
VISUALIZING FEAR: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL CARTOONS ON INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *This study examines how political cartoons visualize insecurity and fear in Nigeria, using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Rooted in Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, the research explores both the linguistic and visual strategies cartoonists deploy to represent violence, critique governance, and mirror public anxieties. Six cartoons purposively selected from Business Day newspaper (2022–2024) formed the primary data. The analysis was qualitative and interpretive, focusing on textual description, discursive practice, and broader socio-political explanations. Findings reveal that cartoonists employ irony, metaphor, exaggeration, symbolism, and evaluative naming to portray insecurity as a national crisis and to expose leadership negligence, hypocrisy, and misplaced priorities. The cartoons function not only as satire but as ideological tools that resist dominant state narratives, amplify silenced citizen voices, and shape public discourse on fear and governance. The study concludes that political cartoons are powerful multimodal texts that contribute to Nigeria’s collective memory of insecurity and act as sites of public resistance and accountability. It recommends that media literacy programs integrate the critical reading of cartoons to strengthen civic awareness, while policymakers should pay attention to public sentiment expressed through such visual discourses. Further research is encouraged to expand the scope across multiple geopolitical zones and examine gendered representations in political satire.*

Keywords: *Critical discourse Analysis, Political Analysis, Insecurity*

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INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has become one of the most pressing issues confronting Nigeria today. From the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast to banditry and kidnapping in the northwest and central regions, armed robbery, herder–farmer clashes, and attacks on security installations, the country faces a range of internal threats. These manifestations of insecurity are not only physical and psychological threats but also deeply political and symbolic. As violence continues to dominate headlines, various media outlets have become central to the documentation and critique of this national crisis.



One particularly potent medium of social and political commentary is the political cartoon. Political cartoons, though often humorous or satirical, are profound tools for expressing public anxieties, critiquing governance, and visualizing societal fears. In the context of Nigeria, cartoonists have increasingly used visual language to comment on the government's handling of insecurity, exposing contradictions in political discourse, highlighting institutional decay, and revealing public frustration. These multimodal texts combining visuals, metaphors, and brief linguistic signs are ideologically loaded and offer fertile ground for discourse analysis.

Given the communicative power of cartoons and their widespread circulation in print and online platforms, it becomes important to critically analyze how insecurity is represented in them and what ideological meanings are constructed through these portrayals.

Background to the Study

The human security situation in Nigeria has in recent times become disturbing matter and tiresome one. Insecurity is a phenomenon that has brought fear, molestation, extortion, coercion, and harassment etc to Nigerians through the activities of terrorists, ritualists, kidnappers and other heinous crimes. It has become so deplorable because the government has not been doing its own part by checking the activities of those involved in this evil acts and doling out necessary punishment as due to them to curb or eventually put a halt to such, because of the loophole left by people in government, insecurity has therefore bred a complex security situation which also affect the country's growth.

This issue has not only generated national threats but has also become a global one, such that Nigerians within and in the diaspora have believed that the country is no more a safe place to dwell or invest in. Many also believe that if government has given more employment, or try their bit to eradicate poverty, or listen to different agitations brewing from ethnic and militia groups, reduce corrupt practices or stop all means of exploitation ,scamming amongst others, and exploitation, (Okorie, 2011; Ezeoha, 2011; Ali, 2013), security challenges in Nigeria might have reduced .

Looking at the history of insecurity in Nigeria, it can be said that, there have been scenarios of inter-tribal clashes, land disputes wars, theft and murder cases of different types, but it became a national issue in the year 2009 when Boko Haram attacks threat became alarming especially In the Northern part of the country. With the Boko Haram invasion since 2009, it brought about other forms of security threats along with it ranging from, banditry, oil bunkering, terrorism, robbery, communal wars, herdsmen activity, arms and drug dealing, kidnap, assassination.

Though, there is a fundamental human rights that states that the people in any given state has the right to security; as spelt out in Section 14 (2) (b) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, thus “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government”. Recently, there is no day without a report of one security challenge or the other in the country. It is really disturbing that the citizens and the nation's economic resources have been the one to suffer for this.

We hear cases of suicide bombing in the North, kidnapping and armed robbery attack in the south; politically communal influenced clashes all over the place. It is unheard of that even the security agencies have little or nothing to do about the situation.

Without no doubts, there are diverse reported crises of this sort in national newspapers and as a result, the media has relied solely on linguistic choices or other means such as the multimedia to convey this critical issue and others which needs being addressed at different times, they often utilize these



tools to inform their readers and citizens of the country all with an intent of guiding them towards opinion formation and worldviews. Therefore, with different editorial direction, that different media outlets have, reports via the media have often taken different shapes, thus aligning with van Dijk's (1998) position that the media have usually been in a kind of binary opposites that use language to portray the incident and agents in bad/good light as good/evil, killer/victim, and so forth.

This study, which is a part of series of studies on the security challenges in Nigeria, holds the view that a linguistic tool /device used in the representation of insecurity either lifts or brings down the situation. This study, therefore, investigates political cartoons on insecurity in Nigeria and the fear such can emanate from the critical discourse lens.

Scholarly works on insecurity in Nigeria have largely concentrated on the non-linguistic aspects. (Ali, 2013; Ezeoha, 2011; Okorie, 2011) these researchers have tried to identify the reasons behind insecurity without attaching the role of the media in it. Other related linguistic researches have investigated studies of (print) media representations especially on issues pertaining to the society and case which have threatened the tranquility of the country and its dwellers, (Osisanwo, 2016, 2024a), protests and agitations (Igwebuikwe, 2020; Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020) and so forth. Osisanwo (2024b) has engaged (in) security as a subject in a discourse-focused study. He posits that the Nigerian press, via the selected newspapers and the utilised discourse forms /strategies, give meaning and practices to insecurity actors by giving them the attributes of a devil incarnate or painting them within the purview of criminals. According to this write-up, by Osisanwo 2004, the newspapers associate themselves within the caucus of the 'we' in-group, but portrays the insecurity actors / personae as the out-group, also associated the government alongside its security apparatus within the 'them' out-group. The study identified eight discourse strategies such as *negative label*, *evidentiality*, *victimisation*, *number game*, *hyperbolism*, *illustration*, *lexicalisation* and *generalisation/depersonalization*) which is said to project nationalist and humanist ideologies.

Osisanwo (2024c), corpusbased with qualitative approaches, focuses on the issue of abduction in Nigeria. By applying corpus linguistics and critical discourse analytical methods to newspaper corpus on abduction in Nigeria, Osisanwo (2024c) found that the keyword focus revealed five constructions on abduction in Nigeria. Osisanwo (2024c) therefore asserts that the various constructions were embellished with the usage of the referential/nomination strategy, using devices such as deictics, metaphors, verbs and nouns to denote processes and actions. Predication strategy was also deployed with devices such as evaluative attributes of negative or positive traits, to portray abduction (context), abductors, abductees and the state. The study associates the perpetrators of abduction in Nigeria to include gunmen, bandits, (BH) terrorists, Fulani herdsmen, and so forth.

Statement of the Problem

Political cartoons are often overlooked as mere humor or satire, rather than serious commentary that shape public discourse and reveal ideological constructions. While insecurity in Nigeria has attracted significant scholarly attention across political science, security studies, and media studies, few academic inquiries have focused on how this national dilemma is discursively constructed through political cartoons. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how selected political cartoons represent and critique insecurity in Nigeria. It investigates the visual and linguistic strategies used by cartoonists, the themes and ideologies embedded in these representations, and how they reflect or resist dominant socio-political narratives about fear, governance, and violence.

Research Questions



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How do selected Nigerian political cartoons represent the issue of insecurity?

What discursive and visual strategies are employed in constructing these representations?

What ideologies are embedded in or resisted by these cartoon representations?

Objectives of the Study

to analyze the visual and textual elements used in political cartoons on insecurity in Nigeria.

to identify recurring themes and ideologies associated with these representations.

to interpret the socio-political implications of the cartoons in shaping public discourse on insecurity.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship in media studies, discourse analysis, political communication, and visual semiotics. It highlights the power of political cartoons not only as artistic expressions but also as critical communicative acts that shape public consciousness and contest hegemonic narratives. The study also offers useful insights into how media texts engage with national crises and how visual representations influence societal attitudes toward governance and security. Additionally, it encourages media literacy by equipping readers with tools to decode multimodal texts critically.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on political cartoons published in Nigerian newspapers between 2022 and 2024. The analysis is limited to insecurity-themed cartoons especially those addressing terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and general public fear. The newspaper chosen as the source for primary source for the data is Business Day Newspaper while the secondary sources are scholarly journal articles that are related to the topic being discussed. The study does not consider other forms of political art or editorial commentary beyond cartoons and restricts itself to qualitative, non-statistical methods.

Operational Definition of Terms

From the title, we have words like we have a themed word Insecurity which is the condition of being unsafe or threatened by violence, especially from terrorism, crime, or poor governance. We also have CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) which is a method of analyzing texts to understand how language constructs power relations and ideologies. There is also Political Cartoons which is a visual satire that combines imagery and minimal text to comment on political and social issues. Political cartoons are hybrid texts that combine visuals and verbal signs to communicate complex meanings. They utilize caricature, metaphor, irony, and symbolism to critique social realities. Unlike news reports, cartoons are subjective, interpretive, and satirical, allowing artists to express dissent, irony, and layered meanings.

Literature Review

Olowu and Ariyo (2014) attempts a multimodal discourse analysis of the pictorial representation of these security threats vis-a vis the implication for Nigeria. The writers are of the opinion that TELL reports are mainly “on the restiveness of Niger Delta militants, Jos crisis, Boko Haram bombing spree, ethno-religious crises” among others as the editors of the magazine have depicted some of



these in their cover pages. The study critically analyse some of these images with a view to bringing out what they signify or represent. Also they investigated certain semiotic resources such as the use of colour, symbols and gaze or posture. And they find out that the deployment of various visual resources such as colour, symbols, gaze, posture, etc. helps in passing information to the consciousness of the reading public.

Richard (2017) applied the theory of CDA which primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context to legal discourse with the aim of exposing how the question-answer sequences of a direct and cross examination, turn-taking, objections, and other legal proceedings create unequal relationship among participants.

Its motivation was drawn from the enormous works on legal discourse in western world that have brought radical changes in their justice system. The data of the study are audio recordings and personal observations of courtroom interactions; Supreme Court Quarterly Report 1990, from the High Court Library. The study discovered that, evidentiary rules empower those who assume the examiner's role by placing them in control of topic choice and direction, and giving them the means to constrain the contributions of others. It also discovered that the Judge wields the ultimate power and dominates in the court and that witnesses are powerless participants in legal discourse and are subjected to various forms of control by examiners. The study concluded that there is a legitimized inequality in the courtroom which manifests through language and that language is the most powerful natural weapon used to effectuate justice in societies.

Ademilokun (2017) examines modal resources in the mediatised discourse of social transformation in Nigeria with a view to showing how they are strategically used to code interpersonal meanings for enhanced and impactful delivery of messages of social transformation in the nation. Data for the study comprises texts on aspects of social transformation campaigns in Nigeria in the context of democracy, anti-corruption crusade, insecurity and domestic violence compiled as small corpora. The data comprises texts produced by government and non-governmental actors consisting of speeches, radio commentaries, jingles, printed texts, interviews, tweets and online newspaper comments and covers the period from March 2013 to March 2018. Corpus-assisted critical discourse approach was employed for data analysis, using Fairclough's (1989, revised 2015) dialectical relational approach, the corpus linguistic tool of Antconc, chi-square test on R-Studio and normalised relative frequencies. The findings revealed that different participants in the discourse used different modal resources to reflect their power on the one hand and resistance on

the other and to capture the intensity of their views and feelings on the actions required for Nigeria to experience genuine social transformation. The study concludes that even though the discourse is largely ideational, modal resources are deployed for emphasising the urgency and seriousness of the issues in the ideational contents of the discourse.

Abdulahi & Umar (2018) analyses news reports of “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign in Nigerian newspapers. The “Bring Back Our Girls” advocacy group was formed to pressure the Nigerian government to intensify efforts to rescue the over two hundred school girls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents at Chibok, Borno State, North East Nigeria. The abduction took place in April 2014 and the subsequent campaign to release the girls received global media attention including many newspapers in the country. The study analyses the schematic directions, discursive strategies and context of the discourse reports of “Bring Back Our Girls” campaigns in Nigerian newspapers using



critical discourse analysis. The corpus was purposively selected from three nationally circulating newspapers: Leadership, New Telegraph and Daily Trust published from 1st May to 31st July, 2014. Descriptive design was adopted using Fairclough (1995) model of critical discourse analysis. Findings of the research show that narration and criticism constitute the dominant schematic directions of newspaper reports of the campaign; on the discursive strategy, it is found out that rationalization, narrativisation and argumentation account for 80% of the discourse and the context revealed that there is negative use of language because the campaigners and the then government of the day were loggerheads over the issue. The study concludes that due to high prevalence of criticism and rationalization in the corpus, the discourse - the text of newspaper report of Bring Back Our Girls campaign largely reflected the narrative and argument of the group against the government which has responsibility to protect and rescue the abducted girls.

Fafiyebi (2020) examined the discourse strategies employed by state actors in expressing their views on the 2019 xenophobic attack in South Africa. Its objective is to examine how this group of people explores the provisions of critical discourse to shape and pattern their communicative intention. The data employed were sourced from selected online media sources between September and November 2019. The study employed the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach with a particular focus on the Discourse Historical Approach framework proposed by Wodak (2001) as its theoretical springboard. The study established that different state actors from each of the countries under scrutiny engage in positive self and negative others presentation. This showed that from their discourses, it can be deduced that the state actors were all out to launder the image of their respective countries on the one hand and that of the kith and kin on the other hand.

Osisanwo (2024) is a corpus-assisted critical discourse study which examines news reports published by selected English-medium Nigerian newspapers from 2020 to 2022 on abduction, to understand how abduction is constructed within the Nigerian socio-political context. Data revealed that the news reports are characterised by five constructions on abduction in Nigeria and they are construction of abduction perpetrators; construction of the state; construction of abduction setting/context; construction of abduction act as a means to an end; and construction of abduction victims.

It was discovered that abductors tend to be negatively evaluated in all the papers, portrayed as gunmen, bandits, ransom demanders and terrorists. Findings further revealed that the newspapers deployed different discourse strategies, especially referential/nomination and predication to negatively evaluate abductors. The range of these focuses indicates that the newspapers converge to negatively portray abduction and the perpetrators of same, thus negatively accentuating the general perception of abductors and abduction.

Umar (2024) explores the responses of Muslim scholars to human insecurity in Nigeria through a thematic and content analysis of online newspaper articles. The study which aims to uncover the key narratives, frame, and strategies adopted by these scholars to address insecurity in the country utilised four major newspapers, namely Daily Trust and Leadership from Northern Nigeria and Sun and Vanguard from Southern Nigeria.

The findings reveal that Leadership and Daily Trust newspapers frame Muslim scholars' response to insecurity in a positive way, highlighting their calls for peace and encouraging government intervention, while The Sun and Vanguard provide a more critical lens, often highlighting the government's perceived inadequacies in addressing insecurity. The study recommends a balance of



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media reporting and collaborative engagement between Muslim scholars, the media, and government agencies in the fighting against insecurity menace.

Several studies have explored media representations of insecurity in Nigeria, though few focus specifically on cartoons.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis is a frame work that concerns itself with what people do with words and how they achieve the expression of ideologies through the use of words in discourse. He opines that “ideologies are closely linked to power because the nature of the ideological assumptions is embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions”. The Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of CDA is adopted for this study as it approaches it from a socio-cultural point of view. It also accounts for the use of language in expressing ideology at the description stage, interpretation stage, and the explanation stage. The description stage concerns itself with the vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures of the discourse. It shows how the ideological differences are embedded in a text. The interpretation stage basically shows the type of discourse that is produced in the interaction. This can be at the surface of the utterance level, meaning of utterance, text structure etc.

The explanation stage basically sets clear issues of power relation, Fairclough (2001) explains that “explanation is a matter of seeing a discourse as part of processes of social struggle within a matrix of relations of power”. It suggests that the social effects of discourse and the determinants of discourse should be investigated at three levels of social organization, the societal, institutional and situational levels.

While there is growing academic interest in media representations of insecurity, few studies apply a combined multimodal CDA approach to Nigerian political cartoons. This study fills that gap by integrating visual and textual analysis to reveal how cartoons construct discourses of fear, governance, and resistance in the face of insecurity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, relying on Critical Discourse Analysis to interpret meanings from political cartoons. It will be interpretive, descriptive, and inductive in nature.

Data Collection

The data comprises 6 political cartoons selected purposively from a Nigerian newspaper namely Business Day. Cartoons were selected based on the following criteria: They directly address issues of insecurity (terrorism, banditry etc). They contain both verbal and visual elements. They were publicly published in this Nigerian daily.

Ethical Considerations

Since no human subjects are involved, so there are no privacy or consent issues. Proper credit will be given to cartoonists and newspapers. The cartoons analyzed are public-domain materials used with attribution.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Description of Selected Cartoons

The selected cartoons were retrieved from notable Nigerian newspapers namely Business Day between 2023 - 2025. They center on political commentary surrounding the escalating insecurity in Nigeria, including terrorism, insurgency, and state failure. The cartoons are rich in both linguistic and visual semiotic elements, employing satire, irony, exaggeration, and metaphor to critique government responses and social realities.

Six cartoons published by Nigerian cartoonist Asukwo and Okpara G25 (these two cartoonists from the way they input their signatures, one could infer that they would have wanted to remain anonymous, this is because the cartoons describe critical situations that needs urgent address by the government. And so, were selected for detailed analysis. The cartoons appeared in the national dailies during a period marked by heightened insecurity in Benue State, including attacks by armed herders, killings, and political tensions. The first cartoon depicts a motorcycle ride past a graveyard, while the second shows a festive political figure welcoming the president in the foreground of a mass grave. Each cartoon is a multimodal text that combines verbal, visual, and symbolic elements to convey criticism of political leadership and reflect public fear, grief, and state abandonment.



Cartoon 1: “2027 vs Burning Nigeria”

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS (DESCRIPTION)

This level of analysis focuses on the visual and linguistic features that constitute the text itself. The Visual elements has the cartoon showing a man (dressed in a cap and agbada-like attire) believed to represent a Nigerian political figure, possibly a generic symbol of political leadership. The man is holding a water hose, but the water is being used to water the year “2027” (stylized in large, blue 3D figures) on a patch of grass with flowers. To the right, there is a house labeled “Nigeria” that is completely engulfed in flames. There is also dark smoke rising from the burning house and forms the word “INSECURITY” in the sky. The hose is not directed at the fire but at the numbers 2027, this directly indicates misplaced priorities.

The Linguistic and Symbolic Choices has the use of “INSECURITY” in the smoke which is both a literal and metaphorical depiction, emphasizing how insecurity is looming, suffocating, and dominant in Nigeria’s current atmosphere. The watering of “2027” symbolizes how political leaders are nurturing future political ambitions while neglecting current crises. The flowers blooming around “2027” contrast with the devastation of the burning house, reinforcing the idea of selective attention or hypocrisy. The man’s blank expression suggests detachment or wilful ignorance. There is no verbal dialogue, which allows the visual symbols to carry the entire communicative weight, enhancing interpretative engagement. The cartoon is built on a visual irony that depicts that while the



nation burns (literally in crisis), the leader tends to his political future ambition. There is a juxtaposition that the peaceful watering scene is directly beside the chaos of fire and destruction, highlighting a shocking contrast. There is also the use of Metaphor such as Fire equating insecurity; house equating Nigeria; water equating power/resources; flowers as political ambition or upcoming elections.

At the DISCURSIVE level, (INTERPRETATION) we have to look at production, distribution, and consumption of the cartoon, the cartoon was published by Business Day, a prominent Nigerian business newspaper with political commentary. This shows that the image is not merely entertainment, but a serious political statement. The cartoonist uses a simplified yet loaded visual narrative that assumes the reader understands Nigeria’s ongoing struggles with insecurity, banditry, and political manipulation and this fits within a broader tradition of editorial cartoons as political critique, a genre that blends art and journalism. The cartoon references real-life political behavior, where Nigerian politicians frequently begin focusing on elections years in advance, while neglecting governance. The reference to 2027 is especially telling as it suggests that even though the 2023 elections just passed, attention has already shifted to the next electoral contest. The burning house signifies real national crises such as Boko Haram insurgency, bandit attacks, kidnappings, and communal violence. With this we can deduce that citizens are daily victims of violence, yet there is an apparent lack of sufficient political will or urgency in addressing it. The cartoon connects with other political commentaries, speeches, social media discourse, and even everyday conversations among Nigerians about the disconnect between citizens and their leaders.

The intended audience includes Nigerian citizens, political analysts, civil society groups, and possibly the international community. It enables readers to be familiar with Nigerian politics and would interpret the image as a critique of political negligence. For some, it might evoke anger, frustration, or agreement, depending on their sociopolitical alignment. The image serves a persuasive purpose, shaping public opinion by making visible the contradiction between leadership rhetoric and actual priorities.

For the SOCIAL PRACTICE (EXPLANATION), we will explore the broader social, political, and ideological conditions that the cartoon reflects, sustains, or challenges ranging from the Ideological Struggle wherein the cartoon reveals a struggle between the political elite and the masses. It critiques the hegemonic discourse of political survival, where governance becomes a means to remain in power rather than serve the people. The cartoon as well destabilizes the dominant narrative of effective leadership by exposing the deep structural flaws in governance and accountability.

For Power and Representation, it positions Nigerian leaders as disconnected from reality, portraying them as self-serving and out of touch. The watering of “2027” shows how political power is preoccupied with preservation rather than intervention. The house burning in the background without any help illustrates how national issues are abandoned for political campaigns and personal gain. The fear and psychological Impact of the cartoon can be seen as embodying the emotional climate in Nigeria as citizens live in constant fear due to widespread violence. The cartoon reflects the normalization of chaos, where insecurity is expected and accepted as part of daily life. This also reflects the erosion of trust in state institutions. Editorial cartoons like this are also a form of resistance and activism as they serve as counter-discourses against dominant state propaganda. It empowers citizens to question authority, demand accountability, and engage in democratic discourse. The cartoon promotes discursive change—reframing political conversation from “who will win 2027” to “who is solving insecurity?”



Cartoon 2: “The President Has Comanded Us to Reconcile”

Description (Textual and Visual Analysis)

Based on Fairclough’s first level we will analyze linguistic and semiotic features. It has visual elements, such as an armed figure which also symbolizes a militant or terrorist group, this also refers to real world actors like bandits / extremist groups. Another visual element that can be seen is the weaponry in form of gun, machete, club, all of these are tools of violence. We also have blood which is very vivid, this surrounds both the militant and the victim, and this is symbolic to brutality and death. We need to note that there is a facial concealment in that the attacker’s identity is hidden, as evident in most pictures and videos uploaded to the media by the terrorist group. This also suggest lack of accountability, there is a dialogue in a statement form blending political rhetoric (reconcile) with barbarism, this highlights hypocrisy. The picture is loaded with linguistic irony which is embedded with the utterance “here is my handshake” turning a symbol of peace into one of violence. The cartoon mocks official statements from the government especially presidential commands for reconciliation as empty or misinterpreted on the ground.

At the Interpretation level also known as (Discursive Practice) we will examine how the cartoon is produced, distributed, and interpreted in sociopolitical contexts. The cartoon is a media response to presidential rhetoric on “peace” or “amnesty” deals with armed groups. It reflects skepticism about government-led reconciliation programs that fail to address justice, accountability, or grassroots trauma. Audience especially Nigerian audiences, especially those in conflict-affected regions, are likely to recognize the disconnect between elite political discourse and grassroots reality. The cartoon interprets state failure as not just an issue of policy but of dangerous naivety, where dangerous actors are “reconciled” without justice. It visually expresses public fear, frustration, and distrust of top-down peace rhetoric.

At Explanation level which deals with Social Practice, we connect the cartoon to broader social structures and ideologies. The power and ideology in the picture is depicted is the militant, offering a “bloody handshake,” this act critiques state complicity, negligence, or failed negotiation strategies. The cartoonist uses irony to resist dominant narratives that claim peace is being achieved. This cartoon also opposes the hegemonic political narrative and functions as public advocacy, drawing attention to injustice masked by political euphemisms. We also have fear as Social Construct as the image constructs fear as a politically-inflicted reality, not just an emotional reaction. It critiques a

society where violence becomes normalized, even justified, under political commands. The cartoon deconstructs the discourse of peace and reconciliation, exposing its misuse in state propaganda. It raises ethical questions about what kind of reconciliation is possible without justice or accountability.

In conclusion, this cartoon is revealed as a potent critique of state narratives, performative politics, and the realities of insecurity in Nigeria. It visualizes fear, irony, and frustration in a sociopolitical climate where calls for peace are undermined by unresolved violence. This political cartoon uses multimodal discourse to expose contradictions between political speech acts and lived experience, thereby contributing to a broader public discourse on justice, fear, and security.

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**Cartoon 3**

This stage focuses on the visible content, language, and symbolism of the cartoon. The visual elements show a split between two territories that is Nigeria on the left, and Israel on the right, divided by a water body which is possibly symbolic of a literal or political divide. On the Nigerian side, there is violence with pictures of armed men stabbing and shooting, blood, burning houses, and smoke rising. There is also a Nigerian official, possibly representing the government or president (dressed in agbada and cap), who is using a megaphone shouting across the water. While on the Israeli side we have two Israeli soldiers who are preparing or pointing a missile, but are not yet engaging in violence. There is a Nigerian official that is yelling “HEY... WE CONDEMN YOUR ACTIONS, CEASEFIRE NOW!!!”

The linguistic features and symbolism in the image are portraying that the megaphone message is bold and angry, reflecting official condemnation, but the irony lies in the hypocrisy of condemning foreign conflict while one's own land burns. There is also irony and contradiction which are central to the cartoon, critiquing Nigeria for focusing on foreign conflicts like Israel-Palestine, while ignoring or failing to address its domestic violence and insecurity.

The smoke and blood symbolize the dire state of insecurity in Nigeria while the official's obliviousness to what's happening right behind him implies deliberate blindness or misplaced priorities. There is a need to also pay attention to the stylistic tools contrast like the peaceful posture of Israeli soldiers vs. chaos in Nigeria. We have exaggeration and caricature which are typical of editorial cartoons, the figures therein are exaggerated for clarity and emotional effect. The image also

has the Satire and Irony embedded in it as the cartoon ridicules the Nigerian state’s performative international diplomacy while failing its own citizens.

The DISCURSIVE PRACTICE (INTERPRETATION) in the cartoon

This level considers the context of production, target audience, intertextuality, and meaning-making. The cartoon used is a media product meant to stimulate political reflection and civic awareness. The cartoonist assumes an informed Nigerian audience aware of both domestic insecurity and the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Intertextual References in the image has to do with the global diplomacy, especially how Nigeria (and other African countries) publicly comment on Middle Eastern conflicts. And it reflects real-world statements issued by Nigerian officials in response to foreign wars (especially when they issue condemnations or solidarity messages). The cartoon contrasts that performative concern with the reality of internal chaos, referencing ongoing security issues in Nigeria such as Boko Haram attacks, Banditry, Farmer-herder clashes, Kidnappings and communal killings, amongst others.

Readers are invited to recognize the hypocrisy in leadership as the image itself provokes reflection rhetorically asks the question “Why is our government condemning another country’s violence while ignoring or mishandling our own?” It aims to create discursive dissonance, where the audience must reconcile the contradiction between foreign policy and domestic neglect.

SOCIAL PRACTICE (EXPLANATION)

This level analyzes the ideological, political, and institutional power structures reflected in the cartoon. The Ideology and Power Relations in the cartoon is criticizing the symbolic power of political speech such as how governments use public condemnation of foreign issues to appear active, moral, or globally relevant, even while they fail in their primary duties. The official is more concerned with global image than local security, reflecting a self-serving or detached leadership.

There is also an act of condemning foreign violence acts as a hegemonic distraction redirecting public discourse away from internal failures. The cartoon challenges this dominant narrative by reasserting the urgency of internal insecurity. The cartoon exposes the way violence and insecurity have become normalized in Nigeria, so much so that leadership can ignore it while focusing on issues far removed from their citizens’ realities. It as well reflects a society where the value of Nigerian lives has been diminished, and bloodshed no longer provokes urgent state response. This cartoon is a form of visual resistance, encouraging citizens to critically question leadership priorities, demand justice, and advocate for domestic accountability. It encourages a shift in discourse: from international posturing to national healing.



Cartoon 4

Description (Textual Analysis)

This cartoon presents the word “INSECURITY” in large, bold, green capital letters. Blood drips from and pools around the letters, staining the ground with the names of Nigerian states such as Benue, Adamawa, Plateau, Borno, and others areas historically plagued by terrorism, banditry, herder-farmer conflict, and insurgency. A fearful citizen, visibly panicked, peeks out from behind the word “INSECURITY,” suggesting both helplessness and entrapment. The word “INSECURITY” is central, acting almost like a character. It is visually dominant, indicating the overarching presence of fear. There is a colour imagery such as Green often represents life or growth, but here it contrasts ironically with blood-red stains which shows how insecurity has tainted the hope associated with Nigeria (as green is a national colour). The cartoon also combines visual and textual elements to communicate powerfully. Blood splashes labelled with state names emphasize geographical spread.

We have visual metaphors like the blood which is not literal but symbolic of deaths and trauma caused by insecurity.

At the Interpretation (Discursive Practice) level, the cartoon was likely drawn in response to ongoing and widespread violence in Nigeria. Media houses use cartoons as a subtle but powerful tool to address political systems. The character hiding suggests the public's perceived powerlessness. The Nigerian audience would immediately understand the references to Borno, Plateau, Adamawa, etc., as areas affected by Boko Haram, banditry, and communal clashes. The cartoon invokes emotional and moral shock as its use of blood aims to generate public concern, anger, or demand for action. The readers interpret this cartoon not only visually but also through shared national trauma and discourse.

At the Explanation level, which also explains the social practice, this cartoon functions within broader socio-political discourses on state failure, government accountability, and public fear. The state is implicitly criticized for failing to protect citizens. The absence of any depiction of government officials suggests their invisibility or ineffectiveness. While the government often promotes a rhetoric of control and victory over insurgency, this cartoon resists that narrative, and thus is highlighting continued violence. The fearful citizen hiding behind “insecurity” visualizes how public fear becomes internalized. It assesses how insecurity has become normalized or monumentalized. The cartoon challenges dominant political narratives by presenting insecurity as a looming structure. It visualizes geographic inequalities by depicting certain regions that are affected, this is reflecting uneven national development or security prioritization. The discourse calls for accountability, reform, or activism.



Cartoon 5

The phrase “murderous herdsmen” is ideologically embedded since it directly names the perpetrators and implying criminal violence. The woman’s narration “This is where they buried my husband and

brother...” reflects a personalized victim narrative. It evokes empathy and grounds insecurity in lived human loss. The male rider’s statement presented through the bubbles says “the governor should renovate it and name it after the president”, this is a statement laced with sarcasm, implying that state leaders are more associated with mass graves than with protection or progress.



Cartoon 6:

The welcome banners “...Alia welcomes Mr. President” stand in ironic contrast to the covered corpse on the ground. The cheerful character, with a party hat and grin, delivers a disturbing message that state officials celebrate visits and photo opportunities, even amid widespread death. The juxtaposition of celebration and death illustrate a disconnect between government optics and citizen reality. For cartoon 5 & 6, they will be treated together as one since they almost represent the same incident and have closely related embedded themes. Both cartoons are situated within Nigeria’s media tradition of political satire, designed for mass consumption in newspapers and online platforms. Their circulation is part of a broader discursive formation around insecurity in Nigeria, where citizens increasingly rely on visual media to articulate discontent. The cartoons use intertextuality, referencing real-world events herdsman attacks, presidential visits that resonate with readers’ lived experiences and news reports.

The social context is one of widespread fear, government mistrust, and ethno-religious conflict, particularly in the Middle Belt. The graveyards symbolize mass deaths that have become normalized. The satire reflects a public discourse of abandonment, where the state is either complicit or indifferent. The symbolism of the images are enclosed within the graves, crosses, and corpses symbolize death, loss, and mourning, the party hat and celebratory banners are symbols of official hypocrisy or misdirected priorities. Politicians are drawn with exaggerated grins and props, portraying them as out-of-touch or mockingly jovial in the face of tragedy. The uniform graves convey mass killings, while the visual sameness suggests systemic failure, not isolated incidents. The speech bubbles work with the images to provide clarity and deepen critique. This study critically analyzed two political cartoons depicting insecurity in Nigeria, with a focus on Benue State. The cartoons use a range of discursive strategies, such as evaluative naming like “murderous herdsman”, sarcasm and irony like renaming graveyard, visual metaphor such as mass graves as welcome mat, smiling leaders amid mourning. These features reflect deep public disillusionment and function as alternative narratives that resist official state rhetoric.

Conclusion

Political cartoons in Nigeria play a critical ideological role in visualizing public anxiety and government assessment. They amplify citizen perspectives often silenced in formal discourse,



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symbolize insecurity and death through powerful, simplified imagery, and function as tools of social resistance and public memory. This political cartoon serves as more than satire as it becomes a discursive site where public trauma, political critique, and fear are negotiated. It reveals how insecurity in Nigeria is not just a physical threat but a discursively constructed structure that affects identity, trust in governance, and collective psychology. It embodies the intersection of text, discourse, and power, showing how visual media contributes to public discourse on national insecurity. Political cartoons, through symbolic brevity, offer a voice of dissent and awareness, making them vital for critical sociopolitical engagement.

Recommendations for further Studies.

Media creators should be aware of the interpretive power of satire in shaping public discourse and mobilizing empathy or outrage. It also help policy makers to recognize public sentiment as reflected in satire and address systemic issues such as security and trust. The society need critical media literacy to engage with cartoons beyond entertainment, appreciating them as socio-political texts. We therefore recommend that government should integrate political cartoons into civic education to develop critical thinking as it encourages archiving of cartoons as cultural records of national sentiments. For further studies, a wider study involving multiple geopolitical zones in Nigeria such as comparative analysis of cartoons across media platforms in print vs. digital. Frontiers of knowledge can also explore gendered representations in cartoons on insecurity.



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