

INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL CARTOONS ON UYO NEWSPAPER READERS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of political cartoons on newspaper readers in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The objectives of the study were to assess the influence of political cartoons on Uyo readers' opinions on political issues, ascertain readers' perception of political cartoons, and evaluate the contribution of political cartoons to political awareness. The study adopted the survey research design and employed a structured questionnaire for data collection. The population comprised residents of Uyo, which, as estimated in 2026 by World Population Review, is 1,520,000, from which a sample size of 400 was drawn using the Yards formula propounded by Taro Yamene. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire administered, 388 were successfully retrieved with data presented in tables and analysed using frequency and simple percentages. Findings showed that political cartoons significantly influence readers' opinions, particularly in shaping their views on political leaders, government policies, and national issues. In addition, respondents generally perceived political cartoons as informative, educative, and entertaining. The study concluded that political cartoons are effective tools for political communication that enhance understanding, shape opinions, and promote political awareness among newspaper readers in Uyo. It was recommended that media practitioners should utilise political cartoons as tools for civic and political education. By consistently highlighting key societal and political issues, cartoons can be used to improve public awareness and encourage active participation in political processes.

Keywords: Influence, Cartoons, Newspaper, Readers, Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Political cartoons have long been recognised as a powerful form of mass communication, particularly within the print media. They combine visual imagery, textual elements, satire, and symbolism to communicate complex political ideas in a simplified and engaging manner. In the contemporary media environment, where audiences are constantly exposed to large volumes of information, political cartoons stand out as concise yet impactful tools for conveying political messages. Their ability to summarise complicated socio-political issues into a single frame makes them an essential component of newspaper content.

In recent years, scholars have emphasised the growing importance of visual communication in shaping public opinion and political discourse. According to Opeibi (2020), visual media such as political cartoons enhance audience engagement by presenting information in a more appealing and easily digestible format. Unlike lengthy editorials, cartoons rely on humour, exaggeration, and symbolism to capture attention and provoke critical thinking. This makes them particularly effective in attracting readers who may not have the time or interest to engage with detailed textual analysis.

Political cartoons also play a significant role in political communication by acting as tools for commentary, criticism, and advocacy. They often reflect societal concerns and provide interpretations of political events, policies, and leadership styles. Ekwueme and Obayi (2021) argue that political cartoons contribute to agenda-setting by highlighting key political issues and directing public attention toward them. Through repeated exposure, readers may begin to perceive these issues as more important, thereby shaping the public agenda.

In the Nigerian context, political cartoons have become an integral part of newspaper journalism. They are commonly featured in national dailies such as *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Daily Trust*, where

they serve as platforms for critiquing government actions, exposing corruption, and addressing socio-political challenges. Adejuwon and Akinola (2022) observe that political cartoonists in Nigeria function as watchdogs of society, using their work to question authority and promote accountability. This watchdog role is particularly important in democratic societies, where the media is expected to hold leaders responsible for their actions.

Furthermore, political cartoons are not only informative but also persuasive. They have the capacity to influence how readers interpret political events by framing issues in specific ways. For instance, a cartoon that portrays a political leader in a negative light may shape readers' perceptions of that leader, even without explicit textual criticism. This aligns with the broader understanding of media effects, where both textual and visual elements contribute to opinion formation. As noted by Yusuf and Bello (2023), political cartoons can reinforce existing beliefs while also introducing new perspectives, thereby influencing audience attitudes toward political issues.

Another important aspect of political cartoons is their role in enhancing political awareness. By simplifying complex issues, cartoons make political information more accessible to a wider audience, including individuals with varying levels of education. This is particularly relevant in developing countries like Nigeria, where literacy levels and access to detailed political information may vary. Political cartoons can therefore serve as informal educational tools, helping readers understand governance processes, public policies, and national issues. According to Okorie (2021), exposure to media content, including cartoons, contributes significantly to citizens' political knowledge and participation.

Despite these advantages, the effectiveness of political cartoons largely depends on the audience's ability to interpret their meaning. Cartoons often rely on context, cultural references, and prior knowledge of political events, which may limit understanding among some. While cartoons are designed to simplify information, their symbolic nature can sometimes make them ambiguous, leading to multiple interpretations. This raises questions about whether all readers derive the intended message from political cartoons.

In Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, newspaper readership remains a primary channel for civic engagement and a critical source of political information for a significant portion of the urban population. Within this media landscape, readers are frequently exposed to political cartoons in national dailies, which function as powerful tools for framing socio-political issues through visual satire and metaphor. While these cartoons are theorized to influence public perception of governance and policy, there is a notable absence of empirical data specifically examining their actual cognitive or behavioral impact on readers within the Uyo metropolis. Consequently, despite the ubiquity of these visual commentaries, their effectiveness in shaping regional political discourse remains a significant scholarly gap that requires further investigation.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the influence of political cartoons on newspaper readers in Uyo, with a view to determining their role in shaping political perception and public discourse and their overall contribution to political awareness.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Political cartoons, as humorous as they appear, have been identified as important tools for the expression of thoughts and feelings on prevailing political issues and events at a given time and have been employed to shape public discourse. Underpinned by Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), these cartoons do not merely reflect reality but actively select and emphasize specific social and political issues, thereby signaling to the audience what topics are most deserving of their attention. Through the use of satire and symbolism, their messages are embedded in ways that not only inform and entertain readers but also highlight political issues and critique political leaders and actors.

Meanwhile, despite the prominence of political cartoons in Nigerian newspapers and their potential for political mobilisation, there is limited empirical research examining their actual influence on readers, particularly at the local level such as in Uyo. Existing studies suggest that factors such as education and political awareness moderate how these messages are decoded, yet few studies have moved beyond general observation to provide evidence-based data on Uyo residents. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which political cartoons influence the political perceptions of newspaper readers in Uyo, filling a critical void in localized media effects research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. determine the extent to which newspaper readers in Uyo understand the messages conveyed in political cartoons;
- ii. assess the influence of political cartoons on Uyo readers' opinions on political issues;
- iii. examine Uyo newspaper readers' perception of political cartoons;
- iv. evaluate the contribution of political cartoons to political awareness among Uyo readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section embodies scholarly works by authors on concepts and opinions related to this work as well as previous empirical studies on the subject.

Political Cartoons

Political cartoons are visual illustrations that comment on political events, leaders, and societal issues, usually combining satire, caricature, and symbolism to communicate opinions about politics or public affairs. They appear mainly in the editorial pages of newspapers and other media platforms and have historically served as opinion-oriented media artifacts used to express critique and challenge authority. Political cartoons often portray contemporary political realities in ways that are accessible and engaging to audiences (Wikipedia 2026).

Importantly, political cartoons are recognized not just as entertainment tools but as visual rhetoric; a communicative form that blends imagery and textual cues (such as captions or labels) to construct meaning and convey perspectives on political topics. Bello (2020), lends credence to this observation by saying that editorial cartoons are excellent means of exposing, revealing, and speaking society injustices and failings, even as they provide entertainment and satire. Their rhetorical power lies in simplifying complex issues into compelling visual metaphors that invite viewers to interpret and reflect on political discourse. For instance, visual rhetorical analyses of political cartoons highlight how metaphors, symbolism, and exaggeration are crucial for expressing political commentary (Pinto & Mustafa, 2022).

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

Political Cartoons and Political Communication

Political cartoons are part of the broader field of political communication, which studies how political messages are created, delivered, and interpreted across media channels. Political communication involves the practice of crafting media messages that shape public opinion, inform voters, and frame political events. In this context, political cartoons function as alternative media messages that influence how audiences perceive political actors, policies, and issues by highlighting contradictions, injustices, and societal concerns.

Political cartoons transcend mere depiction of events. They mobilize visual symbolism and narrative cues that can frame political realities for audiences. Through iconic symbols (national emblems, political figures depicted in caricature, and metaphorical imagery), cartoons can reinforce or challenge prevailing narratives and influence public interpretation.

Political Cartoons and Public Awareness

Political cartoons often serve as political information resources that help readers notice, remember, and interpret political developments. They attract attention through striking visuals and satirical commentary, making them useful for drawing public attention to political issues. They can raise awareness of important issues, challenge common narratives, and offer a critical perspective on current event. Current socio-political issues in Nigeria are no stranger to cartoonists' creative impulses and impressions, and their interpretations of political diegesis, help shape voters' political consciousness and biases regarding

political aspirants, power grabbers and political parties' agenda (Toluwani & Shobukonla 2023)

Inyang and Nwokeocha (2025), observe that political cartoons play important role in informing and engaging citizens during electoral process, thus contributing to political awareness and opinion formation. Similarly, research in Nigerian media also shows that thematic constructions in political cartoons, such as portrayals of insurgency, insecurity, and public policy failures contribute to how readers become aware of national issues and integrate these concerns into their socio-political understanding. This evident power of political cartoons clearly demonstrated in the study by Sani, Abdullahi, Abdullahi & Ali (2025) which found that political cartoons addressing insecurity and poor governance in Nigeria help raise public awareness and shape discourse on these problems.

Review of Empirical Studies

Several studies have been carried out on political cartoons and the roles they play in agenda setting and in enhancing political consciousness. A study by Adeagbo and Oyindamola (2024) examined the multimodal discourse features of selected Nigerian political cartoons and found that these cartoons use a sophisticated mix of visual and linguistic strategies to convey socio-political messages, highlighting issues such as corruption, economic hardship, and political neglect. The study suggests that cartoons do more than entertainment; they engage readers in socio-political critique and influence public perception. The research underscores the significance of political cartoons as tools for socio-political engagement and discourse, demonstrating their role in reflecting and shaping public opinion on critical national issues. It highlights the critical role of visual semiotics in political commentary and the necessity for further research into the impact of visual media on public opinion and political accountability.

Also, Njoku & Ezeifeke (2025) in their work “Meaning-Making in Political Cartoons on the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria: A Social Semiotic Interpretation” analysed selected political cartoons from the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. Using social semiotic approaches, the study found that recurring themes such as corruption, insecurity, political rivalry, and electoral fraud were depicted in cartoons, and that these visual representations helped raise awareness among the public and encouraged informed participation in political discourse. This highlights the role of cartoons in not only reflecting issues but also aiding audience understanding and engagement.

Similarly, Egbe (2024) conducted a multimodal analysis of political cartoons in Nigeria from 2019 to 2021. The study found that cartoons realistically portray societal and political conditions and communicate complex ideas effectively through multimodal resources. Although the study did not measure influence directly, it underscores the informative and interpretive aspects of cartoons, suggesting a potential for influence on reader awareness and interpretation.

Despite these studies, there is limited empirical evidence focusing on how political cartoons affect newspaper readers at the local level, particularly in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. This gap justifies the need for the present study.

Theoretical Framework

This work was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

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

The relevance of agenda-setting theory to this work is seen in its usage as a foundation to offer theoretical insight into how political cartoons are used in newspapers to illustrate current political issues and circumstances as a means of establishing social agendas in order to reorient and influence public opinion, particularly in Nigeria's sociopolitical context. It further supports journalism's dedication to democracy by asserting that certain issues will not receive significant public attention until reporters and traditional news media comment on them. Also, agenda-setting theory is among the many media effect theories that the researcher considers crucial for the current work, as it accounts for the link between the

public and media while helping explain the roles of political cartoons in public opinion formation.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

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

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

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research design and employed a structured questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The choice of this research design is justified by Ogbuoshi (2021), who posits that a researcher studying people's perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and views on a particular subject matter should use the survey method. The population of this study comprised residents of Uyo, which, as estimated in 2026 by World Population Review, is 1,520,000. A sample size of 400 was scientifically determined using the Yards formula developed by Taro Yamene's, where $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$. The researcher adopted the convenience and purposive or judgement non-probability sampling techniques, where the researcher, according to her judgment, picked respondents who met certain criteria set for the study to respond formally to the questions and collected data with the aid of a structured questionnaire. To effectively distribute copies of the questionnaire, the researcher selected five major roads in Uyo, on the grounds that they are densely populated. These roads are: Ikot Ekpene road, Nwaniba road, Abak road, Oron Road and Aka Road.

The researcher divided the 400 copies of the questionnaire among these roads, and it resulted in each having 80 copies. The researcher issued a copy to each respondent the researcher came across on the basis that the respondent would provide accurate data needed until the copies were exhausted. However, it was not possible to retrieve all 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed. Only three hundred and eighty-six (386) were retrieved and used for analysis, which shows a return rate of 96.5%. The data collected were presented and analysed in tables using frequency scores and simple percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Objective 1: Determine the Extent to which Newspaper Readers' in Uyo Understand the Messages Conveyed in Political Cartoons.

Table 1: Extent of understanding of political cartoons' messages and themes

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Great extent	152	39.2%
Moderate extent	136	35.1%

Low extent	100	25.7%
Total	388	100%

Source: Field Survey 2026

Data in this table revealed that 39.2% of respondents understand political cartoons to a great extent, 35.1% to a moderate extent, and 25.7% to a low extent. This proves that newspaper readers in Uyo are exposed to political cartoons and Uyo have at least moderate understanding of political cartoons, allowing them to interpret and be influenced by political cartoons. Also, factors such as colours, captions and images help readers to understand these messages.

Research Objective 2: Assess the Influence of Political Cartoons on Uyo Readers' Opinions on Political Issues.

Table 2: Political cartoons influence on readers opinions on political issues

Responses	Frequency	Percentage%
Strong influence	160	41%
Moderate influence	116	30%
Slight influence	92	24%
No influence	20	5%
Total	388	100%

Source: Field Survey 2026

Here, 41.2% of respondents reported that political cartoons strongly influence their opinions on political issues, 29.9% indicated a moderate influence, and 23.7% noted a slight influence, while 5.2% said cartoons have no influence on their opinions. This shows that the majority of newspaper readers in Uyo are affected by political cartoons when forming opinions on political matters, though a small proportion remain unaffected. The findings suggest that political cartoons serve as a notable tool for shaping public opinion either positively or negatively as respondents indicated so in another question probing the type of influence political cartoons have on them.

Research Question 3: Examine Uyo Newspaper Readers' Perception of Political Cartoons

Table 3: Do you consider political cartoons important in newspapers?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Very important	220	57%
Necessary	148	38%
Not important	20	5%
Total	388	100%

Source: Field Survey 2026.

In this table, 57% of respondents consider political cartoons very important in newspapers, 38% see them as a necessary newspaper element, while 5% consider them not important. This indicates that the overwhelming majority of readers in Uyo recognize the value of political cartoons, confirming their relevance in informing, educating, and shaping their opinions. This finding suggests a positive perception of political cartoons by newspaper readers in Uyo.

Research Question 4: Evaluate the Contribution of Political Cartoons to Political Awareness Among Readers in Uyo.

Table 4: Do political cartoons contribute to your awareness of political issues?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Contribute significantly	205	53%

Contribute slightly	183	47%
Do not contribute	0	0%
Total	388	100%

Source: Field Survey 2026

From the data in the table above, 53% of respondents reported that political cartoons contribute significantly to their awareness of political issues, while 47% indicated that cartoons have some contribution to their awareness and understanding of political issues. This suggests that political cartoons play an important role in enhancing readers' awareness of political matters in Uyo and in the country at large.

Table 5: How political cartoons increase Uyo readers awareness of political issues.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Draw attention to important societal problems	152	39%
Encourage me to follow political news	120	31%
Encourage me to follow political news	78	20%
Simplify complex political issues and make them relatable	38	10%
Total	388	100%

Source: Field Survey 2026

In this table, 39% of respondents reported that draw their attention to important societal problems, while 31% said cartoons encourage them to follow political news. Others indicated that cartoons help them understand political events (20%) or simplify complex issues (10%). This demonstrates the multiple ways cartoons contribute to political awareness of Uyo newspaper readers.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study collectively showed that political cartoons play a meaningful role in shaping how newspaper readers in Uyo understand, interpret, and engage with political issues. The results indicate that readers are not only exposed to political cartoons but also possess a considerable level of awareness and interpretive ability, which enables them to derive meaning from the messages conveyed.

Firstly, the study found that newspaper readership in Uyo is relatively consistent, with a high level of awareness of political cartoons among respondents. Although many readers engage with political cartoons occasionally, a substantial proportion demonstrated a significant level of understanding of the messages embedded in them. This suggests that political cartoons are effective in communicating political ideas, even when exposure is not constant. The finding that many respondents rely on both textual and visual elements to interpret cartoons further highlights the multimodal nature of cartoons as communication tools. This result corroborates the findings of Inyang and Nwokeocha (2025), who reported that readers were able to understand and interpret the messages conveyed in political cartoons during the 2023 presidential election. It also aligns with the position that the effectiveness of political cartoons depends largely on the audience's ability to decode symbolic and satirical content, as noted by Ekwueme and Obayi (2021).

In addition to understanding, the study revealed that political cartoons significantly influence readers' opinions on political issues. A majority of respondents indicated that cartoons shape how they perceive political leaders and assist them in forming opinions on government policies, with many describing this influence as positive. This implies that political cartoons function as subtle but powerful instruments of opinion formation by framing political issues in ways that resonate with readers. This finding is consistent with Adeagbo and Oyindamola (2024), who observed that political cartoons use

visual and linguistic strategies to present socio-political realities in ways that engage and influence audience perception. It also supports the broader argument that media content can shape audience interpretation by framing issues in particular ways, thereby influencing public opinion.

Furthermore, the study showed that readers in Uyo generally perceive political cartoons as important components of newspapers. Many respondents regarded them as both informative and engaging, indicating that cartoons go beyond mere entertainment to serve as meaningful sources of political information. This positive perception enhances their effectiveness, as audiences are more likely to engage with media content they find appealing and relevant. This finding supports the view that humour and satire, which are central features of political cartoons, make them attractive while still conveying serious political messages, as observed by Opeibi (2020). It also reflects the idea that audience perception plays a key role in determining the impact of media messages.

Finally, the study established that political cartoons contribute to political awareness among readers in Uyo. Respondents indicated that cartoons help draw attention to important societal issues and encourage them to follow political developments more closely. This suggests that political cartoons serve as accessible entry points into political discourse, especially by simplifying complex issues and highlighting key concerns. This finding is in agreement with Inyang and Nwokeocha (2025), who found that political cartoons contributed significantly to political awareness and public engagement during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. It also reinforces the argument that media exposure plays a role in enhancing political consciousness and civic engagement.

Taken together, these findings support the assumptions of Agenda Setting Theory, which posits that the media influence not necessarily what people think, but what they think about. By presenting political issues in simplified and visually engaging forms, political cartoons draw attention to specific topics and shape the focus of public discourse. Thus, political cartoons serve not only as tools for entertainment but also as effective instruments for political communication, awareness, and opinion formation among newspaper readers in Uyo.

CONCLUSION

The findings have shown that political cartoons are not merely elements of entertainment but serve as significant tools that set the agenda for public discussion and help in public opinion formation. Findings also established that Uyo newspaper readers generally perceive political cartoons positively, recognising them as informative, educative, and entertaining; and have significantly contributed to political awareness by helping readers understand current political events, drawing attention to societal problems, and encouraging interest in political affairs. This finding supports the assumptions of the Agenda Setting Theory, which posits that the media influence what audiences consider important by highlighting specific issues. Political cartoons, by consistently focusing on key political matters, help shape the public agenda among readers in Uyo.

From these findings, therefore, the study concludes that political cartoons are powerful instruments of communication that influence readers' understanding, opinions, perceptions, and awareness of political issues. As such, they remain relevant in promoting political engagement and public discourse among newspaper readers in Uyo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Based on the findings on readers' understanding of political cartoons, newspaper cartoonists should ensure that their messages are presented clearly and simply through the effective use of visuals and captions. This will enhance readers' ability to properly interpret and understand the messages conveyed in political cartoons;
- ii. Media organisations and cartoonists should make deliberate efforts to present balanced and responsible content. Since cartoons shape readers' views on political leaders and policies, accuracy and fairness should be emphasised to avoid misleading the audience;
- iii. Newspaper organisations should continue to promote the use of cartoons as informative and educative content, not just for entertainment. This will further strengthen the positive perception already held by readers and increase their engagement with political information;

- iv. Media practitioners should utilize political cartoons as tools for civic and political education. By consistently highlighting key societal and political issues, cartoons can be used to improve public awareness and encourage active participation in political processes.

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