of Bola Tinubu's presidential victory, El-Rufai underscores the legitimacy of the electoral outcome by appealing to the topos of legality and toposof responsibility. He frames Tinubu's win as a product of democratic process, hard work, and public faith: "Our party has a duty to repay this faith by providing purposeful governance." This appeal invokes the topos of obligation, which is common in legitimising future political action based on past electoral support.In contrast, the post also deploys the topos of threat, particularly in warning against "a return to the most sordid aspects of backward governance." Here, El-Rufai constructs a binary opposition between progressive continuity and regressive reversal. Lexical choices such as "titanic struggle," "regrettable," and "festival of democracy" exemplify semantic contrast and metaphorical framing, which collectively dramatize the stakes of political choice and intensify affective engagement.

In his 2025 posts, particularly ERF_2025_03, El-Rufai invokes the topos of victimhood and unjust persecution. By describing the abduction and imprisonment of political allies under the guise of legal procedure, he constructs a narrative of state repression: "Jafaru's real crime is

his resignation from the APC…" He discredits the judiciary by labelling magistrates as "henpecked and compromised," employing ad hominem arguments to delegitimise the institutional apparatus allegedly used for political suppression.The rhetorical power here lies in loaded language ("kidnapping gang claiming to be the police," "ignominious role") and the use of hyperbole ("no condition is permanent") to predict future reckoning. The concluding Arabic interjections ("Allah Ya Isa! Allah yaTsine ma su") function as a religiously coded condemnation, enhancing emotional gravity and moral indignation.

Post ERF_2025_01 marks a turning point in El-Rufai's political identity as he resigns from the APC and joins the SDP. The argumentation here rests on the topos of disillusionment, justifying his departure on grounds of irreconcilable ideological divergence. El-Rufai builds a case by juxtaposing his historical commitment to the APC's founding ideals with the current party's deviation: "The party has since strayed and left me stuck in the vision of its well-meaning founding fathers."He uses evidential markers ("developments in the last two years confirm…") and evaluative verbs ("recognise," "conclude," "admit") to rationalise his decision while maintaining ethos as a principled actor. The move is legitimised further by invoking collective consultation with "mentors, colleagues, and loyalists," creating a sense of democratic deliberation rather than personal ambition.

In ERF_2025_04, El-Rufai critiques the federal government's decision to suspend elected officials in Rivers State. This post draws heavily on the topos of legality, specifically constitutionalism, to argue against federal overreach: "Our country's Constitution does not support it…" and "the responsibilities of a president… are constrained by the Constitution." El-Rufai enhances his argument with legal intertextuality, referencing the 2006 Supreme Court ruling in the case involving Governor Joshua Dariye. This lends legal legitimacy and precedential weight to his claim.The post is also rich in balanced syntax and hypothetical constructions, such as "A state of emergency could surely have been proclaimed…" These linguistic features help sustain a tone of reasoned critique rather than emotive condemnation, thereby enhancing his appeal to institutional loyalists and constitutional purists.

**Perspectivisation Strategies in El-Rufai's Identity Construction in the Selected Posts**

In the post titled "KADUNA UPDATE" (ERF_2023_01, February 7, 2023), El-Rufai employs perspectivisation strategies to frame events from a particular ideological and moral standpoint. These strategies allow him to align with certain institutional and constitutional values while distancing himself from political actors he deems irresponsible or illegitimate. Through these discursive moves, El-Rufai positions himself as a defender of democracy, judicial authority, and the economic well-being of ordinary Nigerians.One prominent perspectivisation strategy involves the use of epistemic markers to signal degrees of certainty and authority. For instance, El-Rufai declares that "The President cannot override the Supreme Court of Nigeria," employing categorical modality to assert his position as an absolute truth. The absence of hedging in this claim underscores his confidence and frames his interpretation as non-negotiable. Such assertions are not merely legal interpretations; they function to project a self-image of legal expertise and political fortitude.

In addition, El-Rufai frequently refers to judicial decisions and the constitution as external points of reference, thereby anchoring his personal perspective in broader institutional authority. By citing the Supreme Court's interim injunction and emphasising the finality of its judgments, he integrates institutional voices into his own and amplifies his legitimacy. This form of intertextual alignment strengthens his perceived credibility and projects an identity aligned with constitutionalism rather than personal or party interest.El-Rufai's use of deictics such as "we," "our citizens," and "these elements" further reveals how he positions himself in relation to others. The inclusive "we" invites the audience to view him as part of a collective that values justice and order, while the distancing "these elements" identifies the antagonistic group within the federal government as outsiders to this shared normative order. This binary construction enhances the moral contrast between the speaker and his opponents, reinforcing an us-versus-them ideological stance.

Moreover, El-Rufai'sperspectivisation is enhanced through evaluative language and attitudinal markers. Terms such as "subversion," "misguided," and "cruel" are strategically employed to judge the actions of federal actors while also conveying his emotional and ethical standpoint. These lexical choices function to orient the reader's perspective, inviting them to see the federal government's policy as both irrational and unjust. This emotional colouring of discourse further consolidates El-Rufai's identity as a morally responsible leader who empathises with the plight of citizens.The cumulative effect of these perspectivisation strategies is the construction of a speaker persona that is principled, authoritative, and aligned with constitutional democracy. El-Rufai uses his platform not merely to inform but to influence how events and actors are to be interpreted. By embedding his personal stance within the discourse of legality, institutional respect, and moral indignation, he successfully mobilises support while challenging the legitimacy of competing political actors.

**Intensification and Mitigation Strategies in El-Rufai's Identity Construction in the Selected Posts**

The analysis of the intensification and mitigation strategies employed by Nasir El-Rufai in constructing his political identity is conducted post-by-post for the selected 2023 and 2025 Facebook posts in this section, focusing on how El-Rufai strengthens or moderates his statements to shape perceptions of himself, his allies, and his adversaries. His use of intensification serves not only to heighten the perceived importance of his actions and convictions but also to morally legitimise his political stance and differentiate his persona from those he implicitly or explicitly critiques.

InERF_2023_01, El-Rufai intensifies the legitimacy of the Supreme Court's judgment by referring to it as "resounding," a lexical choice that frames the legal outcome as definitive and beyond reproach. This adjective strengthens the rhetorical weight of the verdict and positions El-Rufai as a defender of judicial authority. Moreover, he describes his administration's fiscal action (keeping "old and new notes in circulation") as a necessary act of "protecting livelihoods and well-being," a formulation that intensifies the ethical stakes of his intervention

while mitigating the potentially controversial nature of resisting federal monetary policy. The implicit mitigation here lies in portraying his actions as humanitarian rather than oppositional.
In ERF_2023_02, where El-Rufai offers a tribute to a late public servant, the intensification is achieved through laudatory modifiers such as "distinguished," "patriotic," and "accomplished." These expressions elevate the subject's moral and professional standing, while also constructing El-Rufai's identity as one who recognises and honours excellence in public service. The tone of reverence is further intensified through collective plural pronouns ("we mourn," "we celebrate"), which embed the post in communal affect and mitigate the personal grief by broadening it into a shared national sentiment.
In ERF_2023_03, El-Rufai's emphasis on developmental achievement is intensified through cumulative listing and assertive adverbs. He states that the Kaduna Urban Renewal Project was "successfully implemented," and specifies infrastructure achievements such as "completed roads, schools, hospitals," employing a cataloguing strategy that amplifies his image as a leader of action. This cumulative intensification is matched by a mitigation of possible criticism through his reference to continuity: "We hope the incoming government will sustain these gains." Here, the use of the modal verb "hope" softens his critique while subtly reinforcing the significance of his accomplishments by implying they are worthy of preservation.
In ERF_2023_04, the strategy of intensification appears through repeated references to ongoing construction and governmental oversight. Terms like "timely delivery," "inspected projects," and "ensure" are performatively assertive and indicate rigorous attention to public works. These lexical choices cast El-Rufai in the mould of a meticulous and responsible leader. Notably, the absence of mitigating language in this post reflects a rhetorical choice to assert control and success without qualification, aligning with his identity as a no-nonsense administrator.
ERF_2023_05, which is EL-Rufai's farewell speech, presents a nuanced blend of intensification and mitigation. While reflecting on his tenure, he declares that his team "tried our best," a mitigatory formulation that pre-empts criticism and acknowledges potential shortcomings. Yet, this phrase is juxtaposed with intensifiers such as "we served with commitment and integrity," and metaphors like "walked the path of reform," which elevate his leadership narrative to one of principled governance. The mitigation here softens final self-evaluation, while the intensification ensures a heroic framing of his administrative legacy.
ERF_2025_01 is aresignation statement in which El-Rufai deploys intensification strategiesto construct an identity of moral steadfastness and visionary leadership. Through evaluative expressions such as "fond memories," "progressive values I cherish," and "castrated its organs," he emphasizes a deep ideological rift and dramatizes the moral decline of the APC. His use of intensified lexical items like "capricious trajectory" and "unhealthy situation" accentuates institutional decay, while expressions like "I have diligently served" and "my eight-year tenure…was devoted to" elevate his personal legacy and reinforce his identity as a committed reformist. The statement "These records count for little" and "I find this no longer acceptable" are intensified judgments of betrayal and ideological disillusionment. However,

mitigation is subtly woven in through formal and procedural language such as "consultations with my mentors" and "without prejudice to this decision," which frames the defection as principled rather than impulsive. This tempering suggests respect for political decorum and helps project El-Rufai as a rational, strategic actor rather than a disgruntled defector.

ERF_2025_02features strong intensification through the binary framing of "oppression and abuse of power" versus democratic values, constructing El-Rufai as a vigilant defender of constitutionalism. The command "We must all stand up" operates as a performative call to action, amplifying urgency and collective moral duty. The phrase "safeguard our democracy and sovereignty" escalates the stakes, linking local political persecution to national existential threats. While mitigation is minimal, it exists implicitly in the depersonalized, collective framing of the issue, suggesting the concern transcends individual grievances and thus legitimizes the criticism. This rhetorical balance maintains his identity as a principled statesman acting in the public interest rather than a self-serving partisan.

ERF_2025_03is marked by highly intensified rhetoric aimed at delegitimizing both the APC and the judicial apparatus in Kaduna State. Descriptors like "kidnapping gang," "henpecked and compromised magistrates," and "ignominious role" serve to morally indict state actors and portray a systemic collapse of legal norms. The repetition of abduction cases ("Bashir Saidu," "MallamJafaruSani") and the emotive religious appeals ("Allah Ya Isa! Allah yaTsine ma su") heighten the post's affective intensity, constructing El-Rufai as a persecuted reformist confronting authoritarian abuse. However, mitigation surfaces in the temporal projection ("no condition is permanent") and procedural tone of "we are watching and waiting," which tempers the rhetoric with a sense of lawful patience and delayed justice. This blend reaffirms his identity as both a moral witness and a strategic actor invested in systemic redress.

ERF_2025_04showcases a strategic use of intensification through legal and historical references that elevate the constitutional gravity of the Rivers State suspension. Phrases like "so clearly wrong," "wanton aggression," and "gross violation" are evaluative intensifiers that moralize the issue and frame it as a national crisis. The invocation of "democratic tenets," "rule of law," and "Constitution" positions El-Rufai as a guardian of democratic values. Intertextual references to Tinubu's past opposition to similar executive overreach and to the *Attorney-General v. Dariye* case further intensify the argument by grounding it in legal precedent. Mitigation is evident in the use of diplomatic appeals such as "It is my view that..." and "I appeal to all patriots," which soften the criticism and preserve his statesmanlike posture. This interplay allows El-Rufai to construct an identity that is oppositional yet respectful of legal processes and civic dialogue.

ERF_2025_05, though brief, exhibits intensification through its celebratory tone and prophetic projection. The expression "The coalition transition has started" signals an irreversible political momentum, while "urban and rural banditry will be extinguished...in 2027" is a hyperbolic claim that amplifies optimism and inevitability. The term "Congrat, Nigeria!!" with its dual exclamation marks performs emotional intensification and collective affirmation. Although mitigation is not overtly employed, the reference to "by God's Grace" tempers the deterministic assertion with a theological modesty, providing a humble frame to what might

otherwise be seen as political overconfidence. This strategy enhances El-Rufai's identity as both a confident political strategist and a faith-anchored nationalist.

**Findings**

The analysis of Nasir El-Rufai's selected 2023 and 2025 Facebook posts reveals a strategic deployment of the five major discursive strategies outlined in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), namely, nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation, to construct, project, and negotiate his political identity and that of others. Each strategy is underpinned by context-sensitive linguistic devices that not only legitimise El-Rufai's ideological positioning but also differentiate between moral in-groups and delegitimised out-groups.Nomination strategies foreground El-Rufai's shifting political alignments and affiliations, from his earlier defence of APC leadership and Northern identity to his later repositioning within the Social Democratic Party. These identity constructions are supported by anthroponyms, deictics, metaphors, and presuppositions that reify collective identities and historic continuities. Predication strategies consistently attribute positive moral traits to El-Rufai and his allies (such as loyalty, patriotism, and visionary leadership) while negatively characterising political adversaries through moral degradation, institutional corruption, and betrayal of democratic ideals.Argumentation strategies are anchored in topoi of history, authority, legality, and threat, allowing El-Rufai to rationalise his political actions and critique opponents with appeals to precedent, constitutional order, and national interest. Perspectivisation is realised through epistemic markers, intertextual references, and inclusive pronouns, constructing El-Rufai as a constitutionalist and statesman committed to institutional fidelity. Intensification and mitigation strategies reinforce the affective and evaluative tenor of his discourse. Through hyperbolic and emotionally charged expressions, El-Rufai amplifies the legitimacy of his actions and the failures of others, while mitigating potential backlash through appeals to collective responsibility, procedural fairness, or divine providence.Together, these findings demonstrate how El-Rufai strategically employs discourse not only to frame unfolding political events but to craft a dynamic identity rooted in moral clarity, regional pride, democratic commitment, and ideological resilience. His rhetorical strategies serve as tools for both self-legitimation and the delegitimation of others, illustrating the complex interplay of language, politics, and identity in Nigeria's contemporary political communication.

**Conclusion**

This study has examined the discursive construction of political identity in selected 2023 and 2025 Facebook posts by Nasir El-Rufai, employing the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as an analytical framework. Through the integration of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation strategies, the analysis reveals how El-Rufai positions himself within shifting political terrains, negotiates ideological affiliations, and constructs dichotomous representations of allies and opponents. The findings underscore that identity in political discourse is not static but is actively (re)constructed

through context-sensitive linguistic choices that reflect and respond to ongoing socio-political developments.El-Rufai's nomination strategies foreground key dimensions of identity (regional, ideological, moral, and generational) while predication serves to attribute value-laden qualities that legitimise or delegitimise specific actors. His argumentation is grounded in topoi of authority, history, legality, and threat, allowing him to justify political decisions and critique adversaries with persuasive force. Perspectivisation strategies enable him to embed his views within broader constitutional and moral frameworks, while intensification and mitigation work to calibrate rhetorical force and emotional resonance, enhancing the persuasiveness of his narrative.Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of how Nigerian political actors utilise social media platforms as arenas for identity performance, ideological contestation, and discursive power negotiation. It also demonstrates the usefulness of DHA in unpacking the layered and dynamic nature of political communication in digital public spheres. Further research could explore how audiences interpret and respond to such discursive constructions, thereby extending the analysis from production to reception within Nigeria's evolving political discourse ecology.

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