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Laughing right: Jordanian political humour and right-wing ideologies in social media spaces

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Abstract

This article examines how Jordanian political humour has been strategically employed in social media spaces since the 2011 Arab uprisings. It explores how right-wing ideologies have given rise to Jordanian political humour, particularly of a populist nature in social media spaces, both to reflect and contest dominant political dynamics, social tensions, and public discourse in post-Arab Spring Jordan. While much of the existing literature on Jordanian political humour has tended to over-emphasise the application of linguistic theories of humour or Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of carnival and carnivalesque humour, this article offers a new perspective by arguing that Jordanian political humour in social media spaces is increasingly shaped by right-wing populist themes and ideologies. These include anti-government sentiment, nostalgic appeals, hyper-loyalist expressions of Jordanian identity, and misogynistic undertones that target the role and function of women in Jordanian society. The findings reveal that Jordanian political humour in social media spaces has recently been shaped by populist rhetoric that often engages with right-wing ideologies and, at times, with far-right nationalist discourses.

Keywords: Jordanian political humour, right-wing ideologies, social media spaces, Jordanian politics, the 2011 Arab uprisings.

1. Introduction

The Jordanian political landscape is influenced by a unique form of political syncretism that combines Arab-Islamic values, strong nationalism, and tribal and familial affiliations, with local loyalties to the Hashemite regime (in power since 1921). In such a context, the traditional left-right political spectrum is difficult to define because the voting system is still based on electoral district boundaries rather than taking political positions or favouring political parties. Politically sensitive and contested terms, such as far-left, left-wing, centre-left, centre-right, right-wing, far-right, and populist, are more rooted in Western political history and culture. They typically refer to well-defined political parties and ideologies that shape mainstream politics (Wodak et al., 2013; Kubik & Mole, 2025). Despite these contextual differences, the ideological components of these terms, including authoritarianism, nationalism, social conservatism, and exclusionary identity politics, can still resonate within the Jordanian socio-political landscape.

Reflecting on these resonances, Jordanian political ideologies can be grouped into three broad ideological camps, as shown in Table 1 below. While the 'Left' and 'Right' in Jordan are mostly ideological and intellectual in nature, the 'Centre' is monarchy-aligned and largely dominates Jordan's political reality. It is occupied by moderate and pro-regime political parties, including those established following the 2021 Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System. In this context, right-wing ideologies in Jordan can be simply understood as a fixed political stance (i.e., pro- or anti-Hashemite regime). It can also reflect a dynamic and evolving discourse that, at times—perhaps inadvertently—challenges this binary. In the right-wing ideological space, the interplay between Islamic rhetoric and ultranationalism (which is presented in a form of tribal identity as a marker of 'authentic' Jordanian identity) has influenced a unique form of right-wing populism that blends tribal Jordanian nationalism with anti-government sentiment. Such blending has produced a powerful oppositional discourse against the government in Jordan since the 2011 Arab uprisings, a period marked by profound socio-political changes in the Middle East and North Africa.

Table 1. Contemporary mainstreams of political ideologies along the left–right spectrum in Jordan

Left-wing	**Centre-wing**	**Right-wing**
Socialism	Conservativism	Islamic democracy
Pan-Arabism	Liberalism	Conservativism
Progressivism	Nationalism	Ultranationalism

Because this research adopts an epistemological stance that involves categorising humorous artefacts under specific right-wing/far-right ideologies, its analysis should serve as a 'thematic commentary' rather than follow a positivist approach. This research therefore reflects a more interpretivist position in labelling political stances and tendencies, particularly right-wing ideologies. The examples of political humour presented here illustrate a relationship between right-wing ideologies and the Jordanian cultural context. Such context is increasingly shaped by various socio-political forces and influences, including tribal nationalism, exclusionary identity politics, and other ultraconservative tendencies, such as tribal nationalism and Islamist groups. Some of these influences are rooted in a nostalgic nationalist ideology associated with a perceived golden era of Jordanian governance during the 1950s and 1960s. Such humour has, perhaps inadvertently, posed challenges to the regime's proposals regarding the integrity of Jordanian national unity, such as *Jordan First* in 2002 and *We Are All Jordan* in 2006. It has highlighted enduring social divisions within Jordanian society between Transjordanian nationals in the hinterlands, Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and other 'non-Jordanians' in urban centres.

2. Review of related literature

Political humour and satire have deep roots in historical and political antecedents. Existing research on political humour has shown that humour can be used as a tool for political commentary, critique, and resistance (Tsakona & Popa, 2011) and can both challenge and reinforce political ideologies (Holm, 2017). Political humour can also reflect the politics of everyday life through media and cultural representations (Brassett, 2021) and influence public opinion and populist movements, such as Brexit (Weaver, 2022). Research in this area has found that political humour proliferates in times of political instability and socio-political unrest, such as wars, protests, and periods of political uncertainties.

Recent scholarship in political humour studies has also examined how right-wing and far-right groups strategically weaponise humour to promote certain propaganda and normalise some extremist views online (Bayarri Toscano & Fernández-Villanueva, 2025) under the guise of entertainment or 'just joking' (Attardo, 2023). In such contexts, political humour functions not only as a tool for authoritarian populism, but also as a vehicle for the dissemination of right-wing/far-right ideologies that target marginalised groups in a society (Chowdhury, 2024). The recent edited volume on humour studies by Ford et al. (2024) explores humour from an interdisciplinary approach, including disparagement humour. It argues how humour can function as a 'double-edged sword' for uniting people, while at the same time reinforcing divisions within society (Meyer, 2024). Together, these works have highlighted a shift in humour scholarship that transcends traditional and culture-bound analyses to a focus on dynamic, transnational, and digitally mediated forms of humour that serve as a tool for spreading ideologies.

Existing research on political humour and right-wing ideologies has also demonstrated how humour is influenced by the cultural context in which it occurs. It focuses on the strategic use of political humour to normalise right-wing/far-right ideologies in public and social media spaces (Sinkiewicz & Marx, 2022; Gaufman & Ganesh, 2024; Kuipers & Zijp, 2024). Much of the recent literature on political humour (e.g., McSwiney & Sengul, 2024) has found how right-wing/far-right groups strategically maintain right-wing/far-right politics by softening the ideological content of their extremist messages online through humour. For example, memes that combine far-right discourse with humour resonate more than either far-right narratives or humour alone (Schmid et al., 2024). This suggests the powerful impact and emotional appeal of right-wing/far-right political ideologies when expressed through humour online.

While much of the recent literature on political humour has emerged from Western contexts, similar dynamics can be observed in the Global South (Dozio, 2021; Hoefel et al., 2024). For example, recent research on political humour in the Middle East and North Africa has largely focused on the politics of humour in times of authoritarianism (Kishtainy, 1985; Shehata, 1992), economic and cultural differences (Muhawi, 1996), or carnivalesque humour in revolutionary times, such as the 2011 Arab uprisings (Badarneh, 2011; El Marzouki, 2015; Halabi, 2017; Barahmeh, 2020). Overall, this body of work has largely examined the role of stereotypes and diverse sociopolitical conditions in the creation and circulation of political jokes that target specific ethnicities, power structures, and certain ideologies in the Arab world.

In the Middle East, where language and politics are intrinsically linked and ideologically contested, Jordanian scholars have examined Jordanian humour using three main epistemological approaches: (1) a linguistic approach, popular in Jordan in the 1990s, which was largely influenced by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin's linguistic theories of verbal humour developed since 1985; (2) a translational approach, which emerged from an academic interest in the relationship and differences between Arabic and English jokes; and (3) a Bakhtinian approach to political humour, which has focused on the role of humour as a revolutionary impulse aimed at exposing the shortcomings of established political power and reflecting public attitudes toward that power.

The first approach applied two linguistic theories of humour: the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH), developed by Raskin (1985), and the General Theory of Verbal Humour, an updated version of the SSTH, developed by Attardo & Raskin (1991). In the context of early research on Jordanian humour, these theories were widely used to analyse political jokes during and after the Gulf War (1990-91) and to explain the linguistic features of Jordanian ethnic jokes, particularly those targeting the Transjordanian people in the steppe and hinterlands, such as the people of At-Tafilah (Shakir & Farghal, 1993; Barahmeh, 2023c). Studies demonstrating the intersection of language, culture, and politics in the context of Jordanian humour include but are not limited to Al-Momani et al. (2016); Al-Sawaeer et al. (2022); and Barahmeh (2023a; 2023b;

2024). These studies have provided important insights into the role and function of humour as a tool for social critique and political commentary in Jordanian society. This has been particularly evident in relation to power and resistance and reflected dissatisfaction with many political and social issues.

By contrast, the translational approach has focused on the challenges of translating Jordanian jokes into English. This approach grew out of an academic interest among some Jordanian linguists studying the relationship between language and humour, especially the (un)translatability of Jordanian humour as well as the linguistic and cultural differences between Jordanian jokes and English jokes. Studies that have explored this approach include but are not limited to Al-Khatib's (1999) analysis of Jordanian jokes from a socio-linguistic and comparative perspective to English jokes; Shunnaq's (1996) analysis of the (un) translatability of Jordanian rural jokes into English; Al-Kharabsheh's (2008) analysis of accidental humour in the translation of Jordanian shop signs from Jordanian Arabic into English; and Farghal and Hamdan's (2024) analysis of (un)translatability of Jordanian jokes to English, based on their conversational implicature. These studies have clearly indicated that there is a relationship between language and local culture, highlighting the (un) translatability of Jordanian jokes into other languages, such as English.

A third, Bakhtinian approach to Jordanian humour emerged since the 2011 Arab uprisings. This approach has emphasised the role of humour online, noting that Bakhtin's 'marketplace' is no longer located in public spaces, such as streets and squares, but rather in social media spaces (Barahmeh, 2020, p. 238). In post-Arab Spring Jordan, political humour represents a form of 'licensed disruption' that allows only the ridicule of the government but not of the monarch (Barahmeh, 2023a, p. 105). Such mockery has encouraged a certain degree of commissioned criticism whilst the 'red lines' of criticising the monarch have never been crossed.

The most recent approach to Jordanian humour has drawn on both Bakhtin and Freud to analyse Jordanian humour in social media spaces since the 2011 uprisings. According to Barahmeh (2024), this approach argues that both Bakhtin and Freud recognise the role of repression (albeit in different forms) in influencing the production of humour, particularly political humour. For Bakhtin, Barahmeh (2024, p. 5) argues that repression is politically motivated, while for Freud it is self-repression and often unconscious. This most recent approach to Jordanian humour has explained many examples of the ways in which ordinary Jordanians use online platforms to broadcast their resistance against power and government in social media spaces. However, the avenues for such discourse continue to proliferate. There is still a scarcity of research on the intersection of language, politics, and populist humour, particularly in the context of Jordanian right-wing ideologies in social media spaces. This new perspective on Jordanian political humour warrants critical investigation. It reveals how Jordanian right-wing ideologies are constructed and circulated within social media spaces.

3. Methodology

The data collected for this research included 500 humorous artefacts that are publicly available across social media platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. These humorous artefacts consisted of political cartoons, internet memes, satirical videos, and a few user-generated commentaries from Facebook posts or comments or from X tweets or replies. The data collection drew upon the practices of netnography, which is relatively a new methodological design to study the online culture and performativity of users in digital spaces (Kozinets, 2019). The data selected for this research was based on social media popularity metrics, such as reach (how many people saw the humorous artefact), impressions (the total

number of views for each humorous artefact), and engagement (the total number of likes, shares, and comments each humorous artefact has received).

The data analysis utilised two research methods, namely thematic analysis and the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to analyse Jordanian political humour that aligns with right-wing ideologies in social media spaces. CDA was particularly useful to identify patterns and analyse the rhetoric and targets of right-wing ideologies in Jordanian political humour. As shown in Table 2, below, the analysis identified four ideological themes in Jordanian political humour. These four themes have formed the basis for the final analytical approach used in this research. They have illustrated how Jordanian political humour can serve as a tool to normalise extremist and discriminatory views by presenting them in comedic forms, rendering such content more palatable to online audiences.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage distribution of right-wing ideological themes in Jordanian political humour

Theme No.	Theme Description	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1.	Anti-government sentiment	185	37%
2.	Nostalgic references	125	25%
3.	Hyper-loyalist expressions	110	22%
4.	Misogynistic undertones	80	16%
Total		**500**	**100%**

To avoid labelling ideologically contested terms that may not well align with Jordanian socio-political and cultural norms and values (e.g., 'right-wing' ideologies), the researcher has adopted an ethnographically grounded approach informed by his background as a native Jordanian and a cultural insider. Rather than assigning explicit ideological labels to each humorous artefact, the analysis has identified four themes in Jordanian political humour that align with right-wing ideologies. The analysis has also ensured anonymity for the creators of these humorous artefacts. This is because many individuals in the Middle East (including Jordan) may not consciously identify with, or seek to promote, right-wing ideologies in their humorous artefacts per se. For this reason, the researcher argues that their content is best framed as natural, as moral (or Islamic), or as reflexive. Such content is epistemologically embedded within the users' local discourse and logic and may therefore not fully align with the West's traditional left-right spectrum. Such a methodological approach reflects the broader socio-political values of the people in the Middle East. It helps explain the many political movements that are frequently structured around religious principles rather than secular economic and political lines. This approach has accounted for the influence of political scrutiny and fears of challenging socio-political and cultural norms or government actions in the Middle East.

4. Right-wing ideologies in Jordanian political humour: An analysis of rhetoric and targets

Right-wing ideologies in the Middle East since the 2011 Arab uprisings can be linked to the global rise of right-wing/far-right populist themes in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Right-wing ideologies have been evident in post-Islamist political styles (Bayat, 2013) as well as in the recent rise of populist policies that appeal directly to ordinary people (Lynch, 2014). In Jordan, right-wing tendencies have been displayed in a nationalist and populist rhetoric (Alajlouni,

2023) that strongly resonates with the idea of *Jordanity* or *al-Urdunniyya*.[1] These tendencies draw on anti-elitist sentiment (opposition to the central government) and appeals to—or on behalf of—the 'common Jordanian people' frequently referred to as *Awlād al-balad* (the sons of this land or country) or *Abnā' al-Ḥarāthīn* (the sons of the ploughmen or descendants of farmers). This form of tribal-nationalist identity is often perceived by Jordanians in urban areas as backward or exclusionary, particularly in discussions of everyday nationalism and identity politics. This is because it associates Transjordanian people with 'authentic' Jordanian identity, in contrast to the perceived image of modernising, Westernising, and non-Jordanian cultural aspects in urban centres, such as Amman. The 'us vs. them' dichotomy is a core component of polarisation in Jordanian society. It is specifically a central topic in Jordanian right-wing populist narratives in social media spaces.

In such a context, political humour has increasingly taken on right-wing ideologies (sometimes far-right characteristics). It has blended populist rhetoric with strong nationalist agendas against the government and modernity in social media spaces. These populist and nationalist movements have used humour as a vehicle to critique power and amplify public discontent with political authority, without, however, materialising into mass movements demanding regime change or public revolution.

4.1. Anti-government sentiment

Anti-government humour has become a staple of Jordanian online culture since the 2011 Arab uprisings. It has been used by many Jordanians online in the sense of Bakhtin's carnivalesque humour (1984) to question the authority of the government, the House of Parliament, and government discourse on economic and its processes. One political cartoon during the 2018 protests depicts Jordanian prime ministers as 'shock absorbers' for popular anger, portraying them as 'light bulbs' controlled by external hands and replaced one after another as needed. While Jordanian political humour has regularly critiqued the prime minister, cabinet ministers, and members of parliament, it has typically tended to avoid targeting the king or royal family, which remain off-limits due to strict socio-political and legal red lines.

A central figure in this type of humour is the representation of the 'normal' Jordanian man as a plaintive and exploited character. In some politically satirical writings and internet memes, the figure of the ordinary Jordanian man is portrayed as skeletal or as *Mam'ūt*, a half-naked character surrounded by falling feathers. This imagery serves as a powerful metaphor for the individual's degradation, symbolising sexual humiliation and the stripping of dignity due to harsh economic policies. In other political cartoons, the figure of Mam'ūt is depicted as an alien-like figure. This is to visually exaggerate his loneliness and separation from the rest of Jordanian society. The figure is sometimes represented as trapped inside a small bottle or struggling to escape from its bottleneck (a metaphor for economic reform and hardship). Overall, these visual and metaphorical representations of Mam'ūt suggest how the ordinary Jordanian man has been made to feel exploited, foreign, and excluded from the larger part of Jordanian society.

Humour about economic reform and its processes have also been sexualised, particularly in some provocative internet memes and political cartoons. Such humour describes economic hardship as a series of *khawaziq* (literally 'stakes' or 'impalements'), a metaphor for being violated or penetrated by the government. One particularly vulgar expression *ad-daf' qabl ar-*

[1] Jordanity and al-Urdunniyya are closely related terms. Jordanity is an English transliteration (or coined term) that is used in academic and political discourse to refer to the idea of Jordanian-ness, especially in the context of identity politics, inclusion/exclusion, or everyday nationalism. Al-Urdunniyya, which literally means 'Jordanian-ness,' is more commonly used to describe a tribal-nationalist conception of Jordanian identity rooted in Bedouin or Transjordanian heritage (i.e., East Bank Jordanians). Despite these small nuances, I treat these two terms in this research as equivalent and interchangeable. I will therefore use Jordanity as a translation or shorthand for al-Urdunniyya.

raf' ('paying the people before raising the prices') compares government-citizen relations to a transaction with a sex worker. Such phrases mock the government's temporary economic support before re-imposing hardship, such as subsidy cuts. This form of sexual humour, which involves some taboo words or bodily references (in the sense of Bakhtin, 1984), is intended to mock economic reform and its impact on ordinary Jordanian people.

Jordan's House of Parliament is also a frequent target of ridicule in Jordanian political humour in social media spaces. In one political cartoon, MPs are drawn as 'puppets' to suggest the idea that they are being controlled by external forces (i.e., the government). Another cartoon mocks the 'achievements' of the House of Parliament with a reference to a real incident that took place in Jordanian House of Parliament when a Jordanian MP fired a rifle during a session in 2013. In this cartoon, the achievement is mocked and compared to two historical events: the moon landing in 1969 and Steve Jobs' launch of the iPad in 2010. These examples rely on comic irony and absurd juxtaposition to ridicule Parliament's ineffectiveness. This view is also echoed by a former MP, who once described the Jordanian House of Parliament and its members as mere 'decoration' in the political landscape, with little power in reality. The comment was made to criticise the fact that voters in Jordan have preferred charismatic individuals over substantive policies.

Jordanian anti-government humour in social media spaces has functioned as a tool for commentary to critique power and entrenched social hierarchies. Since the 2011 Arab uprisings, it has increasingly featured some right-wing populist themes, such as marginalisation, perceived inequality, and resentment toward political elites. These feelings are particularly observed among economically disadvantaged and socially conservative groups, such as Transjordanians, who, despite their loyalty to the state, often feel forgotten, neglected, or left behind. In social media spaces, Jordanian political humour has served as a subversive outlet for expressing public frustration and discontent with power and government. It has remained, however, constrained by the boundaries of what Jordanian society and the government would allow, most notably, the exclusion of the monarchy from ridicule.

4.2. Nostalgic appeals

The right and left wings in Jordan (and possibly elsewhere) diverge in their views about the past, present, and future. Those on the right adopt either revolutionary or reactionary stances against contemporary government policies on social, economic, and political reforms. Since the growth of social media technology and its use from the mid-2000s, right-wing individuals have tended to eulogise and glorify the past, while criticising and satirising the present. In contrast, left-wing individuals have focussed on the future, hoping for change in traditional societal values. In Jordan, this nostalgic longing for the past is often expressed colloquially as *Ayām al-Lūlū* (the days of the pearls) to refer to a golden period of Jordanian life during the 1950s and 1960s. This metaphorical expression about the past employs an affectionate description that is largely romanticised and sentimental in nature.

As the evidence analysed here shows, a nostalgic longing for the past is a key feature of right-wing discourse in Jordan. It reflects dissatisfaction with the present and a desire to return to a time when days were better, more authentic, or more in line with traditional values. One example of this nostalgic longing is evident in the satirical depictions of the material culture of Transjordanian society in Bedouin and rural areas in the hinterlands. Nostalgic references to material objects between the 1950s and 1960s include but are not limited to mudstone houses, *bayt al-sha'r* ('the black tent inhabited by the Bedouins), *khubz shrāk* (a traditional type of flatbread that is most popular in rural areas), and most notably the Mercedes-Benz 200 (a quality car from a bygone age), which many Jordanians affectionately describe as a vehicle that that is reliable and never dies. These cultural material objects are celebrated as cultural symbols of a

time when life was simpler, more communal, and deeply connected to traditional ways of living. The language used in these satirically nostalgic writings is Jordanian colloquial Arabic. It directly refers to the language and culture of Transjordanian people as well as the idealised view of the past in desert and rural areas.

Nostalgia is also evident in reactions to modern and contemporary issues, such as the 2024 national curriculum proposals by the National Centre for Curriculum Development (NCCD). When these proposals were introduced, a wave of reactionary nostalgia emerged. Many Jordanians online criticised the inclusion of a short biography of the Lebanese-Armenian singer Samira Tewfik in a fourth-grade art book. Tewfik sang many nationalist songs for Jordan between the 1960s and 1970s and her songs had a significant influence on Jordanian culture. Despite this, the inclusion of her biography was met with a hostile response from Jordanians who are possibly aligned with right-wing/far-right ideologies. Many Jordanians online argued that the curriculum should instead focus on Jordanian national heroes and martyrs who sacrificed their lives in defending Jordanian land and Palestine from Israeli aggression, an inclusion that the NCCD has already confirmed in the curriculum. This debate was not just about curriculum reforms and proposals. Rather, it was deep-rooted in a nostalgic desire to return to a time when Jordanity was tied more explicitly to local cultural heritage (i.e., Transjordanian culture) rather than external influences, such as Tewfik.

Another example of nostalgic appeal includes personal reflections about the past lives of Transjordanian families in rural areas and the hinterlands. These reflections involve sharing personal stories and photographs from family albums from a pre-IT and pre-internet age. Many Facebook posts sentimentalise traditional family weddings and family gatherings in desert and rural areas. They often humorously describe the bride's white dress, the folklore songs sung, and the behaviour of relatives during that happy event. The posts also highlight the traditional values of the 1950s and 1960s, which are closely associated with community gathering, strong family bonds, and simpler ways of life. Overall, the humour in these Facebook posts frequently carries a deep sentimental longing for a time before the 1989 political opening and economic liberalisation in modern Jordan, which some perceive as the loss of traditional values in favour of westernised and more individualistic norms in contemporary Jordanian society.

Jordanian nostalgic humour has therefore become highly politicised in social media spaces. This is because it contrasts an idealised past with a flawed present. It has tended to critique contemporary government politics and neoliberal policies, as endorsed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund since 1989. In the Jordanian context, this has involved the mythologisation of the early Hashemite period or the pre-1990s era of tribal authority, portraying these periods as a golden age for Jordan. Such humour has functioned politically because it has mobilised collective memory to critique, legitimise, or resist current power structures. Within right-wing Jordanian discourse, sentimental humourists frame contemporary Jordanian society as having lost its way, attributing blame to the government, political elites, modernity, or foreign influences. They instead tend to glorify a more conservative and traditional vision of an 'idealised Jordan,' from a pre-IT and pre-internet age before the 1990s.

4.3. Hyper-loyalist expressions of Jordanian identity

Jordanian political humour about exaggerated loyalty is captured through the image of *Saḥīj* (an exaggerated loyalist). The term, which has somewhat obscure origins, refers to some Transjordanian people who are 'blind loyalists': those who strongly support and even celebrate government discourse and policies without criticality, including unpopular ones. Although the term is etymologically related to expressions of exaggerated approval, such as clapping or cheering, it has come to symbolise blind loyalists as having square-shaped heads, referring to their rigid thinking and outdated loyalty. Although Jordanian humorous artefacts online have

rarely caricatured the figure of Saḥīj directly, its abstract sense of exaggerated loyalism has been frequently treated as a subject of critical mockery within the realm of 'safe satire' and unproblematic targets.

One meme alludes to the image of one Saḥīj through abstraction to a tragic life that would lead one to hell or being caught in a trap like a mouse. The meme mocks this blind loyalty in stick figures, without, however, fully visualising the image of Saḥīj in a realistic drawing**.** Another meme plays on the Saḥīj's inability to criticise authority or question power structures in society. In this example, a Jordanian Facebook page features this story. An Arab ruler misses a shot while hunting a hare. The Saḥīj who accompanies him in that journey into deep desert says, "Oh my God, this is the first time I see a dead hare running!" This awkward response is presented in a meme to absurdly justify the ruler's failure. It also highlights how loyalist people tend to elevate their rulers to near-divine status by portraying them as incapable of error or wrongdoing.

The concept of Jordanity emerges in this type of politically humorous content. At its core, Jordanity refers to Bedouin and rural East Jordanian culture, language, and performative nationalism. Jordanians of Palestinian origin in urban areas often view this traditional marker of Jordanian society as backward and exclusionary, particularly when it dismisses modernisation of Jordanian society. One viral meme embodies this romanticised Transjordanian identity: a traditional Bedouin man, who looks stern and humourless, and who is asked why he never smiles. He replies, "Our coffee is bitter [referring to the traditional taste of Jordanian Arabic coffee, known as *qahwa sādah* or plain coffee], our sea is dead [a metaphorical reference to the Dead Sea and the impossibility of life forms existing or surviving in its water], our gulf is an obstacle [referring to the Arabic meaning of the city of Aqaba as an obstacle], our dish is Maqluba [literally means 'upside down'], our famous names are Za'el [literally 'angry'], Muhawish [literally 'aggressive'], and Odwan [literally 'hostile'], our famous singer is Mit'eb [literally 'tired'], and our favourite song by Tewfik reads 'Woe to those who oppose us.' Based on these references, how could I be cheerful or have a smiling face?!" Here this humorous exaggeration parodies stoicism and national pride. This is because it is often associated with conservative Transjordanian cultural traditions which place less value on humour and joking and more on stern and serious facial expressions.

Another genre of politically satirical memes highlights stereotypical masculine traits associated with Transjordanians in everyday life. Common examples include sayings, such as: "If a Jordanian buys falafel, he'll eat most of them on the way home," "He'll refill an empty shampoo bottle with water," "If his mother asks where he's going, he'll reply, 'I'll be right back,'" and "He bites a dead remote battery before reinserting it." These humorous artefacts celebrate Transjordanian masculinity while subtly critiquing its rigidity and traditionalism. At the same time, they reinforce loyalty to the inherited Transjordanian cultural imagination, in contrast to Jordanian-Palestinian culture, which is more associated with modernity and cosmopolitan lifestyles.

In other memes, the traditional Jordanian is represented by the abstract figure of *nashmī*, namely a man who embodies courage, generosity, honour, and other noble traits associated with Transjordanian Bedouin or rural culture.[2] As Al-Mahadin (2022, p. 63) explains, the word has become closely associated with East-Banker Jordanian masculinity and the true meaning of being a Jordanian. This image is used to assert the ethnic superiority of Transjordanians over Palestinians and others of non-Arab backgrounds in urban centres. Such humour resists national

[2] The word *nashmiyya* (plural: *nashmiyyāt*) is the feminine equivalent of *nashmī* (plural: *nashāma*), a term representing the Transjordanian masculine, national ideal, or heroic figure. While women may be linguistically included through this feminine form, they are often sidelined or left undefined. In the Transjordanian national ideal, the abstract figure of the nashmī remains predominantly masculine. The role of nashmiyyāt is rendered, however, as largely symbolic rather than fully realised.

unification and promotes instead East Jordanian exclusivism. It uses satire and exaggeration to critique the regime proposals for the unity of Jordanian people by highlighting divisions among Jordanian society.

Here, while the ideal Jordanian is portrayed as nashmī, the non-nashmī remains a subtle yet persistent contrast to the noble traits the non-nashmī lacks (Barahmeh & Fras, 2025, p. 210). This contrast is sometimes visually marked through clothing: the red-and-white checkered headscarf worn by many Transjordanians, which serves as a cultural emblem of Transjordanian tribal identity, Bedouin heritage, and loyalty to the Hashemite regime. In contrast, those who wear the black-and-white patterned scarf are commonly associated with Palestinian identity and solidarity. This alternative form of headwear is sometimes implicitly positioned within the idealised image of the nashmī. Here, Jordanity functions not just as a cultural identity but as a political construct. It is framed in exclusivist, nationalist, and ethnic terms, drawing a sharp distinction between Transjordanians and others, where the abstract image of the nashmī represents the idealised and masculine Transjordanian figure. In such context, this image of nashmī is not merely cultural. It is highly politicised and ethnicised. It shapes Jordanity as an exclusivist construct.

4.4. Misogynistic undertones

The role of women in the Middle East (including Jordan) has been shaped by both local (nationalist) discourse and foreign (colonial) influences. These narratives are often intertwined with issues of women's rights, state feminism, and cultural representations. In a such context, the status of women has been largely reinforced by patriarchal dominance and masculinist populism (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Although this is slowly changing, women in contemporary Jordanian society remain socially, culturally, and politically underrepresented. Public and private life continue to be dominated by men. This is largely because Jordanian society has been traditionally tribal and patriarchal (Tell, 2013, p. 31). This tradition has therefore largely defined gender roles by enforcing the authority of male figures. In such a conservative society, women are rarely mentioned in social, historical, and political narratives. In some Transjordanian rural areas, women are still confined to the domestic sphere, with little access to education and employment outside of the home. Instead, they are primarily tasked with household responsibilities, food preparation, and raising children.

It is, consequently, not surprising that women are frequently targeted by Jordanian sexist jokes and gender stereotypes (Haider & Al-Abbas, 2022). As evidence shows in this section, misogynist humour in Jordan is frequently seen as political. This is because it reinforces patriarchal power dynamics and consistently undermines the role of women in public life. Recent research (e.g., Bellè, 2025) has suggested a distinctly political dimension to misogynistic humour in Italian far-right politics. This is because it reinforces, or occasionally challenges, existing gender power relations and ideologies within the country's socio-political context.

One common example of misogynistic humour in Jordan includes memes that mock women who appear in public spaces without make-up, highlighting the cultural expectation that beauty is women's primary asset. These jokes often label women as 'ugly' or 'unattractive' without cosmetics. Other Jordanian posts in social media spaces sarcastically state 'A woman's heart is the most beautiful part of her body because it does not have any make-up.' Some jokes mock women's driving skills, portraying them as 'careless' or 'dangerous drivers.' These jokes associate women with negative stereotypes that perpetuate harmful comments about women.

Other jokes highlight women's consumer habits. They frame them as 'irrational spenders,' obsessed with going out and shopping. Phrases such as, 'her credit card cries more than her baby' or 'every mall is her second home' are widespread among Jordanians in social media spaces. The contents of women's handbags are also a recurring target. Witty comments imply

that women's handbags are mostly filled with cosmetics and other useless items rather than anything practical or intellectual. These witty remarks play on gender roles and traditionally stereotype women as materialistic and self-centred.

Jordanian jokes about marital life, including arguments between husbands and wives, are also trending topics in social media spaces. Although these jokes play on sensitive and controversial topics, they are often light-hearted and uplifting. Some humorous anecdotes and memes depict wives as 'nagging, emotionally unavailable, or unapologetic.' Other posts exaggerate women's personality traits. They suggest that women are 'inherently difficult individuals, hard to satisfy, overly demanding, and unappreciative by nature.' These misogynistic views, which contain sweeping and negative generalisations about women in Jordanian society, are not based on scientific evidence. Rather, they are influenced by learned stereotypes and cultural influences. The prevalence of Jordanian misogynistic humour in social media spaces indicates the persistence of tribal and patriarchal values in Jordanian society.

Women studying at university, especially those from rural backgrounds, are often ridiculed for their perceived loss of Jordanity. In this context, the cultural imagination of femininity is inherently self-contradictory. While women from Transjordanian or rural backgrounds are linguistically celebrated as *nashmiyyāt*, their social mobility and engagement with urban lifestyles are frequently mocked and viewed as 'betrayals' of an authentic Transjordanian tribal or rural identity. One common target of such ridicule is the rural women's pronunciation of the Arabic letter *qāf* in their speech as a [ʔ] (glottal stop) variant, which is the primary characteristic of urban Jordanian dialect. Instead of the [g] variant, which is common among Transjordanian tribal and rural dialects, some rural women studying at university make this linguistic shift to showcase their urban identity and modernity. Jokes of this type focus on how Transjordanian women soften their pronunciation of qāf to favour prestigious features over tribal and rural males who prefer the pronunciation of the [g] variant. This substitution is apparent in words such as *ʔahwa* (with the glottal stop ʔ) instead of *gahwa* (coffee). This phonological shift is mocked as pretentious or inauthentic to Jordanity. It reinforces the stereotype that educated women from tribal or rural backgrounds are trying too hard to appear urban or sophisticated. Far from being benign or harmless, these misogynistic undertones reinforce social inequalities and perpetuate negative stereotypes through 'just joking.' They seek to function as a cultural mechanism to control women in both public and private spaces.

5. Discussion

Jordanian political humour in social media spaces reflects a deep ideological stance within the country's political landscape. It has relied on a discourse that is primarily anti-government, calling for the implementation of far-reaching economic and political reforms from above, but it has never called for the overthrow of the Hashemite regime (Ryan, 2018). Such humour cannot be simply reduced to a pro- versus anti-regime binary. Rather, it shows a more fluid and sometimes complex ideological terrain in which the critique of the government coexists with loyalty to the Hashemite regime. The humour about hyper-loyalist expressions of Jordanity is rooted in Transjordanian life and culture and is contrasted with the image of 'non-Jordanian' identity in urban centres.

The nature and specifically the rhetoric and targets of Jordanian political humour were significant to the rise and development of right-wing ideologies in social media spaces after the 2011 Arab uprisings. Tribal nationalist actors have re-emerged during this period under populist slogans, such as *Jordan for Jordanians* to invoke nostalgia for the pre-1990s era of tribal authority, when tribal loyalty translated into economic and political privilege. Political humour that has aligned with these actors often ridicules leftist ideologies, modern gender norms, or

liberal urban elites in contemporary Jordanian society. They glorify traditionalism, religion, and a limited sense of indigenous Jordanian national identity that is based on East Jordanian exclusivism. From this perspective, Jordanian right-wing humour is not merely comic relief. It is a political and ideological tool. It reinforces populist narratives that blame elites and the government, promote exclusionary identity politics, and often resist globalist or liberal social changes in contemporary Jordanian society. Whether emerging from Islamist or within tribal nationalist circles among Transjordanians online, this humour has focused on a conservative Jordanian national identity. Such identity has remained anxious about socio-political changes and the integration of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in the wider Jordanian society. It has also feared some geopolitical pressures, such as the 'alternative homeland' scenario that would envision Jordan into a new homeland for Palestinians.

The findings of this research illustrate how Jordanian political humour in social media spaces functions as a cultural critique while also remaining within the limits of what can and cannot be said under societal expectations and legal frameworks. These four themes resonate in the broader global patterns observed in right-wing and far-right political humour research (e.g., Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022; Gaufman & Ganesh, 2024; Kuipers & Zijp, 2024; Bellè, 2025; Bayarri Toscano & Fernández-Villanueva, 2025). However, in the Middle East, and more specifically Jordan, research into political humour has tended to over-emphasise the application of linguistic theories of humour (e.g., Farghal & Shakir, 1993; Khatib, 1999; Al-Momani et al., 2016; Al-Sawaeer et al., 2022; Farghal & Hamdan, 2024), with some recent attention to the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival and carnivalesque humour (e.g., Barahmeh, 2020; 2023a; 2023b; 2024). This study extends that body of work by examining how Jordanian political humour contributes to the construction and dissemination of populist and right-wing ideologies in social media spaces. Socio-economic grievances, such as those voiced by conservative Transjordanians in rural areas, are examples that reflect changes in the socio-political and ideological shifts of contemporary Jordanian society since the 2011 Arab uprisings.

6. Conclusion

This article has analysed prominent and recurrent themes in Jordanian political humour related to right-wing politics in social media spaces. It has explored how regional dynamics and the emergence of a new form of right-wing populism have significantly influenced Jordanian political humour since the 2011 Arab uprisings. In post-Arab Spring Jordan, political humour has become a discursive tool through which widespread discontent is voiced, particularly among Transjordanian people who feel economically or politically marginalised. In this atmosphere for 'change,' political humour has highlighted a relationship between Transjordanian ethnic exclusivism and the formation of Jordanian right-wing ideologies in social media spaces. As this article has demonstrated, this shift has pointed to the emergence of right-wing populism in the Jordanian political landscape since 2011. This right-wing populism is increasingly shaped by a significant tribal component.

The findings of this study have identified, non-exclusively, four themes within Jordanian right-wing political humour: (1) anti-government sentiment, (2) nostalgic references to tribal or national identity, (3) hyper-loyalist expressions of Jordanian identity, and (4) misogynistic undertones that target the role and function of women in Jordanian society. Each theme has illustrated how Jordanian political humour in social media spaces functions as a cultural critique while remaining within the limits of what can and cannot be said under societal expectations and legal frameworks. Jordanian social media users often operate within regime-defined red lines, yet they express their socio-political and economic grievances using a satirical and populist tone.

The rise of Jordanian political humour that aligns with right-wing ideologies in social media spaces appears to have been associated with a small but growing anti-government sentiment. However, unlike many of its Arab neighbours, these sentiments have not materialised into a public revolution or rebellion against the Hashemite regime, nor they have been solely defined by Islamic rhetoric or tribal nationalist discourse. Rather, these sentiments have been primarily motivated by socio-political and economic grievances. This is particularly evident in the examples of political humour that target the government's economic reform and its processes since 2011.

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