

Comparative Rhetorical Analysis of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's Open Letter to Nigerians 2023

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Abstract

This study examines a comparative rhetorical analysis of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's 2015 and 2023 open letters. It explores how he strategically employs Aristotelian appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos to influence political discourse in Nigeria. Through a qualitative analysis of both texts, the research reveals a clear evolution in Obasanjo's rhetorical approach, shaped by the country's shifting political and socio-economic landscape. The 2015 letter adopts a confrontational tone anchored in authoritative ethos and fear-based pathos, reflecting national instability and leadership dissatisfaction, while, by contrast, the 2023 letter embodies a more inclusive and hopeful rhetoric, emphasizing collective responsibility and logical argumentation to engage an increasingly participatory electorate. The study demonstrates how political communication adapts to contextual realities and public expectations. It contributes to the growing body of African rhetorical scholarship by highlighting the dynamic interplay between credibility, emotion, and logic in shaping persuasive political messages. The findings suggest that rhetorical evolution is not merely stylistic but a strategic response to democratic maturation and audience awareness.

Keywords: Rhetorical analysis, Ethos, Pathos, Logos, Open Letters.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Open letters have been used as effective rhetorical devices for years to sway public opinion and political action. Political leaders and other powerful individuals frequently use open letters as a means of direct communication with the receivers of the letters as well as the general public. According to Fowler (1991), open letters have long served as a powerful medium for political communication, allowing public figures to articulate their concerns, influence public opinion, and shape national discourse. Open letters are remarkable because they engage both mass communication and interpersonal strategies by combining public spectacle with personal address. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was a former Nigerian military head of states between 1976 and 1979 and was democratically elected president between 1999 and 2007. He is well-known for his strategic use of open letters to address critical national issues and hold political leaders accountable. The letters not only reflect Obasanjo's rhetorical strategies but also reveal his role as an elder statesman attempting to steer national conversations on governance, democracy, and socio-economic development. His deliberate use of linguistic appeals to influence public opinion and political outcomes is evident in his open letters,

especially those sent to former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2015 and the Nigerian populace in 2023.

The importance of rhetoric in political discourse has been extensively recognised in both classical and contemporary scholarship. Aristotle identifies three primary persuasive appeals: ethos, pathos and logos. Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973) have expanded on Aristotle's framework, emphasizing the situational and constructed nature of rhetoric. Bitzer (1968) proposed the concept of rhetorical situation and argued that rhetorical discourse arises in response to an exigence (a pressing issue or problem that demands a rhetorical response). This view was further supported by Fairclough (2015) and Van Dijk (2011) that political rhetoric is not static but evolves in response to socio-political conditions. Vatz (1973) opines that rhetors actively create meaning through their interpretation and presentation of events.

Open letters occupy a unique space in political communication, blending personal appeal with public declaration. Fairclough (1995) writes that open letters allow writers to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly address their intended audience. In addition,

Opeibi (2009) states open letters serve as an alternative channel for unfiltered political expression in Nigeria, where media control and political propaganda often shape public perception.

The 2015 open letter to Goodluck Jonathan was written at a time when Nigeria faced political and economic instability. According to Campbell (2018), Jonathan's administration was bedeviled by allegations of corruption, security failures, especially regarding the Boko Haram insurgency, and widespread disillusionment with the government's capacity to deliver good governance. However, in 2023, Obasanjo's open letter was written in the context of a tense electoral season and mounting socio-political discontent. In this letter, Obasanjo moves away from direct confrontation to a more collective and unifying tone, appealing to Nigerians to make informed decisions in the upcoming elections and to reject corrupt and incompetent leadership.

This study conducts a comparative rhetorical analysis of Obasanjo's 2015 and 2023 open letters to examine how he strategically employs ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade his audience. It explores the evolution of Obasanjo's rhetorical strategies, highlighting how they have adapted to Nigeria's changing political and socio-economic landscape.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

According to Charteris-Black (2014), political figures use political language as a strategic communication tool to sway public opinion, create political narratives, and achieve their political goals. In a political context, rhetoric refers to the deliberate use of language to influence, inspire, and involve audiences. Aristotle (2007) defines rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (p. 24). Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical reasoning) usually serve as the foundation for these persuasive techniques in political settings.

Political rhetoric serves multiple functions, such as persuasion, legitimation, mobilisation and framing (Finlayson, 2021; Van Dijk, 2015; Chilton, 2004; Lakoff, 2004). Finlayson (2021) opines that political leaders use rhetoric to shape public opinion and gain support. Van Dijk (2015) notes that rhetoric helps political figures legitimise their positions and policies by appealing to shared values and norms. While Chilton (2004) argues that political rhetoric can be used to mobilise voters, build political movements and foster collective action, Lakoff (2004) states that politicians use rhetorical strategies to frame political issues in ways that resonate with their target audiences. Charteris-Black (2014) contends that political rhetoric is intrinsically strategic as political leaders craft their messages to maximize persuasive impact while addressing political

realities and audience expectations. The strategic use of rhetorical appeals enables politicians to manage political tensions, establish credibility, and inspire action.

Open letters are politicized communications meant to increase public awareness and gather support for a cause (Collins, 2019; Stanley, 2004). According to Fairclough (2000), open letters represent a unique genre of political communication, positioned between personal correspondence and public address. They allow political figures to communicate directly with both political elites and the general public. Adetunji (2019) notes that open letters serve three primary functions in political communication: direct engagement, moral and ethical positioning, and political accountability. Open letters bypass traditional media routes, enabling politicians to connect directly with the public without editorial interference. They are used by political leaders to criticize political opponents from a position of ethical superiority and to establish moral authority. Open letters serve as public records, holding political actors accountable for their acts and policy decisions.

According to Finlayson (2021), political rhetoric is inherently adaptive, as political leaders adjust their rhetorical strategies to align with evolving political realities. Similarly, Chilton (2004) contends that political adaptation involves both rhetorical continuity and innovation. Political figures maintain fundamental rhetorical strategies that align with their political identity while introducing new elements to respond to emerging political challenges.

Essien, Dahunsi, Nwachukwu, and Aribisala (2023) examined the complexities of Nigerian politics, focusing on the delicate balance between the call for electoral accountability and concerns over national sovereignty and foreign involvement. Grounding their study in agenda-setting theory, they used paradigmatic analysis to break down the discourse into four key paradigms, offering a structured exploration of how alleged electoral malpractices influenced the post-election letters. Ultimately, they argue that bridging the divide between Adichie's advocacy for transparency and Oke's defense of national sovereignty requires a commitment to deliberate patriotism, free from ethnic bias. Igwebuike (2018) explored the ideological themes in open letters addressed to President Obasanjo, examining how word choices and patterns of association shape socio-political discourse. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study analyzed how synonyms, antonyms, and hyponymy highlight key political concerns while lexical collocations reveal dominant ideological stances. The findings showed that these open letters shed light on pressing issues such as corruption, misappropriation of funds, political intimidation, and resistance to Obasanjo's extended stay in office. The study concludes that analyzing open letters through a critical discourse lens offers valuable insight into how

Nigerian newspaper readers perceive governance and political power, revealing the broader ideological landscape of the time.

Aikorogie and Ugwu (2014) conducted a pragmatic analysis of Olusegun Obasanjo’s December 2, 2013, open letter to then-President Goodluck Jonathan. Their analysis revealed that Obasanjo strategically used language to shape public perception of corruption, both explicitly and implicitly. Oyelakin (2021) explored the role of grammar in linguistic stylistic analysis by examining Niyi Osundare’s open letter to President Jonathan. The findings revealed that Osundare’s grammatical choices were strategically used to persuade President Jonathan to graciously accept the outcome of Nigeria’s 2015 General Elections. Additionally, the study highlights how these grammatical devices shape Osundare’s stylistic approach in political discourse. The study concluded that grammar plays a crucial role in political discourse analysis as it helps uncover the underlying intentions behind political texts.

While Aristotelian rhetoric has been widely studied in Western political communication, its application to African political discourse remains relatively underexplored. Garver (2004) argues that Aristotle’s rhetorical framework is culturally adaptable, as ethos, pathos, and logos are fundamental elements of human communication across societies. Ajibola (2020) examined the use of Aristotelian rhetoric in Nigerian

political speeches and found that ethos and pathos tend to dominate, with politicians relying more on their credibility and emotional appeal than on logical argumentation. Building on this, the present study not only conducts a rhetorical analysis but also compares Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s 2015 and 2023 open letters, thereby highlighting how Obasanjo balances ethos, pathos, and logos as well as traces the evolution of his rhetorical strategies in response to Nigeria’s shifting political and socio-economic landscape.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing Aristotle’s rhetorical triangle of ethos, pathos, and logos as the analytical framework. The research is comparative and interpretive. The letters were sourced from Channels television online news and BusinessDay Newspaper online. The texts were selected based on their relevance in shaping Nigerian political discourse. The data analysis follows textual segmentation and comparative interpretation. Rhetorical patterns were interpreted against the backdrop of Nigeria’s socio-political developments during the respective periods.

4. Data Presentation and Analyses

Rhetorical Analysis of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s 2023 Open Letter to Nigerians.

Ethos (Appeal to Credibility and Authority)

Table 1:

Themes	Instances
A. Leadership and Governance	“I have done my research, and I have spoken to all the key players.” “Track record of ability and performance; Vision that is authentic, honest, and realistic; Character and integrity; Physical and mental capability.”
B. Ethical Leadership and Moral Responsibility	“I have no candidate, but I have a national agenda.” “Some of those who are campaigning are only seeking power for their own self-interest.”

In Table 1, Obasanjo presents himself as an experienced leader who understands governance and leadership. He reassures readers that his opinions are based on first-hand knowledge and thorough investigation. He proposes a four-point leadership framework (TVCP)—Track record, Vision, Character, and Physical/Mental capability as a rational guide for choosing leaders. Obasanjo positions himself as a neutral adviser, distancing himself from partisan interests. He reinforces his impartiality and commitment to national

progress, making his advice trustworthy. He calls on citizens to prioritize moral values in leadership selection. He exposes corrupt politicians, encouraging voters to demand ethical leadership. Obasanjo presents a structured evaluation to strengthen his credibility as a thoughtful leader in governance. He relies on his status as a former president and elder statesman to strengthen his arguments.

Pathos (Appeal to Emotions and Values)

Table 2:

Themes	Instances
A. Youth Participation and Political Responsibility	“Your future, my future, the future of grandchildren and great-grandchildren is in your hands.” “Make your own friends and stop inheriting your father’s enemies.”
B. National Unity and Reconciliation	“No Nigerian is more Nigerian than any other Nigerian.” “What is masqueraded as ‘competence’ is self-interest and nepotism.”

Themes	Instances
C. The Consequences of Poor Electoral Choices	<p>“If we fall prey again, we will have ourselves to blame, and no one can say how many more knocks Nigeria can take before it tips over.”</p> <p>“Nigerian youth... need education which is now denied to over 20 million children.”</p>

In Table 2 Obasanjo directly appeals to young Nigerians, urging them to take charge of their political future. He challenges them to break free from inherited political rivalries. He emphasizes responsibility and legacy stirring a sense of duty and empowerment. He encourages independent thinking, emotionally detaching young voters from divisive politics. He appeals to Nigerians to reject tribalism and political divisions. This parallel structure conveys a strong message of equality, fostering a sense of national identity and unity. He warns

against leaders who manipulate ethnic sentiments for power, stirring frustration towards tribal politics and urging voters to prioritize national interest. His use of fear appeal to warn against another leadership failure creates a sense of urgency, making voters feel personally responsible for Nigeria’s fate. He highlights the suffering caused by poor governance, particularly in education, triggering empathy and concern.

Logos (Appeal to Logic and Reasoning)

Table 3:

Themes	Instances
A. Leadership and Governance	<p>“A combination of track record, vision, character, and capability must be the basis of choice.”</p>
B. Youth Participation and Political Responsibility	<p>“We have moved from the frying pan to the fire, and from the mountain top to the valley.”</p> <p>“Gowon became Head of State at 31, and Enahoro moved the motion for independence at 27.”</p>
C. The Consequences of Poor Electoral Choices	<p>“More than 20 million children are out of school.”</p> <p>“Bad leadership leads to economic hardship, and economic hardship leads to instability.”</p>

In Table 3 Obasanjo uses facts, logic, and rational argumentation to persuade his audience. He presents a logical method for choosing leaders, rather than relying on sentiments. He frames leadership selection as a rational decision-making process and encourages objective evaluation. He compares past and present leadership performances to logically demonstrate a decline in governance. He metaphorically provides a visual contrast, making his argument more persuasive. He refutes the age-based argument against young leaders by providing historical examples. He logically dismantles the notion that leadership is only for

the elderly referencing past young leaders. He supports his argument with statistical evidence which further strengthens his claim about the failures of leadership. He warns of cause and effect in poor governance, explaining why Nigerians must vote wisely, reinforcing the urgency of responsible decision-making.

Rhetorical Analysis of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s 2015 Open Letter to Goodluck Jonathan

Ethos (Appeal to Credibility and Authority)

Table 4:

Themes	Instances
A. Authority and Experience in Governance	<p>“Mr. President, I write this letter with a heavy heart and deep concern about the direction in which you are taking the country.”</p> <p>“I have had the rare opportunity of serving my country as a soldier, as Head of State, and as an elected President.”</p>
B. Moral Responsibility as an Elder Statesman	<p>“History will not forgive us if we fail to take corrective measures.”</p> <p>“This letter is written with no malice, no bad blood, but out of a deep concern for Nigeria.”</p>

In Table 4 Obasanjo establishes himself as a statesman, mentor, and patriot whose words should be taken seriously. He presents himself as a senior political figure with wisdom and experience, reminding Jonathan of their past interactions. His tone shows urgency and disappointment which reinforces his authority and establishes him as a responsible leader concerned for the

nation. He references his past contributions to Nigeria’s development, emphasizing his moral right to speak on governance which further builds his credibility as an elder statesman with unmatched leadership experience. He assumes the role of a mentor and guardian of democracy, positioning himself as a voice of wisdom and conscience. His invocation of historical judgment

implies that his intervention is a patriotic duty rather than a personal attack. He distances himself from partisan interests, reinforcing his neutrality. This reassures the

audience that he is acting out of selflessness and integrity, rather than political rivalry.

Pathos (Appeal to Emotions and Values)

Table 5:

Themes	Instances
A. Fear of Political and Economic Instability	“Nigeria is bleeding. The economy is crumbling. Corruption is deepening.” “If care is not taken, your government will push Nigeria into a state of anarchy.”
B. Betrayal of Trust and Disappointment	“I supported you wholeheartedly, believing you would bring about positive change. But what we see today is a far cry from what was expected.” “You swore an oath to protect Nigeria. Are you fulfilling that oath?”
C. Patriotism and Nationalism	“Nigeria is bigger than any individual or political ambition.” “We have never been this divided along ethnic and religious lines.”

In Table 5, Obasanjo paints a grim picture of the consequences of bad governance, appealing to fear and anxiety. He uses metaphor to create a strong visual image of a nation in distress, making the letter more emotionally compelling. He warns that Jonathan’s actions could lead to national chaos. The warning intensifies the urgency, compelling Jonathan and Nigerians to reflect on their choices. He expresses personal disappointment in Jonathan’s leadership, highlighting a sense of betrayal. This contrast between expectation and reality evokes emotional regret and frustration. He appeals to Jonathan’s conscience and

moral responsibility by asking a rhetorical question. This rhetorical question forces Jonathan to introspect, using guilt as a persuasive tool. Obasanjo invoked national pride and unity, calling for a shift away from personal and sectional interests. His statement appeals to patriotism, reminding Jonathan that national interest must come first. He further laments the divisions created by Jonathan’s administration. His statement stirs emotions of concern and nostalgia, urging Jonathan to restore national unity.

Logos (Appeal to Logic and Reasoning)

Table 6:

Themes	Instances
A. Corruption and Mismanagement	“Billions of dollars have disappeared without accountability. Can you explain how \$20 billion went missing from the NNPC?” “Inflation is rising, unemployment is skyrocketing, and yet, the government remains unbothered.”
B. Political Manipulation and Electoral Integrity	“If the democratic process is subverted, what legitimacy will the government have?” “A leader who allows insecurity to fester benefits from the chaos.”
C. Solutions and Recommendations	“A change in leadership style, transparency, and a genuine fight against corruption are urgently needed.” “Without accountability, there will be no trust. Without trust, there can be no progress.”

In Table 6, Obasanjo supports his claims with quantifiable data on corruption. He cites a specific figure to make his argument more factual and difficult to dismiss. He criticizes economic policies and their impact on ordinary Nigerians. He uses logical cause-and-effect reasoning of poor governance and economic hardship to make his argument compelling and rational. He warns against election rigging and political interference, providing a logical argument for free and fair elections. He uses rhetorical question to force the audience to consider the long-term consequences of electoral malpractice. He accuses Jonathan of fostering insecurity to retain power, using logical deduction. His implied reasoning suggests that Jonathan’s government was not

proactive in addressing insecurity because it served political interests. He proposes logical solutions rather than just criticism. To ensure his letter is not just an emotional rant but a constructive one, he offers practical steps to solving the problems. He further advocates for accountability and governance reforms, making a clear cause-and-effect argument. His parallel sentence structure makes this statement both memorable and logically sound.

Comparative Rhetorical Analysis of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s 2015 and 2023 Open Letters

Ethos

Table 7:

Thematic Category	2015 Open Letter	2023 Open Letter
A. Self-Presentation as an Elder Statesman	“I have had the rare opportunity of serving my country as a soldier, as Head of State, and as an elected President.”	“I am constrained to write to all Nigerians, especially young people, because of the critical moment we are in.”
B. Neutrality and National Interest	“This letter is written with no malice, no bad blood, but out of a deep concern for Nigeria.”	“None of the contestants is a saint, but when one compares their character, track record, and vision, one stands out.”

In Table 7 Obasanjo highlights his role as a patriotic elder statesman who has Nigeria’s best interests at heart. In 2015, he positioned himself as an experienced leader, advising Jonathan directly. The tone of his letter is personal and authoritative, drawing from his experience with governance and his direct relationship with Jonathan. In 2023, he shifted his tone, addressing all Nigerians rather than just one political leader. He portrays himself as a guardian of democracy and a voice of reason in a crucial political period. In 2015, Obasanjo

carefully distanced himself from political bias. He portrays himself as non-partisan and driven by national interests rather than personal grievances. However, his neutrality is less pronounced in 2023, as he explicitly endorsed a candidate (Peter Obi) in the presidential election. This shift in ethos makes the 2023 letter more politically charged compared to the 2015 letter, which was more advisory.

Pathos (Emotional Appeals)

Table 8:

Thematic Categories		
A. Fear and Anxiety About Nigeria’s Future	“Nigeria is bleeding. The economy is crumbling. Corruption is deepening.”	“We are at a defining moment in our history, and the future of our country is in your hands.”
B. Betrayal and Disappointment	“I supported you wholeheartedly, believing you would bring about positive change. But what we see today is a far cry from what was expected.”	“We cannot continue on this destructive path.”
C. Patriotism and National Unity	“We have never been this divided along ethnic and religious lines.”	“Your votes can reshape this country for the better.”

In Table 8, he paints a picture of Nigeria in crisis, invoking fear and urgency. In 2015, he warned Jonathan about the risk of economic collapse, corruption, and national disintegration. He directs his emotional appeal to Jonathan, urging him to correct his course before it’s too late. In 2023, he expressed concern about the future of Nigerian democracy, particularly regarding the youth and electoral integrity. The emotional appeal is more inclusive, targeting young voters and Nigerians as a whole rather than a single individual. Obasanjo appeals to Jonathan’s sense of guilt by reminding him of his past support. His expression of personal disappointment is a strong emotional tool, reinforcing Jonathan’s failure to meet expectations. In 2023, he did not express personal disappointment but rather collective frustration with

Nigeria’s political system. This time, the focus shifted from a single leader’s failure (Jonathan in 2015) to the collective responsibility of Nigerians in making a better choice. He further emphasizes national unity and the need to put Nigeria above personal interests by warning against ethnic and religious divisions caused by Jonathan’s administration in 2015. His emotional appeal seeks to heal divisions and restore national cohesion. In 2023, he appealed directly to Nigerian youths, urging them to take control of their future. His motivational rhetoric is expected to inspire action rather than just criticize leadership.

Logos (Logical Arguments and Evidence)

Table 9:

Thematic Categories		
A. Corruption and Governance Failures	“Can you explain how \$20 billion went missing from the NNPC?”	“The old order has failed us repeatedly. We need leaders with competence, integrity, and vision.”
B. Electoral Integrity and Democratic Governance	“If the democratic process is subverted, what legitimacy will the government have?”	“Let us look at competence, track record, and integrity before we cast our votes.”
C. Proposed Solutions and Call to Action	“A change in leadership style, transparency, and a genuine fight against corruption are urgently needed.”	“The power is in your hands. Go out and make the right choice.”

In Table 9 both letters highlight corruption and mismanagement, but with different targets. In 2015, Obasanjo directly accused Jonathan's government of corruption. He uses specific figures and concrete evidence to build a case against Jonathan. In 2023, he criticizes the entire political class, not just one leader. Instead of focusing on a single leader's failures, he presents a systemic criticism of Nigerian politics. In 2015, he warned Jonathan against election rigging and political interference. His argument follows a logical sequence that if elections are rigged, legitimacy is lost and national stability is threatened. In 2023, he framed voting as a rational choice, urging Nigerians to compare candidates objectively. His reasoning encourages Nigerians to make informed, logical decisions rather than voting based on emotions or tribal affiliations. Obasanjo does not just criticize; he offers practical solutions. In 2015, he advised Jonathan to change his leadership style. His focus is on reforming governance from within. In 2023, he urged Nigerians to take action through voting. His argument shifts from urging a leader to change in 2015 to urging citizens to change leadership in 2023.

5. DISCUSSION

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's 2015 and 2023 open letters demonstrate the strategic use of Aristotelian rhetoric- ethos, pathos, and logos to engage his audience and influence public discourse. In the 2015 letter to Goodluck Jonathan, Obasanjo projects himself as an elder statesman with firsthand governance experience. His credibility is anchored in his past leadership roles and direct participation in Nigeria's political affairs. By invoking his military and presidential background, Obasanjo crafts a persona of wisdom and experience, which strengthens his persuasive appeal. In contrast, the 2023 letter shifts from an authoritative to a collective ethos. Here, Obasanjo positions himself not just as a former leader but as a concerned Nigerian advocating for national unity and democratic integrity. This reflects Garver's (2004) assertion that rhetorical ethos is adaptable to changing cultural and political environments. In both letters, Obasanjo employs emotionally charged language, drawing on national concerns to evoke a sense of urgency. These findings align with previous research indicating that Nigerian political rhetoric heavily relies on pathos (Ajibola, 2020; Chilton, 2004).

In the 2015 letter, his use of disappointment and warning tones resonates with Chilton's (2004) findings that political actors employ fear-based rhetoric to highlight imminent threats. He appeals to nationalistic sentiments, warning of potential crises should Jonathan's administration continue its perceived failures. However, the 2023 letter marked a notable shift in pathos. Rather than focusing on fear and disappointment, Obasanjo leaned towards optimism and collective responsibility. He acknowledged Nigeria's political struggles but also

presented a hopeful vision for the future. This reflects Aristotle's (trans. 2007) notion that effective rhetoric balances fear with hope to mobilize audiences constructively. The transition from a critical to a more solution-oriented emotional appeal indicates an evolution in Obasanjo's rhetorical approach, making his message more palatable to a wider audience.

In 2015, his argumentation was structured around empirical evidence, citing specific policy failures and governance shortcomings. He referenced security concerns, economic instability, and corruption scandals, reinforcing his claims with factual substantiation. This approach aligns with Aristotle's (trans. 2007) principle that logos strengthens credibility when supported by verifiable facts. By 2023, Obasanjo's use of logos had evolved towards a more pragmatic, solution-based argument. Instead of merely critiquing the government, he outlined steps for national progress, reinforcing his argument with comparative references to other nations.

In the 2015 letter, Obasanjo directly addresses Goodluck Jonathan and adopts a confrontational and accusatory tone. He frames himself as a mentor and elder statesman, leveraging ethos to establish his authority. The letter is heavily focused on Jonathan's leadership failures, particularly in corruption, economic mismanagement, and electoral malpractice. His emotional appeal (pathos) conveys disappointment and fear over the state of Nigeria under Jonathan's rule. Logically (logos), he builds an argument that Jonathan's actions are jeopardizing Nigeria's stability and democracy. The call to action is directed at Jonathan, urging him to change his leadership approach and avoid electoral misconduct.

The study's findings reinforce the argument that political rhetoric is not static but evolves in response to socio-political conditions (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2011). In 2015, Nigeria faced heightened insecurity and economic downturns, which influenced Obasanjo's confrontational rhetoric. His warnings about national instability align with Chilton's (2004) model of political crisis rhetoric, where leaders emphasize impending dangers to push for immediate change. Conversely, the 2023 letter emerges in a more politically aware and digitally engaged Nigeria, where citizens have greater access to information. The shift towards an inclusive and solution-driven discourse aligns with the findings of Adetunji (2021), who argues that modern African political communication is adapting to changing audience expectations for constructive political engagement.

The major differences between Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's 2015 open letter to Goodluck Jonathan and his 2023 open letter to Nigerians lie in their audience, tone, rhetorical approach, and call to action. The 2023 letter was not addressed to a single leader but to the

Nigerian people. The tone is advisory and motivational rather than confrontational. Obasanjo presents himself as a guardian of democracy and shifts his critique from an individual leader to the broader Nigerian political system. Instead of attacking a sitting president, he appeals to the collective responsibility of Nigerians, particularly the youth, to make informed voting decisions. His emotional appeal (pathos) is rooted in urgency and hope, encouraging citizens to take charge of their future. The logical argument (logos) highlights systemic failures in governance and emphasises the need for competent leadership. Unlike the 2015 letter, where he calls on a leader to change, in 2023, he calls on Nigerians to actively participate in the electoral process to bring about change. Over time, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's rhetorical approach has undergone significant reformation, shifting from a tone of personal confrontation in 2015 to one of collective responsibility in 2023. This evolution reflects a broader change in political communication, where persuasion increasingly relies on inclusive discourse rather than authoritative critique.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's rhetorical techniques changed between his open letters from 2015 and 2023, reflecting the shifting political and socioeconomic climate in Nigeria. Drawing on Aristotle's timeless ethos, pathos, and logos, Obasanjo shows a remarkable ability to adapt his message to the situation at hand and speak directly to the expectations, anxieties, and dreams of the Nigerian people. In 2015, his tone was firm and confrontational, rooted in the authority of a seasoned statesman warning the nation of looming dangers. By 2023, however, that tone had shifted. Rather than casting blame, Obasanjo spoke as a fellow citizen, calling for unity and offering a roadmap for progress. This transformation highlights just how fluid political communication can be and how it must evolve to resonate with new realities and a more politically aware, digitally connected public. As Fairclough (2015), van Dijk (2011), and Adetunji (2021) have rightly observed, the most effective political rhetoric adapts to its environment, and Obasanjo exemplifies this shift. This study reinforces the significance of balance in political persuasion. While Nigerian political speeches often lean heavily on ethos and pathos, Obasanjo's letters, especially in 2023, show a growing integration of logos. His arguments are not only emotionally compelling but also grounded in logic, evidence, and thoughtful analysis. This suggests a maturing political rhetoric, one that doesn't just stir emotions or assert authority but seeks to reason with the public. This research contributes to the broader discourse on political communication in Africa by showing that rhetoric is not merely about language but serves as a mirror of the times, a leadership tool, and a bridge between leaders and the people. As Nigeria's democracy continues to evolve, future studies could explore how

other African leaders adapt their rhetorical strategies in response to changing national realities.

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