

Impartial humour in war times: global and national cartoons on Russian full-scale aggression in Ukraine

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Abstract

This article examines the use of impartial humour in political cartoons on the Russian-Ukrainian war. The dataset includes 18 political cartoons from Australia, the USA, Algeria, Morocco, Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Greece, Taiwan, Qatar, Iran, Ukraine, and Russia. This dataset is a selection from a corpus of 3,780 political cartoons from 65 countries in Europe, Asia, North America, South America, Africa, and Australia as a part of the research project “Laughter During the War: Russian Aggression in Ukraine in Political Cartoons and Memes”. The analysis of impartial humour is based on the corresponding parameters of political cartoons (goal-target, frame of reference-focus, and means-presentation) supplemented by two criteria: a) the author’s attitude toward the conflict parties and b) the author’s position towards the war and its consequences in general. Methodologically, it is supported by quantitative content analysis (MAXQDA 2024). It highlights the unique characteristics of this humour and its significance within the study of political cartoons. The authors conclude that even if political cartoonists do not show a clear stance on conflict parties, their work still reflects the vision of war as a global evil without borders. The paper presents insights into political cartoons as an important element of modern culture, providing a space for dialogue and discourse.

Keywords: impartial humour, political satire, political cartoons, armed conflict, Russian-Ukrainian war.

1. Introduction

Visual art and political communication are linked in different ways. Then as now, this art was and is a powerful language for expressing political ideas, values, and convictions. It opens up a new critical reflection, it can raise awareness, and subsequently educate on certain social, cultural, or political issues and problems (armed and social conflicts, global crises, political

oppression) and thus actively demonstrate the author's engagement and his/her attitude toward these problems. Political cartoons provoke laughter as a mocking commentary on a current socio-political problem or event. Their forms of expression can make complex topics more accessible and understandable, reflecting and documenting cultural identity, and historical and current events in a condensed form

Political cartoons are an important element of modern culture that form a certain "background of meanings" and potentially affect the political sphere. Political cartoons as a phenomenon at the intersection of art and politics make pointed statements about people, countries, and events in a partisan manner. This partiality is one of the main features of political cartoons, which is very evident in military and political conflicts, where the conflict parties mock each other using humour as a weapon. At the same time, cartoonists depicting armed conflicts may demonstrate a lack of favouritism toward one side or another (impartiality), but the author's attitude to the war, in general, is related to his/her subjective perspective and can be expressed differently.

This paper aims to analyse the implementation of impartial humour in global and national cartoons on the Russian-Ukrainian war. We are going to determine the level (high and low) of impartiality in the research corpus in terms of: a) the cartoonist's position on the war and its consequences, and b) the author's attitude toward the conflict parties. To achieve this goal the following research questions should be addressed:

RQ1. Does humour have a built-in political bias?

RQ2. Can impartial/unbiased/neutral humour provide a space for dialogue and interpretation, despite the representation of supporters or opponents?

2. Political humour, political satire, and political cartoons: some main features

The study of political humour emerged as a distinct field of study in the early 2000s. Quite naturally, virtually all of the scholarship produced until fairly recently focused on the political humour landscape that existed at the time. But while the lessons learned from this scholarship are still valid, the landscape has shifted dramatically. In addition to the fact that political humour scholarship has moved the field forward in the past decade, much has changed in the world of politics and political humour.

One of the popular approaches to political humour is to define it as an umbrella term that encompasses any humorous text dealing with political issues, people, events, processes, or institutions (Young, 2017), or similarly, as a humorous message, communicated via any medium that references some aspect of the political world. (Baumgartner, 2021). Those approaches are based on two assumptions: a) that various works of political humour have been responsible for producing political change, and b) that exposure to political humour can affect how we understand the world of politics.

The use and appreciation of humour are related to different political phenomena, e.g. the relationships between specific styles of humour and left-right political orientations, between humour styles and political engagement, or the interdependence of political orientations and the ability to appreciate and create humour in everyday life (Kferer et al., 2021). Those publications (Young, 2017; Baumgartner, 2021; Kferer et al., 2021) are linked with psychological studies aiming to map value systems and personality factors onto political ideologies to make sense of political orientations. Two main points are: a) personality significantly affects political outlooks (Furnham & Fenton-O'Creevy, 2018), as an indirect pathway to political orientations, through

deep-rooted value systems and personal history (Fatke, 2019); b) although personality traits and political attitudes are correlated, they may not be causally related (Verhulst & Hatemi, 2016).

Humour plays a significant role in encouraging the sharing of political information and improving people's memory for that information. It also enhances brain activity in areas related to understanding other people's mental states. This suggests that humour might help individuals consider the perspectives of others, such as anticipating how people might react to shared political information. (Coronel et al., 2021).

Speaking about the effects of political humour, we have to distinguish between its various subtypes because they have different impacts on the audience. Holbert et al. (2011) suggest the concepts of "Juvenalian satire" and "Horatian satire". Young (2017) differentiates between political comedy and political satire. According to him, political comedy's primary objective is to make people laugh, even if it is centred around a political figure or topic. Political satire is a message that makes a political point but is delivered humorously. It can take many forms, known as humorous techniques of exaggeration, contradiction, parody, and more. We follow Baumgartner's (2021) typology which distinguishes between simple and complex satire. Simple satire has a singular message and is easy to interpret (e.g., related to political comedy shows). Complex satire, sometimes known as "ironic" satire, has both explicit (direct) and implicit (indirect) messages.

Political humour is inherently contextual and subjective, and it is crucial to recognise that different cultures significantly shape its content and characteristics and that political humour can be perceived differently by individuals. While it often elicits laughter, it can also lead to unexpected and unpleasant outcomes, including nervousness and embarrassment, when it offends or upsets others. It is important to be mindful of this dual nature. This dual nature of political humour is determined by common experiences and stereotypes that decisively shape our identities and perceptions of ourselves and others. Furthermore, the culture, language, history, norms, values, and beliefs of a specific society or ethnic group, along with the political culture of a country, significantly influence these dynamics (Feldman, 2024).

We acknowledge that humour in general and political humour, in particular, is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it has evolved as a result of the dynamic interactions between individuals and their environment. In this sense political humour is a kind of persuasive discourse, shaping opinions and attitudes—typically against the "other." Understanding this relationship can enhance our appreciation of political humour and its role in armed and political conflicts. In addition, political humour is utilised, perceived, and interpreted differently by diverse cultural backgrounds—both Western and non-Western, including Asian and Middle Eastern societies. Humour is a powerful tool for challenging societal norms and boundaries, questioning established beliefs, and encouraging critical reflection. It can help individuals see the world from different perspectives and expand their viewpoints. The social acceptability of political humour becomes a topic of debate, raising important questions about whom it targets, what makes a cartoon or meme socially acceptable or unacceptable, and whether it is the intention of the cartoonist, the reaction of the audience, or the meme/cartoon itself. These questions urge us to consider the context in which political humour is used, and the ideological preferences of cartoonists and their audiences (Leon, 2024).

Political cartoons are the subject of many different disciplines: cultural studies, media studies, linguistics, and political science. Accordingly, there is a large number of interpretations of these phenomena and consequently different research methods. Despite different approaches to political cartoons, they have transdisciplinary acknowledged features: *topicality*, *criticism*, *partiality*, *alienation*,¹ and *satirical stance* (Knieper, 2002). These features are directly

¹ Although a cartoon reflects a cartoonist's point of view and the visual commentary often exaggerates circumstances, responsible editorial standards do not allow the cartoonist to alter facts. During the process of rendering opinions into such a visual form, many artistic decisions (regarding symbols, metaphors, allegories,

connected to the structural elements of the cartoon. The interaction among these elements is crucial: cartoons remain incomplete until the audience engages with them.

Cartoonists are often seen as representatives of the citizen's perspective on public life. They operate at the intersection of the artist as a social critic and the journalist as a social commentator or reporter, balancing 'high' intellectual culture with the mass culture of their newspaper's readership. Cartoonists are viewed as traditional intellectuals who often see themselves as independent and autonomous from the dominant social group, challenging its values and worldview. Additionally, cartoonists consider their core roles to be investigating governments, providing analysis of complex problems, discussing national policy, and providing interpretation of international developments (Roe, 2004; Phiddian, 2008; Mackay, 2016).

2.1. Impartial humour in war times

Humour can strive to be impartial, though achieving true impartiality is challenging. Impartial humour aims to critique or satirise political figures, events, or policies, without favouring any particular party, ideology, or individual. This concept can be understood through the lens of how humour has been used in times of conflict. During the American Civil War, a new wave of comic writers emerged creating humour that was less about individual characters and more about language play, appealing to a broad audience across different regions. The two most prominent representatives are Charles Farrar Browne, author of the character *Artemus Ward*, an illiterate rube with "Yankee common sense" (The Biographical Dictionary of America, 1906); and Edgar Wilson Nye, an American humourist and the founder and editor of the newspaper *Laramie Boomerang* (Knight, 2020).

Political cartoons in newspapers during World War I played a significant role in shaping public opinion and providing commentary on the war and its participants. Political humour has been often used as a form of protest against the horrors of modern warfare. While not necessarily impartial, this type of humour provided a means for soldiers and civilians alike to cope with the grim realities of war. The usage of political humour continued during the World War II. Political cartoons became a powerful medium for commentary and propaganda, reflecting the intense political and social climate of the time.

Recent armed conflicts (i.e., the Russian full-scale aggression in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas's war) have signalled an increased proliferation of visuality and humorous genres (cartoons and memes) that are shared widely via social media (Góra & Moczol 2023; Rakityanskaya, 2023). On the other hand, the rise of social media and internet technologies impacted on our sense of humour in various ways. As Attardo (2023, p. 18) puts it, "to what extent humour-on-the-internet is different from humour-before-the-internet?". Firstly, the internet has democratised humour and blurred the line between amateur and professional comedians. Secondly, the boundaries of socially acceptable humour have been pushed. Humour became more transgressive (Gerlofs, 2022). Thirdly, audiences are now more informed and fragmented, thanks to the abundance of online content and niche communities. Content producers must constantly innovate and tailor their material to diverse audiences. Impartial humour during wartime can temporarily escape the harsh realities of war (stress relief) and build psychological resilience (Menéndez-Aller et al., 2020).

Political cartoons often employ satire to comment on the absurdities and contradictions of war. This can help highlight the futility or irrationality of certain actions without direct criticism. Humour that does not take sides can help bridge divides between opposing groups by highlighting shared human experiences and emotions. Impartial humour can foster cultural understanding by showcasing the similarities between different peoples affected by war. It can

techniques, etc.) must be made. This means that the envisaged political person of action (target) is depicted by a generally known and familiar means (setting), but remains recognisable in this setting.

help bridge divides between opposing groups by highlighting shared human experiences and emotions. Impartial humour manifests during war times as a) *a coping mechanism*; b) *social commentary*; and c) *a way to overcome differences*. (Tavory, 2014).

Overall, humour during wartime can serve various purposes, from providing comic relief and entertainment to offering a platform for social and political critique. While it may not always be impartial, it reflects the complexities and contradictions of human experiences during conflict. These complexities cause some challenges for the impartiality in humour. The first challenge is the *subjectivity of humour*. Humour is inherently subjective: what one person finds funny, another might find offensive or biased. This subjectivity can make it difficult for humour to be perceived as truly impartial. The second challenge is the *cultural and social context*. Political humour often reflects the cultural and social context in which it is created. This context can impact the target, the focus of the cartoon, and how they are presented, potentially leading to perceived bias. Humour is often deeply rooted in cultural and national contexts, which can influence its impartiality. During wartime, humour may reflect the perspectives and biases of a particular group or nation, making it challenging to be entirely impartial (Jiang, 2019). Finally, different audiences may *perceive humour differently*, especially in the context of war. What one group finds funny or comforting, another might find offensive or inappropriate (Carli, 2023). A joke or cartoon intended to be impartial might be seen as biased by those who feel it targets their beliefs or political affiliations. This variability can affect the perceived impartiality of humour.

Thus, humour in wartime can be complex and multifaceted, and whether it can be impartial depends on the context, the audience, and the intent behind the humour. While complete impartiality in political humour may be difficult to achieve, humourists can take steps to minimise bias: a) *focus on universal themes*; b) *self-awareness and transparency*; c) *inclusive humour*. By focusing on universal themes such as human suffering, famine, the value of human life, and responsibility for crimes, humourists can create content that resonates across different cultures and societies. Acknowledging one's own biases or potential for bias can help humourists approach their work more objectively. Transparency about the intent behind the humour can also aid in maintaining impartiality. Creating humour that is inclusive and considers multiple perspectives can help in achieving a more balanced approach.

2.2. Corpus and methodology

The research material presented in this paper consists of 18 political cartoons (see Figures 2-19). It represents the 13 countries with a significant share of impartial humour from different regions of the world including Ukraine and Russia as warring parties. This share has been calculated via MAXQDA relative to the total number of cartoons in each document group (see Table 3). This dataset is a fragment of the larger corpus: 3780 political cartoons from Europe (26 countries), Asia (21 countries), North America (3 countries), South America (9 countries), Africa (5 countries), and Australia, assigned to 6 document groups. The corpus was collected in the period from 24.02.2022 to 24.02.2024 using the web galleries *Cartoon Movement* (60 -100 cartoons daily from over 220 freelance cartoonists in 80 countries, <https://www.cartoonmovement.com>), *ToonPool* (3,441 artists from 120 countries, <https://www.toonpool.com>) and *Cagle Cartoons Inc*, the syndication service for newspaper editors, distributing political cartoons and columns to over 500 subscribing newspapers (<https://caglecartoons.com>). The data collection was based on the search terms *Russian-Ukrainian war*, *War in Ukraine*, *Ukraine*, and *Russian invasion in Ukraine*. The collected corpus is a part of the research project “Laughter during the War: Russian Aggression in Ukraine in Political Cartoons and Memes” co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement.

We consider political cartoons as a genre of complex political satire that serves ideological, epistemological, cognitive-emotional, identificational, and constructive functions. They effectively challenge the current political and social order by highlighting the stark contrast between the flawed reality and the ideals of what could or should be. This questioning is determined by *target*, *focus*, *social acceptability*, and *presentation* (Paletz, 1990). The interaction of these elements shapes the spectrum of political humour from subversive to supportive. Political cartoons can be defined by a) goals; b) frame of reference; and c) means. The corresponding parameters (goal-target, frame of reference-focus, and means-presentation) provide an analytical framework for this paper, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the topic (Table 1). This analysis will be supplemented by the quantitative computer-based content analysis (MAXQDA 2024) of the distribution of different types of humour (supportive, subversive, and impartial) in the project corpus and the share of impartial humour in different countries of the world.

Table 1. Analytical framework

Analysis units	Meaning	Corresponding parameters
Target	politician and/or institution depicted in the cartoon	Goal
Focus	a particular aspect of the political reality/activity	Frame of reference
Presentation (setting)	metaphors, symbols, captions, inserts, speech bubbles	Means

Figure 1 shows the distribution of different humour types in the project corpus. As we can see, the most frequent is subversive humour (83%), followed by supportive humour (9%). These humour types correspond to the functions of political discourse: a) *attacking* (opponents), b) *acclaiming* (identity, values), and c) *defending* (Benoit, 2007).

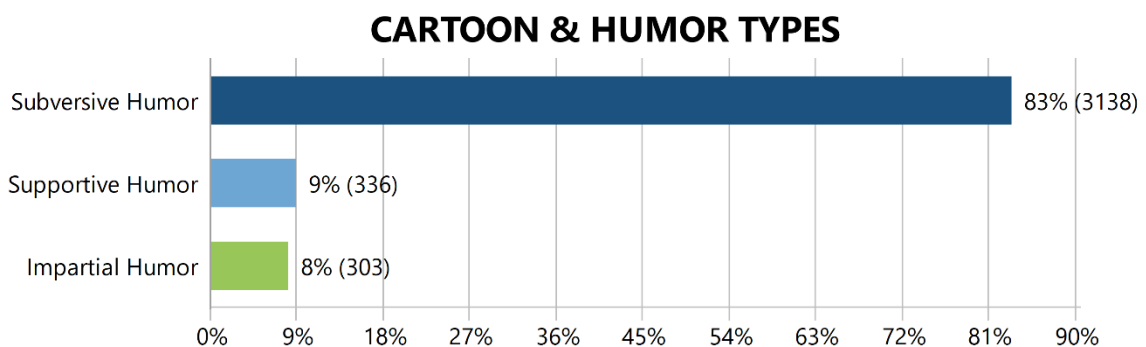


Figure 1. Humour types distribution

In addition to the two types of humour (subversive and supportive), the preliminary analysis revealed that the project corpus (3780 documents) contains 303 cartoons from different regions of the world with impartial humour (8%). To analyse this type of humour, we supplemented these analytical parameters with two more criteria: a) *the cartoonist's position on the war and its consequences*, and b) *the cartoonist's attitude toward the conflict parties*. The choice of these criteria was determined by the following considerations. As mentioned above, cartoonists play an essential role as social commentators, illuminating the complexities of modern conflicts, and

revealing their visions of the conflict and the conflict parties. They challenge perceptions, prompting audiences to critically examine the narratives presented. By distilling complex issues into compelling visuals, cartoonists spark vital dialogue and reflection. Their insights not only entertain the audience but also provoke thought, making their perspective on conflict parties crucial for understanding the nature of modern conflicts. In addition, political cartoons as a genre may promote partiality. Therefore, the author’s attitude towards the war in general or the conflict parties is usually quite explicit in cartoons depicting military conflicts. Accordingly, if the cartoon’s setting allows us to conclude about the author’s position towards: a) the war and its consequences in the global dimension, or b) the conflict parties, the level of impartiality should be considered low. Conversely, if the cartoon simply captures the state of affairs without expressing the author’s attitude to the war or its parties, the level of impartiality should be considered high (see Table 2).

Table 2. Evaluation criteria

Cartoonist’s Position on the War and its Consequences	Cartoonist’s Attitude to the Conflict Parties	Level of Impartiality
not expressed (-)	not expressed (-)	high
expressed (+)	expressed (+)	low

2.3. Research results

The total number of documents with the code “impartial humour” in the corpus is 303. This type of humour occurs in all document groups. Table 3 shows the countries with a significant share of impartial humour. This share has been calculated relative to the total number of cartoons in each document group.

Table 3. Distribution of impartial humour

Asia	Europe	South America	Africa	Australia	North America
Taiwan (36.8%)	Italy 32,7%	Argentina 26,1%	Morocco 28,6%	Australia 4,5%	US 6,9%
Iran 33.3%	Greece 27%	Brazil 22,4%	Algeria 14,3%		
Qatar 33.3%					

For the analysis of the global and national impartial humour on the Russian-Ukrainian war, the dataset of 18 political cartoons from Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Greece, Morocco, Iran, Italy, Qatar, Russia, Taiwan, Ukraine, and the USA was established. The cartoons from these 13 countries have a significant percentage of impartial humour and diverse focuses: the global food crisis, prolonged war, war crimes, and the geopolitical struggle between the US and Russia. Some cartoons in each document contain calls for peace and negotiations without showing the particular event or the conflict party.

Figure 2 is an Australian cartoon using Ukrainian national colours that interact with another symbol (maze). The maze is an intricate network of multicursal paths. It symbolises confusion

and disorientation. There are no verbal elements in the cartoon. The level of impartiality is high because the cartoonist simply records the state of affairs (i.e., endless and unpredictable war) without showing his attitude toward this war.



Figure 2. Peter Kreiner (Australia)

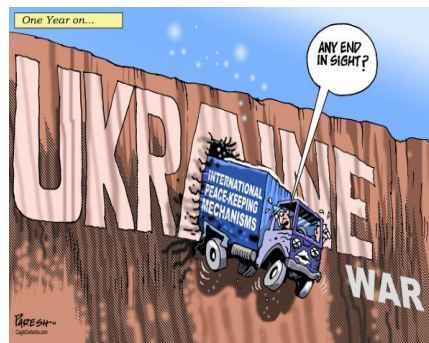


Figure 3. Paresh Nat (USA)

US cartoons containing impartial humour always have a clear target and focus, with or without verbal elements. Figure 3 contains both nonverbal and verbal elements (truck with the insert “*international peacekeeping mechanisms*” stuck in the wall with the insert “*Ukraine war*” and speech bubble “*Any end in sight?*”). The level of impartiality is high, because the cartoon simply states the current state of affairs (i.e., a protracted war), without being supportive or subversive.



Figure 4. Khalid Cherardi (Morocco)



Figure 5. Naji Benaji (Morocco)



Figure 6. L'Andalou (Algeria)

In the document group “*Africa*”, there are two countries with a significant share of impartial humour – Morocco and Algeria. Cartoonists use military symbols (e.g., tanks, military aircraft, soldiers, helmets) supported by verbal elements (inserts; e.g., *war*) to show that the war is a danger to the world (Figure 4). Another danger from which protection is needed is the food crisis (Figure 5). The level of impartiality in both cartoons is low because the cartoonist’s attitude to the war and its consequences is expressed (strictly negative), even though there are no markers of what war is depicted and who is responsible for its consequences. Figure 6 uses Ukrainian national colours as a background and shows the man who turned his back and did not want to see a missile sticking out of the ground. The image alludes to the cartoon character “Mr. Linea” (i.e., an Italian animated series, originally broadcast on the Italian channel RAI between 1971 and 1986). It is a man drawn as a single outline around his silhouette, walking on an infinite line of which he is a part. The character encounters obstacles and often turns to the cartoonist, represented by a live-action hand holding a white grease pencil, to draw him a solution, with various degrees of success. The focus and setting of this cartoon are similar to those in Figure

2. Both cartoons display high impartiality by simply recording the state of affairs, which is an endless and unpredictable war, without revealing any personal attitude towards it.

In the document group “South America”, there are two countries with a significant share of impartial humour – Argentina and Brazil. The most frequent topics are rapid price increases and nuclear threats. These topics are depicted in a figurative manner using military symbols: uniforms, rockets, guns, and tanks (Figures 7-8).



Figure 7. Elmer (Argentina)

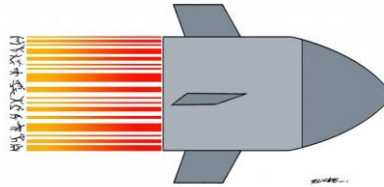


Figure 8. Roukes Souza (Brazil)

Both cartoons feature a high level of impartiality because the cartoonist’s attitude to the topics depicted is not expressed in any way (in terms of ethical principles) and there are no markers of who or what caused the price growth or who is responsible for the nuclear danger. The cartoons simply present the current situation without being subversive or supportive.

Some cartoons in this document group contain anti-war appeals using peace symbols (dove) in Figure 9 or showing its brutal consequences (Figure 10). There is no indication of who is responsible for these terrible consequences of war. But the setting of both cartoons reveals the anti-war stance of the cartoonist: war is represented as a bloody danger to peace and as accompanied by war crimes. Accordingly, the level of impartiality in both cartons is low.

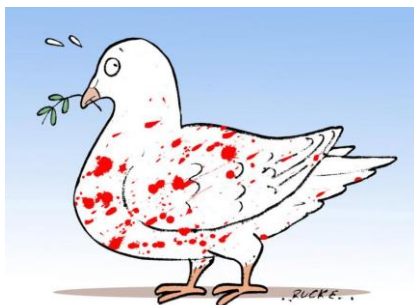


Figure 9. Roukes Souza (Brazil)

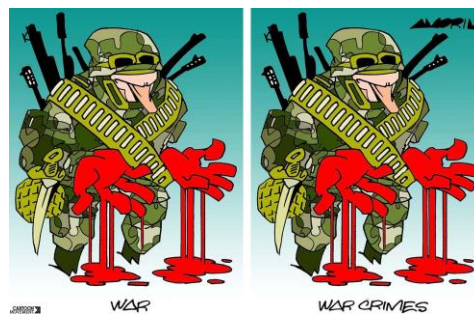


Figure 10. Amorim (Brazil)

In the document group “Europe” there are three countries with a significant share of impartial humour: Italy (32,7%), and Greece (27%). The cartoons in this document group usually do not depict politicians but use symbols instead containing several semantic layers that require background knowledge to decode.



Figure 11. Vasileios Papageorgiou (Greece)



Figure 12. Marco d'Angelis (Italy)

Similar to US cartoons, the European ones have a distinct target or focus mostly without text. Figure 11 depicts a loaf of bread on the edge of the sword hovering over a black woman with a baby (i.e. allusions to “the sword of Damocles”). It portrays the threat of hunger in the countries of the global South. Another cartoon’s setting (Figure 12) shows the anti-war stance of the author: the dove as a symbol of peace is much bigger than the tank as a symbol of war, and it holds the muzzle tight blocking the fire. The level of impartiality in both cartoons is low, as the cartoonists exhibit a strictly negative attitude toward the war and its consequences. However, the cartoons do not specify which war is being depicted or who is responsible for the resulting consequences.



Figure 13. Stellina Chen (Taiwan)



Figure 14. Reynold Philip (Qatar)



Figure 15. Divandari (Iran)

In the document group “Asia” there are three countries with a significant share of impartial humour: Taiwan (36.8%), Qatar, and Iran (33.3% each). Figure 13 uses a biblical motif (i.e. Christ’s birth), showing a missile resembling the star of Bethlehem flying over an empty manger. The cartoon bears a low level of impartiality showing the absurdity of war that leads to Christmas without the presence of Christ. Figure 14 demonstrates a high level of impartiality, as the cartoonist uses the metaphor (UKRAINE=BOUNCER) to depict Ukraine as a battleground for the competition between the US and Russia. This portrayal is neither subversive nor supportive, it simply presents the current situation, but there are no direct indications of who is responsible, or of support for, any of the parties. Figure 15 contains an appeal *Stop war on Ukraine*. The setting of the cartoons suggests a low level of impartiality. The visual implication that the war is bad, primarily for Ukraine, is clearly expressed, but there are no direct indications of who has to stop this war.

To have the full picture, the analysis in 6 document groups was supplemented by the examination of impartial humour in Ukrainian and Russian cartoons. This type of humour in Ukrainian cartoons makes up 1.5% , while in Russian cartoons, it is at 4%.



Figure 16. Alexandr Schmidt (Russia)



Figure 17. Vladimir Khakanov (Russia)

The main topics of Russian impartial cartoons are negotiations, war crimes, and calls for peace. Depicting these topics Russian cartoonists use symbols (e.g., soldiers, round tables, guns, angels). The level of impartiality in Figure 16 is high because the cartoon's setting reveals its focus (i.e., homicide) in a very abstract way. No element of the cartoon gives any indication of which countries the soldier and his victim represent. A high level of impartiality is present in Figure 17. The soldier hugs the target, he was shooting at. In addition, the setting of the cartoon does not allow us to conclude the author's position on the situation depicted, even when its cartoon's focus is evident (i.e., reconciliation and forgiveness)

The main topics of Ukrainian impartial cartoons are the protracted nature of the war, media war and propaganda, and refugees (Figures 18-19).



Figure 18. Vladimir Kazanevsky (Ukraine)

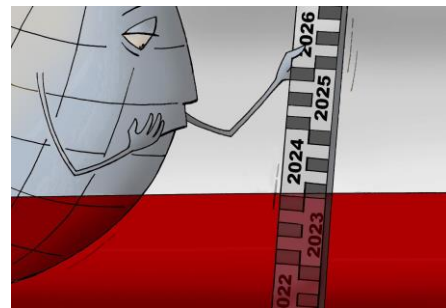


Figure 19. Victor Holub (Ukraine)

Even though the setting of the cartoon (Figure 18) marks the conflict parties (through national colors on helmets) and reveals its focus, using a circle as a symbol of infinity and portraying the protracted nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the level of impartiality is high, because there is no indication of soldiers' roles: who is the aggressor and who is the victim? The cartoonist's attitude towards the endless war is not explicit. The focus of another cartoon (Figure 19) is also the protracted character of the Russian-Ukrainian war, but the level of impartiality is low here because of the cartoon's setting (i.e. a sad world standing in blood with the ruler with years on it). This setting reveals the negative cartoonist's attitude to the situation depicted.

3. Conclusion

This paper contributes to the academic discourse on the reflection of the Russian-Ukrainian war in political cartoons. By examining this genre, we gained deeper insights into the complex views of this war in different regions of the World, including Ukraine and Russia as conflict parties.

Political cartoons tackle significant topics such as armed conflicts, global crises, and political oppression, effectively demonstrating the cartoonist's dedication and stance toward these critical challenges making clear, partisan statements about people, countries, and events. This partiality is especially noticeable during military and political conflicts, where the conflict parties use humour to mock each other. At the same time, cartoonists depicting armed conflicts can demonstrate a lack of favouritism toward one side or another (impartiality), but their attitudes toward the war, in general, are influenced by their perspective and can be expressed in various ways.

For the analysis of the global and national impartial humour on the Russian-Ukrainian war, the research corpus of 18 political cartoons from 13 countries (Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Greece, Morocco, Iran Italy, Qatar, Russia, Taiwan, Ukraine, and the USA) was established. The cartoons from these 13 countries have a significant percentage of impartial humour and diverse focuses: the global food crisis, prolonged war, war crimes, and the geopolitical struggle between the US and Russia. Some cartoons in each document group include appeals for peace and negotiations without depicting specific events or conflict parties.

To determine the level of impartiality (high and low) in the research corpus the analytical framework was established. It is based on the correlation of parameters that accurately characterise cartoons as a distinct genre of political satire. These parameters are target/goal, focus/frame of reference, and setting/ means. To analyse the level of impartiality in the research corpus two more criteria have been considered: a) the cartoonist's stance on the war in general and its consequences (including a moral evaluation), b) the cartoonist's attitude toward the conflict parties (which should be clearly expressed). These additions helped us assess the level of impartiality in the research corpus. We have identified two levels of impartiality.

The level of impartiality is to be considered high when the cartoon's setting does not reveal the cartoonist's attitude toward the war and its consequences in general and/or toward the conflict parties. These 'high impartiality' cartoons are rare, they have a focus (particular topic, e.g., nuclear threat or price jump), but no target and simply present the current situation without any assessment.

The level of impartiality is to be considered low when the cartoonist's stance is reflected in the cartoon's setting (even if the cartoon's target is not labeled or only the focus is marked). This stance can relate to the evaluation of war and its consequences in general or to the conflict parties in particular, or to both of them.

Although the quantitative distribution of low- and high-impartiality cartoons is uniform in the research corpus, with nine cartoons in each category, there are qualitative differences in the level of impartiality based on the topics and the countries represented in the corpus.

The majority of anti-war cartoons in the corpus (Brazil, Morocco, Greece, Iran, Italy, Taiwan) display low impartiality focusing on the dangerous consequences of the war (e.g. war crimes, food crises, famine, price rise) using symbols and metaphors (setting) sometimes supported by the text (e.g. *No war*) that most clearly convey the cartoonist's attitude. There are some South American cartoons with high impartiality showing the consequences of the war (e.g. price rise) or the nuclear danger (Argentina, Brazil).

Cartoons focusing on the protracted character of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Australia, Algeria, Ukraine, and the USA) and the geopolitical struggle between the US and Russia (Qatar) have a high level of impartiality, even if the conflict parties (target) are explicitly marked. Their authors simply describe the state of affairs (i.e. the impossibility of predicting options for ending

the war and Ukraine as a battleground for the USA and Russia). The setting of the cartoon is tailored to accurately convey the cartoonist's vision.

Addressing RQ1 "Does humour have a built-in political bias?", we state that humour can indeed have a built-in political bias, although it is not inherently political. The political leanings of humour often depend on several factors: cultural context, author's perspective, target of humour, and audience interpretation. Different countries have distinct political values, which influence the types of humour that are acceptable. Cartoonists often express their political opinions, whether explicitly or implicitly in their works. Persons/countries depicted in the cartoon and the way they are portrayed can indicate a political slant of the cartoonist. It impacts the target, the focus, and the setting of the cartoon. The cartoonist's stance on politicians or events can be supportive or subversive, depending on the creator's perspective. The political bias of humour can also be influenced by how the audience interprets it. Particular cartoons may be intended to be impartial or unbiased, but different groups might perceive it through the lens of their political beliefs or life experience. Even if the political cartoonist does not show his/her stance to one or another conflict party, he/she cannot be entirely impartial and thus shows his/her attitude to the war and its consequences, giving a moral assessment of war as a global evil that has no borders.

This leads us to RQ 2. "Can impartial humour provide a space for dialogue and interpretation, despite the representation of supporters or opponents?". The answer will be "yes" with the following remarks.

1. It is easier to be impartial when you do not live in a country that is a party to the conflict. If political humour in general and political cartoons, in particular, are aimed at attacking the opponent and acclaiming one's values and identity, especially in times of war, then supportive (for friends) and subversive (for foes) humour is more appropriate.
2. Impartial humour can become a platform for mutual understanding, but this should be preceded by the work of governments, parliaments, and journalists aimed at overcoming global challenges and crises. But, despite the representation of one party (of supporters or opponents), political cartoons as visual art and an important element of modern culture provide a space for dialogue and discourse that taps into the imagination and allows for interpretation.

Acknowledgements



This research is part of the project No. 2022/45/P/HS2/02536 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 945339. For Open Access, the authors have applied a CC-BY public copyright license to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.

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