

Assessment of the Roles of Political Cartoons in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: *Assessment, Political Cartoons, 2023 Presidential Election, Nigeria*

Received : 5 June

Revised : 23 July

Accepted: 23 August

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the roles of political cartoons in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The objectives of this study were to; evaluate the effectiveness of political cartoons as campaign tools in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria; identify the contributions of political cartoons to the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design and employed the multi-stage and the purposive/judgement sampling technique. With the aid of structured questionnaire as it research instrument, the study collected data from a sample size of 400 respondents selected from headquarters of the ten federal constituencies in Akwa Ibom State. Data collected were analyzed and presented in tables using simple percentages. Findings proved that political cartoons contributed significantly to the outcome of the 2023 presidential election by shaping public opinions and influencing perception of the presidential candidates and the Nigerian situation. Based on the findings of this research, it was concluded that political cartoons played crucial roles during the 2023 presidential election in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, they shaped electorate opinions of presidential candidates and reflected the prevailing socio-political situation in the country. Thus, political cartoons remain a powerful tool for political communication, education, and mobilization during democratic processes. The study also recommended that media organizations should sustain and expand the use of political cartoons in both print and online platforms. Since majority of the electorate accessed cartoons through the internet, greater investment in digital platforms is strongly recommended

INTRODUCTION

Man cannot not communicate' is a statement that reflects the importance of communication in a man's existence. A saying that emphasizes how important communication is. Since it has been done daily and over the years, the dissemination of information on political issues and activities is not unusual in our surroundings. In many cases, the media has been used to define development agendas, express public interest, encourage individuals to participate in politics, and affect people's behavior in a number of ways. In addition to engaging in political education and orientation, the media also hold public officials responsible for their actions and stewardship.

Additionally, the media has been used to promote a variety of social, political, and electoral causes, including population counts, revenue distribution, boundary demarcation, and more. Reaching a large audience or recipients would be nearly impossible without the media, which are seen as crucial components of political communication due to their significant influence in the political realm. Political communication and the media are inseparable because without the mass media, which now serve as the focal point of all social activities, political communication would not be possible in the current world (Podkowińska, 2018).

The deliberate dissemination of meanings pertaining to the political domain is known as political communication. The creation, transmission, reception, and processing of communications that could have a major direct or indirect influence on politics are all included in political communication (Popoola and Oboh, 2018, p.50). Similarly, political communication is seen by Asemah et al. (2022, p. 1) as a system that processes, produces, distributes, stores, and exchanges standardized information that can affect the realization of political authority. According to Gisela (2018), referenced in Asemah et al. (2022), political communication encompasses a range of professional skills as well as a multidisciplinary field of study that focuses on the interactions between public spheres, media, and political actors.

As distributors of political communication, the media use a variety of channels to spread political information. These consist of editorials, features, dramas, commentary, and more. Verbal (speaking), non-verbal (tone, body language, etc.), and visual communication are the many modes of media communication. The use of symbols and images to convey ideas and messages is known as visual communication. Whether it's to make you laugh, embarrass you in public, frighten you, or feel comfortable, the goal of visual communication is to evoke strong emotions in you (Adetola and Abioye, 2020). The most important means of interaction and information sharing amongst people is visual communication. Over time, the public has been exposed to visual representations of remarks in both print and electronic media. Since their portrayals serve as means of understanding, expressing, and interpreting many aspects of society – and thus, of supplying information and power in society – the mass media do, in fact, play a significant role in defining social concerns (Jimoh in Ho et al, 2021). Cartoons are used by the media as a means of encoding and communicating meanings in order to support this function.

Cartoons are among the most often utilized media in political communication. "The art of caricature," which is defined as exaggerated features in a character with a funny goal, is where the cartoon got its start (Adetola and Obioye, 2020). Over time, cartoons have taken center stage in newspapers and magazines, to the point where people seek out certain publications specifically for their drawings. Kurfi et al. (2022) describe cartoons as a journalistic genre that is presented in short, simple, and catchy formats that appeal to human senses and, as a result, enable speedy receipt of the ideas conveyed. Similarly, cartoons are a distinct kind of journalism that differs from traditional modes of communication, according to Elwood Atfield (2018).

Cartoons are made up of one drawing or a collection of linked drawings with an inscription or typeset caption placed inside or underneath a speech balloon. Cartoons, according to Ocholor et al. (2023), convey complex and nuanced concepts that language may not fully capture or represent or may require a lot of words to explain. Cartoons frequently have amusing themes and political and social statements that the cartoonist hopes will not disturb viewers. The pictures have the ability to powerfully interpret the news of the day. Stories are explored and explained in ways that articles cannot. They are more successful than writing or film because they humanize the subject matter by capturing the empathetic qualities of their subjects.

Cartoons are used as language arts in media communication. They are used as visual metaphors to convey a viewpoint on political, social, or cultural issues. Political cartoons, according to Sanu (2023), are caricatures that humorously depict political people while exaggerating their personal traits. As a form of social entertainment, political cartoons serve as a representation of "a variety of political, cultural, and social events in an ideologically shaped viewpoint" and aid in stress relief (Mowafy, 2022). They are well-liked because they deal with issues head-on. Political cartoons are visual illustrations that remark on political events in society and appear on newspaper and social media pages. They may or may not have captions. They offer a structure that allows complicated concepts to be conveyed in a single image that would otherwise need lengthy explanations if stated in words. People can better comprehend current events and complicated political circumstances by watching political cartoons. Compared to editorials, political cartoons use more images than words.

The main components of political communication that encourage political contemplation and can operate as a foundation for social action are political cartoons (Onyike et al., 2022). They are effective ways to use wit and sarcasm to reflect, critique, and defend political opinions. Political cartoonists utilize it to humorously convey their opinions on current events, political topics, or historical figures. According to Bello (2022), political cartoons are meant to parody contemporary political concerns and provide nuanced criticism deftly veiled in humor and satire. Additionally, even though cartoons are entertaining, they are a powerful tool for bringing social injustices to light and for strategically communicating important and profound messages to the public.

Political cartoon language is mostly based on topics pertaining to politics, including campaigns, lobbying, electioneering, important political figures, etc. They are utilized to make strong statements and offer specialized expertise on current sociopolitical topics in an open and covert manner. By addressing important topics and denouncing political leaders and their despicable actions, political cartoons aim to increase public awareness through figurative language and graphical imagery (Usman & MomohTairu, 2016). Cartoons have provided special insights into local and national politics throughout Nigerian history. "Political cartoons address serious issues facing the nation that otherwise would be incomprehensible to the average citizens if discussed in articles through written words," according to Latif and Elgarria (2021), which supports this claim. This claim is undoubtedly true, as political cartoons' influence was amplified during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, and they were used in political communications by almost all national publications.

Newspapers and other media outlets heavily featured cartoons in their coverage of Nigerian politics during the 2023 presidential election. The subjects or themes depicted in the photographs or pictures were insecurity, gerontocracy, self-centered political aspirations, unemployment, poverty, electoral malpractice, and other socio-political issues. Regarding their remarks or deeds during the electioneering campaign, almost every presidential candidate from the major political parties – the All Progressives Congress (APC), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party (LP), the New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP), etc. – was cartooned in one way or another. The function of political cartoons in the 2023 Akwa Ibom State presidential election is of importance to this study.

Statement of the Problem

The message's substantial political impact on people's thoughts, opinions, and actions, as well as those of groups and the entire society and environment in which they live, is the crucial component of political communication. And in the 2023 presidential election, a strong visual component, like a cartoon, would undoubtedly be crucial since it would grab people's interest and attention and speed up the processing and comprehension of the messages.

Even though political cartoons are widely used in politics and elections across a variety of media platforms for political mobilization, interest articulation, and political participation, there is little to no empirical evidence to support this claim. This is because almost every presidential candidate, especially those from the major political parties, was cartooned in some way regarding a speech, action, or topic of public interest. The people in Akwa Ibom State may not be fully aware of political cartoons. Additionally unknown are the roles that political cartoons played as campaign tools in the 2023 presidential election, the themes and issues that cartoons were used to portray, and the media outlet that featured cartoons the most throughout that race. These and more were the concerns of this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study set to achieve the following:

- investigate the level of awareness on political cartoons by electorate as a tool for campaign in Akwa Ibom State;

- evaluate the effectiveness of political cartoons as campaign tools in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria;
- ascertain the extent that electorate understand the messages, ideas and opinions expressed in cartoons on the 2023 presidential election;
- identify the contributions of political cartoons to the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria;
- ascertain the media channel that electorate accessed cartoons most on the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Communication Defined

The study of how information and messages are created, shared, and perceived in a political setting in order to affect political beliefs and actions is known as political communication (Kaid, 2020). Political communication, according to Podkowińska (2018), is the messaging that surrounds politics and can be either inward or outward focused. The creation of the political offer and persuading others of its equity through marketing strategies are the subjects of political communication. It is the deliberate dissemination of meanings pertaining to the political domain.

Similar to this, Chadwick (2020) defines political communication as the sharing of ideas, information, and messages in the political arena, especially between political actors, institutions, and the general public. This includes a variety of communication channels, such as debates, speeches, news coverage, social media posts, press releases, and campaign advertisements. The study of political communication looks at how various people and groups in society spread, receive, interpret, and are impacted by these messages.

Mass Media and Political Communication

Since politics depends on the media to spread its messages and day-to-day operations to the public, political communication is impossible in the current world and cannot be accomplished fully and effectively without it. In modern civilizations, the media – whether it be new media like social media platforms and the internet, or traditional media like radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc. – is the primary source of information and the means by which people form their political beliefs. The significance of digital platforms in modern political communication is highlighted by Shaker and O'Rourke's (2021) analysis of political communication on Twitter during the 2020 US presidential election, which found that political candidates used Twitter to interact with their supporters, influence public opinion, and react to news events. This demonstrates how political actors utilize various communication channels to engage with their audience and convey their messages.

Furthermore, Chadwick (2020) discussing on the use of social media in political communication to mobilize citizens for election, notes that politicians deploy platforms like Facebook and Twitter facilitate the spread of political content, enabling individuals to both consume and contribute to political discussions.

Political Cartoon Explained

Political cartoons are types of editorial illustrations that make statements about political problems or events using text and images. It alludes to a cartoon that has been in use since the 16th century and is made to appeal to a larger range of viewers. Currently, they are posted on social media platforms or appear in the editorial sections of newspapers and e-newspapers. Images, imagery, and satire are used in political cartoons to express ideas about contemporary political topics and events. According to Bello (2020), editorial cartoons skillfully blend humor and sarcasm with current political concerns to satirise them and offer indirect criticism. Cartoons are excellent means of exposing, revealing, and speaking to society injustices and failings, even as they provide entertainment and satire. Cartoonists can reach a wider audience through political cartoons. In a similar vein, Padilla (2019) claims that a political cartoon is a particular kind of hilarious, multimodal communication that seeks to both entertain and persuade viewers by using certain techniques to convey their opinions in a "disguised and persuasive way."

Cartoons are widely accepted as a form of communication because of their distinctive ability to convey ideas through visual representation through humorous caricatures and satire. These days, cartoons are mostly utilized in magazines for social comedy and visual wit, and in newspapers for political commentary and editorial opinion (Britannica, 2022). "Cartoonists' stock in trade has been to lampoon the excesses and moral foibles of political power holders," claims Akpabio (2021, p.97). He goes on to say that cartoonists have been particularly hostile to dictatorship, power abuse, and misrule. Cartoons offer a critical assessment of their subject, which frequently manifests as a moral or ethical judgment, a good-bad or righteous position.

In the meantime, as technology and the media used to produce them have changed over time, so too have political cartoons. As politics and society have changed, so too have themes and subjects. Despite their small size, political cartoons are able to transmit a great deal of complex information in a single image, whereas a lot of written explanation would typically be needed. Cartoons use a fictionalized version of actual events to educate and aid viewers in understanding politics, which is frequently a hard subject.

An Overview of History of Political Cartooning in Nigeria

Nigeria has a lengthy tradition of political and editorial cartooning that dates back to the early 1900s, when British colonial control was in effect. Akinola Lasekan's (1916–1972) work with the prominent Nigerian Pilots Newspaper and his nonconformist, rebellious, and resistance to the colonial lords' authoritarian rule during the early imperial era – which evolved into agitation for Nigerian independence in the 1930s – are credited with igniting the rise of political cartoons (Toluwani and Shobukonla, 2023).

Akinola Lasekan (1916–1972), one of Nigeria's "Fathers of Contemporary Art," invented modern cartooning through the West African Newspaper, which was established in 1937 by Nnamdi Azikiwe, as suggested by Jimoh referenced in Fasunon (2018). Indigenous political cartooning became a mainstay in Nigerian cartooning after Lasekan, a graphic illustrator for the newspaper house, used his political cartoons to express the agitations of the populace, criticize the

oppressive policies of the colonial masters, and advocate for Nigeria's independence.

Cartooning emerged as a means of addressing Nigeria's socio-cultural and political problems and criticizing oppressive military and civilian regimes after the country's post-independence political upheavals and military takeovers. The golden age of Nigerian illustration and cartooning, which combined concept cartooning with political satires, was sparked by this new wave of artistic protest using illustrative cartoons. It soon became a movement and a powerful voice that exposed the corrupt agendas of Nigerian politicians to the public. The late 70s and '80s further saw the use of cartoons as a viable tool for product advertising as cartooning soon experienced lesser controversial themes after the Civil War and expanded to action adventures and multiple panels called comic strips, which were used to tell stories and advertise products; notably was "Kaptain Afrika" by Andy Kman, "Terror Muda" by Kola Fayemi which featured in the Vanguard Daily Newspaper in the 1970s and 1980s. (Jimoh, 2019; Fasunon, 2018; Pijnaker, 2018).

Nigeria's contemporary socio-political issues are nothing new to cartoonists' artistic impulses and perceptions, as well as their interpretations of the political landscape, which influenced voters' political consciousness and prejudices toward political candidates, power brokers, and party agendas. When it comes to national concerns, cartoonists set the tone for public discourse (Ifechelobi & Nwachukwu, 2021). The field of editorial cartooning has also been plagued by other well-known Nigerian cartoonists. Their writings, which frequently reflected the national mood, added to the political debates of the day. Several of these cartoonists have achieved national and worldwide recognition, making them prominent figures.

Essential Components/Elements of Political Cartoons

Political Bias

Every political cartoonist bases their political contributions, conclusions, and stances on a political slant. This offers a hint for understanding the cartoonist's work and could be cultural, ethical, religious, or political. Jimoh (2019) analyzes Mike Asukwo's work "Riding Out the Storm" and exposes his political prejudice. By recognizing the cartoonist's point of view, political bias helps reviewers and critics of political cartoons quickly arrive to work summaries. Another political cartoonist who exhibits political prejudice in his work is Mustapha Bulama.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of an abstract language to convey a distinct meaning in cartoons. The use of objects or symbols to represent a person, object, or feeling may also fall under this category. Cartoonists use semiotic expressions, artifacts, signs, cyphers, markings, or emblems to depict more abstract ideas or thoughts since symbols are employed in Africa in a variety of ways to indicate rights, customs, or instruction. In political cartoons, viewers are urged to identify these symbols, think about their meaning, and speculate on what the cartoonist meant each one to represent. For instance, the symbolism of a ferocious wild cat eating

its prey at the whim of a political leader who showed no care was created to represent insecurity in the country and the insensitivity of the government.

Exaggeration

A key aspect of caricature, exaggeration serves as the basis for all other visual appeal components in political cartoons. Sometimes, the characteristics of characters are exaggerated to make them humorous. A character's features can be raised, lowered, or enlarged by the artist to make them appear comically larger or smaller. This crucial element appeals to viewers who often find the caricature entertaining while maintaining a certain degree of similarity. This leads to the exaggeration of features such as the head, hands, limbs, clothing, and facial emotions. Viewers should try to understand the message the cartoonist was trying to convey through exaggeration.

Irony

Irony is the conveying of one meaning through the use of syntax that symbolizes another; it is the discrepancy between how things should be and how they appear or are perceived. In political cartooning, artists suggest a concept but then use opposing imagery to depict it in a different way. This is done in an attempt to weaken the cartoon's punchiness and minimize criticism while maintaining irony.

Labelling

Labelling in a political cartoon refers to the intentional tagging or captioning of individuals, objects, and events to denote their intended meaning and emphasis. They serve to clarify and simplify the meaning of a cartoon's context for the audience.

Analogy

Political cartoonists juxtapose two unrelated concepts that have some characteristics using analogies. This shows that while the political issue being addressed is unique, the cartoonist's perception of the issue may share certain commonalities, which may help readers and viewers of political cartoons comprehend the topic in a new and clearer way.

Political Cartoons and Public Opinion Shaping Power

Political cartoons are an effective way to shape public opinion. It can provide a critical viewpoint on current affairs, question conventional wisdom, and bring significant concerns to light. Political cartoons are effective tools for swaying public opinion on matters of public concern, such as the opinions of voters toward candidates, particularly during the campaign and election season. Cartoonists' creative impulses, impressions, and interpretations of political diegesis are not unfamiliar with current socio-political issues in Nigeria. These factors have influenced voters' political consciousness and biases regarding political aspirants, power grabbers, and political parties' agendas (Toluwani & Shobukonla 2023). Several media outlets have used political cartons to fulfill their agenda-setting function. They serve to establish the social agenda for public conversation by educating the public about the important topics to discuss and, consequently, influence their views on particular topics.

Symbolism and imagery are two ways political cartoons influence public opinion. Cartoonists make difficult concepts and feelings simple enough for the general public to understand by using visual cues. Due to their ease of

recognition and memorability, these symbols have the power to shape public opinion. Using comedy is another method political cartoons influence public opinion. Satire and irony are frequently used in cartoons to convey a message and make it more appealing to viewers. A cartoonist can make a difficult subject more approachable and accessible for the audience by using comedy. This can make it more likely that people will pay attention to the message and be more open to considering the cartoonist's point of view.

Because they offer an alternative viewpoint to the mainstream media, political cartoons can also influence public opinion. Political cartoons can offer an alternate viewpoint to the one that is frequently expressed by the mainstream media on an issue. When the mainstream media portrays a skewed picture of a problem, this might be particularly crucial. Political cartoons can contribute to a more balanced discussion and a more complex knowledge of the subject by offering an alternative viewpoint.

Importance of Political Cartoons in Democracy

Political cartoons are essential for social action, public mobilization, political speech and activism, and ultimately for the advancement of the country. By depicting a fictionalized version of actual events, cartoons clarify and aid viewers in understanding politics, which is frequently a complex subject (Guy, 2016). Through their encouragement of free speech, active citizen involvement, critical thinking, and accountability, political cartoons contribute significantly to the advancement of democracy. They can be used to question prevailing beliefs, ridicule or criticize political figures and programs, and bring significant concerns to the public's attention. In addition to ensuring that citizens are aware of current affairs and the conduct of their leaders, this can aid in holding politicians and other public servants accountable.

Political cartoons can also teach citizens to think critically and to develop their own ideas on social and political issues. They can also give people a way to personally interact with political problems and increase their sense of commitment to the democratic process. By offering an alternative viewpoint on the news and denouncing the media when it falls short of its duty as a watchdog of democracy, political cartoons can likewise act as a check and balance on the media.

Furthermore, political cartoons can function as a historical document by offering a graphic depiction of the social and political concerns of a specific era. Mowafy (2022) supports this by suggesting that political cartoons can serve as a prism through which individuals can perceive and comprehend political history. This can assist future generations in comprehending the background, importance, and ways that historical events influenced the modern world.

The Political Cartoonist

An editorial cartoonist is a writer and illustrator of such pictures. In order to challenge power or call attention to political brutality, corruption, and other social evils, they frequently blend satire, creative talent, and exaggeration. As a result, the cartoonist expresses public opinion, offers social criticism, or recounts a story. In his own right, the cartoonist teaches (Iyorza, 2015). He gives the reader tips on how to better comprehend written reports. The editorial cartoonist is also a watchdog of the society who has learnt his trade of educating through drawings in a formal or non-formal setting. Political cartoonists comment on political leaders, policies, and ideologies, and sometimes addresses issues such as corruption, inequality, and freedom of expression.

Notable Nigerian political cartoonists who use their cartoons to convey powerful messages and critique the political landscape in the country include:

1. Mike Asukwo: He is a well-known cartoonist who has been working for The Guardian newspaper in Nigeria for many years. He is known for his satirical and thought-provoking cartoons.
2. Albert Ohams: He is a celebrated cartoonist who has worked for several Nigerian newspapers including Vanguard and The Sun. His cartoons often highlight social and political issues in Nigeria.
3. Mustapha Bulama: He is a cartoonist known for his work in Leadership newspaper. His cartoons often address various political issues in Nigeria, highlighting corruption and societal problems.
4. Josy Ajiboye: He is known for his cartoons that address various political and social issues in Nigeria. His work has been featured in newspapers such as The Punch and The Guardian.
5. Mike Asaaha: He is a cartoonist who has worked for The Nation newspaper in Nigeria. His cartoons often focus on political satire and corruption in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on the following theories as they are relevant and give backings to the work; Agenda Setting Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

According to Obeagu (2018, p.86), Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw introduced Agenda Setting Theory in 1972. This idea is based on the fundamental premise that the media shapes a society's perception of what matters at any given moment. Social concerns and events that are covered by the media inevitably become important topics of public discussion because of the media's emphasis on them. Likewise, proponents of the agenda setting hypothesis concur that, depending on how much weight they give a particular subject, the media can sway public opinion in favor of or against it (Ukaegbu 2018, p. 191).

In order to achieve this, this study used agenda setting theory as a foundation to offer theoretical insight into how political cartoons are used in newspapers to illustrate current political issues and circumstances as a means of establishing social agendas in order to reorient and influence public opinion, particularly in Nigeria's sociopolitical context, such as the 2023 presidential election. It further supports journalism's dedication to democracy by asserting

that certain issues will not receive significant public attention until reporters and traditional news media comment on them.

Also, agenda setting theory is amid the many media effect theories that the researcher considers crucial for the current work as it accounts for the link between the public and media while helping explain the overall objectives, roles and outcomes of political cartoons in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Uses and Gratification Theory

Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurewvitch introduced the Uses and Gratification Theory in 1974. The study of this humanistic theory of media consumption focuses on the motivations behind media use. The uses and pleasure hypothesis, according to Ogbuoshi (2021), is an audience-centered theory that aims to explain why people use the media as well as its purposes and functions for persons, groups, and society at large. According to the uses and gratification hypothesis, media consumers should carefully consider which medium source best meets their requirements, satisfies them, or gratifies them (Ukaegbu 2018). It implies that viewers actively choose, understand, and react to media messages according to their own psychological and social motivations rather than being passive recipients of them. It therefore suggests that the media vie for the attention of viewers with other information sources. According to Obeagu (2018), these demands include things like knowledge, amusement, education, socialization, escape, personal relationships, excitement, and personal identity.

The Uses and Gratification Theory is relevant to this work because it sheds insight on the reasons why audiences select a given media over another. It describes how people seek out certain publications because of their political cartoons' visual attractiveness. That is, because of their particular needs for information, opinion reinforcement, entertainment and emotional gratification, social interaction and identity gratification, escapism and diversion, etc., some audiences who comprehend the messages of political cartoons will only choose to read newspapers (printed or downloaded online) that contain cartoons. The UGT also helps to explain that what works for audience A, may not work for audience B. That is to say that, political cartoons may have influenced the opinions and voting decisions of audience A during the 2023 presidential election to a large extent, but may not also influence audience B, because of their psychological needs and differences.

METHODOLOGY

For a quantitative research of this sort, which involved the collection of views, perspectives or opinions of respondents on political cartoons, the survey research design was adopted and the instrument for gathering data was a structured questionnaire. The population of this study comprised the total number of voters that collected their permanent voters cards (PVCs) in Akwa Ibom State as at January 2023, which according to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), stands at 2,198,628. Therefore, the population for this study was 2,198,628. A sample size of 400 was scientifically determined for this study using the Yards Formula propounded by Taro Yamane in 1964.

$$n = N$$

$$1 + N(0.05)^2$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population of the study

e = Error limit or level of significance [given as (0.01 or 0.05)²]

1 = Constant value

This study employed the multi-stage sampling technique and the purposive/judgment sampling technique. Going by this, Akwa Ibom State was clustered into senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo Senatorial District), Akwa Ibom South (Eket Senatorial District) and Akwa Ibom North West (Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District), and further divided into federal constituencies where 400 subjects were proportionately selected from the heterogeneous clusters in the ten federal constituencies, in relation to their population.

At the district level, Uyo Local Government was chosen and Idongesit Nkanga Secretariat picked as a cluster from where subjects were purposively selected as sample for the study, on the basis that the respondent voted in the 2023 presidential election, have knowledge of political cartoons and would understand the questions and provide accurate data needed for the study.

The same method was applied in Eket, Ikot Abasi, Oron, Itu, Ikono, Ukanafun, Etinan, Abak and Ikot Ekpene Local Government Areas. Here, samples were drawn from the heterogeneous clusters and subjects were purposively selected from their Local Government Councils / headquarters and other densely populated communities on the condition that they have knowledge of political cartoons.

Table 1. Below Shows a Breakdown of the Sample Proportionately Selected From the Ten (10) Federal Constituencies That Make Up Akwa Ibom State

S/N	FEDERAL CONSTITUENCIES	POPULATION	SAMPLE SELECTED Number Percentage
1	Uyo	633652	80 20%
2	Eket	434247	45 11%
3	Ikot Ekpene	481951	50 13%
4	Etinan	404102	39 10%
5	Oron	415935	41 10%
6	Ikot Abasi	369871	36 9%
7	Abak	317763	34 8%
8	Itu	316461	31 8%
9	Ukanafun	297312	24 6%
10	Ikono	230757	20 5%
	TOTAL	3,902,051	400 100%

Source: 2006 National Population Commission census figure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What is Akwa Ibom Electorate Level of Awareness of Political Cartoons as Campaign Tools in the 2023 Presidential Election?

Finding out how much the Akwa Ibom electorate knew about political cartoons as a media tool for political education, sensitization, and mobilization during the 2023 presidential election campaigns was the goal of this question. As a key factor in determining the Akwa Ibom electorate's degree of awareness, the researcher first examined their general knowledge of political cartoons in order to find the answer to this research question. Only 4% of respondents claimed not to be aware of political cartoons, compared to 96% who agreed. At the same time, the Akwa Ibom electorate is highly aware of political cartoons. 34% of respondents indicated this, compared to 26%, 21%, and 19% who indicated moderate extent, extremely high extent, and low extent, respectively. Therefore, in response to this research question, it can safely be said that the level of awareness of political cartoons in Akwa Ibom State is high. This finding buttresses the position of Nnanyelugo and Mohammed (2016) that cartoon is a screaming medium that cannot be denied attention.

Research Question Two: To What Extent did Akwa Ibom Electorate Understand the Messages, Ideas and Opinions Expressed in Cartoons during the 2023 Presidential Election?

Data revealed that Akwa Ibom State electorate understood the messages, ideas and opinions expressed in cartoons during the 2023 presidential election to a high extent. This answer was proven by the preponderant responses of 50% of respondents as opposed to 24% and 26% who said very high extent and low extent respectively. According to Okon and Samuel (2018), "even though editorial cartoons use images, the combination of a written text makes it more explicit." This conclusion supports the ease and simplicity of political cartoons. The visual pictures can successfully convey without written words. Because their content – a combination of sarcasm and humor – is understandable to all people, regardless of educational background, cartoons are regarded as one of the most effective forms of communication. An editorial cartoonist uses language and images to convince the reader of a particular interpretation of a phenomenon or occurrence, as opposed to a photographer who simply captures the event.

Research Question Three: How Effective were Political Cartoons as Campaign Tools in the 2023 Presidential Election in Akwa Ibom State?

Results demonstrated that political cartoons provided rapid and efficient political education and were successful campaign tools in the 2023 presidential election. While 27% of respondents pointed out that political cartoons were effective because they presented certain facts in ways that written words would not adequately capture in detail, 25% said they explained and made messages more digestible, and 13% (47) said they caricatured and criticized presidential candidates and their intentions, this answer was supported by 92% of respondents who answered "yes" to a previous question and 35% who answered "yes" to a subsequent question, which stated that they were effective because they offered quick and effective political education.

According to Mowafy (2022), "political cartoons with their use of humour and contrast, can make messages more digestible, thus becoming a perfect means of quick and effective education, which can influence citizens on political issues." This finding is a clear representation of that belief. This result further supports Ekpe's (2016) conclusion that cartoons were frequently used to quietly enlighten, educate, and entertain politicians, their followers, voters, and the general public during the 2015 Nigerian election.

Research Question Four: What were the Contributions of Political Cartoons to the Outcome of the 2023 Presidential Election in Akwa Ibom State?

97% of respondents agreed that political cartoons contributed to the outcome of the 2023 presidential election. Also, responses revealed that the role political cartoons played, viz-a-viz their contribution to the outcome of the 2023 presidential election was that they shaped public opinions of the people on the presidential candidates and the Nigerian situation. This answer was evidenced in the responses of 33% of respondents as against 28%, 27% and 13% who said political cartoons drew attention and made electorate understand better, the socio-political, cultural and economic situation of the country, political cartoons influenced electorate voting decision and participation and political cartoons offered social mobilization, respectively.

This finding lends credence to the opinion of Toluwani & Shobukonla (2023) that current socio-political issues in Nigeria are no stranger to cartoonists' creative impulses and impressions, as well as their interpretations of political environment, which helped shape voters' political consciousness and biases regarding political aspirants, power grabbers and political parties' agenda.

Research Question Five: Through which Media Channel did Akwa Ibom Electorate Access Cartoons on 2023 Presidential Election most?

Data analyzed showed that majority of Akwa Ibom electorate accessed political cartoons on the 2023 presidential election mostly on the internet, while others relied on traditional newspapers. This answer was derived from the responses of 55% of respondents who agreed that they accessed political cartoons on the internet, while 45% said they accessed cartoons on traditional newspapers. This finding is a clear attestation of the impacts of technology on journalism, which brought about online journalism, which according to Akakwandu (2021) is a contemporary form of journalism where editorial contents such as news, editorials, opinions and columns, feature articles and political cartoons are distributed over the internet as opposed to publishing via print or broadcast. Also, this finding supports a point in the uses and gratification theory of Katz Blunder and Gurevitch M. used in this study which holds that media compete against other information sources for audience gratification.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since political cartoons are a means of chronicling history and popular opinion on key events, they are a genre that merits scholarly consideration. According to this study, cartoons in Nigerian media serve important communication functions by imaginatively promoting national concerns, establishing the parameters of public debate, and offering political commentary in clever and artistic ways that capture the sociopolitical reality of the country.

The survey also found that it's usually not hard to understand what cartoons are trying to say. Most people can read and understand the messages, concepts, and viewpoints that cartoonists express, regardless of their level of knowledge. Drawing from the research findings, it can be said that political cartoons were important in the 2023 Akwa Ibom State presidential election. In particular, they influenced voters' perceptions of presidential contenders and represented the nation's sociopolitical climate. Political cartoons "are both informative and persuasive and they offer people narratives about social problems," according to Saygin (2017, p. 81). Therefore, during democratic processes, political cartoons continue to be an effective medium for political mobilization, education, and communication.

FURTHER STUDY

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Media organizations should sustain and expand the use of political cartoons in both print and online platforms. Since the majority of the electorate accessed cartoons through the internet, greater investment in digital platforms is strongly recommended.
2. Political actors and campaign organizations should strategically employ political cartoons as complementary campaign tools. Their combination of humor, satire, and simplified messaging makes them effective for political education, sensitization, and mobilization.
3. Civic education agencies and NGOs should integrate political cartoons into voter education programmes, as the study established that cartoons are easily understood regardless of educational background. This can enhance political consciousness and participation.
4. Policy makers and media regulators should encourage the creative use of political cartoons by supporting freedom of expression, while ensuring ethical standards are maintained to prevent misinformation or defamation.
5. Future researchers should investigate the impact of political cartoons on voting behavior across other states and regions of Nigeria. Such studies will broaden understanding of cartoons as persuasive campaign tools and their contributions to democratic processes.

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