

Multimodal Discourse Features in Selected Nigerian Political Cartoons

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Abstract

Political cartoons in Nigerian society serve as tools for political commentary and social critique. This research investigates the socio-political impact of visual and linguistic strategies in selected Nigerian political cartoons, addressing a significant gap in the existing literature concerning the role of visual media in political discourse. Despite the prevalent use of political cartoons in Nigerian media, there has been limited scholarly attention to how these cartoons utilise visual and linguistic elements to critique socio-political disputes. This study aims to bridge this gap by employing Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design and Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory to analyse seven selected political cartoons. The study's primary aim is to explore how these cartoons communicate complex political realities and influence public perception. The objectives include identifying the visual and linguistic strategies used in the cartoons, examining the socio-political issues they address, and evaluating their impact on public discourse. The findings reveal that Nigerian political cartoons employ a sophisticated blend of visual and linguistic strategies to convey powerful socio-political messages. The analysis demonstrates that these cartoons effectively highlight issues such as corruption, economic hardship, political neglect, and the disparity between the ruling elites and the suffering masses. The study also found that these cartoons effectively depict the disparity between the ruling elites and the suffering masses, employing salience, framing, modality, denotation, connotation, and myth to engage and challenge public perception. The research underscores the significance of political cartoons as tools for socio-political engagement and discourse, demonstrating their role in reflecting and shaping public opinion on critical national issues. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of political cartoons as a medium for socio-political engagement and discourse in Nigeria. It highlights the critical role of visual semiotics in political commentary and the necessity for further research into the impact of visual media on public opinion and political accountability.

Keywords: Political Cartoons, Visual Semiotics, Socio-political Commentary, Nigerian Media and Visual Grammar Analysis.

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Introduction

Political cartoons have long served as a potent medium for social commentary and critique, using humour, satire, and visual metaphors to highlight societal issues and political malfeasance. In Nigeria, political cartoons play a significant role in the socio-political landscape, offering insights into the collective consciousness of the populace and serving as a voice for the disenfranchised. This study examines the visual and linguistic strategies employed in selected Nigerian political cartoons, using the frameworks of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar theory and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. By analysing these cartoons, the study aims to uncover the socio-political impacts of these semiotic elements. Political cartoons are a form of visual rhetoric that communicates complex messages through the interplay of images and text. They often condense multifaceted political and social issues into single, impactful visuals, making them accessible and engaging to a broad audience. In Nigeria, political cartoons have a rich history, dating back to the colonial era when they were used to critique colonial policies and advocate for independence (Uche, 1989). Over the years, they have evolved to address contemporary issues such as corruption, poverty, insecurity, and governance. This study leverages Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar theory, which provides a systematic way to analyse visual compositions by examining elements such as colour, vectors, and framing. This theory posits that images, like language, have grammar that can be deconstructed to understand how they convey meaning. In the context of political cartoons, this involves analysing how visual elements are arranged to create a narrative or convey a particular stance. Additionally, Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic theory is employed to dissect the signs and symbols within the cartoons. Barthes' concept of denotation and connotation helps to unpack the literal and implied meanings of the visual and linguistic elements. This dual-layered approach enables a deeper understanding of how cartoons communicate complex socio-political messages and influence public opinion. Political cartoons in Nigeria serve multiple functions. They are a tool for political communication, a form of social critique, and a means of public engagement. Given the country's diverse ethnic, religious, and political landscape, cartoons offer a unique medium to address sensitive issues in a manner that can transcend these divides (Omoera, 2010). They provide a platform for the expression of dissent and the mobilisation of public sentiment, often filling the gap left by mainstream media, which may be constrained by political or economic pressures. The socio-political environment in Nigeria is characterised by numerous challenges, including widespread corruption, economic instability, and social inequality. Political cartoons often depict these issues vividly, using satire and irony to expose the failures and excesses of political leaders. For instance, cartoons highlighting the mismanagement of public funds, electoral malpractices, and the plight of the masses underline the disconnect between the ruling elite and the general populace. These cartoons not only inform but also provoke thought and discussion, acting as a catalyst for public discourse and potential social change (Nwafor, 2016). The aim of this study is to explore the visual and linguistic strategies used in Nigerian political cartoons and their socio-political impacts.

Previous Studies on Political Cartoons in Nigeria

Newspaper cartoon has a long-standing tradition of merging satire with political commentary in a society. It has, in several situations, been the most direct medium for criticising bad practice and maladministration by governments. Previous studies on political cartoons have been carried out from semiotics, pragmatics, multimodality and so on. For instance, Mardziah and Afida (2014) researched on political cartoons in the first decade of the millennium. The study reviewed studies conducted in the area from the beginning of the millennium (2000) to the year 2010 that marks the first decade of the 21st century millennium. This work revealed that political cartoons constitute a specific genre of political reporting in that they are pictorial representations which depict political and social issues, as well as the parties involved, in an immediate and condensed form. Sani (2014) explored the power of verbal and visual metaphors in the construction of satire in Nigerian political cartoons, limiting his works to the most widely read newspapers in 2010 thus using the perspective of cognitive metaphor, which he claims has been identified as the most predominant device used in constructing satirical depictions which facilitate better understanding of issues of national interest reflecting social realities aimed at bringing positive change in the Nigerian socio-political context. Omosebi (2021) in his investigation, considered the multimodal discourse analysis of the implicature of some political cartoons associated with the 2020 American presidential election, using the cooperative principle theory and relevance theory. He established that images, focusing on cartoons aside their social significant role, also carry pragmatic impulses as they are focused on conveying messages that have contextual relevance in the society. Also, Taiwo (2023) worked on political cartoons practice in Nigeria and essential components. The study relied on qualitative descriptive theory to explain the critical parts and also used supplementary data that reinforced the meaning and context inherent in the components. Despite the prevalent use of political cartoons in Nigerian media, there has been limited scholarly attention to how these cartoons utilise visual and linguistic elements to critique socio-political disputes. This study aims to bridge this gap by employing Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design and Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory to analyse seven selected political cartoons. Therefore, this study investigates categories of visual elements and socio-political issues of the visual and textual elements in the selected Nigerian political cartoons.

Literature review

Political Cartoon as a Weapon of Satire

Political cartoons are effective means cartoonists use to express thoughts, and the goal of political cartoon is to raise public consciousness using figurative tone and graphical imagery to address crucial issues and criticise leaders and their contemptible practices (Momoh, 2016). In other words, the genre serves as a medium of political reporting, articulating a particular message from a particular point of view using language and imageries as prime tools. In view of the fact that political cartoons contents are mostly expressed through visual illustrations,

they are best understood through investigation of incorporated visual rhetoric (McNair, 2011). It has been shown historically and through researches that, political cartoonists dominantly employ satire and attendant humour to draw the attention of the public. As a consequence, the communicative functions of humour and satire and the attendant visual power have made political cartoons an interesting research field across academic disciplines. Historically, political cartoons are recognised as one of the earliest forms of political satire (Townsend et al, 2008). The basis of satire as a fundamental ingredient of political cartoon today largely depends on the criticism of the injustice and the abuse of power usually perpetrated by those in power or the dominant ruling party (Morris, 1992). In recent years, there has been increase in research on political cartoons across disciplines. This has made political cartoons a potent interdisciplinary research field. Some researchers' interest focuses on the role of political cartoon in shaping socio-political movement (Steuter, 2004): while some view it from the perspective of criticism of political leaders, politicians and political parties (Lamb 2004). Some delve into a much more complex issue involving the overall political atmosphere as featured, the literary and cultural allusion employed, personal character traits and situational themes (Desousa 1981).

The goals of political cartoons are principally weaved around criticism of political leaders or political decisions. This genre has been adopted by the media in covering the Nigerian activities, actions of politicians, government policy direction and perception of the citizenry in recent times. This is because there are many controversial issues as there are political developments. Not all decisions of government are acceptable by the populace or the opposition, just as, not all criticisms are taken by the government or democratic institutions or political parties in good faith. In the midst of all these, the media step in from time to time to make their position known, albeit in a cartoon tone.

Political Cartooning

Political cartooning, a distinct and influential genre of visual commentary, has been instrumental in shaping public opinion and providing critical insights into political and social issues. Originating in the 18th century, political cartoons use humour, satire, and symbolism to critique politicians, policies, and societal trends. This form of artistic expression transcends language barriers and can distil complex political narratives into accessible visual metaphors (Edwards, 2018).

The history of political cartooning is rich and varied. One of the earliest and most notable political cartoonists was James Gillray, whose work in the late 18th and early 19th centuries sharply criticised political figures and policies of his time. His cartoons were influential in shaping public opinion and are considered foundational in the development of the genre (Knight, 2019). Similarly, Thomas Nast, an American cartoonist of the 19th century, is credited with creating enduring political symbols, such as the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant (Morris, 2017). His work played a crucial role in the political landscape of his era, particularly during the Reconstruction period in the United States. Political cartoons often employ a range of artistic techniques to convey their messages. Exaggeration and caricature are common

methods used to highlight the traits and behaviours of political figures, making them instantly recognisable and amplifying their perceived flaws or characteristics. Symbolism is another key element, where objects or figures represent broader concepts or ideologies. For instance, the use of animals, such as eagles or lions, can symbolise nations or political parties, allowing cartoonists to critique complex ideas succinctly (Hollihan, 2018).

The role of political cartooning extends beyond mere entertainment; it serves as a powerful tool for social and political critique. Cartoons can encapsulate public sentiment and provide a platform for dissenting voices. In times of political upheaval or censorship, cartoons have often been a means for expressing opposition and rallying public support for various causes (Press, 2020). Their visual nature allows them to bypass linguistic and educational barriers, reaching a wide audience and provoking thought and discussion across different demographics.

Despite their humorous facade, political cartoons can have significant real-world impacts. They have been known to influence public perception and even policy decisions. For example, during the Watergate scandal, cartoons played a pivotal role in reflecting and shaping the public growing mistrust of the Nixon administration (Reilly, 2016). By distilling complex political issues into easily digestible images, cartoonists can sway public opinion and bring attention to critical issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

However, political cartooning is not without its controversies. The use of caricature and satire can sometimes cross the line into offensive or insensitive territory. Cartoons that address sensitive topics or minority groups can provoke strong reactions and lead to debates about the limits of free expression and the responsibilities of cartoonists (Connors, 2018). The balance between critique and respect is a constant challenge in the field of political cartooning, highlighting the ongoing tension between freedom of speech and the potential for harm. In conclusion, political cartooning is a vital and dynamic form of commentary that combines art and journalism to critique and influence political discourse. Through the use of humour, symbolism, and exaggeration, political cartoons provide accessible and impactful critiques of political figures and policies. Despite the potential for controversy, their role in shaping public opinion and fostering discussion is undeniable, making them a significant component of the political landscape (Goldstein, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This paper combines both Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Barthes' semiotic theory. The integration of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Barthes' semiotic theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework. Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design offers a comprehensive framework for analysing visual communication through the lens of semiotics. Their work, particularly outlined in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006), extends the principles of linguistic analysis to visual media, positing that images can be "read" using a similar grammar to that used for texts. The model identifies three types of meanings: representational, interactive and compositional.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that images convey meaning through representational structures, which include narrative and conceptual processes. Narrative processes depict actions and events, while conceptual processes categorise and define relationships between elements within the image. This distinction helps in understanding how cartoons represent political scenarios and relationships. This aspect focuses on the interaction between the image and the viewer. It includes the gaze, distance, and angle of the depicted participants, which influence how the viewer engages with the image. For instance, a direct gaze might suggest a demand for attention or engagement, while an oblique angle might imply detachment or observation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This pertains to the arrangement of elements within the image, including the placement, size, and balance of components. It deals with how different parts of an image are integrated to form a cohesive whole, guiding the viewer's attention and interpreting the overall meaning. The use of salience, framing, and modality are crucial in this regard (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

In the context of Nigerian political cartoons, Kress and van Leeuwen's framework helps dissect how visual elements convey political messages. For instance, the representational structures in the cartoons often depict politicians and masses in various scenarios, narrating stories of corruption, neglect, or struggle. The interactive meanings are evident in the way characters are depicted engaging with each other and the viewer, influencing how the audience perceives their actions and intentions. Compositional meanings are crucial in understanding how the visual arrangement of elements emphasises certain aspects of the cartoons, such as highlighting the disparity between the politicians and the masses.

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, provides a robust framework for analysing the deeper meanings embedded within visual and textual elements. Barthes' seminal works, including *Mythologies* (1972) and *Elements of Semiology* (1967), explore how signs and symbols create meaning within cultural contexts.

Key Tenets of the Theory

Denotation and Connotation: Barthes (1972) distinguishes between denotation, the literal or primary meaning of a sign, and connotation, the secondary, cultural or ideological meaning. Denotation refers to the direct representation of an object or event, while connotation involves the associations and values that a culture attaches to that object or event. This dual-layered approach allows for a nuanced analysis of visual and textual elements in political cartoons.

Barthes (1972) extends his semiotic theory to include the concept of myth, which refers to the broader cultural narratives and ideologies that underpin the connotations of signs. Myths transform history into nature, making cultural constructs appear natural and inevitable. This concept is particularly useful in understanding how political cartoons reinforce or challenge dominant socio-political narratives. Using Barthes' framework, the analysis of Nigerian political cartoons involves identifying the denotative meanings of visual elements (e.g., a politician

holding money) and exploring their connotative meanings (e.g., corruption, greed). The concept of myth helps in understanding how these cartoons reflect and critique broader socio-political ideologies, such as the myth of political leadership as inherently self-serving. The integration of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Barthes' semiotic theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework. Kress and van Leeuwen's focus on the structural aspects of visual design complements Barthes' emphasis on the cultural and ideological dimensions of meaning. Together, they enable a detailed exploration of how Nigerian political cartoons use visual and linguistic strategies to convey complex socio-political messages. This combined approach allows for a thorough dissection of both the explicit and implicit messages within the cartoons, revealing how visual and textual elements work together to critique political leadership and highlight social issues. By employing these theories, the study uncovers the multifaceted ways in which political cartoons serve as powerful tools for socio-political commentary and engagement.

Methodology

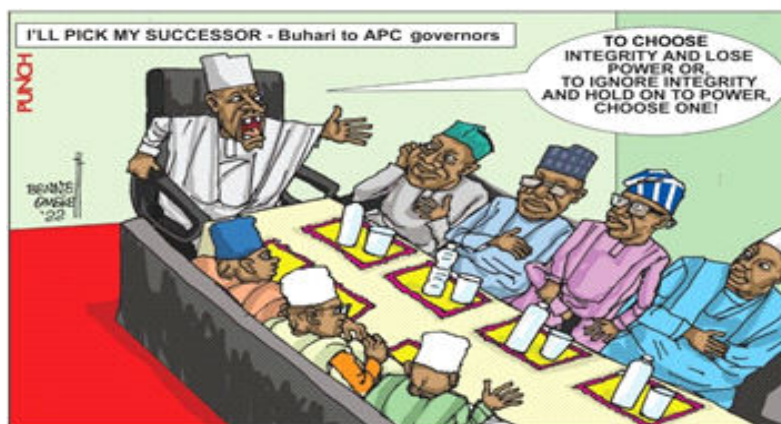
This paper adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the visual and linguistic strategies used in Nigerian political cartoons and their socio-political impacts. The methodology is designed to facilitate an in-depth analysis of the selected cartoons' content, meaning, and implications. The research design involves a qualitative content analysis framework, focusing on a purposive sample of seven political cartoons published in Nigerian newspapers and online platforms. The seven cartoons were selected to represent a diverse range of socio-political issues in Nigeria, ensuring that the sample is representative of the broader political and social discourse. Focusing on a smaller number of cartoons allows for a more comprehensive understanding of each cartoon's content, and meanings. These cartoons span a period from 2010 to 2023, covering significant political events and social issues in Nigeria. The period reflects changes in cartooning trends, styles, and themes, providing insight into how cartoonists adapt to shifting socio-political contexts. Also, the period covers political events and social issues in Nigeria, ensuring that the study remains relevant to current socio-political discourse. The study aims to dissect the semiotic elements within these cartoons and understand how they convey socio-political commentary. Political cartoons were purposively selected from prominent Nigerian newspapers and online media known for their editorial cartoons, such as *Punch* and *The Nation*. The selection criteria included relevance to socio-political issues in Nigeria, representation of a diverse range of issues (including corruption, insecurity, economic challenges, and governance), and recency to ensure contemporary relevance. This process ensured that the sample was representative of the political and social discourse in Nigeria during the specified period. The cartoons were obtained through archival research from newspaper archives, online databases, and official websites of the media houses. Each cartoon was documented with details such as the publication date, cartoonist's name, and the socio-political context being addressed. This comprehensive collection process ensured that the

selected cartoons were accurately contextualised within the larger political and social landscape. Two primary analytical frameworks were employed: Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar theory and Barthes' (1977) semiotic theory.

Data Presentations and Analysis

Identify and categorise the visual structures and elements in the selected Nigerian political cartoons.

Cartoon 1



Source: *Punch* (23rd April, 2023)

Cartoon 1 features eight represented participants. Seven are dressed in attire representing their tribes and regions, while the eighth participant represents former President Muhammadu Buhari. The participants are positioned in a manner that signifies a meeting, indicating a formal, possibly political gathering. The arrangement and interaction of the participants suggest a hierarchical structure, with Buhari positioned as the central figure giving instructions. Saliency is achieved through the positioning and attire of the participants. The different tribal and regional attires create visual diversity, making each participant visually significant. Prominence is also given to Buhari through his central position and his act of speaking, which draws the viewers' attention to him. The statement made by Buhari, "To choose integrity and lose power or to ignore integrity and hold on to power, choose one!" is highlighted, perhaps in bold or larger font to capture the viewers' attention immediately. The composition of the cartoon places the participants within a specific context – a political meeting. The spatial arrangement, with Buhari at the focal point, creates a sense of authority and control. Framing devices such as lines or borders around the participants are used to indicate the group's unity and collective response (or silence) to Buhari's statement. The modality of the cartoon also influences the interpretation. The depiction of the environment as a political gathering reinforces the realism and seriousness of the message being communicated.

Denotatively, the literal depiction shows a meeting with eight participants, one of whom is giving instructions to the others. In terms of connotation, the deeper meaning suggests a critique of political integrity and power dynamics. Buhari's statement connotes the moral dilemma faced by politicians – the choice between maintaining integrity or clinging to power. The cartoon taps into the myth of political integrity versus corruption. It portrays the ideology that political figures are often willing to sacrifice ethical standards for the sake of power. Buhari's statement, combined with the silent consent of the other participants, reinforces the myth that power is often maintained at the expense of integrity. The attire of the participants symbolises the diverse ethnic and regional representation in Nigerian politics. This diversity, however, is overshadowed by the unifying theme of political ambition and ethical compromise. Buhari's central position and his speech bubble symbolise authority and the dissemination of political strategy. The statement "To choose integrity and lose power or to ignore integrity and hold on to power, choose one!" serves as an anchorage, guiding the interpretation of the visual elements. The silence of the other participants acts as a relay, suggesting their tacit agreement and the collective acceptance of the ideological stance presented by Buhari. Through Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework, we identify the hierarchical structure, the salience of the participants, and the composition that directs attention to the central figure, Buhari. Bathes' semiotic analysis reveals deeper meanings, highlighting the ideological message of political compromise and the symbolism of ethnic and regional diversity within the context of Nigeria politics.

Cartoon 2



Source: Punch (12th March, 2023)

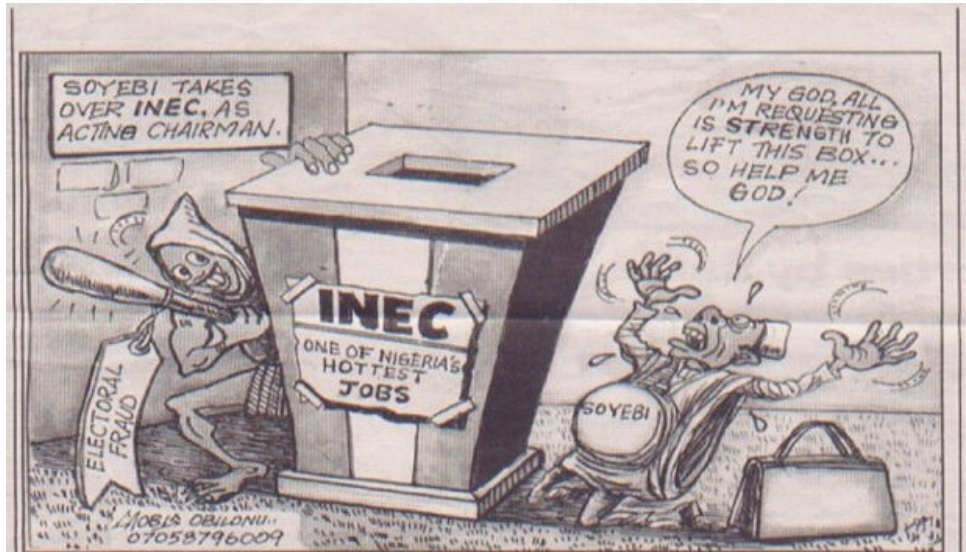
The cartoon 2 above, features three represented participants, each wearing glasses. The participants are depicted in a struggle, each holding onto an object inscribed with "MANDATE." The struggle signifies a competitive and intense contest for power. The interaction is highly dynamic, with the participants engaged in a physical tussle, conveying a sense of conflict and urgency. The word "MANDATE" is written in capital letters and bold, drawing immediate attention to its significance. This prominence indicates the central theme of the cartoon – the

fierce competition for political power. The participants' grey hair is visually salient, highlighting their age and experience, and perhaps commenting on the longevity of their political careers. The composition places the three participants at the centre of the image, reinforcing the idea that they are the primary focus. The metal object with "MANDATE" serves as a unifying element, connecting the participants and emphasising their shared goal. The framing likely includes a background that suggests a political setting, although this is not explicitly mentioned, the environment underscores the political nature of the struggle. The modality of the cartoon is realistic enough to make the participants recognisable and the situation relatable, but it may also include exaggeration (e.g., profuse sweating by two of the participants) to highlight the intensity of the struggle. The depiction of sweat and physical exertion adds a layer of realism, suggesting the genuine effort and stakes involved in the political contest.

Denotatively, the cartoon shows three participants with glasses, engaged in a physical tussle over a metal object inscribed with "MANDATE." The deeper meaning relates to the fierce competition among presidential candidates from the APC, PDP, and LP for the 2023 election. The glasses symbolise the need for vision and insight in leadership, while the struggle connotes the intense rivalry and high stakes of political power. The cartoon invokes the myth of political rivalry and the relentless pursuit of power. It critiques the political landscape where candidates are willing to go to great lengths, including physical struggle, to gain power. The ideology presented is one of relentless ambition and the often contentious nature of democratic elections. The glasses worn by each participant symbolise their vision or insight, potentially alluding to their political agendas. The object with "MANDATE" represents political power and authority, central to the participants' struggle. The grey hair signifies experience, longevity, and perhaps a critique of the established political figures who continue to dominate the political scene. The inscription "MANDATE" serves as an anchorage, directing the interpretation towards the struggle for political power in the 2023 presidential election. The visual elements, such as the participants' physical exertion and sweat, act as relays, enhancing the narrative of a fierce and exhausting political battle.

By applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework, we can identify the dynamic interaction, salience of key elements, and the central composition that underscore the competitive nature of the depicted political struggle. Barthes' semiotic analysis reveals deeper layers of meaning, highlighting the intense rivalry, the symbolism of vision and experience, and the ideological critique of the political contest. Cartoon 2 is in the context of intra-party election to determine the presidential candidate of PDP in year 2023 election. The cartoon effectively communicates the high stakes and contentious nature of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election through its visual and textual elements, providing a comprehensive commentary on the political landscape.

Cartoon 3



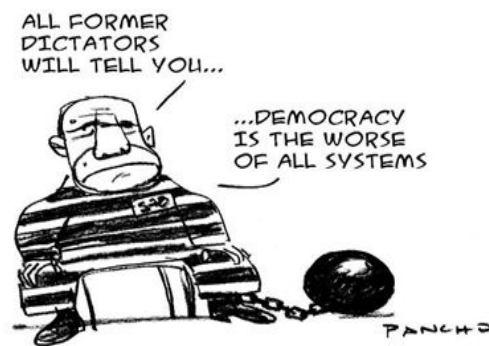
Source: *Punch* (12th May, 2010)

The cartoon 3 above, features multiple participants, including the acting Chairman of INEC, represented by Soyebi, who is kneeling and praying, and a giant monster representing the forces of electoral fraud. Soyebi's act of praying suggests desperation and the need for divine assistance, while the monster's firm grasp on the ballot box and the baton symbolises control and intimidation. The bright briefcase behind Soyebi adds an element of urgency or importance, indicating the burdens of responsibility and the significant challenges ahead. The ballot box at the centre of the cartoon is the most salient feature, signifying its critical importance to the electoral process. The text elements such as "Soyebi takes over INEC, as acting Chairman," "My God, all I'm requesting is strength to lift this box... so help me," and "Electoral Fraud" are written in uppercase and bold, emphasising their significance and ensuring they capture the viewer's attention immediately. The central composition of the ballot box with the INEC acronym establishes it as the focal point of the cartoon, highlighting its symbolic importance. The contrasting positions of Soyebi kneeling on one side and the monster on the other create a visual dichotomy between the legitimate authority struggling with its responsibilities and the corrupt forces impeding its efforts. The framing suggests a dramatic and contentious environment, underlining the gravity of the situation. The cartoon combines elements of realism (the depiction of Soyebi and the ballot box) with exaggerated features (the monstrous figure) to convey the severity of the challenges faced by INEC. The realistic elements root the cartoon in the actual political context, while the exaggerated elements serve to emphasise the threats and difficulties symbolically.

At denotative level, the cartoon shows Soyebi, the acting Chairman of INEC, kneeling and praying for strength, a giant ballot box with the acronym INEC, and a monstrous figure labelled “Electoral Fraud” holding the box. The deeper meaning relates to the enormous pressure and challenges faced by the electoral body in Nigeria. Soyebi’s prayer signifies the immense difficulty of the task, while the monster represents the pervasive issue of electoral fraud and corruption. The cartoon invokes the myth of the beleaguered electoral body struggling against overwhelming odds. It critiques the Nigerian political system, suggesting that electoral fraud and corruption are deeply entrenched and formidable obstacles to free and fair election. The ideology presented is one of scepticism towards the political process, highlighting the need for significant reforms to combat these systemic issues. The ballot box symbolises the electoral process and the integrity of democratic practice. The monstrous figure symbolises the forces of corruption, fraud, and coercion that undermine the electoral process. Soyebi’s posture of prayer symbolises desperation, humility, and the recognition of the enormous responsibility and difficulty of the task ahead. The verbal text acts as anchorage, directing the interpretation towards the challenges of running INEC and the pervasive issue of electoral fraud. Phrases like “Electoral Fraud” and “My God, all I’m requesting is strength to lift this box... so help me” highlight the central themes. The visual elements, such as the monster’s grasp on the ballot box and Soyebi’s praying posture, act as relays, enhancing the narrative of struggle and the dire need for divine or extraordinary intervention to manage the electoral process.

Through Kress and Van Leeuwen’s visual grammar framework, we identify the central composition, salience of key elements, and the dramatic framing that underscores the contentious and challenging nature of managing INEC. Barthes’ semiotic analysis reveals deeper layers of meaning, highlighting the symbolic struggle against corruption and the ideological critique of the political system. The cartoon effectively communicates the enormous pressures and formidable challenges faced by the electoral body in Nigeria, advocating for significant electoral and political reforms to ensure credible and fair elections.

Cartoon 4

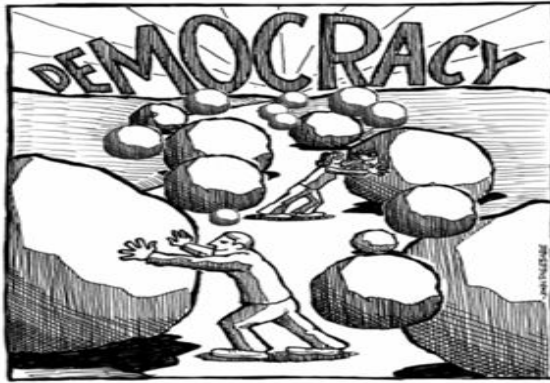


Source: *The Nation* (8th January, 2023)

This cartoon 4 features a single participant with a sad expression, indicating discomfort or dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. The participant has a chain around his leg, symbolising restriction or limitation. This suggests that the participant, likely a former dictator or politician, feels constrained by the emergence of democratic nature of Nigeria. The text “ALL FORMER DICTATORS WILL TELL YOU DEMOCRACY IS THE WORSE OF ALL SYSTEMS” is in uppercase and bold, making it highly salient and drawing immediate attention. This prominence ensures that viewers grasp the critical message of the cartoon. The chain and the participant’s sad face are also visually salient, emphasising the theme of restriction and discomfort associated with democratic checks and balances. The composition centres on the participant, highlighting his emotional state and physical constraint. The cartoon’s realism is balanced with symbolic elements. The sad face and the chain are realistic enough to convey the participant’s emotions and physical restriction, but the overall image is likely exaggerated to emphasise the constraints imposed by democracy. The linguistic element adds a direct commentary, providing context and guiding the interpretation of the visual element.

At denotative level, the cartoon depicts a single participant with a sad face and a chain around his leg. The text reads, “ALL FORMER DICTATORS WILL TELL YOU DEMOCRACY IS THE WORSE OF ALL SYSTEMS. The deeper meaning suggests that democracy imposes restrictions on former dictators or politicians, making them accountable and subject to checks and balances. The sad expression connotes dissatisfaction with this loss of unchecked power. The cartoon invokes the myth of the constrained dictator, critiquing the discomfort of former autocrats under democratic systems. It highlights the ideological shift from absolute power to accountability and governance under democratic principles. The ideology presented favours democracy, portraying it as a system that, despite its imperfections, ensures checks and balances and curtails the excesses of former dictators. The chain around the participant’s leg symbolises the restrictions and limitations imposed by democratic systems. It signifies the loss of absolute power and the imposition of accountability. The sad face symbolises dissatisfaction and discomfort, reflecting the former dictator’s frustration with being held accountable. The text serves as a direct commentary, reinforcing the symbolic message that democracy is disliked by those who were once unchecked in their power. The text acts as an anchorage, directing the interpretation towards the idea that democracy is challenging for former dictators or politicians who are now subject to its constraints. The visual elements, such as the chain and the sad expression, act as relays, enhancing the narrative of restriction and discomfort under democratic governance. Using Kress and Van Leeuwen’s visual grammar framework, we identify the central composition, salience of key elements, and the symbolic framing that underscores the constraints imposed by democracy. Barthes’ semiotic analysis reveals deeper layers of meaning, highlighting the ideological shift from unchecked power to accountability. The cartoon effectively communicates the impact of democratic systems on former dictators or politicians, emphasising the importance of checks and balances and the discomfort experienced by those accustomed to absolute power. The cartoon advocates for the value of democracy in ensuring responsible governance and curtailing authoritarian excesses.

Cartoon 5



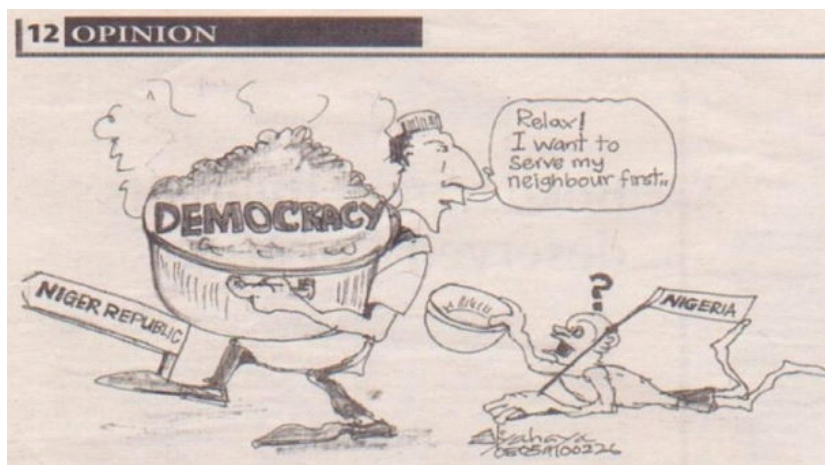
Source: *The Nation* (13th June, 2023)

The cartoon features two participants, a male and a female, struggling to move massive rocks to pave the way for democracy. The text “DEMOCRACY” is prominently displayed in uppercase and bold. The deeper meaning suggests that democracy in Nigeria is a challenging and ongoing effort, hindered by significant obstacles. The male and female participants represent the Nigerian populace, striving tirelessly for democratic governance despite numerous setbacks. The cartoon evokes the myth of the struggle for democracy, portraying it as a difficult but noble pursuit. The image of the two participants pushing against massive rocks symbolises the collective effort of the Nigerian people to establish and maintain democratic principles. The value presented is one of perseverance and hope. It underscores the belief in democracy as a desirable but arduous goal, requiring continuous effort and commitment from the masses. The male and female participants symbolise the general populace, representing all genders and the collective will of the people. Their struggle indicates that democracy is a shared aspiration and a collective responsibility. The rocks symbolise the significant barriers to democratic progress in Nigeria, such as corruption, political instability, and historical setbacks. Their size and immovability highlight the magnitude of these challenges. The physical effort of pushing the rocks symbolises the tireless and often exhausting struggle of the Nigerian people to achieve and sustain democracy. This effort conveys a sense of resilience and determination. The word “DEMOCRACY” anchors the meaning of the cartoon, explicitly stating the goal the participants are striving for. This anchoring helps viewers immediately understand the context of the struggle depicted. The visual struggle of the participants acts as a relay, enhancing the narrative of a difficult journey towards democracy. The visual elements convey the ongoing effort and the resilience of the populace, reinforcing the textual message.

The cartoon reflects the sociopolitical reality of Nigeria, where democracy is seen as a work in progress, fraught with challenges but pursued with determination. It highlights the historical context of fluctuating democratic practices and the persistent efforts of the people to

establish a stable and just political system. The portrayal of both a male and a female participant underscores the inclusive nature of the democratic struggle, indicating that democracy is a concern for all segments of society. The imagery of pushing massive rocks suggests that significant reforms and persistent efforts are needed to overcome the entrenched obstacles to democratic governance in Nigeria. By examining and interpreting the semiotic meaning and sociopolitical implications of Cartoon 5, we see how the visual and textual elements convey the challenging journey towards democracy in Nigeria. Barthes' semiotic framework reveals the deep connotations of struggle, resilience, and collective effort symbolised by the participants and the massive rocks. The cartoon effectively highlights the ongoing challenges and the persistent efforts of the Nigerian people to achieve and sustain democratic governance, making a powerful statement about the nation's political landscape and the enduring hope for a better democratic future.

Cartoon 6



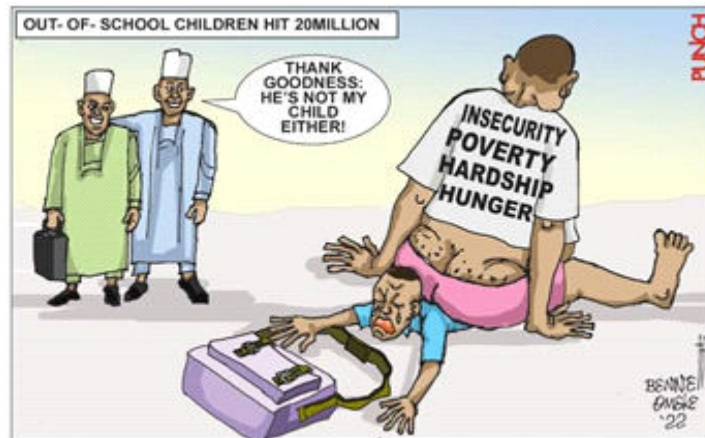
Source: *Punch* (13th June, 2023)

The cartoon 6 above features two participants: the late president carrying a huge container labelled "Democracy" heading towards Niger Republic, and a pauper holding an empty begging bowl and the Nigerian flag, lying on the ground. The text elements include "NIGER REPUBLIC," "DEMOCRACY," "NIGERIA," and "RELAX! I WANT TO SERVE MY NEIGHBOUR FIRST," all in uppercase and bold. The deeper meaning suggests a criticism of Nigerian leadership prioritising foreign aid over domestic needs. The president's action of taking food (democracy) to Niger Republic while ignoring the starving pauper (representing the Nigerian populace) symbolises neglect and misplaced priorities. The cartoon evokes the myth of the neglectful leader, highlighting a situation where Nigerian leaders focus more on international relations and foreign aid rather than addressing the pressing needs of their own citizens. The ideology presented is a critique of the leadership's priorities, implying that true

democracy involves caring for the basic needs of the people. It suggests that leaders should ensure the well-being of their citizens before extending aid to others. The president symbolises the leadership of Nigeria, and the container of food labelled “Democracy” signifies the resources and democratic principles that should ideally benefit the citizens. The pauper symbolises the impoverished Nigerian masses, highlighting their dire need for basic necessities like food. The begging bowl represents their plea for help, and the national flag signifies their identity and citizenship. This signifies the direction of the aid and the leadership’s focus on foreign aid over domestic welfare. The written Text which reads “RELAX! I WANT TO SERVE MY NEIGHBOUR FIRST” explicitly stating the leadership’s priority, which is serving foreign interests before domestic ones. The text elements, particularly “RELAX! I WANT TO SERVE MY NEIGHBOUR FIRST,” provide a clear directive that guides the interpretation of the visual elements. It underscores the president’s prioritisation of foreign aid over the needs of the Nigerian people. The visual depiction of the president heading towards Niger Republic with food, while the pauper remains neglected, enhances the narrative of misplaced priorities and the neglect of domestic welfare.

The cartoon reflects the sociopolitical reality in Nigeria, where leadership often appears to prioritise international image and relations over addressing domestic issues such as poverty and hunger. It highlights the disparity between the leadership’s actions and the citizens’ needs, critiquing the failure to provide basic necessities to the populace. The depiction of the pauper with the national flag suggests a call for nationalistic governance that focuses on uplifting the citizens before extending aid to others. The cartoon also comments on the broader issue of food security and the need for political leaders to ensure that their own people are not left starving while extending help to others. Using Barthes’ semiotic framework, Cartoon 6 is analysed to reveal a critical commentary on the priorities of Nigerian leadership. The denotation and connotation illustrate the neglect of the Nigerian masses in favour of foreign aid, symbolised by the president’s action of taking food to Niger Republic while ignoring the starving pauper. The myth of the neglectful leader and the ideology of misplaced priorities are conveyed through the symbolic elements of the cartoon. The anchorage and relay elements guide the viewer to understand the sociopolitical critique being made. This cartoon effectively highlights the disparity between leadership actions and citizen needs, calling for a re-evaluation of priorities to ensure that domestic welfare is not overshadowed by international relations. The socio-political implications underscore the necessity for leaders to focus on addressing the basic needs of their own citizens as a fundamental aspect of true democratic governance.

Cartoon 7



Source: *Punch* (3rd April, 2022)

Cartoon 8 features four participants: two neatly dressed men in traditional attire on the left, and a haggard-looking man pressing down on a helpless, tattered young boy on the right. The linguistic elements include “OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN HIT 20 MILLION,” “THANK GOODNESS: HE’S NOT MY CHILD EITHER,” “INSECURITY,” “POVERTY,” “HARDSHIP,” and “HUNGER,” all in uppercase. The deeper meaning suggests a stark contrast between the lives of the political elite and the suffering masses. The well-dressed men symbolise politicians who are indifferent to the plight of the youth, represented by the helpless boy, burdened by systemic issues like insecurity, poverty, hardship, and hunger. The cartoon evokes the myth of the indifferent politicians, highlighting the disconnect between the ruling class and the general populace. The well-dressed men’s nonchalant attitude towards the boy’s suffering underscores the leaders’ neglect of their responsibilities. The ideology presented critiques the failure of the political elite to address critical issues affecting the youth and the masses. It suggests that the resources and attention needed to alleviate these problems are instead siphoned by the politicians for their gain. These participants symbolise the Nigerian political elite, whose wealth and comfort starkly contrast with the struggles of the common people. Their attire and smiles suggest their detachment and lack of concern for the suffering around them.

The participants who look haggard symbolise the oppressive systems and challenges faced by the Nigerian masses. His action of pressing down on the boy indicates the crushing weight of societal issues. The helpless boy in the above represents the youth of Nigeria, bearing the brunt of systemic issues like insecurity, poverty, hardship, and hunger. His tears and exhausted appearance highlight his desperate need for help and relief. The text elements, especially “OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN HIT 20 MILLION” and “THANK GOODNESS: HE’S NOT MY CHILD EITHER,” anchor the meaning of the cartoon by explicitly stating the dire situation of Nigerian children and the politicians’ indifference. The visual elements, such as the

well-dressed men's smiles and the boy's tears, relay the narrative of disparity and neglect, reinforcing the textual message. The combination of text and visuals paints a comprehensive picture of the sociopolitical reality.

The cartoon reflects the sociopolitical reality in Nigeria, where a significant portion of the population, especially the youth, suffers from systemic issues that the political elite largely ignore. The juxtaposition of the well-dressed men and the suffering boy highlights the stark inequality and the lack of effective governance. It underscores the politicians' failure to address fundamental problems like education, security, and economic hardship, which disproportionately affect the youth and contribute to a cycle of poverty and despair. The depiction serves as a critique of the leadership's priorities, calling attention to the need for urgent reforms and a more empathetic and responsible approach to governance. It suggests that the wellbeing of the youth and the general populace should be prioritised over the self-serving interests of the political elite. By applying Barthes' semiotic framework, Cartoon 7 is analysed to reveal a poignant commentary on the state of Nigerian society. The denotation and connotation illustrate the vast divide between the political elite and the suffering masses, symbolised by the well-dressed men and the helpless boy. The myth of the indifferent politician and the critique of their priorities are conveyed through the symbolic elements and the interplay of text and visuals. The socio-political implications highlight the urgent need for leadership that genuinely addresses the needs of the populace, particularly the youth, who are depicted as the most vulnerable and neglected segment of society. The cartoon calls for a reevaluation of governance priorities to ensure that the basic needs and rights of the Nigerian people are met.

Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of Nigerian political cartoons using Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design and Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory reveals significant insights into the socio-political landscape of Nigeria. The cartoons frequently depict politicians and elites in stark contrast to the suffering masses, highlighting issues such as corruption, mismanagement, and neglect. Visual grammar analysis shows how compositional elements like salience, framing, and modality effectively draw viewers' attention to these disparities, emphasising the power imbalance and the resulting societal impact. Furthermore, the use of Barthes' semiotic theory elucidates the deeper connotations and cultural myths embedded in the cartoons. For instance, the denotative depiction of a politician hoarding resources is enriched by its connotative meanings of greed and systemic corruption, and the broader myth that political leaders are disconnected from the populace's struggles. This dual-layered approach unveils how cartoons not only represent current socio-political issues but also challenge and critique underlying ideologies.

The combined theoretical frameworks demonstrate how linguistic and visual elements in the cartoons work synergistically to convey potent socio-political messages. The narrative processes, interactive meanings, and compositional strategies described by Kress and van Leeuwen, together with Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, reveal the

cartoons as sophisticated commentaries on Nigerian politics and society. The detailed analysis of Nigerian political cartoons, through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design and Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory, provides a comprehensive understanding of the cartoons' communicative power. These visual narratives are not mere illustrations but are rich in meaning and critique, encapsulating the socio-political issues faced by Nigeria. By employing these analytical frameworks, the paper highlights how political cartoons serve as critical tools for socio-political engagement. They expose the failures and shortcomings of political leaders, reflect public sentiment, and stimulate discourse on pressing national issues. The findings underscore the importance of visual media in shaping public perception and opinion, illustrating that cartoons are a vital component of political communication and cultural expression in Nigeria.

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