AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 12 Number 4
December, 2025

A Socio-Semiotic Analysis of Ideological Multimodal Framing of Selected 2023 Gubernatorial Candidates of Nigeria's General Election Campaign Posters

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Abstract

The study examined campaign posters produced to advertise gubernatorial candidates in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The paper critically investigated text producers' ideological framing of semiotic resources in campaign posters which is intended to present gubernatorial candidates as desirable choices during the campaigns. The purposive sampling method was adopted for the selection of data from posters produced for gubernatorial candidates of All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), and People Democratic Party (PDP) in Enugu, Kano, Lagos and River States. The data gathered included those produced and circulated between September 2022 and March 2023. This period covers the beginning of the campaigns for the general elections to 24 hours before the gubernatorial elections. The research adopted a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic theory, focusing on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions in the posters. The findings of the study revealed that candidates across the four states

employed a combination of ethnic, religious, welfare, collective and cultural ideologies to appeal to voters' identities. In addition, the analysis showed that the campaign posters were carefully designed with verbal and visual semiotic resources to project the candidates as ideal leaders while subtly delegitimising their opponents. The study concluded that campaign posters are not merely promotional tools, but are ideological constructs shaped by Nigeria's socio-political realities.
Keywords: Social semiotics, ideology, critical discourse analysis, political campaign poster

Introduction

Most elections at the local, state and federal levels in Nigeria are highly contested, and this accounts for why most politicians employ available campaign tools to ensure they stand out during campaigns. Political campaigns are important for the expression of political ambition and related political acts, which may influence the electorate. However, a significant observation that has been made about the campaigns in Nigeria since the 1960s is that the discourse deployed by politicians sometimes escalate tensions and lead to violence. Nigeria's general elections in 2023 witnessed increased participation of youths and other citizens at all levels. This further increased the sense of competition among politicians, particularly with the emergence of Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) whose candidacy changed the dynamics of elections at the national level of the country. Beyond this, the nation witnessed rising tensions particularly in Enugu, Kano, Lagos and River States as politicians deployed threatening discourse and, in some cases physical violence to intimidate the opponents (Carboni & Serwat, 2023). Against this background, the multimodal discourse that was deployed to campaign for gubernatorial candidates especially in states that could be considered as hot beads in Nigeria's democratic space requires research attention. The study investigated the expression of power in multimodal texts produced to campaign for gubernatorial of the All Progressives Congress

(APC), Labour Party (LP), and People Democratic Party (PDP) during the general elections campaigns. Social semiotic analysis was adopted for the study of the campaign posters because it was seen as appropriate for a study that sought to make clear the ideological framing of multimodal discourse in Nigeria's democratic environment.

Social Semiotics and the Critical Approach to Discourse Analysis

Generally, the study of symbolic communication is called semiotics, a field which primarily investigates how meanings are constructed and how signs and significations are used to describe reality (O'Halloran, 2022). Social semiotics is a branch of semiotics that explores human signifying practices within particular social and cultural contexts. Social semiotic theory which was developed by Leeuwen and Kress (2001) is strongly influenced by the work of Michael Halliday (1994) and his Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2004). Halliday's theory of social semiotics focused on the underlying structure (or "grammar") which they argue are used to understand experience. They further note that experience is construed by language users through the choices they make in the systems of options that are available to them to make sense or meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) however noted that sign making is the intricate depiction of certain things or entities based on contextual, historical, social, psychological, and cultural factors. Unlike Halliday's preoccupation with language as a semiotic resource, in social semiotics, texts are seen as multimodal complexes and therefore are perceived as being constituted by more than one mode of signs. Thus, writing, music, speech, dance, layout, gesture are examples of modes, which serve as material resources for making meaning visible. Modes refer to the tools that are used for the creation and manifestation of signs. The distinctness of each mode results from their unique materiality and social shaping. Also, text producers' structuring of modes within societies is

deeply influenced by underlying ideologies, shared belief systems that have evolved and persisted over time and expressed through language and other semiotic resources.

A social semiotic analysis of multiple modes can be broadly described as a process of description and investigation across three inter-connected levels: the level of modes and semiotic resources, and their provenance and meaning potential; the level of design, that is, inter-modal relations; and the level of the sign-maker and context. Jewitt and Henriksen (2019) further explain these three stages of social semiotic analysis of multimodal discourse thus: The stage of a social semiotic multimodal analysis where the use of modes in the texts are analysed, the stage where questions are raised on the modal organization or multimodal design of texts, the dominance or emphasis of modes in the layout of the text and the stage where analysis of the multimodal text is carried out guided by the concept of the motivated sign and the interests of the producer or sign maker. The last stage gives attention to the detailed attention to the contextualization of text within the social context of its production. Social semiotic approaches to multimodality, across these three analytical levels or stages, often employ sociological imagination as a research tool, sometimes in the form of commutation, a method from structural linguistics, which involves disrupting the order of elements in a unit to uncover its 'invisible' order, a tool which has been extended to a range of modes. Kress (2010), for example, explores the consequences of three alternative layouts of a textbook double spread. Using this method, Kress shows the effect of changes in layout on the narrative and coherence of a text, and the connection between image and writing. Such comparisons help to make visible the range of possibilities for a text, and in doing so highlight the sign maker's selection and choices of modes, semiotic resources, materials, among others. These choices, in turn provide an insight into the sign maker's interest. Recognizing the agency of the sign maker is central to social semiotics, notably in

relation to the idea of the motivated sign that is used to assert that a person chooses one signifier over another as the 'carrier' of a signified. In this approach, sets of such choices are then elevated to 'design principles' that the sign maker applies, and this helps a researcher to form a hypothesis about the meaning of the sign, and the sign maker's interests.

The critical tradition influenced by thinkers such as Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci among others is concerned with issues of power, ideology, hegemony and resistance in communication (Donoghue, 2018). It seeks to uncover hidden power structures in text, media and discourse. The critical tradition or approach is an intellectual framework rooted in the idea of challenging dominant ideologies, power structures, and social inequalities. Emerging from critical theory, particularly the Frankfurt School, it emphasizes the role of culture, ideology, and communication in maintaining or challenging power dynamics (Horkheimer & Adomo, 2002). Different approaches to the critical study of discourse include critical linguistics (Fowler), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001), computer mediated discourse analysis among others. Social semiotics as developed by Kress and van Leeuwen also aligns with critical approaches to the study of discourse. However, unlike the preoccupation of other approaches with language, social semioticians argue that contemporary texts are highly multimodal in nature and therefore verbal and visual modes employed in texts have to be analysed to understand authors' shaping of power relations and ideological struggles through the use of semiotic resources.

Campaign Posters and Nigeria's Electioneering Processes

Campaigns are important to the outcome of electioneering process all over the world. In order to reach the electorate, most producers of campaign materials choose to make their message as persuasive as possible. Campaign advertising resources could be in the form of political manifestos, magazines, billboards, posters, flyers

among others. Campaign posters have long been a staple of Nigerian electoral culture, serving as both informational tools and symbolic artefacts. Posters are usually made and produced in a variety of colours, materials, forms, and sizes. Campaign posters are typically circulated through physical, digital, and traditional media platforms in Nigeria. Traditional media, including television, radio, and newspapers, provide formal avenues for placing of campaign posters. Newspapers however stand out as a reliable and structured platform for campaign poster circulation. Previous studies (e.g. Edegoh & Anunike, 2020) have shown that Nigerian campaign posters often incorporate culturally resonant imagery, proverbs, religious references, and national symbols to appeal to voter sentiment.

Beyond their persuasive function, these posters also reflect influence of the socio-political landscape, including ethnic diversity, economic disparities, and political patronage systems. In the 2023 gubernatorial elections, technological advances in design and printing, coupled with heightened political competition, produced a visually rich and symbolically layered set of campaign posters. Analysing these posters through a social semiotic framework not only reveals the aesthetic and rhetorical strategies employed but also illuminates the underlying ideologies influencing the framing of the narratives about leadership, governance, and collective identity.

Literature Review

Scholarly works have been carried out on the analysis of political campaign posters in Nigeria, Africa and across the globe. Ciumacenco (2013) is a semiotic study of political campaign posters. The paper analysed visual resources as promotional imagery deployed as political communication in the United States' presidential election campaigns. The research drew insights from Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory to analyse meaning making in the visuals produced for former President Barack

Obama in 2008. The findings revealed that there is a connection between advertising, politics and visuals in campaign communication. In addition, it underscored the usefulness of semiotic theory in the study of visual communication.

Other scholars have focused on the social semiotic investigation of political campaign discourse. For instance, Martinez-Lirola (2023), conducted a critical approach to the semiotic analysis of political posters produced for the general elections in Ireland in 2016 and 2020. He adopted Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (2006) and van Leeuwen's (2001) social actor theory to the study of the political posters created for the campaigns of the Irish political parties Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. He concentrated on four posters produced to represent the candidates in the elections that occurred in 2016 and 2020 with the goal of first observing how the candidates were represented and then identifying the similarities and potential differences between them. He also examined the linguistic and visual strategies used to persuade the audience to vote for the parties, and to emphasize the politician's power.

The findings showed that politicians are always portrayed favourably, with complete formal attire and prestige, which encourages people to vote for the party they represent because they have faith in the political establishment. The study concluded that campaign posters are an effective technique for highlighting the influence of political parties during election campaigns. Qadir (2023) also employed the critical approach to the study of the semiotic resources employed in four election posters for the Iraqi parliamentary election in Kurdistan Region. The study investigated the technicalities that were employed to display the candidates' suitability. In addition, it concentrated on the four election posters featuring the candidates. The primary language and visual tactics employed to persuade the public to support each party were also examined. The study's findings indicated that, based on the

pictures' constituent parts, people were drawn to and convinced to vote for political candidates.

Studies have also been carried out on the use of multimodal resources in Nigeria's democratic environment. Olayiwola et al. (2021) is a study which examined the stylistic features of the Ekiti state 2022 governorship election while Omole (2023) applied the multimodal discourse analysis to the study of selected campaign posters of the APC's presidential candidate in the 2023 general elections. Ademilokun and Olateju (2015), in their analysis of Nigeria's 2011 campaign, noted that the country's electioneering activities featured an intriguing application of multimodal resources for the expression of meaning. They critically analysed the multimodal components of twelve (12) political rallies that took place in six states of south western Nigeria.

The data were purposively gathered from the multimodal resources that were used during electioneering campaigns in this region. The theoretical foundation of the investigation was provided by Madlin and Mayr (2012). The analysis showed that gender, carnivalesque and community ideologies were promoted by the multimodal resources utilized in the campaigns. These resources were primarily employed to maintain and negotiate political and class power. The study demonstrated how political and cultural identities are deliberately employed in political campaign graphics for marketing and legitimacy purposes.

Oduola and Adeagbo (2019) is a study that focused on pragma-semiotic analysis of specific hate speeches found in Nigerian presidential campaign posters from 2015 and 2019. Against the perspective that hate speech has grown to be a powerful tool in Nigerian politics, the study examined the discursive image and pragmatic acts used in the hate speeches. The researchers noted that earlier research on political discourse in Nigeria had mainly examined stylistics, pragmatics and semiotic aspects in general rather than delving into the ways in which pragmatic act types

(locutionary, Illocutionary and perlocutionary acts) and semiotics combine to shape meaning negotiation. Thus, Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory and social semiotic theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) were adopted to analyse five speeches delivered during the 2015 and 2019 presidential campaigns. The findings showed that different pragmatic acts, such as warning, accusing, challenging and condemning acts, which coincide with contextual features of reference (REF), metaphor (MPH), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and voice (VCE), characterized the speeches.

Similarly, a social semiotic study of the billboards and campaign posters of Akinwunmi Ambode and Jimi Agbaje produced for the 2015 governorship election in Lagos state were analysed by Nwabueze (2021). The goal of the study was to determine how communication tactics affect election outcomes in the country. The study focused on the Lagos state gubernatorial election, paying particular attention to how semiotic tools from the visual campaign materials were used and how they affected the result of the election. Data were purposively gathered from the billboards and posters produced for Akinwunmi Ambode of the APC and Jimi Agbaje of the PDP. Through the application of social semiotics, specifically focusing on kinesis (gestures, facial expressions, posture, among others), proxemics, and clothing materials, the study revealed that Ambode presented as more sociable, seemingly striving to win over the electorate, while Jimi Agbaje was represented as more relaxed due to his confidence in the electorate's support. The study concluded that the semiotic choices in the campaign materials played a crucial role in shaping public perception, ultimately influencing voters' decisions and contributing to the highly competitive nature of the election.

Oremeyi and Onyemechi (2022), is a semiotic analysis of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu's attire for the presidential campaign during the 2023 presidential elections. The authors argued that the symbols and signs seen on a dress are representations of reality

which need to be examined and comprehended as means of expressing the image of the social and cultural reality of the wearer. Thus, the study looked at how Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu communicated non-verbally through the different outfits, and other communicative variables related to his style. The social semiotic theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), served as the theoretical foundation for the qualitative interpretation and analysis of the study's data. The data consisted of four images of Tinubu wearing different dress codes. The results revealed that clothing is a form of semiotic symbol since it conveys the wearer's ideology, personality, and the circumstances around their attire.

According to the findings, Tinubu's wardrobe reflected certain facets of his character, social standing, and class. In addition, a social semiotic analysis of Nigerian presidential campaign posters was conducted by Adeagbo (2020). The study examined the discursive image, ideological resources and interpersonal function performed through the use of campaign posters circulated in Nigeria's democratic environment. Aspects of Kress and Leeuween's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1987) were used for the research. A set of twelve (12) Nigerian presidential campaign posters were purposively chosen based on their extensive use of many media to convey politically sensitive messages. The posters' visual language included the use of semiotic tools, including framing, information value, scale and strong focus and salience, to create compositional, interactive and representational meanings. The posters were characterized by two political ideological constructs: continuity ideology and identity ideology. The study showed that the visual and verbal modes in the campaign posters not only complemented one another but also enhanced and supported the meaning of the verbal mode. Furthermore, the study highlighted that political campaign posters serve as vital visual communication tools for candidates to appeal for votes.

All these studies show that robot analysis of multimodal resources require a holistic investigation of the verbal and non-linguistic elements that encode text producers' intention. This study shares similar interest particularly with Nwabueze's (2021) which focussed on the social semiotic analysis of campaign discourse produced for gubernatorial candidates in Nigeria. However, while Nwabueze analysed the multimodality of the campaign adverts circulated in Nigeria's southwestern region during the 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns, this study analysed the campaign posters produced for gubernatorial candidates of three major political parties in Nigeria during the 2023 general election campaigns in order to examine contextual influence on the shaping of visual and verbal modes of campaign discourse deployed by politicians to persuade the electorate to vote for them.

Research Methodology

The study which is qualitative in nature employed a critical approach to social semiotic analysis of campaign posters produced for gubernatorial election campaigns in 2023. The area of study were Enugu, Kano, Lagos and River States, focusing on semiotic elements in the selected campaign posters of governorship candidates of the APC, LP and PDP. More than one hundred campaign posters were downloaded from the internet through Google search (including www.lookaside.fbsbx.com and pbs.twimg.com). Purposive sampling method was used to select twenty-four (24) political campaign posters of governorship candidates of the APC, LP and PDP in Enugu, Kano, Lagos and River States for this study.

The selected posters were those used from September 2022 to March 2023. This period covers the beginning of the campaigns for general election campaigns to 24 hours before the gubernatorial elections. The purposive sampling technique adopted for data selection helped to limit data to posters that demonstrated ideological undertones on campaign messages produced for

gubernatorial candidates in Nigeria. In addition, the campaign posters were selected from four states/zones: Enugu/ South-East, Kano/North-West, Lagos/South-West, and Rivers/South-South to investigate contextual influence on the structuring of campaign messages in Nigeria.

The data were analysed drawing insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to social semiotic analysis of verbal and visual modes of campaign posters deployed to persuade voters during the 2023 gubernatorial election campaigns. In addition, the socio-political context of each of the states from which the campaign posters were drawn were examined, with particular attention given to its influence on the shaping of the campaign discourse. Using the social semiotic framework, political campaign posters were analysed as visual texts that encode ideologies, power relations and identity cues through their design choices.

The analysis involved the investigation of the linguistic and non-linguistic resources deployed to present candidates positively and in some cases their opponents negatively. The ideological underpinnings of the posters were also interpreted against the contexts of their production. For ease of analysis, the data were itemised as Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3 and so on.

Findings and Discussions

The study revealed Nigerian campaign poster producers' deployment of semiotic resources for political communication and shaping of candidates' identities for persuasive purposes. In the analysis below, samples of campaign posters which were strategically produced to appeal to the electorate are analysed to demonstrate influences of context on political discourse in Nigeria's democratic environment.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 1 and Figure 2 are campaign posters produced for Babajide Sanwo-Olu, the APC gubernatorial candidate for Lagos State who was also the incumbent governor during the campaigns. In Figure 1, visual, textual, and linguistic elements were strategically combined to project ideologies of cultural identity, continuity, and trustworthiness. Interdiscursively, the slogan "One Good Term Deserves Another," is a deliberate use of "term" instead of "turn" to reinforce Sanwo-Olu's past achievements as justification for his re-election. The APC colours, logo, and symbols reaffirms his party membership and thus create an inclusive relationship between him and other party loyalists. His attire, glasses, facial expression, crossed hands, and direct gaze collectively portray him as an amiable, confident technocrat committed to professionalism and ready to connect with voters. The deliberate inclusion of Yoruba text, "Igbega Ipinle Eko, Ajumose Gbogbo Wa Ni," fosters shared values and ethnic solidarity with Yoruba-speaking voters, subtly contrasting him with his main opponent, Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour whose candidacy was criticized during the campaigns on the basis of his mixed Yoruba-Igbo heritage. The use of Yoruba therefore serves as an inclusive yet politically strategic tool, reinforcing APC's ethnic-based hegemonic positioning in Lagos politics.

The producer adopts an incumbent discourse in Figure 2 to leverage the candidate's access to resources and power in order to project Sanwo-Olu as capable of delivering a promising future for Lagos State if re-elected. The slogan "A Greater Lagos Rising," positioned on the left of the poster serves as the "New," while Sanwo-Olu and his running mate, Hamzat placed on the right serve as the "Given," implying that these familiar leaders could achieve greater success if allowed to govern for the second time. The use of colour yellow conveys optimism for the state's progress, while their attire, hand gestures, and gazes depict them as amiable technocrats and professionals. The deliberate sizing and positioning of the two political actors foreground Sanwo-Olu's leadership and Hamzat's supportive role, symbolising unity of purpose. These visual and verbal strategies align with Cummings and Wise's (2005) and Oamen's (2015) view that incumbents benefit from resource access and status when projecting a positive self-image during campaigns.

Figure 3



Figure 4

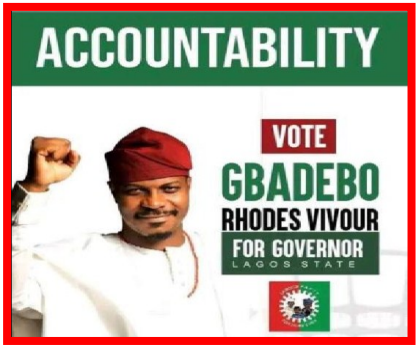


Figure 3 and Figure 4 are campaign posters produced for the Labour Party candidate, Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour. Rhodes-Vivour who is a of a mixed ethnic group attempted to challenge the dominance of identity politics in Lagos during the campaigns by exploiting the popularity of Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of LP in the 2023 elections. The imposing image of Obi behind him

strategically linked him to the Obedient Movement, a youth-driven support base for Obi, thus leveraging Obi's popularity to boost his own electoral appeal. In Figure 3, the slogan "The Lagos face of obedient," positioned on the left as "New," pairs with the imperative "Vote Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour" on the right as "Given," visually introducing him to the electorate. His Yoruba attire projects cultural pride and affiliation with Lagos heritage, countering APC supporters' criticisms of his mixed ethnic background which was their basis for delegitimizing his candidacy during the campaigns. His clenched fists symbolise defiance against APC's hegemonic control. Rhodes-Vivour's challenge of APC dominance in Lagos state is sustained in Figure 4 where the noun "accountability" is foregrounded through size and placement at the top of the poster, functioning as both a critique of the incumbent APC administration and a self-commitment by Rhodes-Vivour to judiciously manage the state's resources if elected. This emphasis positions him as a reform-oriented candidate promising change. His raised fist symbolises empowerment, solidarity, resistance, and activism, framing him as a revolutionary leader intent on liberating Lagos residents. His smile and direct gaze project him as an approachable leader while also reinforcing his image of a determined and principled contender.

Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 5 and Figure 6 are posters that were produced to seek voters' support for the PDP gubernatorial candidate, Dr. Abdul-Azeez Olajide Odediran by projecting him as a leader who would not be influenced by powerful politicians in Lagos. The clause in Figure 5: "Lagos needs an independent Governor, one that is not tied to apron strings of an individual" was an indirect attack on the problem of 'godfatherism' in Nigerian politics generally and Lagos State in particular. In addition, it was an attack on Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate who has been criticized for dominating the state in relation to leadership selection and resource control (Majeed, 2022 and Ajeluorou, 2019). Also, the visual resource of traditional Yoruba attire was used to connect the candidate to the Lagos state voters by portraying his shared ethnic heritage and culture with the electorate. Similarly, the phrase in Figure 6: 'Lagos 4 Lagos' was an indirect attack on Tinubu's political influence in Lagos as his ancestry had been traced to Osun state. In this way, ethnic discourse was deployed to delegitimize Tinubu's influence in the state since he was not indigenous to Lagos (Adebanwi, 2011).

Figure 7



Figure 8



In Figure 7 and Figure 8, the text producer used visual and verbal resources to reinforce the political identity of Uche Nnaji, the APC gubernatorial candidate for Enugu state. The phrase "Enugu Shall Rise Again" placed at the top of Figure 7 suggests a promise of

transformation, implying that Enugu state has stagnated under the incumbent who was a PDP governor. This reflects opposition candidates' strategy of positioning self as a reformer who will restore the lost glory of a state or country due to the inefficiency of the incumbent party/candidate (McAllister, 2007). The use of the Igbo phrase: "Uche Ndi Enugu" (meaning: *Uche of the people of Enugu*) was therefore meant to establish shared identify with the masses and present the APC candidate as a politician who was contesting in the interest of the people/electorate. His attire, a white Kaftan and red cap, is of cultural significance, symbolizing leadership and authority in southeastern Nigeria. The assertive phrase in Figure 8 "the man for the job" is typed in capital letters for emphasis. Additionally, the APC party logo at the top left corner serves as the new information, connecting the candidate to the ruling party, and thereby suggesting his political influence based on his link to the party in power. Visually, Uche Nnaji's attire, a red shirt with rolled-up sleeves and wristwatch has symbolic implication. Red is culturally significant in Igbo tradition, often associated with leadership, strength, and passion (Eze, 2001).

Figure 9

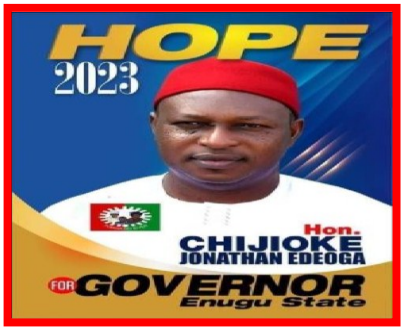


Figure 10



Figures 9 and 10 are campaign posters produced for Hon. Chijioke Jonathan Edeoga, the LP gubernatorial candidate for Enugu State. The bold, golden-yellow phrase "Hope 2023" at the top of Figure 9 conveys themes of hope, change, and leadership and represents the

candidate as a transformer. In the two posters, he is dressed in a white traditional Igbo outfit and a culturally significant red cap which are symbols of leadership, wisdom, and integrity, visually reinforcing his cultural and political identity. The slogan "People's Choice 2023" prominently displayed at the top of Figure 10 presupposes that Enugu State electorate had chosen him as the preferred candidate. The candidate's character traits are listed in form of nouns: 'character', 'competence' 'accountability' to verbally represent him as a credible leader.

Figure 11



Figure 12



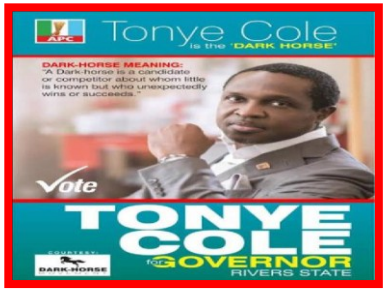
Conversely, Figures 11 and 12 which are campaign posters produced for Peter Mbah, the PDP gubernatorial candidate for Enugu State deliberately projected him as an innovative, accessible and professional technocrat. The bold declarative in Figure 11, "Peter is the Answer", positions him as the solution to the challenges that were facing Enugu State. The text producer may have also used the word "Peter" intertextually to mentally connect the viewer with Peter Obi, the LP presidential candidate who was popular at the grassroots during the 2023 general elections campaigns. Thus, the use of the name Peter was deployed to tacitly project a positive image for Mbah. In both posters, the formal navy-blue suit, white shirt, and red tie also project Mbah as a professional who possesses executive competence, and modern approach to governance. This move is best appreciated against the background that his academic/professional pedigree is marked by a blend of legal expertise, practice in Oil and Gas and public service

as Chief of Staff and Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development in Enugu State. The text producer therefore exploited these achievements to project him as a candidate who could elevate the situation of the people of Enugu state. In Figure 12, the spatial metaphor: "Tomorrow is Here" also reinforces the idea that Mbah is an embodiment of the ideal future that Enugu state indigenes hope for. The statement "And with Peter Mbah, Our Tomorrow is Assured" further reinforces the message of the candidate's reliability. The use of the family discourse "our" is significant as it responsibilises Mbah as the selfless agent of the desired change.

Figure 13



Figure 14



Figures 13 and 14 are campaign posters produced to seek support for Tonye Cole, the APC gubernatorial candidate for Rivers State in the 2023 general elections. In Figure 13, the Nigerian Pidgin English "Our Time Don Come" (meaning: This is our time) is deployed to connect Cole who is elitist to the electorate of a state where Pidgin English is the lingua franca (Okoro, 2019). The slang "No more Jonzing" (meaning: no wasting of time) which is popular among Nigerian youth also serves as a linguistic means of connecting the candidate to the younger generation of voters. The use of the title 'Pastor' is also strategic as it is used to appeal to the religious sentiments of voters in a state with high Christian population. The use of pidgin and religious title demonstrate how Nigerian politicians exploit language and religious sentiments to frame political candidates positively/negatively during campaigns.

Consequently, this discursive combination presents him as both morally upright and accessible. Meanwhile, the visual resources of body posture, the thumps-up, attire and direct gaze represent the candidate as confident, accessible and optimistic about the future. In addition, the metaphoric use of "dark horse" in Figure 14 was employed as a face-saving strategy to counter his opponents' representation of him as a candidate who was imposed on the party by the former Governor, Rotimi Amaechi. The verbal text and the picture of a horse therefore metaphorised him as a viable candidate and leader.

Figure 15



Figure 16



Figures 15 and 16 are campaign posters produced for Comrade Beatrice Itubo, the only female governorship candidate in the Rivers state gubernatorial election. The use of the title 'Comrade' in the two posters ideologically positions the LP candidate as an activist, and thus implies that she is contesting solely for the purpose of liberating the electorate rather than self-interest. The verbal text in Figure 15, "The Voice for Better Tomorrow" metaphorically positions her as a relatable and visionary leader as well as a unifier. The noun "voice" projects the candidate as a welfarist. The use of the word 'voice' therefore aligns with her title 'comrade' which projects Itubo as a freedom fighter or liberator of the people of Rivers state. In Figure 15, the slogan "Greater and Better Rivers State is Possible", is interdiscursively deployed as an

extension of Peter Obi's campaign slogan of "a New Nigeria is Possible". Similar to Rhodes-Vivour's posters, Figure 15 also exploits the popularity of Peter Obi, the LP presidential candidate to project Itubo as politically significant.

Figure 17



Figure 18



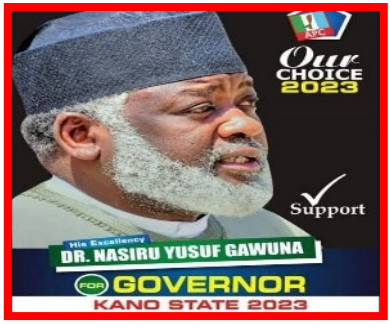
Figures 17 and 18 are the campaign posters produced to market Siminayi Fubara, the PDP gubernatorial candidate. In Figure 17, the short form (SIM) of Fubara's first name is used to personalize the message and make it more memorable. His posture of looking at his watch, suggests his readiness to act while his outfit (cap and shirt) which is typically the south-south men's style of dressing, projects his cultural pride and deep-rootedness in tradition. The interdiscursive use of the text "it's Sim O'clock, right time, right choice!" presents the candidate as the ideal candidate for the state. It also suggests urgency and the need for decisiveness on the part of the voters. The assertion in Figure 18 "Divine Mandate 2023" demonstrates the typical Nigerian politicians' use of religious sentiments to frame a candidate favourably during campaigns. The phrase presupposes that the candidacy of Siminayi Fubara is divinely orchestrated. The ideology of divine selection is common in Nigeria's political space, and politicians exploit this to canvas for votes (Ukah, 2014). The repeated use of the verb "win" in Figure 18 also reinforces the idea of collective victory for the

candidate and the electorate, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual benefit.

Figure 19



Figure 20



In Figure 19 and 20, Dr. Nasir Yusuf, the APC candidate is presented as the heir to the incumbent governor, Abdullahi Ganduje. For instance, the caption "The Successor 2023" presupposes that Yusuf who served as Ganduje's Deputy between 2019 and 2023 had already been elected as governor. The phrase also suggests an authoritarian style of change of leadership and implicates the complexity of Nigerian democracy where the ideology of godfatherism sometimes backgrounds the electorate's power to choose their leaders through proper voting process. The use of the title "Dr." and the honorific 'his excellency' positions him as a well-educated and high-ranking politician in Kano politics. The referents of the pronoun "our" in Figure 20 could infer that the party members are the sole determinants of the outcome of the election because in Nigerian politics, the interest of a few party stalwarts could override that of the electorate (Babalola, 2024).

Figure 21



Figure 22

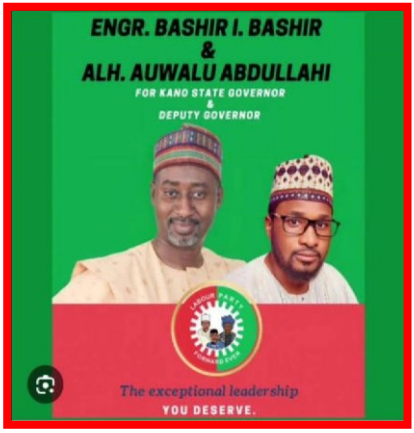


Figures 21 and 22 are the posters produced for the PDP candidate, Muhammad Sadiq Aminu Wali. They were framed to project him as a welfarist and religious politician. The greeting in Figure 21: "Barka Da Sallah" used during the Eid Kabir (Festival of Sacrifice), the visual element, a ram. The clause in Figure 22 "Allah Ya Amsa Addu'a" (translated as "May Allah accept our prayers") all reinforce his image as a caring devout Muslim. His sitting posture and open palms (Figure 22) are religious and cultural signs that are intended to frame him positively as God-fearing. Similar to Rhodes-Vivour's posters (Figures 3 and 4), which were designed to challenge political dominance perpetrated mainly through ethnic sentiment, Figures 21 and 22 leverages religious and cultural appeal to resonate with Kano's electorate. However, while Vivour's campaign emphasized ethnic liberation, the PDP posters exploited faith-based sentiments to legitimize and position Wali as a divinely supported leader.

Figure 23



Figure 24



Similar to Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour's (Figure 3), Figures 23 and 24 which are campaign posters designed for Engineer Bashir Ishaq Bashir, the LP gubernatorial for Kano state, demonstrate how LP gubernatorial candidates drew on Peter Obi's popularity to assert political relevance during the campaigns. The image of Peter Obi

and Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, placed side by side in Figure 23, projects the national LP movement, emphasizing the unity between the presidential and gubernatorial candidates. The northern-style attire of the politicians who are of the Igbo and northern ethnic extracts signals a nationalist message that bridges regional and ethnic divides, a key strategy in a multi-ethnic democracy like Nigeria. Similar to the campaign poster of Sanwo-Olu and his running mate (Figure 2), the duo's positioning side by side in Figure 42 signifies partnership, unity, and shared responsibility, which are crucial for successful democratic leadership.

Conclusion

In this study, we examined the semiotic and discursive strategies employed in the posters produced for selected gubernatorial candidates in 2023. The study argued that context influences the verbal and visual composition of campaign posters produced for political candidates in Nigeria's general elections. It was observed that the posters served not only as campaign tools but also as semiotic tools that framed candidates in ways that aligned with the socio-political realities of each state. The use of multimodal resources such as traditional attire, gaze, posture, slogans, and symbolic colors were employed to evoke identity, emotional appeal, and ideological resonance. The strategic use of indigenous languages and religious discourse also helped to create ethnic and religious affinity with the electorate. The study concludes that political campaign posters are important semiotic texts that reflect broader ideological struggles and socio-cultural negotiations in Nigeria's democratic environment.

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