

60 DAYS OF TINUBU'S PRESIDENCY

On the 29th of May 2023, Nigeria inaugurated Bola Ahmed Tinubu as its fifth president since the return to democracy in 1999. President Tinubu was declared the winner of one of the fiercest presidential contests in the country's history. The contest also witnessed the lowest voter turnout in Nigeria's democratic history and recorded several allegations of vote rigging. In fact, opposition candidates now await the verdict of the tribunal where Tinubu's victory has been challenged.

Democracy in Nigeria, like in most countries around the world, is increasingly becoming platformed. Besides governmental policies and decisions, social media platforms have now become veritable means to understand citizens' political bent and likely electoral choices.

This report collects data from Twitter and Facebook to thematically examine the sentiments and reactions of Nigerians regarding the first 60 days of Tinubu's presidency. Four findings were made. One, three sectors have generated the most engagement - economy, education, and politics. Two, the people are not over the election yet. A large chunk of the commentaries is not devoid of remarks about pre-election activities and events and a possible re-run.

Three, whilst there is a general record of neutral sentiments towards Tinubu's administration activities, the negative remarks have come mostly from a place of distrust in the practicality of policies and decisions. Fourth, tribal and ethnic sentiments continue to remain a strong pivot of Nigeria's political outlook.



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INTRODUCTION

On the 29th of May 2023, Nigeria inaugurated Bola Ahmed Tinubu as its fifth president since the return to democracy in 1999. President Tinubu was declared the winner of one of the fiercest¹ presidential contests in the country's history. The contest also witnessed the lowest voter turnout² in Nigeria's democratic history and recorded several allegations of vote rigging³. In fact, opposition candidates now await⁴ the verdict of the tribunal where Tinubu's victory has been challenged.

Aside from the keenly contested election that brought Tinubu to power, social media platforms also provided a virtual but volatile battleground for the contestants and their supporters alike.

Democracy in Nigeria, like in most countries around the world, is increasingly becoming platformed, where political interactions are instant and not one-way, like in the traditional print and electronic media.

Globally, research has increasingly examined the role of social media⁵ on election outcomes through disinformation, polarisation, echo chambers, hate speech, bots, political advertising, and new media. For example, analysts predicted⁶ that the US 2020 presidential election would be influenced by what people see, read and learn on social media, particularly as 72% of the country's citizens who are of voting age are active on these media.

¹Nigerian Election 2023 and Bola Tinubu's Victory: What to Know. (2023). The New York Times.

²Nigerian Election 2023 and Bola Tinubu's Victory: What to Know. (2023). The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/nigeria-election.html>

³Opposition Parties in Nigeria Call for Election Rerun, Citing Vote Rigging. (2023). The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/28/world/africa/nigeria-election-challenges.html>

⁴Sunday, I. (2023, August 11). Presidential Election Tribunal: Anxiety as Nigerians await judgement day. Daily Post Nigeria; Daily Post Nigeria. <https://dailypost.ng/2023/08/11/presidential-election-tribunal-anxiety-as-nigerians-await-judgement-day/>

⁵Gradwohl, R., Heller, Y., & Hillman, A. L. (2020). Social Media and Democracy. Cambridge University Press EBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108890960>

⁶Suciu, P. (2021, December 10). Social Media Could Determine The Outcome Of The 2020 Election. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2020/10/26/social-media-could-determine-the-outcome-of-the-2020-election/>

In Nigeria, a Dataphyte report on political adverts by the three main presidential candidates recorded [261](#)⁷ Facebook and Instagram adverts between March and August 2022. For an election in February 2023, this could be the most social media-engaged election in the country's history. Previous research also examined the [role of social media](#)⁸ in the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Therefore, social media platforms have now become veritable means to understand citizens' political bent and likely electoral choices, besides governmental policies and decisions.

This report collects data from Twitter and Facebook to thematically examine the sentiments and reactions of Nigerians regarding the first 60 days of Tinubu's presidency. Four findings were made. One, three sectors have generated the most engagement - economy, education, and politics. Two, the people are not over the election yet. A large chunk of the commentaries is not devoid of remarks about pre-election activities and events and a possible re-run. Three, whilst there is a general record of neutral sentiments towards Tinubu's administration activities, the negative remarks have come mostly from a place of distrust in the practicality of policies and decisions. Four, tribal and ethnic sentiments continue to remain a strong pivot of Nigerian's political outlook.

⁷Ayantola Alayande. (2022, September 27). Running Digital: Online Political Advertising and Nigeria's 2023 General Elections. Dataphyte.

<https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/special-report/running-digital-online-political-advertising-and-nigerias-2023-general-elections/>

⁸Nwosu, C. O. (2015). Political Participation in the Twittersphere and the Nigerian 2015 and 2019 Presidential Elections: A Cultural Underpinning. Uts.edu.au. <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/147456>

Impressions of Tinubu on Google in his first 60 days in office

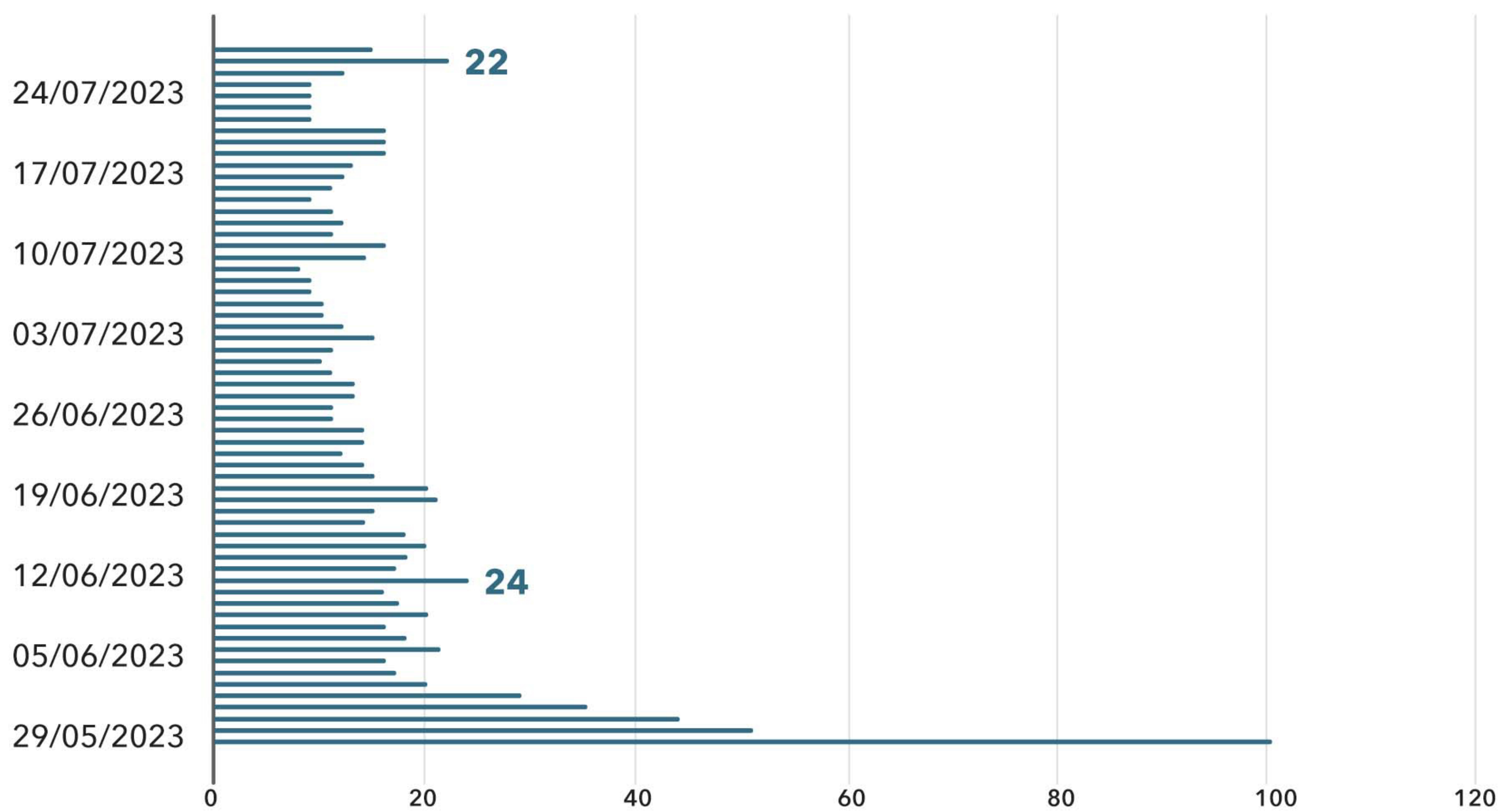


Figure 1: Impressions of Tinubu on Google in his first 60 days in office.

Using popular media reportage as a baseline, there were nine (9) major policy highlights of Tinubu’s first 60 days in office. These are: (i) Subsidy removal/Unification of the multiple naira exchange rates – May 29, 2023; (ii) Signed Electricity Act 2023 (later suspended) – June 9, 2023; (iii) Student Loan (Access to Higher Education Act 2023) – June 12, 2023; (iv) Freedom of Data Act 2023 – June 12, 2023; (v) Signed tax policies of telecommunication, alcoholic beverages, and green tax (later postponed) – July 6, 2023; (vi) Signed 2023 Finance Act (postponed) – July 6, 2023; (vii) Emergence as ECOWAS president – July 9, 2023; (viii) Declared state of emergency on Food Security – July 13, 2023; (ix) First batch of ministerial appointments – July 27, 2023

However, to understand which policies have generated the most online interest, we measured the Google Trend impressions of Tinubu on each day the policy was signed or announced. We used Google as an instrument to gauge the public’s interest for three reasons. First, not all policies were communicated by the official presidency or even Tinubu’s social media handles. For instance, the presidency or Tinubu's Twitter handles did not post about the education bill or the food security emergency. The only time they did was outside of his first 60 days. Thus, it is imperfect to use the official communication channels as instruments to directly measure the public interests in those policies.

Secondly, using major news outlets as a probable way to measure Nigerians' interests in the above policies proved problematic because of the inconsistency of views. As an example, whilst The Punch News registered 346k views on their education loan news on Twitter, they only attracted 27k views on the news of the full list of ministerial appointments. This does not mean the people were not as interested in the ministerial list as they were in the education bill, the gap in viewership may have been caused by platform algorithms, repeated news posts, or which outlet first broke the news. These dynamics are present for other news outlets too.

Lastly, a computer language code query of *"how many people spoke about a policy on social media when the policy was announced?"* may only prove useful for Twitter and not Facebook. This is because Twitter's API allows data to be extracted from all users, to an extent, but Facebook's API does not allow this because it only permits data extraction from public pages and not individual users' posts. Therefore, this 'coding' method would only gauge Twitter to an extent but return almost zero (0) values for Facebook. Google, therefore, becomes a neutral way to measure people's interests in these policies/decisions where the data (in millions) are presented for each date of the 60 days.

Therefore, from the data presented above, within Tinubu's first 60 days, three major policies and decisions have attracted the most impression⁹. The first is the subsidy removal, which shows an outlier rise that peaked at 100 million on the day of his inauguration and extended into the rest of the week.

The second is the signed 'Access to Higher Education' law, which seeks to establish a Students' Loan Fund (SLF) for Nigerian students. The Google impression about Tinubu over this policy peaked at 24 million on the day the bill was signed.

The third is the news of the first batch of ministerial appointments sent to the Senate House on the 27th of July. 22 million impressions were recorded that day. In this line,

⁹Impression means how often a word or link is seen through Google. What are impressions, position, and clicks? - Search Console Help. (2019). Google.com. <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/7042828?hl=en>

therefore, this report focuses on these economic, educational and political policies and decisions of Tinubu’s first 60 days in Office.

DATA OVERVIEW

We conducted our research with utmost precision, utilising the most advanced open source intelligence (OSINT) tools to scrape social media conversations relating to President Tinubu’s policy in his first 60 days. Our focus was on three specific keywords: "Tinubu Subsidy" (from May 29 to May 31), "Tinubu Education loan" (from June 12 to June 15), and "Tinubu Ministerial appointment" (from July 27 to July 29). On Facebook, we sourced data only from public pages, while on Twitter, we only included what the algorithms classified as "top" and "all" tweets.

| POLICY/DECISION | FACEBOOK | TWITTER (X) | TOTAL |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Economy (Subsidy Removal) | 861 | 699 | 1,560 |
| Education (Access to higher education act) | 755 | 312 | 1,067 |
| Politics (Ministerial appointments) | 495 | 755 | 1,250 |
| Total | 2,111 | 1,766 | 3,877 |

Figure 2: Breakdown of scraped social media commentaries

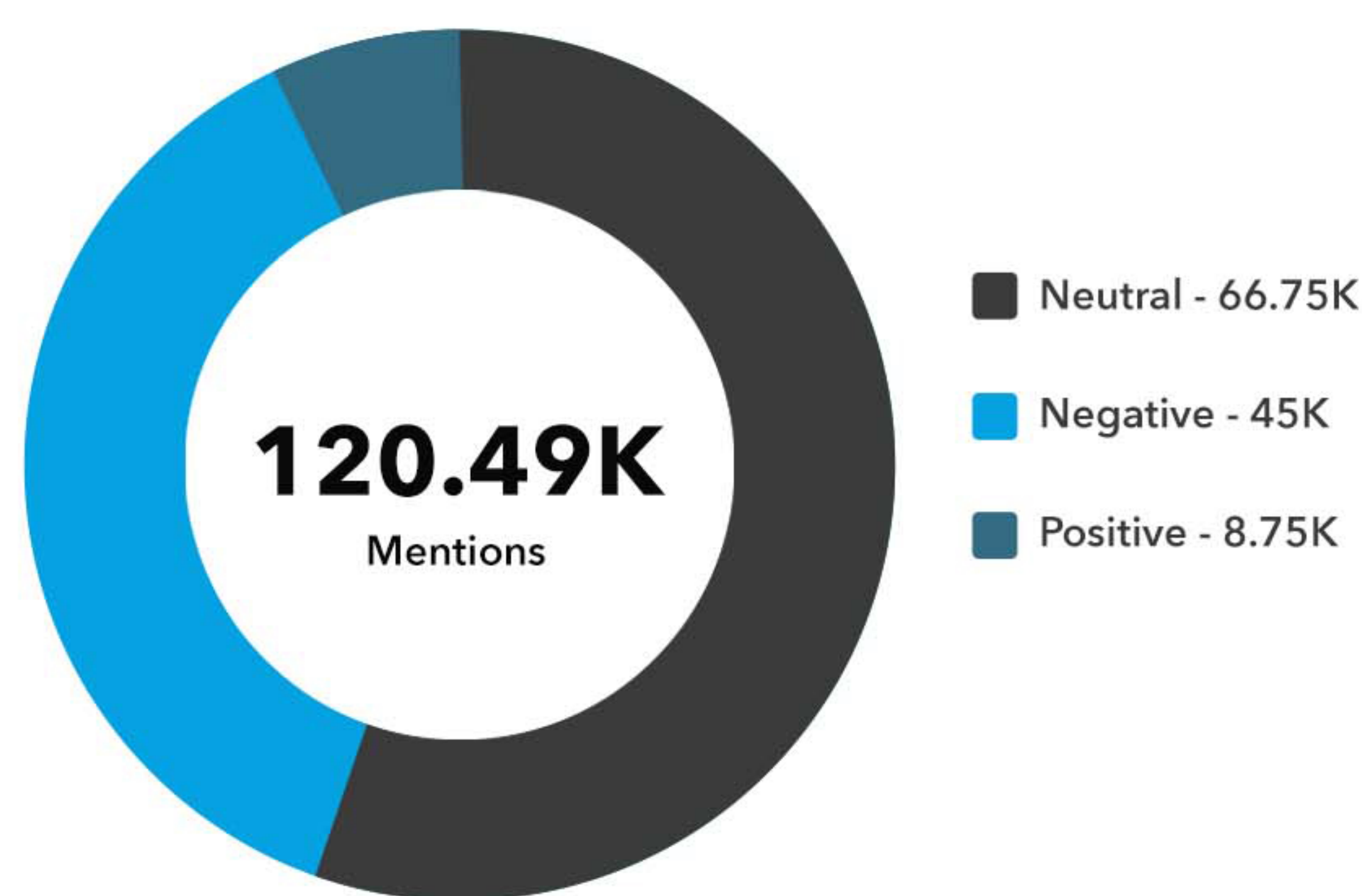
Our data preparation involved the exclusion of GIFs, memes, videos, emoticons, and posts from users who used trending words and hashtags for a different purpose. We then subjected the data to a qualitative text analysis using Atlas.ti. The results were conclusive and insightful.

SENTIMENT SUMMARY

Generally, as the data snapshots below suggest, most of the social media commentaries across the three policies/decisions were judged neutral. This may be explained by the fact that the presidency is a new administration and needs to be given a chance to test its initiatives.

However, there is generally a record of more negative sentiments than positive ones. As regards the subsidy removal, for every 1 positive sentiment there are 5 negative remarks. For the education loan, negative sentiments are 14% more likely to be recorded than positive sentiments. For the ministerial appointments, negative sentiments are 40% more likely to appear than positive.

Sentiment summary ⓘ



Sentiment trend ⓘ

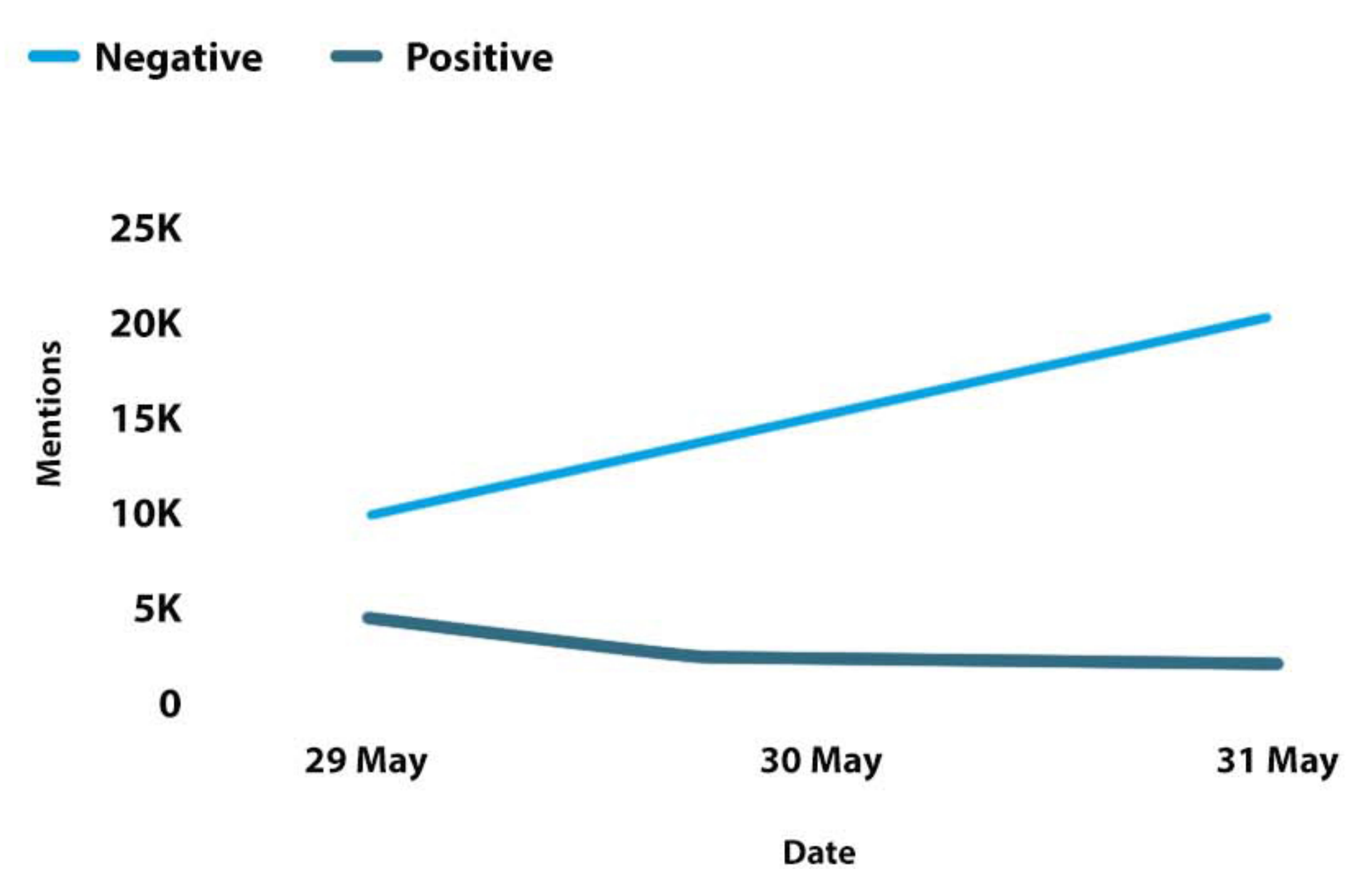
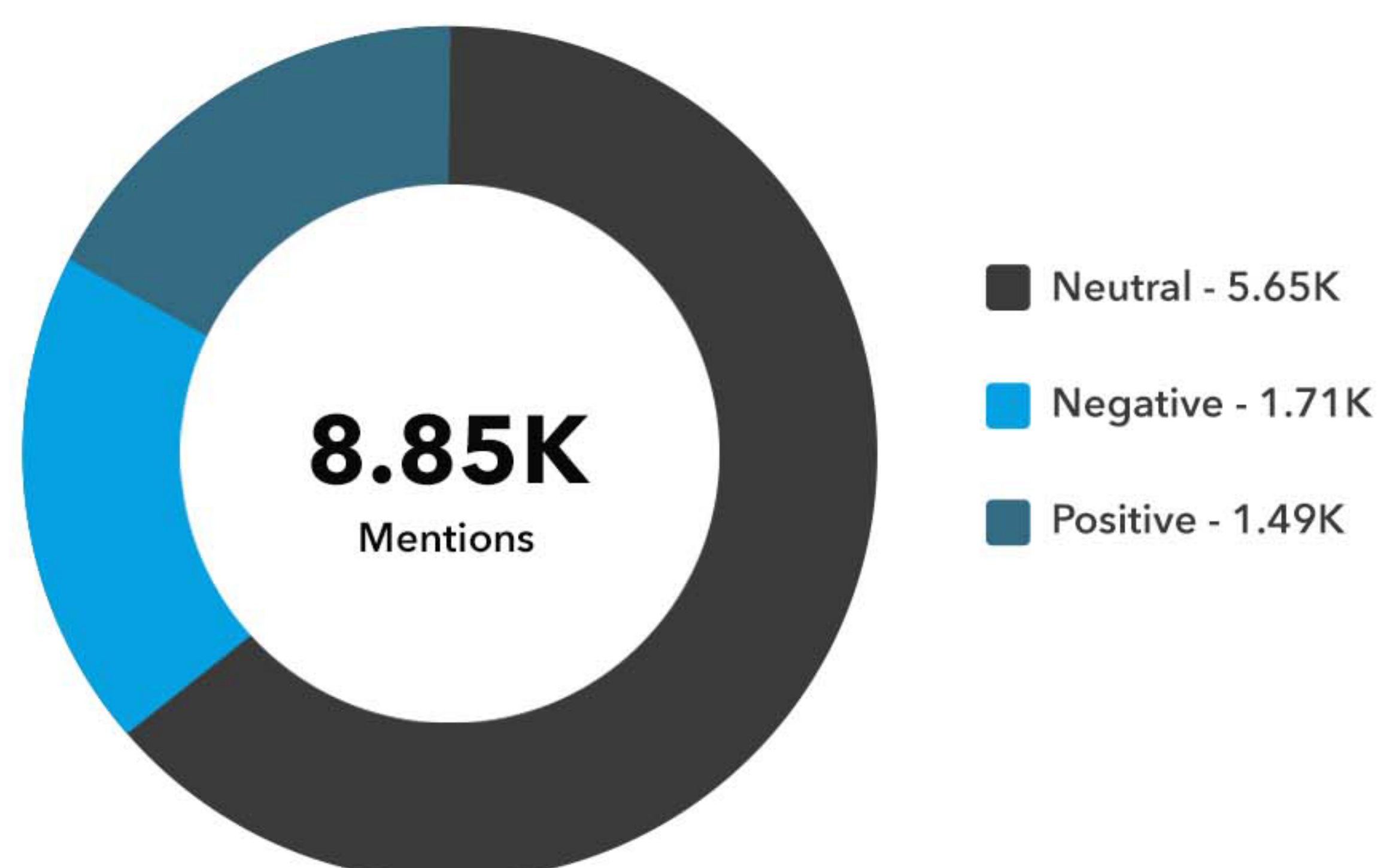


Figure 5: Sentiment summary of Tinubu's subsidy removal announcement (Source: Sprinklr)

Sentiment summary ⓘ



Sentiment trend ⓘ

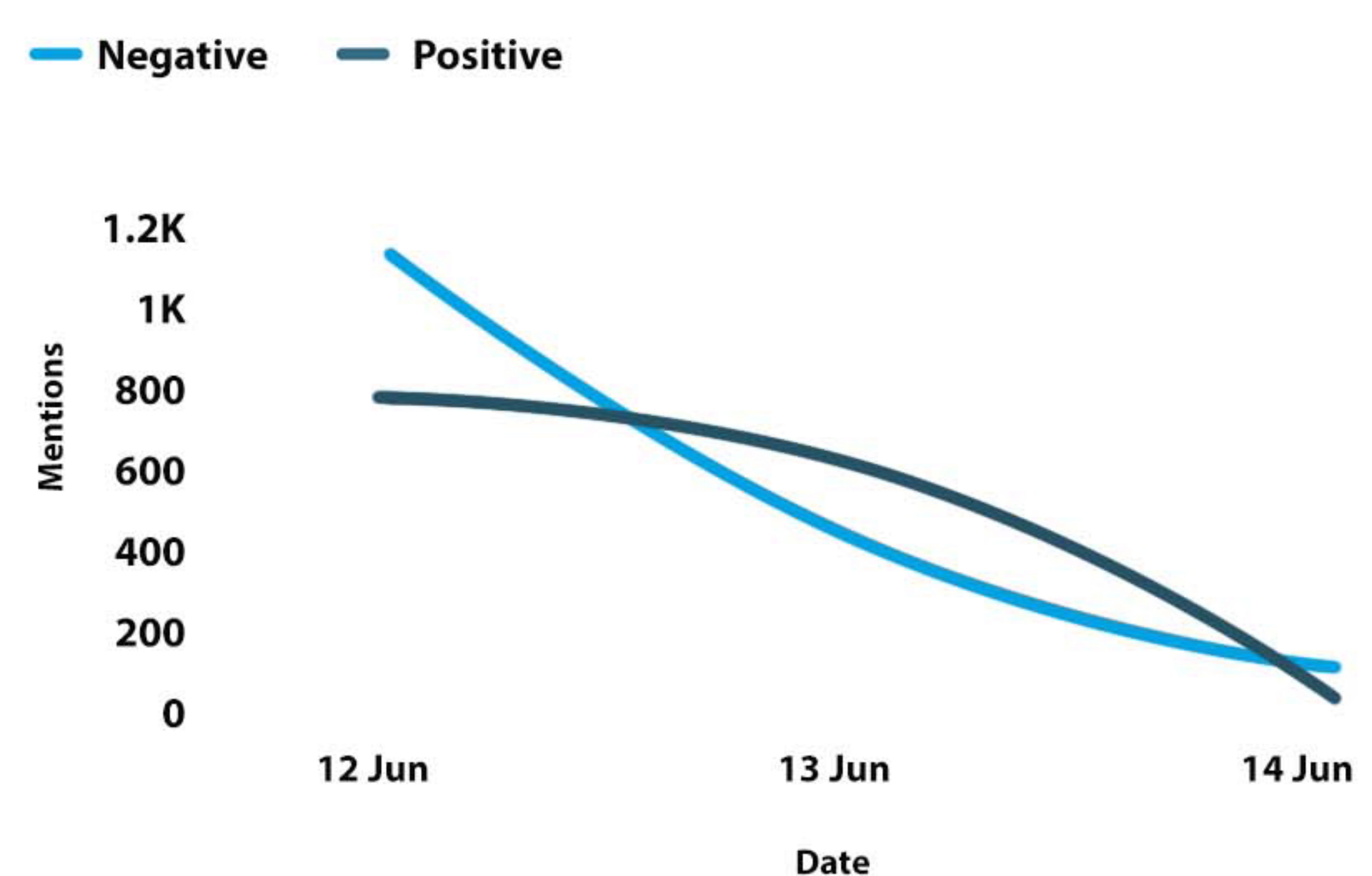
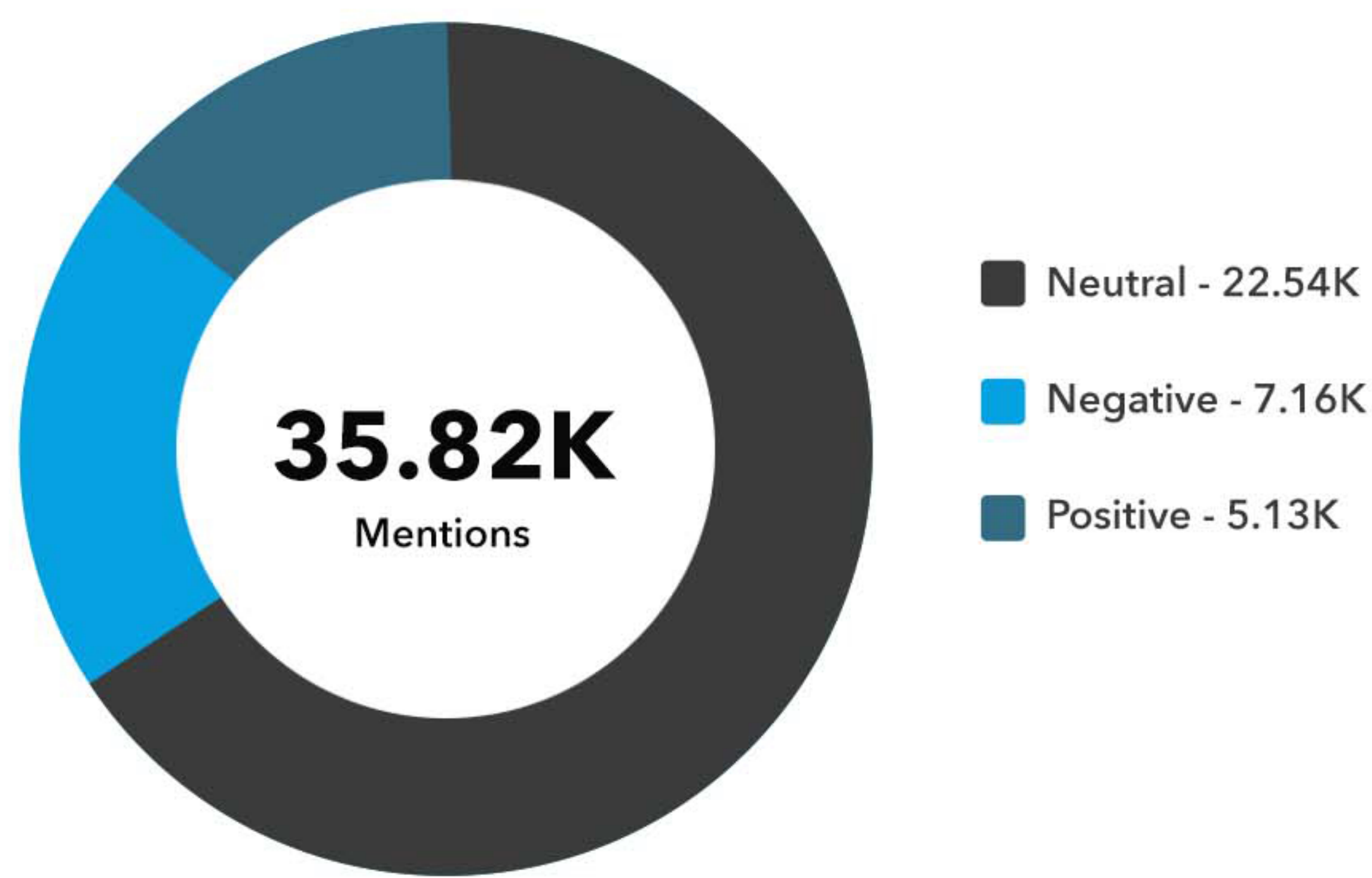


Figure 6: Sentiment summary of the Education Loan bill signed into law (Source: Sprinklr)

Sentiment summary **i**



Sentiment trend **i**

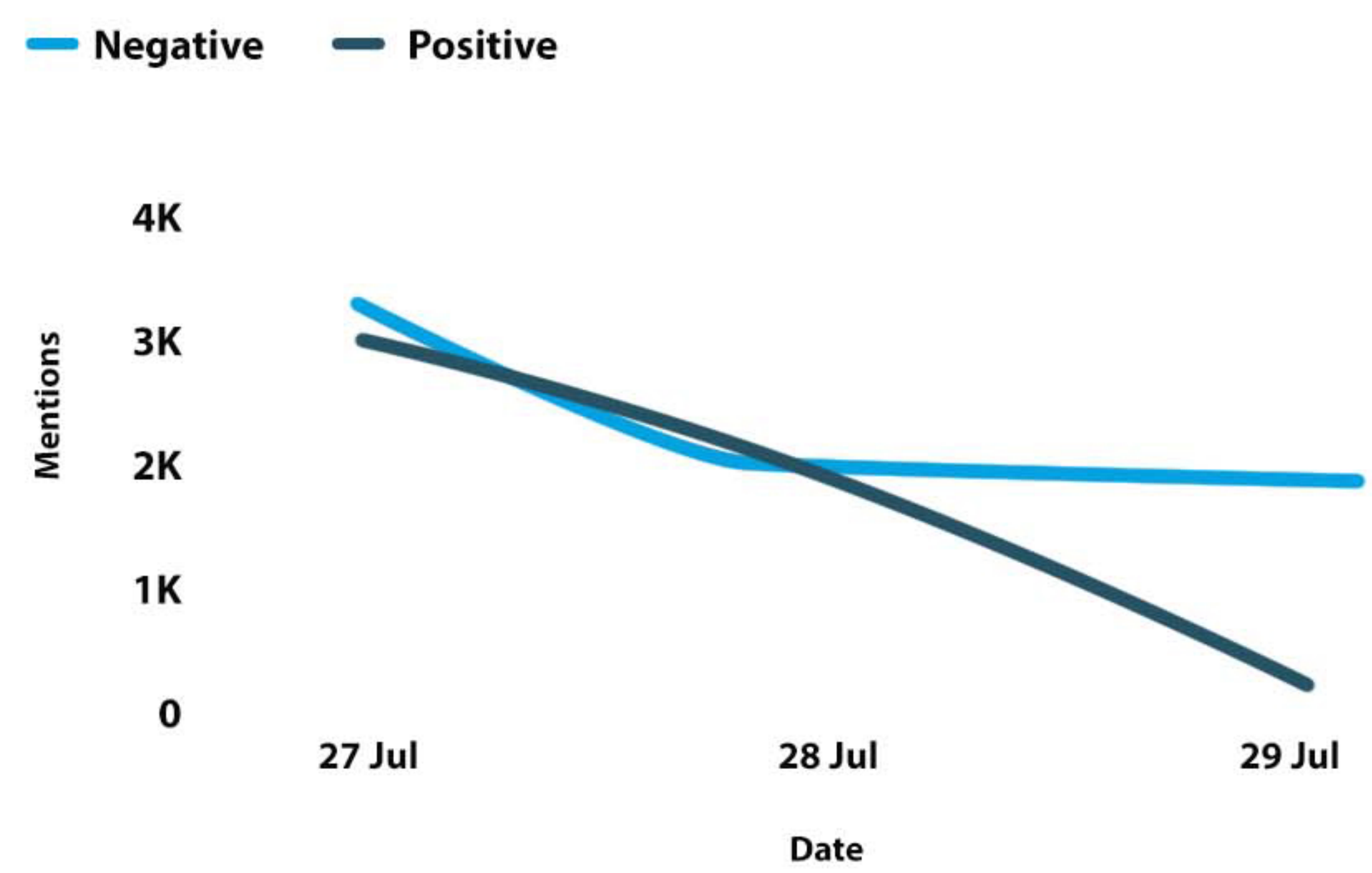


Figure 7: Sentiment summary of the first batch of Ministerial appointment (Source: Sprinklr)

However, beyond these sentiments overview, there is a need for a deeper dive into the comments made for largely two reasons. First, quantitative-based sentiment reports may lack context within which comments are based. As an example, a comment of **“good for you”** to the news of harsh economic realities caused by the subsidy removal may be algorithmically classified as positive or approval of the news. However, in reality, it is a negative comment written sarcastically to refer to the fact that actions have consequences, especially when the action is deemed bad. Similarly, sentiment algorithms may not be fully trained to understand the local language, broken English, or humour of Nigerian social media users.

SUBSIDY REMOVAL - ECONOMY



Figure 8: Wordcloud of social media commentaries on subsidy removal

In an unusual way, President Bola Tinubu, at his inaugural address, announced major policy changes which included the removal of fuel subsidies. Although Nigeria is the largest¹⁰ producer of oil in Africa and 15th in the world, it still imports petroleum due to its incapability to refine enough oil to meet local demands. Thus, previous governments have continuously subsidised the imports of petroleum products.

Last year, this subsidy was worth N4.3trn (\$9.3bn)¹¹, and for the first half of this year, N3.36trn was budgeted for it. Dangote's recently commissioned refinery, which is the largest single-train¹² refinery in the world, is not expected¹³ to change anything anytime soon. Aside from this, the subsidy regime has been alleged to provide room for corruption and embezzlement because only a cabal¹⁴ of petroleum importers benefit from the scheme with little or no accountability.

However, the sudden announcement of this removal immediately led to a rise in the price of petrol which had ripple effects on other goods and services. Fuel prices increased¹⁵ by 50% to 200% to cost between N500 - N600, and two months later, the country's inflation increased to 23%. Seven million more people are expected to fall into poverty by the end of the year. Studies have already predicted¹⁶ that subsidy removal will trigger higher macroeconomic and even non-trivial instabilities because of the abrupt shock in the oil price. Thus, subsidy reforms are advised to come with **“well-targeted safety nets and sustainable adjustment mechanisms”**. Nevertheless, international rating agencies such as Fitch Rating argue that the subsidy removal alongside the proposed unified exchange rate are positive steps for the country's credit profile¹⁷.

¹⁰Izuaka, M. (2023, June 16). Nigeria regains position as Africa's largest oil producer. Premium Times Nigeria.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/604891-nigeria-regains-position-as-africas-largest-oil-producer.html>

¹¹BBC News (2023, May 29). Bola Tinubu inauguration: Fuel subsidy removed in Nigeria. BBC News; BBC News.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-65737846>

¹²Nigeria's 650 kbpd Dangote Refinery being commissioned; largest single-train refinery in the world (2023). Green Car Congress. <https://www.greencarcongress.com/2023/05/20230522-dangote.html>

¹³Dangote Refinery Unlikely To Start 50% Production This Year – Osifo. (2023). Channels Television.

<https://www.channelstv.com/2023/08/02/dangote-refinery-unlikely-to-start-50-production-this-year-osifo/>

¹⁴Kingsley Moghalu. (2023, May 17). Why and how petrol subsidy must go. By Kingsley Moghalu. Premium Times Nigeria.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/598977-why-and-how-petrol-subsidy-must-go-by-kingsley-moghalu.html>

¹⁵Odewale Abayomi. (2023, June 27). Consequences of fuel subsidy removal on Nigeria's balance of trade. Vanguard News.

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/consequences-of-fuel-subsidy-removal-on-nigerias-balance-of-trade/>

¹⁶Omotosho, B. S. (2020). Oil Price Shocks, Fuel Subsidies and Macroeconomic (In)stability in Nigeria. Central Bank of Nigeria Journal of Applied Statistics, Vol. 10 No. 2, 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.33429/cjas.10219.1/6>

¹⁷Fitch ratings (June 2023).

Concerns were raised about the Increase in the cost of tertiary education, a liberalisation agenda of the Tinubu presidency which is enacted by **“shelving all responsibilities”** and **“full commercialisation”** of everything possible. In addition, the bill has created rumours of increment in school fees by federal universities, with purported¹⁹ images of new federal university fees going around on social media.

A further analysis of collected social media commentaries shows that Nigerians were worried about accessibility to the conditions that come with the loan. The conditions include²⁰ that students must provide at least two guarantors, each of whom must either be a civil servant of at least level 12, a lawyer with at least 10 years post-call experience, or a judicial officer, or a justice of the peace. Some Nigerians adjudged the conditions to only be accessible to the privileged. They questioned the fact that **“how can the poor access it when the criteria is high”, “criteria not for the poor”, “poorer students can’t provide these guarantors”**. Thus, there is a lot of doubt that the loan may only be a racketeering scheme to allocate money to a selected few, and as such, **“is a scam”**. In addition, some users noted how **“recovery of loan has been difficult since 1972 when the Nigeria Student Loan Board was first established”**, and as such, if **“you give students loan with such unemployment rate...90% of benefactors are going to jail**. No surprise that In the word cloud above, **“pay”** is an often-repeated word. Furthermore, a lot of humour was made about how education may become inaccessible or when students are unable to pay back the loan because the question of unemployment still lingers.

Nevertheless, a number of users applauded the initiative with comments such as, **“glad my vote is working well”, “our man is really shaming many of them now. More strength, sir”,** and **“good one”**. Also, the committee of Vice Chancellors for private universities lauded²¹ the loan scheme. They argue that students will no longer find it hard to choose between private or public universities since money will no longer be an issue. Economists also backed the bill as a good one in the long-run for the

¹⁹Guardian Nigeria. (2023, August 19). UNIL

AG denies claims of additional fees | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News. The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News. <https://guardian.ng/news/unilag-denies-claims-of-additional-fees/>

²⁰Suleiman, Q. (2023, June 16). All you need to know about Nigeria’s new student loan law. Premium Times Nigeria.

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/604984-all-you-need-to-know-about-nigerias-new-student-loan-law.html>

²¹Punch Newspaper (June 2023). Student loan will make tertiary education affordable – VCs.

<https://punchng.com/student-loan-will-make-tertiary-education-affordable-vcs/>

The nomination of Nyesom Wike as a Minister received the most interest. Wike is a member and an immediate former governor under the opposition party, PDP, and yet, he has been appointed a minister in the Tinubu administration. Many citizens saw this as a betrayal of his party, and, in fact, a word closely mentioned alongside **“Wike” is “Judas”**, which biblically means a betrayer. As a governor, his state, Rivers, is the only state that Tinubu under APC won in the South-South/South East region. Thus, many saw his nomination as a **“reward for election riggers”** and **“compensation for election rigging”**. In fact, a user wrote that “once Wike join(ed) the group of this criminals that’s the end...end of court decision on the election rigged results”. Some citizens also believe the nominated ministers are a **“strategy to win again”** if the election results are cancelled. Another user labelled them the **“2023 presidential election rerun campaign Committee”**.

Furthermore, comments such as **“power back to South is sacrosanct”**, **“U are from Yoruba land...ancestor Tinubu will not bring the desired change”**, **“13 northerners”**, **“South part of Nigeria groom Judas”**, **“South-South always has someone in Nigeria politics”** **“useless south-south chairman”** all portray a conscious geopolitical structure of the country. Citizens were concerned with where the nominated ministers came from and which region may be overrepresented or underrepresented. Interestingly, it does matter which person is in power. For instance, days before the release of the list, a group from southwestern Nigeria, a region Tinubu comes from, raised concerns against lopsided appointments²⁵ that may discriminate against other southwesterners.

²⁵Taiwo Amodu, & Taiwo Amodu. (2023, July 21). Rumbings in South-West as group accuses Tinubu of “Lagosizing” appointments. Tribune Online
<https://tribuneonlineng.com/rumbings-in-south-west-as-group-accuses-tinubu-of-lagosizing-appointments/>

CONCLUSION

This report on Tinubu's first 60 days in office records that three policies and decisions in the areas of economy, education, and politics have gained the most interest from Nigerians. A deep dive into these interests reveals that people refer more to the election that brought him into power, and this accounts for many of the negative sentiments he has received in his first two months. Although there is a general record of neutral sentiments towards the Tinubu administration, a good number of netizens still distrust the presidency in following through on its policies and programmes. Lastly, the report reveals that tribal and ethnic sentiments continue to be significant factors in Nigeria's politics.

Dataphyte

Dataphyte is a social impact organisation providing data access, insight and hyperlocal research for businesses, governments and development organisations to achieve their socio-economic goals.

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