

Politically Motivated Campaign Songs and Voting Behaviour: Reflections on Tiv Campaign Songs in the 2015 Elections in Benue State, Nigeria

by

Ver-Or Kachii

kachiiveror@yahoo.com

Lecturer, Department of Theatre Arts,
Evangel University, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper attempts to understand how political advertising impacts on the voting behavior of electorates with the aim of understanding whether the politically motivated campaign songs actually influence voter's choice of candidates or not. The paper specifically reflects on an analysis of Tiv campaign songs in Benue state electioneering process, and by appreciating the theatrics and aesthetics of the songs, the article adopts a sociological approach as a methodological choice for analysis. The study ascertained that campaign songs only create the political atmosphere and promote political candidates, but they do not guarantee election outcomes. In conclusion, the study recommends that political candidates and parties should create and concentrate on other election campaign strategies, and that further studies be done to better understand other existing factors that influence voting behaviour.

Keywords: politics, songs, advert and elections.

Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics. Nelson Mandela

Introduction

Politics is an activity that has gradually become basic and fundamental to the survival of every society. Societies all over the world are therefore deeply involved in politics. Indeed all human societies practice politics in different forms; there is the politics of ideology, politics of religion, politics of ethnicity, academic politics and others. The most controversial category however is, party politics. Added to this, every society in the world has a particular spectrum of politics. In fact at each stage in the life of any society, new political tactics evolve; new strategies are developed and planted with hopes raised in the people. In Nigeria, issues of politics remain a do or die affair with political candidates employing different strategies towards ensuring victory.

In the early periods of Nigerian history, Nigeria witnessed rapid developments because of the efforts of her founding fathers. Nigeria was governed with a deep sense of rational thought by selfless leaders who had the attitude of positivity and of nationalism. The ambition and efforts of such leaders like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Tafawa Balewa, and Sir Ahmadu Bello fought the British colonial government which paved way for the declaration of Nigeria as an independent sovereign state in October, 1960. The declaration of independence led the search towards selfless leaders who would take Nigeria to the 'Promised Land'. The search for leadership resulted in series of Coup and counter Coup d'états beginning from 1966 to 1976 when the period of military dominance paved the way for a democratic transition. The new democratic system that was supplanted gave room for the growth of party politics in the country. Political parties were found ranging from National party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP) and Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) etc. These numerous parties, founded alliances as enunciated by Egwugwu who opines that,

Politics of regionalism and ethnicity were re-introduced by the presidential system of government to develop political norms, practices and culture that could be national in out-look. (Egwugwu, 2004:135)

The politics of regionalism as posited by Egwugwu became the disturbing bane of Nigerian politics. The ideological centeredness on self-interest against the communal interest of the people resonated in the political arithmetic of most emerging leaders.

The focus of this paper is however far from appraising the political developments in Nigeria but rather to assess politically motivated campaign songs and whether they impact voter's choice and election outcomes. Of concern will be an analysis of selected Tiv campaign songs and whether they influence election outcomes or not. The theatrical atmosphere and elements which these songs connote will also be looked at. To begin this paper however, it is imperative to understand the history and political structure of Benue State, North central Nigeria.

Brief History and Political Structure of Benue State: North Central Nigeria

The historical events which ultimately culminated in the creation of the present day Benue State started in 1967. In that year, the Yakubu Gowon led government provided the road map to the creation of the then twelve states of the federation. The Benue/Plateau State was among the new states created and they became fully functional on April 1, 1968 (Ukpoju, 2003: vi). Eight years later, particularly in 1976, there was further split which gave birth to the present Benue State. With the recommendation of the Justice Ayo Irikefe Panel on the creation of additional states in Nigeria, Benue State came into being on February 3, 1976. Then, the Igala speaking part of the then Kwara State (otherwise known as “Kwara overseas”) was excised. They were merged with the former Benue province (now separated from Benue/Plateau State) to form the new Benue State. Colonel Abdullahi Shelleng, was appointed as its first Military governor.

Ukpoju (2003:11) believes that the creation of Benue State was a compensation given to the Tivs and Idomas for the overwhelming support they gave to the ruling Northern people’s congress (NPC) during the first republic. Subsequent upon that year, the state was split into thirteen Local Government Areas. With the creation of Kogi State in 1991, the Igala speaking people of Benue State were ceded and merged with another group from Kwara State to form the present Kogi State.

Today, Benue State comprises of two major ethnic groups-the Tivs and the Idomas. There are a total of twenty-three Local Government Areas in the state namely: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya.

The return of democratic rule in 1999 produced numerous parties and alliances which produced the democratically elected Governor under the then ruling party, The People’s Democratic Party (PDP). From 1999 to 2015, Benue was ruled by PDP. The rule was replete with complaints of corruption, unemployment, poverty and terrorism. This led to a shake up in the polity and the masses campaigned for a new democratic order.

For any democratic system to thrive therefore, it is vital that political parties and candidates provide the electorates with adequate information on party policies, clear-cut vision as well as their political agendas to enable electorates actively choose their candidates based on full information. To achieve this, political parties use the media in campaigns. Curran (2005:129) adds that the media assists voters to make an informed choice at election time. This is done in form of paid political advertising, social media campaigns, commentaries and news stories. In fact, for an election to be considered free and fair, electorates must have adequate knowledge of the candidates, political parties and election policies.

Recently, political parties and their candidates are becoming increasingly aware of the effectiveness of advertising and its role in getting the electorates to choose a particular candidate or party over the other by way of informing them.

The use of Tiv campaign songs in Benue state has become unique to it and very important to the electoral process and voting behavior because it bridges the communication gap between political parties, political candidates and electorates. Hence, political parties and candidates all around the world devote a lot of financial resources to political ad campaigns to sell themselves as the preferred brand to the electorates. Interestingly, the most questions raised in elections are concerned with voting behavior i.e. why the electorates voted for a candidate over the other and the implication of their choice.

Scholars and communication experts argue that, when the politician crafts his campaign messages as being the fight to improve voters' lives, or something similar and come with some good measure of integrity, the voters are more likely to believe him (Feyipitan, 2015). In other words, the electorates are most likely to trust candidates whose political ad campaigns offer to satisfy their basic needs as opposed to those who dwell on their personal achievements. However, these same experts also argue that personality, appearance and language used play crucial roles in political campaigns. Still, many political experts question the efficacy of political ad campaigns in getting the electorates to vote in a candidate's favour.

The Tiv campaign songs took an overwhelming kick-off in Benue State as a campaign strategy after the first eight years of the PDP administration (1999-2007). The failure of the administration during those eight years to tackle the issues of unemployment, payment of salaries and corruption led to the call for new leadership. Electorates and fresh political candidates took up to different campaign strategies to educate, inform and promote better blueprints for a better Benue. The Tiv campaign songs housed the messages, the manifestoes and the criticisms of the previous administration providing a heated contest in the political arena.

Political Advertising Campaigns in Nigeria: A Literature Review

The fact that the mass media even through advertising, continues to pervade our daily lives have continued to be established by various scholars and communication experts alike. In politics, advert campaigns have become an essential tool used amongst candidates contesting for various positions to get the electorates to vote for them. Advertising and public relations occupy the centre-stage of promotion of political candidates and parties vying for different political positions during campaigns (Samaila 2003). Over the last several decades, political advertising has changed significantly. Lyengar and Simon (2000) state that, Political advertising is increasingly the main element in political campaigns, rendering party machines and grass-root organizations less important than they were in the past.

Diamond and Bates in 1992 also posit that, unlike political campaigns in the past, advances in media technology have streamlined the process, giving candidates more options to reach larger groups of constituents with little effort. According to boundless.com (2015), the growth of political advertising especially in the United States of America can be attributed to cable television networks and the internet. It states that:

...The growth of cable television networks heavily influenced political advertising in the 1992 election between incumbent President George H. W. Bush and Governor Bill Clinton, particularly in reaching new target demographics such as women and young voters. The 2004 election saw yet another, and possibly the biggest, change yet in political advertising-the growth of the Internet. Web-based advertising was easily distributed by both incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry's campaigns, and both campaigns hired firms who specialized in the accumulation of personal data. This resulted in advertisements which were tailored to target specific audiences for the first time (a process known as narrowcasting).

In Nigeria, political advertising has grown immensely in the past two decades. This is as a result of the recent awareness by political parties and their candidates on the usefulness of advertising in making the electorates better aware of the candidates as a better brand and in communicating their offerings in form of manifestoes to these same electorates. Olujide et al (2010) note that, advertising have become the most commonly used technique to create a favourable image for the candidate and a negative image for the opponent. Before now, political parties and candidates channelled most of their resources into political rallies, speeches and direct contact to gather the support of electorates, as noted by Opeibi (2004).

Between the 2007, 2011 and the last 2015 elections in Nigeria; presidential and gubernatorial, the use of political advert campaigns have widened from mode of delivery, type of language used, to forms of media used to communicate these messages. The 2015 gubernatorial elections in Benue state witnessed the flood of both traditional (Tiv campaign songs) and new media with media campaigns of the two strong contenders who were; Samuel Ortom and the out-gone governor Gabriel Suswam who desperately campaigned for his choice of candidate Mr Terhemem Tarzor. Suswam's inability during his eight-year term in office to pay civil servants salaries left him with stiff opposition. And with the 'change' against the supposed 'wasted' years of the PDP, the political arena was immensely heated.

Because of the popularity of the change mantra and of the candidates amongst the electorates, campaigns became highly competitive. Each candidate tried to outdo the other using political advert campaigns. They came up with various jingles .i.e “shor chenji...” (The game has changed) amongst others. Also, according to Nworah (2011), the 2011 presidential election between former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the PDP and General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC had its peculiarities. In the sense that, Since Goodluck Ebele Jonathan had not been elected president during his first term, he was saddled with the responsibility of convincing the electorates that he was a better choice than his strongest opponent. This he did by investing a lot of funds into media campaigns which included traditional media and the new media.

Even though it is generally agreed by most scholars and marketing professionals that political advertising is important to every election campaign, some scholars and political consultants remain divided on the extent to which political advertising influence voting behaviour. In the past, most political campaign researchers agreed that political media campaigns had a great effect on voting behaviour. However, recent studies have shown a better understanding on the effectiveness of political advertising communication in elections. Hoolbrooks (1996) concluded that, “variations in candidate support during the campaign season are largely attributable to the occurrence of campaign events”. In support, Ansolabhere and Iyenga (1994) state that political advertising is persuasive and not manipulative and that its messages inform voters about the candidates’ position and allow voters to develop differentiated images of the candidates.

Interestingly, Nigerian electorates are becoming ever more exposed to political advertising a lot more than in the past which in turn raises awareness on political decisions before they are taken. Electorates are becoming more aware about political information; information about candidates and their manifestos, party policies and election guidelines through continuous use of political advertising in election campaigns in Nigeria.

Tiv Campaign Songs and the 2015 Gubernatorial Elections: An Analysis

The most attractive campaign method in Benue state and which is peculiarly common to them is the Tiv campaign songs. The campaign songs are composed and rendered only in the Tiv language partly because of their majority status and political advantage. Most political candidates contract Tiv song composers to formulate songs which content would expose, challenge and criticise their opponents. The songs are then played on radio and television stations. They are also shared among friends on all social media platforms as a way of informing the electorates. During political rallies, the songs are performed live by the composers as a way of promoting the agendas of political candidates and challenging the suitability of their fellow political opponents.

From 2011, with such campaign songs like “*Ugbah nyor shor chenji*” (Ugba has come and the game has changed) where used as a strong campaign song to promote the candidature of Prof Steve Torkuma Ugbah. The songs became the overriding jingle in the political atmosphere in Benue State at the time -the beginning of the continuation of the Tiv campaign songs. However, despite the acceptability of the songs and the musicality that it carried, the outcome of the elections did not reflect the supposed reception that the song and the candidature that Ugbah enjoyed.

In analysing the song that would be presented here with its accompanying English translation, the content of the song would be looked at and whether it is sufficient enough to prompting the electorates voting choice. Care would also be applied in appreciating and/or critiquing the theatricality of the songs in terms of aesthetics and performativity. Moreover, with the party logos especially that of PDP (Umbrella) and APC (Broom), the Tiv song composers are able to derive symbolic meanings of these objects. While the PDP umbrella is referred in Tiv as *Nima* which interpretatively represents shelter, the songs call on the electorates to come where they would have shelter and avoid the APC’s broom (*chancha*) which sweeps everything away. In contesting the philosophical interpretation of “Nima” and “chancha”, the APC campaign songs interpret the broom as sweeping away dirt and the filth that had been created by the PDP for the past sixteen years.

SONG: Idyu ka Nya teen ga by El-Stuffy

Tiv Version	English Version
<p>Under: Idyu ka nya teen ga; Iharev mba vaan inya ve oo Dyu ka nya; teenga; Masev mba vaan inya ve oo Dyu ka nya; teen ga; ityo; ipusu mba ke kungal oo Commissioner u teen nya, shangen ka nya; teen ga oo.</p> <p>Mlu: Hide see a inya yase oo U ngu ordedoo ga Voto wase ka u Tarkighir Dickson a ooo o ityo you joo u Or a soo beacon I zenden manden yo nana lu her a amande Yemen Abuja je ne ooo Dickson uza idyu keng keng</p>	<p>Solo: National Assembly is not selling of plots of lands. Iharev Are lamenting the confiscation of their land. National Assembly is not selling of plot of land; the people of Masev are lamenting the confiscation of their land National Assembly is not selling of plots; the people of Ipusu are bankrupt The commissioner of selling lands, winning election is not selling of plots of land</p> <p>Chorus: Return our land oo You are a wicked man Our vote belong to Takighir Dickson your people I love you If one is fond of pegging beacons let him stay put with beacons Right on your way to Abuja Dickson you must win the National Assembly seat</p>

It should be noted that, most of the Tiv campaign songs usually carry one central message with the chorus. The length of the songs are not determined by a variety of content but rather a repetition of the same verse and chorus. The most driving force been the musicality and instrumentality of the songs.

In the above song, the composer (El-Stuffy) brings out the obvious fact which he feels political candidates should be aware of. In the very first line he makes it advisedly clear that politics or government should not be taken by political candidates or office holders as a place of selling or confiscating the people’s lands “*Idyu ka nya teen ga*”. He takes care in posing such attempts at affecting the generality of the Benue people. Added to this, he denounces politics of attrition and the one that destroys the people’s commonwealth. In condemning such political behavior, the song then recommends and promotes candidates that would represent people fairly.

Furthermore, the Tiv campaign songs are potent with a lot of theatricality and performativity inherent in the people's expression of traditional dances that would constantly hold the people's interest. Every place is a performance area and people usually feel entertained. However, in terms of voter's choice, the campaign songs are short of such greater influence.

In the 2015 gubernatorial elections as well as house of assembly, House of Representatives as well as state, the defining bane was change and the candidates of PDP faced a wind of change that sort to end their years of failure and corruption. Hence, the songs were more general in pinning down the political energy of the ruling party why providing every energy that would propel the opposition government to power and this it did. But far from the wind of change, one is not conclusive of the fact that the campaign songs produced the change, rather people's dissatisfaction and political betrayal influenced their choice.

Conclusion

Political campaigns are good. They are able to provide the electioneering atmosphere and drama that comes with election periods. Campaigns, in which ever guise it is used is able to provide the electorates with an idea of those wishing to lead them. The Tiv campaign songs has become the central form of political advertising common to the Benue politics. With the instrumentality and musical composition of the songs, electorates find them more entertaining than educative, politically. The songs are seldom focused on promoting the agendas of political candidates, but rather, they concentrate on criticising and painting the pictures of opponents in bad light.

Despite the impact of the campaign songs, the outcome of the election results in Benue state are far from aligning to the popularity of the candidate based on the campaign songs. The voting behaviour is therefore in no way controlled or reflective of campaign songs, rather, the choice is instructive of other factors that voters consider paramount. Political candidates are therefore advised to devise more practical and realistic campaign strategies that would provide the electorates with the needed information and a clear political agenda.

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