

**LEAD PAPER**

**PERCEPTIBLE PERCEPTION OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA THROUGH THE PRISM OF MIKE ASUKWO'S CARTOONS**

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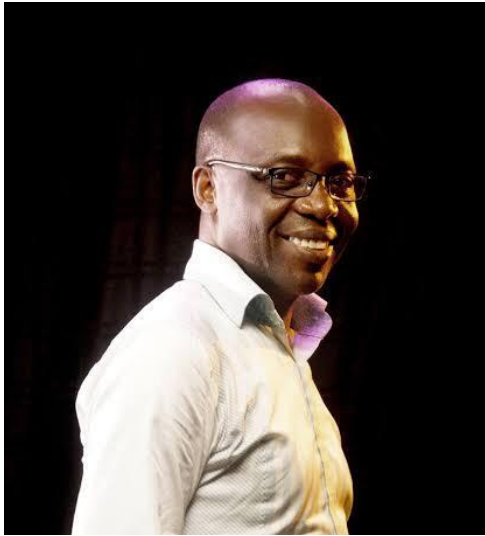
**Introduction**

Cartoons have evolved over the years, to the point that, they are now used for diverse things and reasons. From its very humble beginnings as simple caricature drawings used humorously to lampoon political personalities, to its evolution in film and advertisement. Cartoons' power, to exaggerate its subject and subject matter has been deployed, as a tool for socio-political, cultural and economic advocacy and criticism. However, it will appear that, its minimalist nature, has made it difficult for majority of people to discern its deeper meanings, beyond the humour they can readily grasp. Admittedly though, a large pool of educated elites does understand its immediate and deeper interrogations.

It is within the context of the difficulty a number of people still have, in understanding such deeper meanings that this paper is necessitated. The aim therefore, is a subjective enumeration of some perceived issues that will be extrapolated from selected cartoons herein, for the benefit of the majority. Methodology will be by simple descriptive and contextual analysis of the cartoons. The paper is therefore, structured in a way that a brief background of the cartoonist, Mike Asukwo, is considered important, to establish his evolution as a cartoonist. Subsequently the paper will subjectively focus on the subject matter of politics and governance in Nigeria, as glimpse from the cartoons and thereafter, draw conclusions that will rely on the subjective perspectives enumerated.

**The cartoonist Mike Asukwo**

Asukwo was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1965, and named Etim Bassey Asukwo, at Idua Assan, Oron in Akwa Ibom State. According to Amsayaro (2011), Asukwo as reported by himself states that, he was later christened Michael; Hence, his popularity as Mike Asukwo. Amsayaro further records that, Asukwo started his primary education in an undisclosed school, but was to later complete it at an Army Children School. After passing his common entrance examination, he was enrolled at St. Vincent College Oto-Oron, Akwa Ibom State. On completion of his secondary education at St. Vincent College, he got admitted at the Calabar Polytechnic, now known as Cross River State University of Technology (CRUTECH), to read Business Administration. It was at the polytechnic that he sat for his O-Level Fine Art examination and got an A1. Perhaps, that spurred him to abandon his programme at the polytechnic. He subsequently enrolled for Fine Art studies at the Yaba College of Technology Lagos, graduating in 1996 with specialization in sculpture.



**Plate I, Mike Asukwo**

Asukwo started cartooning practice at a young age, according to him and as recorded by Amsayaro (2011), he joined the press club at St. Vincent College during his 3<sup>rd</sup> year there, from where he started cartooning. He was to continue with that practice again at the Calabar polytechnic, still as a member of the press club then also. Though a sculptor by training and practice, he has found cartooning a viable platform to creatively air his views on socio-political, economic and cultural happenings in his society (Nigeria largely and to some extent, the world). Consequently, he has produced numerous cartoons on a wide range of issues. His cartoons have been widely published in newspapers, magazines, journals, books, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and blogs among others. He is a recipient of several awards right from his days at Yaba College and is currently, the chief Editorial Artist of BusinessDay Newspaper. In Asukwo's words, as reported by Amsayaro (2011),

"In cartoon, I find a way to communicate on a different level. It is a part of me that yearns for a better society, for justice and good governance. I seek an egalitarian society and believe, there is always the need to let some people, especially people in power, know their decisions affect those they govern"

Hence, this paper focuses on his cartoons.

### **Perspectives on Politics and Governance in Nigeria Through Asukwo's Cartoons;**

The surge on political activities and governance issues, occasioned by the preparation for yet another election cycle in Nigeria (i.e., the 2023 general election), has provided food, for the consumption of artists. One of such artists is the cartoonist Mike Asukwo, the creator of the cartoons that are the subject matter of this discuss. The cartoons selected are in no particular order, neither were they selected based on specific themes, other than that, the adduce, evoke or provoke political or governance issues. Thus, they have been randomly selected by way of chance encounter. Four have been considered sufficient, for the purpose of this paper.

Plate II is a cartoon by Asukwo that characterizes the Nigerian president at a dining table, with obviously a political associate/aide, both getting ready to enjoy a sumptuous meal. In the cartoon, someone is shown desperately trying to bash into the room, in order to participate in the meal. However, the over-zealous aide/political associate of the president, uses his leg to further block the door, which was already firmly secured with a broom lock, symbolising trade mark logo of the current ruling party in Nigeria.

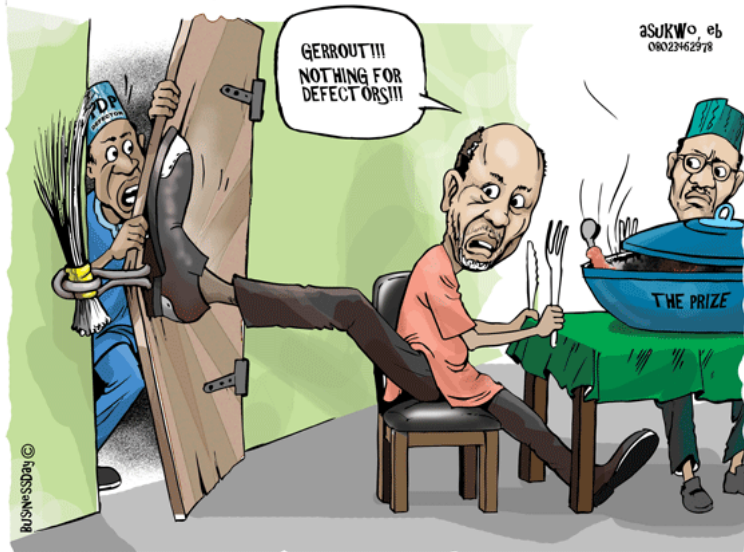


Plate II

The message as deduced from the president's aide/political associate's comment, suggests the reason for blocking anymore participants to the meal. The intruding guest being stopped, is a supposed defector from another party, whom the aide/ political associate believes defected in order to benefit from "their sumptuous meal", and for which the defector did not contribute anything to. This cartoon must have been informed by the usual practice of politicians in Nigeria, defecting to a party in power. Most times after the defectors party had failed in an election. The general feeling is usually that, such persons cannot stay away from the privileges of being in power, as the meal represent in the cartoon. Hence, they will defect to the winners and therefore, the ruling party in order to benefit. However, such actions are also not usually welcomed by some members of the winning party, as they view a defector as a parasite, who wants to reap where they did not sow.

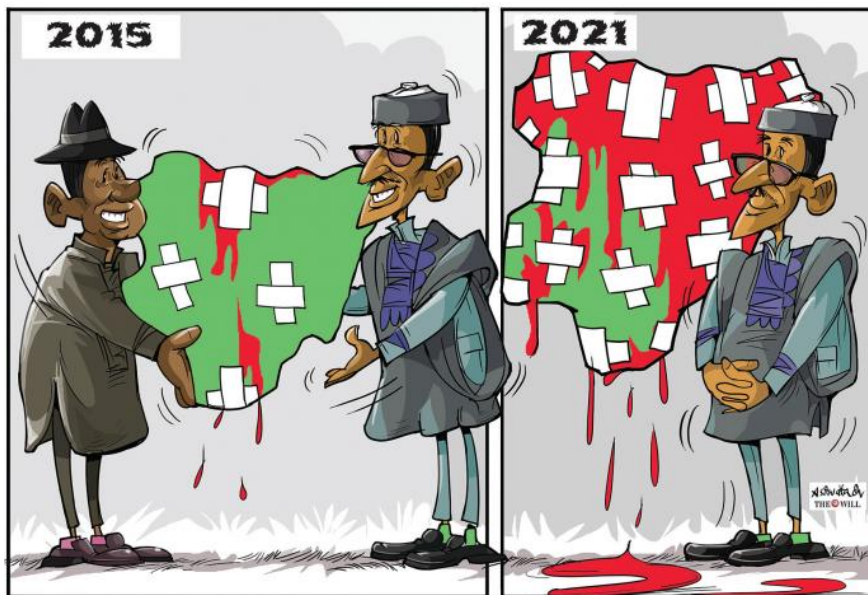


Plate III

Plate III; is another cartoon that characterizes Nigerian former president Goodluck Jonathan and the current president Muhammadu Buhari. Both characters are present in the first of the two cartoon strips. The first strip is showing Goodluck happily handing over Nigeria in 2015 to president Buhari. Nigeria is symbolically represented using its map, which is shown with a few patches of wounds dripping blood. The second strip which is marked 2021, presents president Buhari standing alone beside another symbolic map of (Nigeria) with several more patched wounds, scattered all over the country and almost covered in blood that is dripping and pooling around the feet of the satisfied expression of president Buhari.

This cartoon exemplifies the condition of Nigeria as at 2015 and six years later in 2021. It symbolically captured the manageable state of insecurity as at 2015, when the Jonathan's administration handed over governance to the Buhari's administration as at that time, few states of the country, as represented by the few patches, were experiencing insecurity. Consequently, the cartoonist went ahead to symbolically show also, that as at 2021, the security situation has escalated to the point that the entire country is suffering security challenges, with large scale bloodshed being experienced.

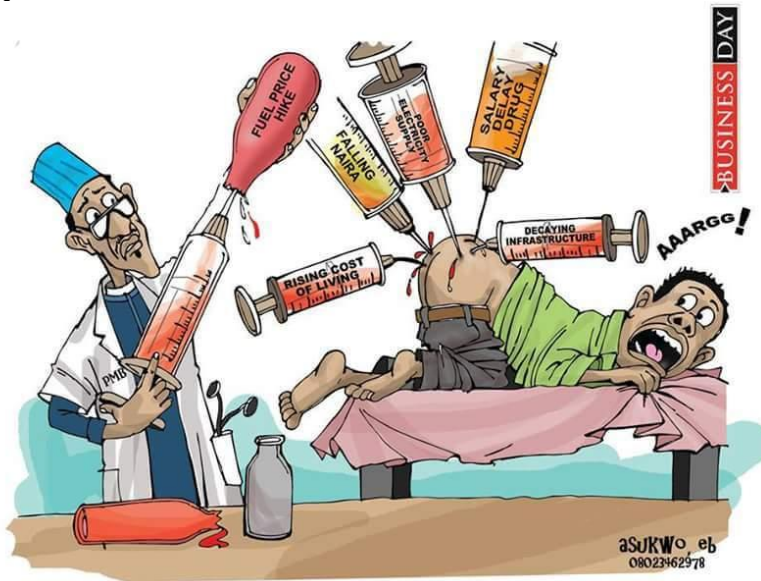


Plate IV

Plate IV: is yet another carton by Asukwo that captured the Nigerian president as a medical doctor attending to a patient, supposedly Nigeria. The patient "Nigeria" is awkwardly positioned on a hospital bed, with several injections being already applied on it, as medication designed to solve diverse, but specific ailments. The doctor (president) is indeed, as can be seen, trying his utmost best to bring relief to his patient, by preparing additional injection.

Ironically, the cartoonist message, as reflected through the types of injections being given to the patient and indeed, the patient's reaction shows the patient (Nigeria) is being wrongly treated by doctor Buhari. Therefore, the patient is clearly not going to get any form of relief soon. This is because, instead of injecting Nigeria with policies that will strengthen the Naira, the government is bringing policies that ensure the Naira, continues to weaken. Instead of injecting the country with the relevant infrastructure that will help jump start the economy, it is decaying infrastructure that is being experienced. For instance, instead of increasing electricity supply capacity, the country is constantly being told of a collapsed national grid, among several other areas of underperformance. Yet, doctor

Buhari (the president) finds it expedient to inject the country's populace with more hardship, through his yet another attempt to increase fuel price.



Plate V

Plate V; is the last, but not the least cartoon to be discussed in this paper. The cartoon presents again, supposedly, the Nigerian president receiving symbolically, captured flags (representing different sectors), as presented by his field commander which is, synonymous with military traditions. The commander, as presented in the cartoon, represents the coordinating officer of the country's diverse sectors. Hence, the sectors are symbolically represented by the different flags put together. Indeed, the commander is presented reporting to the president and commander in chief, that the "war is over" while emphasizing that, all key sectors have been captured.

It is particularly interesting to see how this cartoon captures the sycophantic foolery, that is characteristic of the present-day governance system in Nigeria. Governance structures have been deliberately kept distant from the people, such that, there is a disconnect between what the government is doing from what the people want and the governments' position on matters/issues and what is really on ground. For instance, the inability of government officials, all through the ranks, up to the president, to establish contact and understanding with the people they represent, lead or govern, on issues that affect them, as exemplified in several of their actions. In most instances, they rely on their sycophants, who tell them what they selfishly want to hear, in order to justify their actions.

## **Conclusion**

The character of cartoon, to provide humour, right from its beginning has remained consistent ever since. Its ability to humorously evoke discuss on serious issues is another of its character that has been sustained over the years. However, its minimalist forms and conceptualised way of presenting issues, is what this paper has tried to break down, for easy understanding. To that extent, four cartons were presented, descriptively analysed and discussed.

From the perceptible analysis and discussions made on the four cartoons, the following submissions are made:

- i. The negative implications of politicians making government and governance an opportunity to settle "us" and exclude "them", rather than serving the people is perceived, from the cartoon in plate I. That perhaps accounts for the several corruption allegations made on many former governors and their officials in Nigeria. Also, are the several



- corruption allegations made on the federal government officials. For instance, the recent allegation of corruption on the federal accountant general in Nigeria is one example.
- ii. Plate III contained a strip cartoon that paradoxically presents the reality of Nigeria's security situation as at 2015, which has regrettably become worse at 2021. The frequent and consistent attacks in Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, and Niger states, aside from the established situation in the North east region of Nigeria are examples. Indeed, the June 2022 attack on the church in Ondo state, and the continuous attacks in the south east states like Imo and Anambra, are well known and therefore, justifies the cartoonist compositional claim.
  - iii. Again, Asukwo satirically captures the current state of Nigeria's socio-political and economic life, in plate III. It exemplified most of the areas that represents the hardship and difficulties Nigerians face. This can be attributed to the flawed constitution, being used in Nigeria. The situation can further be attributed to the lack of a proper thought out socio-economic and political blue print for the country, as represented by the several wrong injections that are being given to the "patient".
  - iv. Plate IV lampoons the ineffective monitoring mechanisms used by the country's leaders, as it relates to those they appoint or, that are elected to carry out specific responsibilities. Indeed, most of it, though traceable to the constitution, can be ameliorated, if the leaders go beyond patronage to monitor real time government activities.

This paper, even after highlighting some of the perspectives that can be perceived from the cartoons, does not present them, as the ultimate messages therein. Thus, viewers are free to extrapolate their own perceptions, as long as, they speak to the forms and conceptualizations presented by the cartoonist through his cartoons.

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