

UYO RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

Introduction

Cartoons are rich in political characters and they provide negative images of politicians - persons who, regardless of their training and background, wield political power, hold elective positions, are political appointees, belong to a political party, or are political activists. They cut across class and age, and feature the blunders of the politicians and the electorate.

According to Goldberg (1983) in *Encyclopedia International* (Vol. 4; pp. 132-133):

The political cartoon is the graphic expression of an opinion relating to current news, politics or social injustices that may arouse public interest. It is generally printed on editorial page of a newspaper and sometimes amplifies the view expressed in the accompanying editorial... it is an art of protest.

As observed by political cartoon scholars, these cartoons are normally humorous but may be positively savage; they serve as capsule versions of editorial in their satire and are running commentary on social change, when intended as a corrective to social inertia. They make an effort to reveal mankind to itself, to penetrate artificial armours, expose hypocrisy, deflate pomposity, replace shame with truth, debunk and slowly destroy pretension through honesty (*Encyclopedia Britanica* 1975:909 and *Collier's Encyclopedia* 1979:506).

However, in Nigeria, political cartoons are not restricted to the pages on which the papers' editorials are printed. Even when they are published on such pages, they may not have any connection with the editorials. They can be found on any page of the different newspapers. Political cartoon messages are usually hard-hitting because the tools of satire - irony, sarcasm, parody, innuendo - are employed in packaging them. Mingled with humour, they are used to hold political actors or actions to ridicule.

In exploring the use of political cartoons in Nigeria, account is taken within the knowledge of the Nigerian press structure and practices as a whole. More specifically, in relation to power struggle among the larger ethnic groups and attendant prejudices, which may shape and emphasize the characteristics of the cartoons and colour the captions. In other words, these cartoons may turn out to be caricatures of stereotyped images and notions of ethnic groups. How does the readership feel about the characters and messages represented in cartoons? This is the focus of this paper.

Methodology

The survey method was used in this study, and the residents of Uyo urban - the nucleus of Akwa Ibom State capital - who signified voting intentions by going out for registration during the February 1997 voters' registration exercise constituted the universe. The instrument employed was the questionnaire. From the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria's office (now INEC), a list of registration centres in Uyo urban, numbering 54, was obtained.

Since it was not necessary to draw the sample from 54 registration centres, it was decided that ten centres be used. To pick the centres, a systematic sampling procedure was adopted. This meant arbitrarily picking a number from a table of random numbers as a starting point, and at a sampling interval of five, ten centres were picked from the list of registration centres for Uyo urban. Additional five centres were kept as reserves in the event of encountering problems at any of the chosen ten centres.

Each registration centre was approved by NECON to register 500 voters. Informed by the total number of voters registered in the area in 1992 which was 34,142, and Meyer's (1979) guideline for sample size, a decision was made to draw 370 persons as the sample for the survey, from the ten centres. According to Meyer, this sample size allows for a five percent error margin and 95 percent confidence level for populations between 10,000 and 49,999. This meant that each of the ten centres chosen was to contribute 37 persons to the total sample. However, to prevent having less than the desired

sample size, it was increased to 400, thus raising the quota for each centre to 40.

In order to have as representative a sample as possible, the number of persons that was to be registered at each centre was divided by 40 to have the sampling interval. Thus, every twelfth person on the queue or name on the list of persons registered was selected as a respondent.

After deciding on how to draw the sample, the questions to be administered were discussed with colleagues, and necessary modifications were made. The questionnaire was then administered as decided, during the voters' registration between February 10 and 19, 1997, to those who came out for the registration. Those engaged in the questionnaire administration were research assistants made up mostly of 1995/96 outgoing students of Communication Arts Department, trained by the researcher. The exercise was supervised by the researcher who had to go round the centres chosen.

Result

Those sampled comprised 114 male and 38 female public servants; 56 male and 10 female traders; eight male and four female farmers; and 90 male and 50 female students (Table 1). Further analysis showed that 139 (38%) had a university level of education; 194 (52%) had intermediate level of education; and 37 (10%) had primary school education (Table II).

Table 1

Males				Females			
Public Servants	Trader	Farmers	Students	Public Servants	Traders	Farmers	Students
114	56	8	90	38	10	4	50
268				102			

N = 370

Table II: Occupation and Qualification of Respondents

Occupation		Qualification			
		Higher Degree	Degree/Equivalent	Intermediate Cert.	FSLC
Public	M	2	47	59	6
Servant	F	-	10	17	2
Trading	M	2	9	28	19
	F	1	1	8	-
Farming	M	-	5	2	1
	F	-	-	-	4
Student	M	-	30	57	3
	F	1	22	25	2
Total		6	133	194	37

N = 370

TABLE III: REQUENCY OF POLITICAL CARTOON READERSHIP

Education		Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
University	M	47	36	10	2
	F	17	18	8	2
		64	54	18	4
Intermediate	M	68	51	18	7
	F	14	21	7	7
		82	72	25	14
Primary	M	7	13	3	6
	F	2	1	3	2
		9	14	6	8
N = 370		155	140	49	26
Occupation		Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Public	M	48	50	13	3
	F	17	12	6	3
		65	62	19	6
Service	M	22	23	4	2
	F	1	4	2	2
		23	27	6	4
Farmers	M	2	1	3	3
	F	2	1	1	3
		2	2	4	6
Students	M	50	26	11	3
	F	15	23	9	3
		65	49	20	6
Total		155	140	40	26

N = 370

To help in assessing the extent to which political cartoons have been accepted as a functional alternative art form for meeting political information needs, the frequency of their readership was tested (Table III). A four-category scale containing *always*, *sometimes*, *rarely* and *never* was included in the questionnaire for this purpose. All the 370 persons sampled, held an opinion on the question. Less than half of the respondents 155 or (42%) said they read political cartoons *always*; 140 (38%) said they read them *sometimes*; 49 (13%) *rarely* read them, and 26 (7%) *never* read them.

It became apparent from the data that more males took interest in political cartoons than females. Of the 155 respondents who admitted reading political cartoons *always*, only 33 (21%) were females. Similarly, among the 140 who admitted reading political cartoons *sometimes*, only 40 (29%) were females. Those who said they *rarely* read political cartoons were made up of 31 males and 18 females.

In terms of education, those who said they read political cartoons *always* were made up of 64 persons (41%) with a university level education, 82 (53%) were intermediate qualification holders, and nine persons (6%) had primary education. The *sometimes* category comprised 54 (39%) persons with a university level education, 72 (51%) intermediate qualification holders, and 14 (10%) primary school certificate holders. Those who *rarely* read political cartoons were made up of 18 (37%) persons with a university level education, 25 (51%) with intermediate level education, and six (12%) with primary school education. Respondents who *never* read political cartoons comprised four (15%) persons with a university level education, 14 (54%) with intermediate education, and eight (31%) persons with primary school education.

Table III also shows the occupational analysis of the respondents to the questions on frequency of political cartoons readership. Among the four occupations identified in the survey, public servants and students came top with 65 (42%) respondents each; among those who claimed to read political cartoons *always*, traders were 23 (15%) while farmers were 5 (1%). Among those who said they read them *sometimes*, public servants were 62 (44%);

traders were 27 (19%) farmers 2 (1%); and students 49 (35%). Those who said they *rarely* read political cartoons were made up of 19 (39%) public servants; 6 (12%) traders; 4 (8%) farmers; and 20 (41%) students.

Altogether, 26 persons admitted they *never* read political cartoons (Table IV). The reasons for not reading were given in a four-category scale of (1) can't make sense of them; (2) have no interest in them; (3) prefer news to them; (4) distort events. Respondents were asked to indicate any one that applied to them. Of the six public servants who *never* read political cartoons, one admitted not being able to make sense of them; two preferred news to them; and one said political cartoons distorted events.

TABLE IV: Reasons for not Reading Political Cartoons

Occupation		Can't make sense of them	Have no interest	Prefer news to them	They distort Events
Public	M	-	1	2	-
Servant	F	1	1	-	1
Traders	M	1	5	-	1
	F	1	1	-	1
Farmers	M	1	1	-	-
	F	1	1	-	-
Students	M	2	-	1	-
	F	-	2	1	-
Total		7	12	4	3

N = 26

Ten traders said they *never* read political cartoons. Two said they could not make sense of them; six had no interest in them; and two said they distorted events. Of the four farmers who said they *never* read political cartoons, two did not read because of their inability to make sense of them; and the other two because they did not have interest in them. The students group had six members who *never* read political cartoons. Two could not make sense of them; two had no interest in them; and two preferred news to them.

Exposing oneself to political cartoons no matter how frequently or infrequently was considered as one thing, and being

able to understand the message they conveyed another. Therefore, to find out if the messages were understood, a question was asked in which a dichotomous 'Yes' or 'No' response format was employed. This question was fundamental because political cartoons in the Nigerian press seem to have been assigned a normative task - to displace illiteracy and promote understanding.

TABLE V: Ability to Decode Political Cartoon Messages

Occupation		YES			NO		
		Uni	Inter	Prim	Uni	Inter	Prim
Public	M	45	45	4	3	12	2
Servant	F	15	10	1	3	5	1
Traders	M	10	25	8	-	-	6
	F	1	4	-	-	2	-
Farmers	M	5	1	-	-	-	-
	F	-	-	2	-	-	-
Students	M	28	50	2	2	4	1
	F	16	17	2	6	5	-
Total		120	152	19	14	28	10
				291	52		

N = 343

The result in Table V reflects responses from four occupational groups and three educational levels. The number of respondents to this question was 343. As earlier shown on Tables III and IV, twenty-six persons had indicated that they never read political cartoons. So they were left out in the analysis of subsequent questions. Of the 343 respondents to this question, 291 (85%) said they understood the messages from political cartoons, while fifty-two (15%) said they did not understand. Among those who said they understood were 223 males and 68 females, while 30 males and 22 females made up those who admitted they did not understand political cartoon messages.

One hundred and twenty (41%) persons had a university education among those who claimed they understood political

cartoon messages; 152 (52%) were those who had an intermediate level of education; and 19 (7%) had primary school education. Those who said they did not understand comprised 14 (27%) persons with a university or equivalent education; 28 (54%) with intermediate level education; and 10 (19%) with primary school education.

From the data presented here, more than two-thirds of the sample said that they understood political cartoon messages. What do they really benefit from them? To find out this, respondents were asked if political cartoons helped them understand politics better than news or features did; whether political cartoons helped them in deciding which political party to vote for in an election; and whether they helped them in deciding not to participate in politics (Table VI).

TABLE VI: Functions of Political Cartoons

What Political Cartoons do?	YES					NO				
	Pub. Serv.	Trad-ers	Far-mers	Stud.	Total	Pub. Serv.	Trad.	Far-mers	Stud.	Total
Help in understand politics better than news or features do	M 53	31	2	38	124	57	18	4	48	127
	F 22	1	2	19	44	13	6	-	27	46
N = 341										
Help in deciding which party to vote for	M 42	19	1	28	90	67	30	7	59	163
	F 11	3	1	16	31	24	4	1	30	59
N = 343										
Help in making decision not to participate in politics	M 24	11	-	16	51	86	38	8	69	201
	F 7	3	2	11	23	28	4	-	35	67
N = 342										

Among those who responded to these questions, 168 people (49%) made up of 124 males and 44 females agreed that political cartoons helped them to understand politics better than news or features did. Seventy-five of the number were public servants, thirty-two, traders; four, farmers, and fifty-seven, students. Those who responded in the negative totalled 173 (51%). There were three non-responses.

On whether political cartoons helped people in deciding which party to vote for in an election, 222 people (65%) out of the 344 sampled said they did not help them. It was noticed that, as in the preceding question, public servants and students recorded high negative responses in this question. Only 121 persons (35%) admitted that they were helped in taking that decision by their exposure to political cartoons. Among them were fifty-three public servants; twenty-two traders; two farmers; and forty-four students. The males totalled 90 while the females were thirty-one. There was one non-response.

The question as to whether or not political cartoons helped the readership in deciding not to participate in politics attracted 268 (78%) negative and 74 (22%) positive responses. There were two non-responses. Those who answered in the affirmative comprised twenty-four male and seven female public servants; eleven male and three female traders; no male and two female farmers; and sixteen male and eleven female students. The negative response category was made up of 114 public servants; 42 traders; eight farmers; and 104 students. Again, public servants and students were the majority in this category.

It was necessary to move beyond probing the functions which political cartoons serve, to finding out the impressions which the readers had about them. Again, a dichotomous Yes versus No response format was used, except for one question which was trichotomized. Questions revolved around message recall from political cartoons, ethnic stereotyping, truthfulness, figuration in political cartoons, and whether the press should continue to publish them. (Table VII)

TABLE VII: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION OF FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL CARTOONS/MESSAGES

	Yes						No								
	Publ. Serv.	Trad.	Farms.	Studs.	Total	Publ. Serv.	Trad.	Farms.	Studs.	Total	Publ. Serv.	Trad.	Farms.	Studs.	Total
Messages last in memory	M 63	33	3	58	157	48	16	3	29	98					
longer	F 20	4	-	28	52	15	3	2	19	37					
Contain Ethnic Stereotype	M 64	29	3	61	157	40	15	3	24	82					
	F 25	5	-	33	220	9	1	2	9	103					
Tell truth about events	M 60	31	4	46	141	7	1	-	5	13	43	16	2	36	97
in society	F 10	2	2	17	172	-	-	2	3	16	4	-	28	56	153
Create something new from what happened	M 65	30	2	51	148	39	15	4	34	92					
	F 16	2	1	24	191	18	4	1	21	136					
Nigerian Press should continue to publish pol. cartoons	M 100	45	5	84	234	9	2	1	3	15					
	F 32	5	2	43	316	3	1	-	4	23					
					82					8					

Those who answered the question on message recall from political cartoons were 344. Two hundred and nine (61%) persons said political cartoon messages lasted in their memory longer than messages from news or features. One hundred and thirt-five persons (39%) answered in the negative. Among the respondents who gave a positive answer were 63 male and 20 female public servants; 33 male and four female traders; three male and no female farmers; and 58 male and 28 female students.

On whether or not political cartoons contained ethnic stereotypes, 323 persons made specific responses to this. Twenty one persons did not respond to this question but two hundred and twenty (68%) affirmed that there were ethnic stereotypes, while 103 (32%) thought none existed. The respondents were made up of 157 males and 63 females, and 82 males and 21 females, respectively.

Three hundred and forty-one persons responded to the question on the truthfulness of political cartoons. Three persons had no opinion. This question was trichotomized to include **sometimes**. Those who admitted that political cartoons tell the truth about happenings in society were 172 (50%). Those who said they did not tell the truth were 16 (5%) and those who said the political cartoons tell the truth **sometimes** were 153 (45%).

Making up the positive response category were 141 males and 37 females, the negative response category were 72 males and 56 females. The question whether or not political cartoons created something new from the situations they referred to attracted 327 responses. There were 17 non-responses. One hundred and ninety-one (58%) said **yes** while 136 (42%) said **no**. The positive response category comprised 148 males and 43 females, while 92 males and 44 females made up the **No** respondents.

To the question whether or not the Nigerian press should continue to publish political cartoons, 316 (93%) respondents said **yes** while 23 (7%) said **no**. This brought the total of those who held opinion on the question to 339. There were five non-responses. Two hundred and thirty-four males and 82 females made up the **yes** response category while 15 males and eight females constituted the **no** response category.

Each occupational group was found, in the majority of questions with high positive response ratio, to contribute its majority to such results.

Conclusion

The Uyo survey has brought to light that political cartoon messages have a higher recall rating than same messages from news or features. Sixty-one percent of those sampled on this issue attested to this. Similarly, the study has revealed that political cartoons in the Nigerian press do not help the electorate to decide against participation in politics or which party to vote for in an election. Also, the presence of ethnic stereotypes in Nigerian political cartoons has been established. Up to 68% of those sampled affirmed this. Nevertheless, 93% of those who answered the question on whether or not the press should continue to publish political cartoons said it should continue.

Political cartoons do not seem to be a subject of intellectual interest in Nigeria, hence there is no tradition of their criticism or appreciation. The reason for the situation may be ignorance about the nature of political cartoons as an alternative art form for the dissemination of political information. And the ignorance is not lessening, especially as there is paucity of literature in this area in Nigeria.

Cartoons, as vehicles of political information dissemination, has penetrated every society. They could be a mine of information and insights into political activities. Political cartooning encases the whole fabric of political journalism and political process. Political journalism could be seen as the making or reconstruction and dissemination of political messages. There can be little doubt of the considerable influence and importance of political cartoons. It is from the perspective of their wider meaning and significance that they ought to be taken seriously by intellectuals and political communication researchers in Nigeria.

Hopefully, when this is done, political cartoons would come into prominence in Nigeria as a quality art form, devoid of vulgar association and used for political information dissemination.

References

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