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Satire as Discourse: Examining Power, Speech, and Suffering in Nigerian Political Cartoons

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Abstract

Editorial cartoons are multimodal texts that combine visual satire and concise language to comment on political and social issues. In Nigeria, they serve as important platforms for public critique, often exposing the failures of governance and the contradictions of political rhetoric. Existing studies on Nigerian political cartoons have focused largely on their historical role during the military era or analysed their humour and stylistic features in isolation. However, few have employed a systematic discourse-analytic framework to examine how these cartoons function ideologically within contemporary democratic settings. This study fills that gap by applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to three selected cartoons from mainstream Nigerian media. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the study analyses three editorial cartoons carefully chosen from the mainstream Nigerian press. The analysis is structured around issue-driven categories, which were tagged as the spectacle of national suffering, recycling of corruption, and empty political rhetoric, revealing how cartoonists use metaphor, irony, modality, and intertextuality to expose contradictions between elite discourse and lived public realities. At the textual level, the cartoons undermine familiar tropes and ritualised expressions; at the level of discursive practice, they recontextualise political slogans and national symbols; and at the level of social practice, they function as resistance discourse, challenging hegemonic narratives of reform, legitimacy, and progress. The findings show that editorial cartoons are not neutral illustrations but complex semiotic texts that reflect and reshape public discourse. They provide accessible, culturally embedded forms of

critique that question the legitimacy of state narratives and offer alternative framings of political reality. The study affirms the relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis for analysing multimodal texts and highlights the political function of humour and satire in Nigeria's mediated public sphere.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Cartoons, Visual Satire, Media Discourse, Resistance

Introduction

Nigeria's political history is characterised by protracted struggles over power, legitimacy, and democratic consolidation. Since independence in 1960, the country has oscillated between military dictatorships and civilian rule, each regime imprinting its ideological framework onto public life. The return to democratic governance in 1999 marked a significant turning point, inaugurating the Fourth Republic. However, political instability, corruption, ethno-religious tensions, and weak institutions have continued to define Nigeria's democratic experience (Suberu, 2007; Agbaje, 1999). These tensions have not only shaped political outcomes but have also produced fertile ground for public critique and civic engagement through various communicative forms, including socio-political cartoons.

Socio-political cartoons, often published in mainstream newspapers and now widely circulated on digital platforms, have become important vehicles for political commentary in Nigeria. These editorial cartoons, with their potent blend of art, humour, and critique, have long served as tools for visual dissent, providing a succinct medium for contesting power, exposing hypocrisy, and shaping public opinion. Historically, these cartoons have accompanied national crises, mirroring societal disillusionment and offering symbolic resistance to political excesses. The origin of political cartooning in Nigeria is often traced to Akinola Lasekan's works in *The West African Pilot*, which reflected anti-colonial sentiments and critiqued imperial oppression in the 1940s and 50s (Olaniyan, 2002). This tradition of using satire as a form of political commentary continued through the works of Dele Jegede, Josy Ajiboye, and Boye Gbenro, especially during the prolonged military regimes from 1983 to 1999. Their visual commentaries, what some have called "snapshot histories" of Nigerian democracy, captured the atmosphere of repression and resistance during key moments such as Buhari's coup, Babangida's annulment of the 1993 elections, and Abacha's authoritarian rule.

Cartoons in Nigeria generally operate within a multimodal framework. They merge verbal and visual elements (caption, gesture, symbol, metaphor) to produce politically charged commentary. As Ariyo (2017) argues, they rely on multimodal discourse techniques to construct the meanings that readers can decode based on

shared socio-political knowledge. The interplay of caricature, irony, and symbolic exaggeration allows cartoonists to bypass censorship while delivering powerful ideological critiques. These cartoons are not merely illustrations but discursive interventions. Moreover, cartoons have played a significant role in Nigeria's democratisation and political critique. As Fadeyi (2023) notes, cartoons published in Nigerian newspapers serve as both communicative and ideological texts. They "engage readers visually and rhetorically" and often function as counter-narratives to official political discourse. Their relevance continues into the present, where cartoons mediate conversations about insecurity, economic hardship, political betrayal, and electoral controversies.

This study focuses on how socio-political cartoons in Nigeria construct meaning through language and visual semiotics. The aim is to uncover the ideological and discursive strategies employed by cartoonists in representing and critiquing socio-political realities. This is important because, as Lazar (2005) argues, discourse is not merely a vehicle of communication but a social practice that shapes and is shaped by power relations. Cartoons, therefore, are not just humorous artefacts; they are part of the larger field of discourse that sustains, contests, and negotiates social power. To analyse these cartoons, this study adopts Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough's approach is appropriate because it enables a layered investigation of meaning, focusing on three interrelated levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The first level, textual analysis, will examine the linguistic and visual choices made in the cartoons, including metaphors, irony, intertextuality, and modality. The second level, discursive practice, will address the processes of production and consumption: who creates the cartoons, for what audience, and in what socio-political context? The third level, social practice, will interrogate the broader ideological and institutional structures that inform the cartoon's discourse, such as state power, ethnicity, neoliberal policy, and electoral politics. By applying Fairclough's CDA model to Nigerian socio-political cartoons, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how language and visual images serve as sites of ideological struggle. It also engages with wider debates on the role of media in democratic societies, especially in postcolonial states where the boundaries of free expression, satire, and political critique are constantly negotiated.

Drawing on Fairclough's model, the study addresses these core research questions:

- What linguistic and visual strategies do editorial cartoons in Nigeria employ in political critique?
- How do cartoons represent political actors and institutions?
- What role do they play in shaping political discourse and public perception?

Literature Review

The study of political cartoons in Nigeria has attracted scholarly interest across disciplines, such as communication, linguistics, semiotics, and cultural studies. Scholars generally agree that cartoons function as ideological texts that mediate public discourse through satire, irony, and metaphor. These studies highlight both the historical importance of cartoons in Nigeria and the discursive strategies they deploy in framing socio-political realities.

Jimoh (2010) provides a comprehensive account of the role of editorial cartoons during Nigeria's military era, especially between 1983 and 1999. He demonstrates how cartoonists like Josy Ajiboye and Akin Onipede used visual satire to critique authoritarian rule, electoral manipulation, and social decay. Jimoh argues that these cartoons not only reflected public frustration but also documented the shifting ideological currents during the transition to civilian rule. Similarly, Salihu and Oparaugo (2017) trace the continued relevance of cartooning in postcolonial Nigeria, noting that cartoonists remain relatively autonomous actors even within politically affiliated media houses. Their study underlines the resilience of cartoons in challenging state narratives across different political regimes.

Fadeyi (2023) examines how satire functions as a communicative mode in editorial cartoons. His analysis of selected Nigerian newspapers shows that satire in cartoons serves three interconnected functions: (i) to expose social and political malfeasance, (ii) to entertain through humour, and (iii) to engage readers in a form of visual dialogue. He also notes that cartoons simplify complex political phenomena through exaggeration and stylised visual cues, making them accessible to a wide readership. This accessibility is central to their democratic function. Ariyo (2017) applies a multimodal discourse analysis to selected political cartoons from TELL magazine. His findings support the claim that meaning in political cartoons arises from the interplay between visual grammar and linguistic text. Through metaphor, metonymy, and visual salience, the cartoons construct narrative frames that position political actors in particular roles—corrupt elites, heroic dissenters, or passive citizens. Ariyo's work shows how the meaning of a cartoon depends not just on what is drawn or said, but also on how symbols, gaze, space, and composition guide interpretation.

The usefulness of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in studying cartoons is affirmed by Usman and Nuhu (2016), who explicitly adopt Fairclough's approach. Their analysis shows that cartoons use discursive strategies such as transitivity, nominalisation, and modality to reinforce or challenge power. For instance, cartoons depicting government failures often avoid direct naming but rely on shared cultural codes to expose culpability. Their work strengthens the case for viewing cartoons as "sites of ideological production" that reproduce, negotiate, or contest dominant narratives. Osisanwo and Atoloye (2024) explore how humour functions as a resistance strategy in political cartoons. Their study of selected newspaper cartoons identifies the use of allusion, pun, incongruity, and irony to

subtly critique powerful actors. By using humour to "mask" criticism, cartoonists can bypass censorship or legal reprisals while still drawing attention to abuse, corruption, and injustice. They argue that humour in Nigerian cartoons is not an escape from politics but a way of doing politics.

While existing scholarship has richly documented the historical, communicative, and stylistic functions of Nigerian political cartoons, fewer studies have combined a multimodal stylistic analysis with a full CDA framework. Moreover, much of the focus has been on cartoons from the military era or the early Fourth Republic. There is a need to re-examine how editorial cartoons function in today's digital and post-digital political climate, particularly under renewed democratic backsliding, press insecurity, and electoral disillusionment.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model as the analytical framework. The aim is to examine how Nigerian socio-political cartoons construct meaning and convey ideological critique through visual and linguistic strategies. A purposive sampling method was employed to select three editorial cartoons from established Nigerian print and digital media outlets. The selection was guided by relevance to current political discourse, prominence of publication, and clarity of satirical intent. The choice of three cartoons is deliberate and methodologically grounded: the sample is small enough to allow for detailed multimodal and discourse-level analysis, yet thematically broad enough to reflect key patterns in Nigerian political cartooning, particularly concerning leadership failure, electoral politics, and state-society relations. This focused sample enables depth without sacrificing thematic representativeness, in line with the goals of interpretive qualitative research.

Each cartoon is subjected to a three-tiered analysis following Fairclough's CDA model:

a. **Textual analysis** explores the semiotic and linguistic features of the cartoons, including metaphor, modality, visual symbolism, captioning, and framing.
b. **Discursive practice** considers the context of production and reception—identifying the media platform, intended audience, and communicative intent of the cartoonist.
c. **Social practice** situates the cartoon within broader ideological, cultural, and political structures, focusing on how the cartoon reproduces or challenges dominant discourses.

A combination of multimodal and semiotic tools is applied in the analysis, enabling a close reading of visual signs alongside textual components. Special attention is given to rhetorical devices such as humour, irony, caricature, and intertextuality, which are central to the communicative power of political cartoons. This approach allows for a deeper

understanding of how cartoons serve as vehicles for public commentary and ideological positioning within Nigeria's political culture.

Table 1: Description of Selected Cartoons for Analysis

Item	Title	Brief Description
Cartoon 1	Spectacle of National Suffering	A bandaged figure labelled "Nigeria" lies in a hospital bed marked "Recession Ward," surrounded by birthday cards. The image links economic collapse to corruption.
Cartoon 2	Recycling of Corruption	One leader passes a baton emitting smoke labelled "corruption," "recession," and "insecurity" to a successor. The relay metaphor critiques inherited dysfunction.
Cartoon 3	Empty Political Rhetoric	A politician chants a campaign slogan from a raised platform while citizens seated around him express inability to stand due to hunger, sickness, and poverty.

Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a critical analysis of three selected socio-political cartoons using Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis is guided by issue-driven categories that emerged through close observation of recurring ideological patterns across the data. Each cartoon is examined in terms of its textual features, discursive practices, and broader social implications, with particular attention to how visual and linguistic strategies such as metaphor, modality, and intertextuality are employed to construct political critique. The cartoons are treated not as isolated images, but as multimodal texts embedded in Nigeria's socio-political context. These texts reflect, contest, and reshape dominant meanings in public discourse.

Spectacle of National Suffering

This refers to how cartoons symbolise collective hardship in dramatic, often theatrical ways, presenting national suffering as visual hyperbole or caricature. This appears in images of physical injury, mass poverty, or national disrepair. The body of the citizen or symbolic figure (e.g., Nigeria) is used to reflect systemic failure. In the first cartoon, Nigeria is personified as a bandaged, broken man lying in a hospital bed marked "Recession Ward".



Fig. 1: Textual Analysis

This cartoon presents Nigeria as a severely injured man lying on a hospital bed inside a "Recession Ward". His body is bandaged from head to toe, with visible signs of physical trauma. Around the bed are colourful birthday cards bearing the text "Happy 56th Birthday", clearly referencing Nigeria's independence celebration. The speech bubble reads, "Truly, recession is a ward… corruption victims ward", a pun that fuses economic and medical registers. The character on the hospital bed is also labelled "Nigeria". Visually, this cartoon deploys hyperbolic symbolism to portray national suffering. The use of bandages, crutches, and hospital settings evokes a nation in critical condition. The verbal pun on "ward" performs a double move: first, referring to an economic condition ("recession") and second, to a clinical space of suffering ("corruption victims ward"). This type of semantic layering is characteristic of political cartoons, which condense complex critique into short, loaded texts (Ariyo, 2017).

The modality in the utterance *"Truly, recession is a ward"* is assertive and unqualified, presenting the metaphor not as a possibility but as fact. Fairclough (1995) emphasises that modality reflects a speaker's commitment to truth. Here, the cartoonist's high degree of certainty marks the statement as a commonsense truth, one that aligns the viewer with the cartoon's ideological position. It frames the national crisis as the inevitable outcome of long-term corruption, not temporary misfortune. The contrast between the celebratory tone of the birthday cards and the grotesque image of injury intensifies the satire. It creates a visual irony: how can a nation celebrate when its body lies broken?

Discursive Practice

This cartoon emerged in the period around Nigeria's 56th independence anniversary in 2016, a year when the country officially entered recession under the Buhari administration. Contextual cues, in the instance of the bed labelled "Nigeria", the economic reference to "recession", and the speech content, indicate that the cartoon was directed at the political elite's failure to address economic hardship.

The cartoon draws on intertextual knowledge from multiple discourses:

- Economic discourse (*recession*),
- Medical discourse (*ward*, *victims*),
- Political ritual (*independence celebration*),
- And media discourse (through layout and caption conventions of cartoons).

According to Fairclough (1992), intertextuality in CDA refers to the embedding of different discourses within a single text. Here, the cartoon merges official political ritual (independence celebrations) with the hidden reality of economic trauma. It critiques how political actors maintain symbolic narratives of unity and growth even in the face of deep material distress. Audience interpretation is key. The cartoon relies on shared experiential knowledge; the viewer is expected to already feel the effects of recession, making the satirical message both accessible and persuasive. The humour here is not light but bitter, evoking what Usman and Nuhu (2016) call "critical laughter", a form of discursive resistance that exposes injustice without directly confronting state power.

Social Practice

At the level of social practice, this cartoon critiques the ideological gap between symbolic nationalism and lived experience. Independence Day is officially framed by government discourse as a time for unity, growth, and renewal. However, this cartoon suggests that such celebrations are ideologically dishonest, masking the actual condition of the Nigerian state. The cartoon's ideological position aligns with what Fairclough calls resistance discourse, a kind of text that does not merely describe reality but contests dominant representations of it. Rather than accept the hegemonic narrative of national celebration, the cartoonist reframes Nigeria as a victim of elite corruption. The injuries metaphorically stand in for public trauma: hunger, unemployment, insecurity, and hopelessness. In this way, the cartoon functions as counter-hegemonic discourse: it visually re-signifies national identity, not as something proud and sovereign, but as something injured and deceived. As Salihu and Oparaugo (2017) argue, cartoons in Nigeria frequently perform such ideological work, "providing alternate platforms for social commentary where mainstream narratives fall silent" (p. 5).

This cartoon integrates visual satire, linguistic irony, and cultural memory to mount a powerful critique of the Nigerian state. Through Fairclough's CDA model, we see that it does not merely reflect public sentiment but constructs a politically charged narrative that resists dominant ideologies of progress and national unity. It is a discourse of trauma, irony, and protest, delivered through humour, yet grounded in deep social critique.

Recycling of Corruption

This refers to how political leadership is portrayed as a cycle of inherited corruption, rather than change or progress. It suggests continuity of failure. This is typically shown through

metaphors of race, inheritance, or handover, often with symbolism suggesting a pretence of reform that masks deeper structural continuity. In the second cartoon, one political figure passes a baton to another in a relay race. The baton emits smoke labelled "corruption", "depression", "recession", and "insecurity". Though one runner finishes and another begins, there is no real transformation; the crisis is simply passed on.



Fig. 2: Textual Analysis

This cartoon shows two male athletes dressed in green, the national colour of Nigeria, on a racetrack. The first runner, representing a former president, passes a baton to the second runner, clearly representing a new president. The baton emits dark smoke labelled with the inscriptions: *insecurity*, *corruption*, *depression*, and *recession*. The recipient of the baton, visibly anxious, exclaims, "Off and running!" This scene draws on the metaphor of a relay race, typically associated with continuity, teamwork, and strategy. However, the race metaphor here is subverted: the baton being passed is toxic; it is visibly polluting the air with unresolved crises. Rather than symbolising progress or a new start, the baton becomes a conduit for inherited failure.

The statement "*Off and running!*" is delivered in a declarative, enthusiastic tone, yet the imagery contradicts this optimism. According to Fairclough (1995), such modal incongruity between what is said and what is shown is a powerful strategy in critical discourse. While the runner's internal voice projects energy and confidence, the cartoon visually undermines it by linking him to a legacy of damage. This contradiction between linguistic modality and visual modality invites the viewer to question the legitimacy of political succession narratives.

Discursive Practice

The cartoon was created during the transition from one administration to another (Buhari to Tinubu), when promises of reform and change were rife in media and campaign discourse. Nigerian elections are typically framed by both domestic and international media as chances for "fresh leadership". This cartoon draws on such tropes but

recontextualises them using the language of decay, not renewal. The cartoon is also intertextual: it references the frequent use of sports metaphors in Nigerian political speeches, with leaders saying they will "hit the ground running" or "pass the baton" to trusted successors. These metaphors are deeply embedded in political communication. What the cartoonist does here is take that metaphor literally and stretch it to its critical extreme. The baton becomes not a sign of teamwork, but a symbol of inherited dysfunction. Ariyo (2017) notes that Nigerian cartoons often use "cultural metaphors" drawn from popular domains like sports or religion to comment on political issues. This cartoon follows that tradition by reworking the sporting metaphor into a critique of elite continuity.

Social Practice

At the level of social practice, the cartoon interrogates the ideology of change, a recurring theme in Nigerian elections. Campaigns often position incoming governments as radical departures from the past, despite being part of the same political class or machinery. The cartoonist challenges this by suggesting that power transitions are performative, not substantive, and that the same structural problems are recycled through different faces. This critique aligns with resistance discourse, which Fairclough (1995) defines as the practice of "challenging established orders of discourse". Instead of accepting the mainstream narrative of democratic handover as progress, the cartoon reframes it as a circulation of inherited crises. The baton is not a tool of progress but an object of contamination. This also mirrors what Fadeyi (2023) calls "visual accountability", where cartoonists use familiar metaphors to indict political actors without naming them directly. The cartoon's anonymity (no names are used) invites readers to apply their own political knowledge and experiences. This polysemy strengthens its ideological impact by relying on shared cynicism about leadership. This cartoon uses satire, contradiction, and metaphor to reject the illusion of new beginnings in Nigerian politics. Through Fairclough's CDA lens, we see how the visual and verbal elements construct a coherent ideological position: that corruption, repression, and failure are institutionalised and passed down, not eliminated. The cartoonist mobilises popular symbols and metaphors to mount a critique that is clear, accessible, and deeply political.

Empty Political Rhetoric

This refers to how political speeches are disconnected from lived reality. It identifies a mismatch between elite language and public suffering. This is often presented by juxtaposing the politician's voice with the people's visible condition or spoken rebuttal, showing satire through contrast.

In the third cartoon, a politician stands on a stool calling citizens to "stand". His chant, "One... two... just... on your mandate we shall stand!" mimics campaign rituals. But

around him, every citizen is seated, weak, hungry, or sick. They respond with phrases like "Too hungry", "Too sick", "Too poor", "Too weak", and "Too broke to stand".



Fig. 3: Textual Analysis

This cartoon shows a politician, visibly recognisable through clothing and posture, standing elevated on a platform, addressing a crowd of weak, hungry, sick, and exhausted citizens who lie or crouch around him. He chants, "One… two… just… on your mandate we shall stand!" The people respond with painful interruptions: "Baba… we are too hungry…", "Too poor…", "Too weak…", "Too sick…", "Too broke… to stand". This is a stark instance of contradiction between language and reality. The politician's utterance borrows from political ritual, post-election chants that celebrate popular mandates and national unity. Yet these are rendered absurd in the cartoon's setting: nobody is standing, and nobody can. This creates a satirical inversion of political performance, highlighting the physical and symbolic distance between the leader and the people.

The politician's speech is in the imperative modality, demanding action (stand), while the people's responses reflect deontic and epistemic impossibility; they cannot act due to hunger, illness, poverty, and exhaustion. Fairclough (1995) notes that modality structures the relationship between speaker and reality; here, the cartoonist uses mismatched modalities to undermine the legitimacy of the leader's voice. The commands fall flat. The conditions of the people override the language of power.

Discursive Practice

This cartoon reflects a post-election context, referencing the widespread disillusionment that follows campaign promises. It taps into a discursive routine in Nigerian politics, which is mobilising chants and slogans (on your mandate we shall stand), often used to claim legitimacy from the people. However, this discursive performance is here rendered futile. The cartoon draws heavily on intertextuality. The call-and-response format is

borrowed from both political rallies and religious traditions (especially Pentecostal worship). The politician's chant mimics the cadence of collective affirmation. But the crowd does not respond as expected; instead, their responses fracture the performance. This subversion of ritual intertext shows how satire operates through discursive recontextualization (Fairclough, 1992): the borrowed form is turned against its original function. The cartoon's semiotic resources (gestures of exhaustion, empty bowls, physical posture) reinforce the unfitness of elite discourse in a context of mass suffering. As Osisanwo and Atoloye (2024) argue, Nigerian cartoons frequently construct "humour-laced resistance" by setting up and then destabilising political performances. This cartoon is a clear example.

Social Practice

The cartoon critiques the ideology of rhetorical populism, the belief that merely invoking the will of the people legitimises governance. By portraying the people as too broken to perform the expected chorus, the cartoon undermines the discursive fiction of participatory politics. The people are not participants; they are casualties. This is a form of resistance discourse. It visually dismantles the performative myth of electoral mandate, exposing its emptiness when basic conditions of life, food, health, and security are absent. The cartoon's humour is therefore not escapist but a weapon of critique. Fadeyi (2023) notes that in cartoons, political satire often turns elite language into a site of ideological battle. Here, the ritualised phrase "on your mandate we shall stand" becomes the object of ridicule. Its decontextualisation and parody allow the cartoonist to highlight the gap between elite oratory and public suffering. The cartoon's ideological function lies in its reversal of narrative authority. The politician speaks first, but it is the people's reply that defines the scene. This reversal aligns with what Fairclough (1995) describes as a challenge to dominant discourse orders, where marginalised voices interrupt and restructure the field of meaning. This cartoon uses irony, intertextual parody, and modal conflict to expose the emptiness of political speech in the face of mass hardship. Through Fairclough's model, we see that the cartoon functions as a semiotic site where state performance is stripped of legitimacy and replaced with popular critique. Its ideological stance is clear: no political ritual can substitute for material justice.

Synthesis of Findings

Across the three selected political cartoons, a consistent pattern emerges: the use of visual satire to expose the contradictions between elite discourse and lived realities in Nigeria. While each cartoon employs distinct imagery and metaphors, all three share a common ideological function, which is to contest dominant political narratives through multimodal critique. From Fairclough's (1995) CDA perspective, the cartoons engage at all three levels:

All three cartoons rely heavily on metaphor, irony, and modality to construct meaning. The metaphor of a hospitalised Nigeria (Cartoon 1), the relay baton of corruption (Cartoon 2), and the failed political chant (Cartoon 3) transform familiar political rituals and idioms into objects of critique. In each case, high modality is used not to affirm official statements but to expose their implausibility. This rhetorical inversion is central to the satirical power of the cartoons. Moreover, visual exaggeration and text-image tension are deployed to create layered meanings. In each cartoon, what is said verbally (through caption or speech bubble) is contradicted or undermined by what is shown. This reflects what Ariyo (2017) terms "semiotic subversion", where cartoons deliberately exploit contradiction to provoke critical reflection.

The cartoons are produced within recognisable socio-political contexts of economic recession, electoral transition, and post-election disillusionment. They draw from intertextual resources such as political speeches, campaign chants, state rituals, and religious idioms. However, these are not reproduced faithfully. Instead, they are recontextualised and satirised, a strategy that Fairclough (1992) sees as central to discursive critique. Audience knowledge is presumed. The humour and criticism depend on a shared understanding of political history, slogans, and socio-economic conditions. This reliance on public knowledge allows the cartoons to serve as accessible forms of political commentary that bypass complex theoretical language while delivering pointed ideological critique.

All three cartoons perform resistance discourse. They dismantle the ideological formations of political continuity (Cartoon 2), celebratory nationalism (Cartoon 1), and rhetorical populism (Cartoon 3). Rather than presenting political actors as agents of change, the cartoons depict them as conveyors of recycled failure or empty promises. These narratives stand in direct opposition to hegemonic discourses propagated through state media, campaign rhetoric, and official ceremonies. What binds the cartoons ideologically is their framing of the Nigerian public as burdened, silenced, or immobilised. They are sick, tired, poor, or deceived. This motif contrasts with the self-legitimating portrayals of political elites as problem-solvers or saviours. The satirical reversal of these roles not only subverts power but also invites viewers to adopt a critical position toward dominant narratives. Through the application of Fairclough's CDA model, these cartoons are revealed as complex political texts that encode dissent through humour, metaphor, and visual contradiction. They do not merely entertain; they intervene, i.e., challenging discourses of reform, celebration, and mandate by presenting counter-narratives grounded in collective struggle and public disillusionment. In this way, Nigerian socio-political cartoons function as everyday sites of ideological struggle, where meaning, power, and resistance are negotiated through image and word.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has examined how Nigerian socio-political cartoons function as discursive tools for critiquing governance, exposing contradictions in political rhetoric, and resisting dominant ideological narratives. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis revealed that cartoonists strategically employ visual and linguistic resources, such as metaphor, irony, modality, and intertextuality, to construct meaning and challenge state discourse. Across the three cartoons analysed, a recurring pattern emerged: political actors are framed not as agents of transformation but as symbols of continuity in corruption, rhetorical deception, and systemic neglect. Meanwhile, the Nigerian populace is depicted as exhausted, impoverished, and marginalised, unable to participate in the very rituals designed to legitimise power. These cartoons destabilise elite discourse by recontextualising familiar expressions like, "on your mandate we shall stand", national birthday celebrations, and leadership handovers within frames of injury, crisis, and decay. Theoretically, the study affirms the value of Fairclough's CDA for analysing multimodal texts like political cartoons. By attending to the relationship between text, discourse, and social practice, the analysis shows how humour and satire operate not as neutral entertainment but as forms of semiotic resistance. As popular cultural texts, cartoons in Nigeria contribute to the broader public sphere by making political critique accessible, memorable, and emotionally resonant.

Implications of the study are both methodological and political. Methodologically, it demonstrates that editorial cartoons can be analysed with the same depth and seriousness as verbal texts, provided the framework accommodates multimodality. Politically, it suggests that cartoons are important instruments in Nigeria's democratic culture, especially in periods when official narratives dominate mainstream discourse. By voicing public frustration and dissent in a compressed and coded form, they sustain a form of everyday resistance that is both critical and culturally embedded. Future research may expand this work by examining cartoons across different media platforms, including digital and social media, and by exploring audience reception, which remains an under-researched area in Nigerian media discourse studies.

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