

**PROTEST SONGS, LANGUAGE, AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN NIGERIA'S PRE AND POST
2023 ELECTION LANDSCAPE**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of songs and language as mediums of protest, social commentary, and political mobilisation in Nigeria's pre- and post-2023 general election landscape. The purpose is to investigate how music reflects and shape public opinion on governance, corruption, electoral integrity, and socioeconomic challenges, while functioning as a tool for both grassroots activism and elite political messaging. The study employs qualitative content analysis of seven purposively selected songs released or recirculated between 2019 and 2025 that achieved significant traction during this period. Data sources include lyrical texts, music videos, social media circulation patterns (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook), news reports, archived discourse, and existing scholarly literature on music, language, and politics in Nigeria. Key findings reveal that pre-election songs amplified youth disillusionment and calls for change through multilingual strategies (Pidgin English, English, Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa) and satirical counter-narratives, such as the *Obidient* Movement's track mocking Bola Tinubu's *Emilokan* declaration. Post-election tracks shifted to expressions of grief, anger, and demands for accountability, exemplified by Eedris Abdulkareem's *Tell Your Papa*. Protest songs sustained critique of governance failures, shaped public discourse, mobilised sentiment, influenced voter engagement particularly among youth and impact systemic political transformation. The article concludes that protest songs, linguistic creativity, and social commentary remain vital to Nigeria's democratic process, providing a resilient platform for marginalised voices and underscoring music's enduring capacity to challenge power in a multi-ethnic society.

Keywords: Protest songs, Language, political mobilisation, social commentary, Election.

INTRODUCTION

Music has long served as a vital medium for expression, social commentary, and political mobilization in Nigerian culture. From Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's Afrobeat critiques of corruption and authoritarianism in the 1970s and 1980s to the anthems of the 2020 #EndSARS protests, as well as the Revolution movement led by Omoyele Sowore and political compositions like Senator Dino Melaye's songs, Nigerian music has consistently reflected and shaped the nation's socio-political landscape.

The 2023 general elections represented a particularly intense period, characterized by widespread youth mobilization (e.g., the "Obidient" movement supporting Labour Party candidate Peter Obi), allegations of electoral irregularities, economic hardships from currency redesign and subsidy removal, and a surge in both grassroots protest music and elite-commissioned campaign songs. This era produced an unprecedented soundscape of hope, frustration, and disillusionment, amplified across social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.

Protest music functions as a conduit for dissent, distilling complex grievances into emotionally resonant, accessible forms that interrogate power, advocate change, and foster collective identity. Its historical efficacy is evident in global examples like "We Shall Overcome" during the U.S. civil rights movement, which unified activists and amplified sympathy (Woo, 2024). In Nigeria, such music has granted marginalized voices especially the youth a platform amid distrust in traditional media and perceived state capture of institutions.

Despite extensive scholarship on music in earlier Nigerian elections, relatively few studies have systematically examined the interplay of protest songs, multilingual language strategies (Pidgin, English, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa), and social commentary across the full pre-, during-, and post-2023 election phases. Existing research often focuses on campaign co-optation or identity salience in candidate songs, with limited attention to the continuity

from #EndSARS-era protest anthems to post-election critique, or the dual role of music as both authentic resistance and instrumentalized propaganda.

This paper addresses this gap by analyzing selected songs that gained traction in this period, arguing that in an era of eroded trust in mainstream channels, music has emerged as one of the last independent public spheres for citizens to speak truth to power. Through content analysis of lyrics, dissemination contexts, and public reception, the study contributes a deeper understanding of how protest songs and linguistic creativity reflect and shape Nigeria's democratic landscape, impacting discourse, engagement, and political narratives in a diverse society

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in political ethnomusicology and critical discourse analysis (CDA), supplemented by a review of secondary literature on music, language, and politics in Nigeria. The primary data consist of seven purposively selected protest and politically charged songs released or recirculated between 2019 and 2025 that gained significant traction in relation to Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Songs were purposively selected based on the following explicit criteria to ensure relevance, representativeness, and analytical depth: relevance to the 2023 election landscape; social media and public impact; linguistic and thematic diversity; balance across types; and accessibility and verifiability.

Analysis followed a multi-step CDA process adapted from Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model: textual analysis of lyrics for themes, metaphors, code-switching, and rhetorical devices alongside critical listening of musical elements; discursive examination of production, distribution, and consumption contexts (including social media virality); and social interpretation of how the songs reproduce or challenge power structures and reflect democratic tensions. Social media circulation patterns were validated through cross-referencing metrics from official artist channels, triangulation with news reports, academic articles, and archived discourse, and consultation of secondary sources to confirm public reception and impact, ensuring the analysis is systematic and replicable, and firmly situated in the socio-political context of Nigeria's pre and 2023 electoral period.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are organised into three central themes, each with its own subheading. Empirical findings from the song analyses are presented first under each theme, followed by interpretive discussion that prioritises critical insight over extended description.

1. Language, Music and Politics:

Findings

The analysed songs demonstrate extensive use of multilingual strategies. Pidgin English dominates for accessibility and cross-ethnic appeal, Yorùbá terms (e.g., *Emilokan*) provide cultural specificity and irony, and code-switching between Pidgin, English, and Yorùbá creates layered, satirical meanings. In the counter-*Emilokan* track, Pidgin conveys everyday frustration while Yorùbá repetition mocks the original slogan.

Discussion

Music and linguistics intersect as a powerful communicative medium. The 2023 campaign songs and post-election protest songs in Nigeria are presented in a variety of languages, including English, Pidgin English, Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa, and several other minority languages.

Nigeria's multilingual landscape enables artists, politicians, and citizens to deploy English, Pidgin English, Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa, and code-switching as deliberate communicative strategies (Osisanwo, 2020; Opeibi, 2007). Pidgin English dominates many protest and counter-campaign songs because of its accessibility, informality, and ability to reach urban youth and cross-ethnic audiences (Ikpe, 2023; Omoniyi, 2014). Yorùbá phrases, such as *Emilokan*, carry cultural weight and regional resonance, while their satirical repurposing in Pidgin mocks elite entitlement and signals resistance to perceived Yorùbá political hegemony (Osisanwo, 2020). Code-switching between English, Pidgin, and indigenous languages creates layered meanings: formal English lends legitimacy to critique, Pidgin fosters solidarity, and indigenous terms evoke cultural authenticity or irony (Liadi, 2012; Opeibi, 2007).

Through the songs analysed in this research, Pidgin English, Yorùbá, and code-switching were prominently involved in the song texts. For instance, the counter-campaign song challenging the *Emilokan* mantra combines Pidgin English (Baba wey no well, e dey shout *Emilokan*; Hand dey shake, Leg dey shake) with the strategically repeated Yorùbá term *Emilokan*, producing a hybrid linguistic texture that mocks the original declaration while making the critique instantly relatable to a broad, multi-ethnic Nigerian audience. This deliberate mixing of Pidgin's everyday conversational style with Yorùbá's cultural specificity exemplifies how code-switching and multilingual layering amplify satirical effect, enhance emotional resonance, and expand the song's mobilising potential beyond regional boundaries (Sylvanus & Ezeugwu, 2024; Ikpe, 2023). This strategic multilingualism not only amplifies reach but also shapes collective identity and allows messages to resonate locally while circulating globally via social media.

2. Protest and Mobilization Songs:

Findings

Songs function as a form of campaign and mobilisation by political parties and also function as counter-campaign by opposition groups. Elite campaigns commissioned or promoted praise and endorsement songs to project legitimacy and regional loyalty, while opposition and youth-led songs repurposed or created new tracks for dissent and mobilisation. The counter-*Emilokan* track exemplifies pre-election resistance, reframing Tinubu's succession claim as unfitness through satire.

Discussion

Music served both as an instrument of elite campaign propaganda and as a vehicle for grassroots counter-narratives before and after the 2023 elections. Campaign-co-opted Afrobeats tracks projected aspirational or unifying messages for candidates, while opposition and youth-led songs repurposed popular tunes to challenge dominant narratives and mobilise dissent. The most prominent example is the counter-campaign song that directly targeted Bola Ahmed Tinubu's *Emilokan* declaration.

a. Counter-Campaign Song challenging the '*Emilokan*' Mantra" Before the 2023 Election

As recorded by The Guardian Nigeria News (2023), on June 3, 2022, then presidential aspirant, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, set the social media on fire with a prophetic declaration of "*Emilokan*" (It's my turn). He did that in Abeokuta, Ogun State. *Emilokan* was said during his campaign speech. The statement was widely interpreted as a response to reported internal resistance and political obstacles he faced in his bid to succeed former President Muhammadu Buhari. Various media accounts and political commentary at the time suggested the presence of powerful interests within the presidency often referred to as an "Aso Rock cabal" who were allegedly opposed to his candidacy and sought to block his path through significant challenges.

The declaration of '*Emilokan*' (Yoruba for 'It is my turn') by Bola Ahmed Tinubu on June 3, 2022, elicited a significant reaction across the country, particularly among opposition parties. The '*Obidient* Movement', a formidable third force in the presidential race led by Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate, responded vehemently to Tinubu's assertion. Through various media platforms, the movement strategically released a counter-campaign song that directly challenged the '*Emilokan*' mantra. This song gained immense traction and became a powerful tool for mobilization, galvanizing support for Peter Obi while critiquing Tinubu's declaration. As Abiodun (2003) highlighted, every political party in Nigeria fields a collection of songs, and these tracks are packed with persuasive language designed to rally admirers and win their support. Likewise, Bebey (1973) stressed that no electoral campaign is complete without music, noting that during the 1960 elections in western Nigeria as many as 22 (78-rpm) records were pressed in a brief span. The *Emilokan* song's popularity underscored the deep-seated political divisions and the quest for alternative leadership, highlighting the *Obidient* Movement's efforts to capitalize on perceived weaknesses in Tinubu's camp and sway undecided voters.

Song Text:

Song 1: Baba wey no well, e dey shout *Emilokan*

Emilokan, Emilokan

Baba wey no well, He dey shout *Emilokan*

Hand dey shake, Leg dey Shake

Baba wey no well, he dey shout *Emilokan*

Textual Analysis of the song

The lyrics can be interpreted as a mockery of the "*Emilokan*" declaration, portraying the person (Baba wey no well) making the declaration as unstable, unhealthy and lacking credibility. The use of Pidgin English adds a layer of informality and conversational tone, making the song more relatable and accessible to a wider audience. The song aims to undermine the confidence and authority behind the "*Emilokan*" declaration, using satire and ridicule to convey its message. This satirical inversion aligns with long-standing Nigerian traditions of using music to delegitimise power, transforming a regional-ethnic assertion of entitlement into a national symbol of gerontocratic excess and unearned privilege (Alabi, 2023). The track thus functioned as both mobilisation tool, galvanizing *Obidient* supporters and discursive counterweight, exposing fractures in Tinubu's campaign narrative and contributing to the perception of a viable third-force alternative.

Figure 1.

Excerpt from Baba Wey No Well [by the obedient movement]

Transcribed by: Daniel Omaren

Baba Wey No Well Dey Shout Emilokan

E-mi-lo - kan, E-mi-lo - kan, Ba-ba wey no well he dey shout E-mi-lo - kan,

Hand dey shake, Leg dey shake, Ba-ba wey no well, he dey shout E-mi-lo - kan.

b. Revolution Movement Led by Omoyele Sowore

Omoyele Sowore is a Nigerian human rights activist, politician, and founder of Sahara Reporters, an online news agency. Born on February 16, 1971, Sowore studied Geography and Planning at the University of Lagos, where he became involved in student activism. He gained prominence for his activism and his 2019 presidential bid under the African Action Congress (AAC) platform. Sowore announced the “Revolution Now” movement, calling for nationwide protests starting August 5, 2019, to demand good governance and an end to insecurity in Nigeria. Sowore’s call for revolution was met with mixed reactions, with some Nigerians supporting his demands for better governance and others criticizing the timing and approach. Sowore was arrested by the Department of State Services (DSS) on August 3, 2019, ahead of the planned protests and was later charged with treasonable felony and insulting the President.

Figure 2.

Portrait of Omoyele Sowore, The Revolution Leader.

Source: Arise News Television?

The “RevolutionNow” movement aimed to address Nigeria’s myriad problems, such as insecurity, corruption, and poor governance, with notable songs serving as anthems that unified and energized the protests.

Lyrics of Selected Songs from Omoyele Sowore “RevolutionNow” Movement

Song 2: Freedom Cometh by Struggle

Freedom Cometh by Struggle
 Freedom comes by struggle, by struggle
 Freedom comes.

Source:(<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/17ezvYqymW/>)

Figure 3

*Excerpt from protest songs by the Revolution movement
Transcribed by: Daniel Omaren*

Freedom Cometh By Struggle

Free - dom Co - meth by stru - ggle, free - dom comes by
 3 stru - ggle, by stru - ggle free - dom comes

Song 3: Social Revolution. (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/17ezvYqymW/>)

Social Revolution
 Social Revolution
 The Only way to save Nigeria
 Social Revolution.

Figure 4

*Excerpt from protest songs by the Revolution movement
Transcribed by: Daniel Omaren*

Social Revolution

So - cial re - vo - lu - tion, So - cial re - vo - lu - tion, The on - ly
 10 way to save Ni - ge - ria, So - cial re - vo - lu - tion.

Song 4: Revolution

Revolution
 Aluta Continua
 Victoria Ascerta

Figure 5

*Excerpt from protest songs by the Revolution movement
Transcribed by: Daniel Omaren*

Aluta Continua

Re - vo - lu - tion, A - lu - ta Con - ti - nua, Vic - to - ri - a As - cer - ta.

Textual Analysis of the song:

The song's lyrics "Revolution Aluta Continua Victoria Ascerta" convey a powerful message of resistance, resilience, and determination, calling for collective action towards transformative change with an unwavering confidence in ultimate victory.

Revolution: This sets the tone for a call to action, emphasizing the need for radical change and transformation, setting the tone for a movement or uprising.

Aluta Continua (Latin-inspired phrase for Portuguese for "The Struggle Continues"): Acknowledges the ongoing nature of the fight, suggesting that the journey towards change is challenging and requires persistence and resilience.

Victoria Ascerta ("Victory is Certain"): Expresses unwavering confidence and determination in achieving the desired outcome, serving as a motivational force for those involved in the struggle.

Together, these themes of resistance and activism, determination and resilience, collective action for change in the Song of the Revolution Movement led by the political activist Omoyele Sowore inspires and mobilizes people towards collective action and resistance.

c. Satirical Songs of Protest by Senator Dino Melaye:

Senator Dino Melaye, the flamboyant former Nigerian lawmaker from Kogi West (2015–2019), has carved a unique niche as a "singing senator" through his viral, self-produced songs that blend humor, defiance, and sharp political satire. Known for his dramatic persona and social media savvy, Melaye's musical output often serves as protest anthems or self-parodies, targeting rivals, corruption, and power dynamics with exaggerated lyrics and choreography. These songs, typically short, meme-like videos shared on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, have earned him more prominence in the political scene of the country. While not formally released as albums, they function as populist satire, echoing traditions like FelaKuti's Afrobeat critiques but in a comedic format.

Figure 6.

Portrait of Senator Dino Melaye

Source: Facebook



Based on cultural and media analysis, Melaye's songs can be categorized as follows (with examples from his discography):

Political Satire Songs (or Satirical Protest Songs):

These songs use irony and mockery to lampoon opponents, often exaggerating flaws for comedic effect while highlighting systemic issues. This aligns with satirical traditions in Nigerian music, where humor disarms power (Olaniyan, 2004).

Song 5: O tiyaragbagbe (Yoruba for: You have quickly forgotten) by: Dino Melaye

| Yoruba | English |
|----------------------------------|---|
| O tiyaragbagbe, Ileri re igbakan | You've forgotten your promises in a hurry |
| O tiyaragbagbe, Ileri re igbakan | You've forgotten your promises in a hurry |
| Asebintinl'ogbonori e | Your wisdom is so limited, |
| Iwo ti a rop'ogbon, Yahya Bello | You, whom we assumed were wise, Yahya Bello |
| Asebintinl'ogbonori e | Your wisdom is so limited, |
| Iwo ti a rop'ogbon. | You, whom we assumed were wise |

Source: Youtube (https://youtube.com/shorts/5cPxJ8qcofs?si=RtM_UbrVBRQz4Km)

Textual Analysis of song lyrics

Yahaya Bello is a Nigerian politician who served as the Governor of Kogi State from January 27, 2016, to January 27, 2024. Born on June 18, 1975, in Okene, Kogi State, Bello is a member of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) party. He's known for being the youngest governor in Nigeria during his term and has been involved in various controversies, including allegations of electoral fraud, incitement to violence, and corruption.

The song was posted on social media by Senator Dino Melaye and quickly became a pointed critique of Yahaya Bello following their political split. Cast as a satirical protest, the track accuses Bello of forgetting his

pledges and appearing deficient in wisdom, conveying a tone of disappointment and rebuke that suggests he has fallen short of campaign promises and exercised poor judgment.

This stance aligns with Burton and Chacksfield (1979), who note that poets and singers everywhere are idealists; their idealism renders them acutely aware of national shortcomings and quick to condemn them, especially when leaders fail to meet the high standards they cherish. Similarly, Waterman (1998) observes that Fela Anikulapo Kuti's music functioned as a socio-political weapon, using strident lyrics to attack the excesses of foreign capitalism and Nigerian elites. Dino Melaye's satirical protest should therefore be viewed not as a personal insult but as a corrective medium aimed at calling out political transgressions.

The distinction also echoes Merriam (1964), who differentiates between the use and function of music: "use" denotes the concrete contexts in which music is employed, while "function" refers to the broader purpose it serves (Merriam, 1964, p. 34). In this case, the song's use is its public dissemination on social media, whereas its function is to critique and potentially reform the political conduct of figures like Yahya Bello.

Song 6: Gentle Man No dey o (By: Dino Melaye)

Source: Youtube (<https://youtube.com/shorts/3GFYbQPFRLg?si=h0ZBAfqvySqyfYky>)

Twenty Twenty-Three, Gentle Man No dey o

Gentle Man No dey o

Twenty Twenty-Three, Gentle Man No dey o

Gentle Man No dey o

Buhari, if you want to kill us,

Kill us make we die

We shall never APC 2023

Nma ma ekele, Nma ma ekele.

Textual Analysis of song lyrics

The song's theme is unmistakably anti-APC and pro-opposition: it urges voters to reject the ruling party in the 2023 election and conveys a tone of resistance and defiance. The singer vents frustration and anger at the APC's governance, using the repeated line "Gentle Man No dey o" to suggest that the electorate will not be lenient with a process that could be manipulated by the incumbent party.

The line "Buhari, if you want to kill us, kill us, make we die" is a stark declaration of defiance, indicating a willingness to confront police and security forces that often act on the government's behalf during elections. The refrain "We shall never vote APC 2023" reinforces the outright opposition to the party.

The Igbo phrase "Nma ma ekele, Nma ma ekele," loosely translated as "thank you," is employed sarcastically to express gratitude to the APC and to demand that they step down. In short, the song functions as a political rallying cry, calling on listeners to reject the All-Progressives Congress in the 2023 general election.

3. Post-Election Lamentation and Accountability:

Findings

Post-election songs shifted from pre-election hope and mobilisation to expressions of grief, anger, and demands for accountability. Eedris Abdulkareem's *Tell Your Papa* (2025) stands out as a representative case, blending Pidgin, Yorùbá, and English to critique economic hardship, unfulfilled promises, and elite privilege while urging institutional reform.

Discussion

Following the 2023 elections that ushered in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration, several songs emerged as powerful expressions of disappointment, outrage and calls for reform. Focusing on Eedris Abdulkareem's release, the post-election landscape saw a stark shift from pre-election optimism to grief and anger. His song serves as a representative case, capturing widespread disillusionment with governance outcomes.

Eedris Abdulkareem's Lamentation, song protest and criticism of Tinubu's Government

Eedris Turayo Abdulkareem Ajenifuja (born 24 December 1974), popularly known as Eedris Abdulkareem, is a Nigerian singer and rapper. He was the lead rapper of the defunct Nigerian hip hop boy band The Remedies. He is one of the pioneers of Nigerian hip hop and he is regarded as one of the most influential Nigerian Rappers of all time. Eedris gained national attention in the late 1990s as the lead rapper of The Remedies, alongside Tony Tetuila and Eddy Montana. The group was instrumental in pioneering Nigerian hip-hop, blending local languages and themes with contemporary beats. They disbanded in 2002, leading each member to pursue solo careers. In 2002, Eedris launched his solo career with the album "P.A.S.S" (Pains And Stress = Success), followed by "Mr. Lecturer", which tackled the issue of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities. These works established him as a socially conscious artist unafraid to address pressing societal issues (Wikipedia).

Figure 7.
Portrait of EedrisAbdulkareem
Source: Facebook



Eedris Abdulkareem's latest track in 2025 titled "Tell your papa" is a musical protest that takes sharp aim at President Bola Tinubu's administration, highlighting the suffering of ordinary Nigerians and calling out perceived hypocrisy

Song 7: Tell your Papa by EedrisAbdulkareem

Source: YouTube (https://youtu.be/T3DF8zF_mWE?si=Qe38QaVsqRqRL2nz)

Chorus

Tell your Papa
Seyi, tell your papa country hard
Tell your Papa
Seyi, tell your papa people dey die
Tell your papa
Seyi, this one don pass jagajaga

Post-Chorus

Jaga jaga
Yama-yama
Wuru, Ojoro
Mago-mago
Where the mago-mago dance?
Where the wuru-wuru dance?
Where the mago-mago dance?

Refrain

Seyiebi pa mekunu
Tinubuebi pa mekunu
Seyiebi pa mekunu
Tinubuebi pa mekunu

Verse 1

Seyi, how far?
I swear your papa no try
Too much empty promises
Balabu, grammar
Bulabu, wahala
On behalf of Nigerians
Take our message to him
Kidnappers dey kill Nigerians
Seyi, try travel by road without your security
Make you feel the pains of fellow Nigerians

You dey fly private jet
Insecurity no be your problem
Nigerians weydey travel by road
Some of them dey face death sentence
Eni oriyo o di ile
Shagamu, Ore, Benin
Make you tell Mr President
Hunger dey, anger dey
You still want make them cooperate?
If people dey protest, use soldiers oppress them
Removal of subsidy
A bold step they call it
How much your papa don save?
Since him remove subsidy
Lagos-Calabar coastal road
Four point nine billion per kilometer
700 kilometers run into multiple trillions
When normal road inside town no get any attention
Even Dave Umahi don do worse mago-mago
Judiciary is comprised
State of emergency inside Rivers state
Gbajue nab am
Definition of this government
Akpabio, Natasha, I go soon shoot una movie
Wait for it, it's coming

Chorus

Tell your Papa
Seyi, tell your papa country hard
Tell your Papa
Seyi, tell your papa people dey die
Tell your papa
Seyi, this one don pass jagajaga

Post-Chorus

Jaga jaga
Yama-yama
Wuru, Ojoro
Mago-mago
Where the mago-mago dance?
Where the wuru-wuru dance?
Where the mago-mago dance?

Verse 2

Seyi, how far?
Omo Èmilókan
You say your papa na best president?
Okay, after two years
Tell me wetin your papa don do
Hunger wan kill us
To buy food na luxury
Kpomo, èjà, iresi, èwà, ishu, garri
Indomie, Spaghetti
People dey jump inside lagoon
Because of economic hardship
Very wicked policy
Anti-people's policy
Country hard, people dey die
Hunger dey, your papa no try
We are not against your father

If your papa do well, we go praise am
If e no do well, we go yarn am
To buy food na luxury
Electricity na luxury
Your papa don increase tariff
Even the light, we no see
To on AC, na luxury
Heat wan kill us for the country
To buy data na luxury
Three hours e don finish
Telecommunication companies connive with the government
Banking industry connive with the government
To frustrate Nigerians
This na total wickedness
Your Papa no be the best president
To buy clothe wear na luxury
One jeans 40k
Tshirt 25k
Hustle go, hustle come
Body no be firewood
Parents work every day
Them still no fit pay school fees
Inflation for the nation
Nigerians no fit function

Outro

Shoutout to VeryDark black man
Continue to do what you do
I hail you

Textual Analysis of the Song Lyrics

“Tell Your Papa” Is a potent protest track by Eedris Abdulkareem that tackles Nigeria’s economic and social crises under President Bola Tinubu’s administration, which began in 2023. Released in April 2024, the song takes the form of a message to “Seyi” (the president’s son) and serves as a hard-hitting critique of Tinubu’s government.

Core theme (Lamentation): Its central theme is lamentation as the song laments pervasive hardship, hunger, insecurity, inflation, and deteriorating infrastructure while accusing the regime of empty promises, nepotism, and oppressive policies, thereby turning a traditional praise song into a biting critique. The post-chorus repeats the playful yet sarcastic chant “*jaga-jaga, yama-yama, wuru-wuru,*” mimicking the chaotic state of corruption and mismanagement.

Specific grievances highlighted in the song include Economic distress from subsidy removal, soaring food and electricity costs, summed up in “hunger wan kill us.” Infrastructure decay; Insecurity and kidnappings; Political nepotism with references to “Papa” and “Seyi” which suggest a dynastic mindset and State-media collusion.

Tone & language use in the song: The lyrics blend pidgin, Yoruba, and English, using slang (“jaga-jaga,” “mago-mago”) to keep the tone raw and street-level, reinforcing the song’s authenticity as a voice of the disenfranchised.

In conclusion, Eedris Abdulkareem employs satire, repetition, and vivid local imagery to turn a protest song into a public criticism of Tinubu’s government, urging listeners to recognize the disconnect between the political elite and the suffering masses.

Musical Analysis of the protest songs

The unique formal elements of protest songs amplify their effectiveness as tools for social and political critique. At its core, protest music seeks to broadcast powerful statements about injustice and to rally listeners toward collective action through both lyrical content and musical structure. Such songs typically feature candid, emotionally resonant lyrics that confront pressing issues whether they be authoritarian repression, corruption, economic disparity, or ethnic discrimination and this raw honesty ensures that the message is not only understood but also felt deeply by the audience. Moreover, the potency of protest songs is heightened by its repetitive, easily-learned melodies. Simple, recurring tunes are simple for large groups to grasp, retain, and sing together, which magnifies the song’s reach and reinforces its impact. As Neuman (2020), quoted by Woo (2024), points out, these melodic characteristics guarantee that protest songs endure over time and spread swiftly within communities, transforming them into rallying anthems for mass resistance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the surge of protest songs before and after Nigeria's 2023 general election illustrates how music becomes a potent vehicle for language that both reflects and shapes public sentiment. By weaving vivid social commentary into catchy melodies, artists not only chronicled the anxieties and aspirations of voters but also forged a collective identity that transcended regional and ethnic lines. The strategic use of digital platforms amplified these messages, turning individual critiques into a nationwide chorus that challenged dominant narratives and mobilized support for alternative visions. Ultimately, the confluence of song, language, and civic engagement underscores the enduring power of cultural expression to influence political discourse and to hold leaders accountable in a rapidly evolving democratic landscape.

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