

The Language of Politics

Ofer Feldman *Editor*

Communicating Political Humor in the Media

How Culture Influences Satire and Irony

 Springer

The Language of Politics

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Editor

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*To the Hatanis—
Akifumi, Asaya, and Usa*

Who love trains, green cars, and to laugh.

Preface

This is the second published volume of a project concerning contemporary political humor in a variety of societies and groups around the globe. It follows the first volume entitled *Political Humor Worldwide: The Cultural Context of Political Comedy, Satire, and Parody* (2024), but is distinguished by its focus on political humor in different mass media—print, broadcast, and social networking services (SNS). Its value for readers who are interested in political behavior, communication, and culture is likely to be found in three areas. First, the relationship between culture (encompassing norms of behavior, attitudes, belief, etc., in all walks of life), and expressions of humor about politics, the political system and institutions, and office holders and aspiring politicians, as manifested in a variety of media channels. In particular, this entails how cultural factors (e.g., social structure, social relationship, historical experiences, economic system, and individualism/collectivism) affect the content, type, and style of humorous expressions in channels of communication in a given country/society. Second, the way graphic artists, satirists, comedians, cartoonists, parody programs writers, users of SNS, journalists and columnists, as well as general readers, utilize the media to voice satire, parody, jokes, and other expressions of humor, through which they target policymakers, the administration, and the political processes. Third, political humor's social, political, psychological effects or potential effects as displayed by the media in any given polity.

As with the first volume, this book has an outstanding collection of chapters written by experts in research areas such as political behavior, communication, linguistics, and cultural studies. They all bring multinational and multidisciplinary diversity, as well as an array of theoretical/conceptual approaches and research methods, to detail how culture is relevant (or affects) political humor, also offering potential avenues for future research on the nature and effect of this type of alternative political communication.

The common thread that runs through these two books is that expressions of humor in politics—whether in face-to-face communication such as during parliamentary deliberations and election campaign speeches, or through the mass media—reflect multiple facets. Such expressions are accepted and appreciated by members of one society as amusing and result in laughter, yet they could be regarded as rude and

unpleasant to members of another society. Thus, at the heart of this project lies the notion that culture is a powerful element affecting and determining the content, nature, and characteristics of humor regarding political issues and personnel, and as well as reaction to these.

The two volumes form a collection with strong internal coherence and abundant cross-references among their contributions, and our intent and hope is that they will be read and used together as a unified, polyphonic, and interdisciplinary contribution to the study of the fascinating yet under-researched subject of political humor.

As the editor of this book, I sincerely thank all the contributors for their commitment and support to this project and their timely contributions despite their very busy schedules; their competence and patience made the completion of this volume possible. I hope that the process of writing their chapters has been a rewarding endeavor for them as well. I am especially grateful to Sam Lehman-Wilzig, who, as in previous projects, carried out the language and copy-editing task. All the contributors are deeply indebted to him for his meticulous editing work that improved the quality of our publication. My thanks to Sonja Zmerli for her continual support and sense of humor during this project, and to Hongna Miao for friendship and valuable talks from which I have greatly benefited. Many thanks also to Yuriko Kôno, Aya Ojiri, and Chie Sakuragi, for helping in research, coding, and communication matters regarding this volume. Furthermore, I am deeply indebted to Einat Maoz for years-long friendly and unwavering encouragement and kindness, and to Efraim Gantz and Asher (Ashi) Nutovitz for moral and professional support and advice through difficult times. My great respect and heartfelt gratitude to Tatsushi Mayama, a scholar, colleague, and friend, without whose support this intellectual journey in Doshisha University over the last 20 years wouldn't have been possible. Finally, special thanks to Juno Kawakami, our editor at Springer, for her thoughtful guidance and counsel throughout the whole process. Needless to mention, as in my previous projects, none of the above-mentioned individuals bear any responsibility for any mistake or flaws in this book—except perhaps my three grandsons Akifumi (4.5 years old), Asaya (2.5 years old), and Usa (200 days) to whom this book is dedicated.

Kyoto, Japan

Ofer Feldman

Reference

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Chapter 1

Humor and Politics in the Media: A Conceptual Introduction



Ofer Feldman

Abstract This chapter presents a general introduction to the book. It draws upon and summarizes the key aspects of humoristic expressions in politics as detailed in the previous volume in this series of two books on political humor. It first reintroduces the definition and the scope of political humor, suggesting that humor about political matters is a highly contextual and subjective phenomenon that can be perceived differently by individuals, with different cultures shaping its content, nature, and characteristics. This is followed by a short presentation of the theoretical approaches that guide the subsequent chapters. The chapter also discusses key aspects in the analysis of political humor: first, that humoristic expressions related to politics can be employed for positive and negative purposes, illustrated by examples on the role played by stereotypes and prejudice in creating ethno-national humor; and second, that members of the public, political elite, and the media employ humorous expressions in politics while using different means for different goals. The final section of this chapter details the structure of the book, briefly describing each of the contributions.

1.1 Introduction

This book's overall project views political humor as a form of comical expression communicated via any medium that addresses aspects of, or directed at, the power structure, including the political system and process, political institutions, political leaders, and subject matters in the public sphere. Such expression is found in verbal messages including jokes, puns, parody, comedy, satire, and metaphors, and in non-oral discourse and visual representations such as graffiti, caricatures, cartoons,

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pictures, or *manga* (comic or satiric strips). The latter are detailed in the ensuing chapters.¹

Arguably, political legitimacy implies deference to the government, its institutions, and representatives. This is the primary tenet underlying all types of political systems. Humor that is aimed at the power structure and public officials, through such venues as parody, comedy, satire, and jokes, is created and circulated by members of the public (or journalists and political pundits) on the assumption that this might satisfy a need for disrespect of political authority and a relief from the trivial stress and frustrations people feel toward political leaders, institutions, or policies. In this sense, such humor can be seen as weapons of political criticism and contempt, as methods of individual coping with disliked policies, politicians, and circumstances, and as an instrument to get even with oppressors.

Such humor draws upon two noteworthy concepts. First, the common experiences and stereotypes around which identities and perceptions toward the self and the other are formed. Very often it satisfies needs that are more psychological and symbolic than political, more in the domain of amusement instead of pursuing and realizing public goals. In this respect, it is a discourse of persuasion and opinion, and attitude formation and change, almost always against the political elite, oppressors, and the “other.” On this premise, the rhetoric of political humor is ultimately political.

Second, political humor relies on the semantics and pragmatics of political language, contextual information, the culture, norms, values, and beliefs of a given society or an ethnic group, and the political culture of a given country (Bergson, 2008, p. 11). Humor in general, and humor about political issues and personnel in particular, are thus seen as a highly contextual and subjective phenomenon that may be interpreted differently by individuals. It can be funny for some people and evoke laughter, but could also result in unexpected or unpleasant outcomes, including nervousness and embarrassment, by offending and upsetting others.

The idea that context affects political humor is also central to the project that resulted in this book, focusing especially on cultural circumstances. Our assumption is that humor doesn’t develop in a vacuum; it evolved as part of the interaction between individuals and their surroundings. As a form of alternative communication between individuals, humor is therefore influenced by specific circumstances, language, religion, history, and social values and norms. People from different cultural backgrounds, Western and non-Western—Asian and Middle Eastern societies, individualistic and collectivist cultures—perceive, interpret, use, and are affected by humor, as well as with other means of communication in different ways (see Feldman, 2021). There are cultures and political cultures in which humor plays an important role in social life, where humor in its diverse forms is accepted, and cultures where humor is not encouraged in everyday life.

Focusing on different countries and groups, the following chapters examine the extent to which cultural factors are related to (reflect, shape, determine) the content,

¹ This chapter draws on Feldman (2024). The interested reader should see this reference for a detailed discussion of the theoretical background, methodological perspectives, and numerous examples related to the topic.

nature, and characteristics of humor in selected countries and social groups. The message emanating from this work is about the distinctive power of humor: studying political humor leads to a better understanding of political rhetoric, information processing, attitude formation and change, persuasion, and political engagement.

In this chapter, following a brief theoretical consideration, I detail three selected aspects at the heart of political humor relevant to the ensuing chapters: Sect. 1.3 discusses first the notion that political humor can be employed for both good and bad purposes, followed by a discussion on the role played by stereotypes in affecting ethno-national humor. Section 1.4 details each of the three main groups—the public, politicians, and mass media—that employ humorous expressions in politics, detailing the means they use and their goals in doing so. Finally, the chapter details the structure of the book and briefly describes each of the contributions.

1.2 Theoretical Considerations

Along with studies in such fields of knowledge as anthropology, philosophy, literature, and history, research in the fields of psychology, sociology, and linguistics have paid considerable attention to, and developed theories, explaining humor's role and effect in society, and especially the circumstances that enable humor to be effective, interesting, and amusing. Warren and his team (2021) noted more than 20 different psychological theories that attempt to identify a set of psychological conditions, or characteristics prompting laughter, and the perception that something is amusing. These are split into three predominant theories, often linked to each other and sharing the same concepts, that explain humor appreciation: superiority, incongruity, and relief/release. The three theories and their relevance to political humor are detailed hereon.

1.2.1 *Superiority Theory*

Superiority Theory suggests that the purpose of humor is to demonstrate one's superiority, dominance, hostility, derision, or power over others or some objects, and also over the persons' own former position or a former version of themselves (Lintott, 2016; Smuts, 2006). This theory works well in the realm of political humor, as laughs can easily be gained at the expense of other individuals or groups in society. It is often demonstrated in racist and sexist attitudes that intend to derogate or humiliate members of minorities such as ethnic groups, women, LGBT, and physically handicapped persons (see Feldman, 2023a, 2023b), and in humor demeaning members of certain populations. Here is a joke that falls under this category that ostensibly shows the "superiority" of a Romanian in comparison to Russians.

A Romanian engineer came to visit his friend, a Russian engineer, in Russia, and saw that he had a beautiful apartment with seven rooms. The Romanian, surprised by this wealth, asked his friend how does a person in a communist country manage to build himself a 7-room apartment?

The Russian: Do you see that big bridge over there?

The Romanian: Yes.

The Russian: I planned it. So you take a stone here, a stone there, a bag of cement here, a bag of cement there, and that's how I build it.

A year later, the Russian engineer went to visit his friend in Romania and to his surprise saw that his friend had a huge villa with 24 rooms, a private pool, and tennis and golf courts.

The Russian: How does a person in a communist country manage to build himself a villa like this?

The Romanian: Do you see that big bridge over there?

The Russian: No.

The Romanian: That's it.

1.2.2 Incongruity Theory

The Incongruity theory of humor focuses on its cognitive or intellectual aspects. It is based upon the idea that humor results from a contrast between what is logically expected and what actually takes place or what is said i.e., the mismatch between two or more normally unrelated ideas or events that are brought together in an unanticipated, inappropriate, or surprising manner. Consider the following examples:

Customer: Waiter, there is a dead fly in my soup.

Waiter: I know, the heat kills them.

An old Jewish man reads about Einstein's theory of relativity in the newspaper and asks his scientist grandson to explain it to him.

The grandson explains: "Well, grandpa, it's sort of like this. Einstein says that if you're having your teeth drilled without Novocaine, a minute seems like an hour. But if you're sitting with a beautiful woman on your lap, an hour seems like a minute."

The old man considers this profound bit of thinking for a moment and says, "And from this he makes a living?"

Employee comes back from a business trip to Brazil.

Boss: How was your trip?

Employee: It was fine but I don't like Brazil. The whole country is nothing but soccer players and hookers.

Boss: You do know that my wife is Brazilian, right?

Employee (flushing): Oh really? Which team does she play for?

1.2.3 Relief/Release Theory

Third, the Relief/Release theory relates less to what makes something funny and more to the purpose of laughter and its physiological effects—the release of tension—asserting that humor and the resulting laughter are necessary to discharge energy and stress (Smuts, 2006). Here, humor appears as a socially acceptable vehicle to

relieve tension about such sensitive issues as aggression, violence, racism, and sexual impulses that individuals might find difficult or uncomfortable to discuss (cf., Freud, 1960, pp. 797–803). As opposed to the previous theories, the relief/release theory is not of much use in the study of political humor because while it describes the process of laughter, it does not contribute to the discussion of purposeful humor that the incongruity and superiority theories provide. The following is an example of a joke that could be said to fall under this category:

Two elderly couples were enjoying a friendly conversation when one of the men asked the other, “Jack, how was the memory clinic you went to last month?”
 “Outstanding,” Jack replied. “They taught us all the latest psychological techniques visualization, association—it made a huge difference for me.”
 “That’s great! What was the name of the clinic?”
 Jack went blank. He thought and thought, but couldn’t remember. Then a smile broke across his face and he asked, “What do you call that red flower with the long stem and thorns?”
 “You mean a rose?”
 “Yes, that’s it!” Jack turned to his wife. “Rose, what was the name of that clinic we went to?”

Taken together, the three theories are an essential framework for presenting the variety of classical approaches. They are, however, incomplete and by themselves not adequate to fully describe the phenomenon. As such, scholars proposed comprehensive theories encompassing all aspects of humor development within a framework that makes sense of contemporary matters.

1.2.4 *Comprehensive Theories*

Examples of comprehensive theories include *John Morreal’s* (1983) theory that combines the traditional approaches of superiority, incongruity, and release, emphasizing that all laughter results from a pleasant psychological change of the individual in response to the humorous stimulus, and *Avner Ziv’s* model for understanding humor (Ziv, 1984). The latter emphasizes five specific functions rather than psychological change: aggressive, sexual, social, humor as a defense mechanism, and intellectual function. Here is a brief description of each of these functions.

1.2.4.1 **The Aggressive Function**

The aggressive function of humor involves the victimization of individuals (e.g., lawyer humor, psychiatrist humor), groups (e.g., ethnic humor), or institutions (e.g., political humor), through ridicule or disparagement, creating a sense of superiority in the perpetrator. Consider the following example of this kind of humor:

Questions: What’s the difference between a good lawyer and a great lawyer?
 Answer: A good lawyer knows the law. A great lawyer knows the judge.

Patient: "Doctor, I keep thinking I'm a dog."
 Psychiatrist: "Lie down on the couch and I'll examine you."
 Patient: "I can't, I'm not allowed on the furniture."

God creates the world and decides that for the Holy Land he's going all out. He tells the angels of his plans: "The place will be flowing with milk and honey; there will be beautiful mountain ranges and gorgeous deserts; a fine coast with nice beach; not too big a country so the people can stay together; great weather with no hurricanes, typhoons, snowstorms; etc." At some point the angels stop God and ask: "Don't you think you're exaggerating a bit? OK, they might be your Chosen People, but this is extreme!" To which God replies: "Just wait; I haven't told you who I'm giving them for neighbors."

1.2.4.2 The Sexual Function

The sexual function deals with socially acceptable ways to express and reduce sexual tension i.e., what society consider taboo. Sexual humor can indicate enjoyment, anxiety, or disappointment in sex, allowing people to challenge such taboos in a pleasant manner. An example in this regard:

A man goes to a psychologist and says, "Doc, I got a real problem, I can't stop thinking about sex."
 The Psychologist says, "Well let's see what we can find out," and pulls out his ink blots. "What is this a picture of?" he asks.
 The man turns the picture upside down then turns it around and states, "That's a man and a woman on a bed making love."
 The Psychologist says, "Very interesting," and shows the next picture.
 "And what is this a picture of?"
 The man looks and turns it in different directions and says, "That's a man and a woman on a bed making love."
 The Psychologists tries again with the third ink blot, and asks the same question, "What is this a picture of?"
 The patient again turns it in all directions and replies, "That's a man and a woman on a bed making love."
 The Psychologist states, "Well, yes, you do seem to be obsessed with sex."
 "Me!?" demands the patient. "You're the one who keeps showing me the dirty pictures!"

1.2.4.3 The Social Function

This function of humor is characterized by two aspects. First, relationships within a group, the social system within which personal acquaintance and interaction between and among group members exist. Second, society as a whole or social phenomena. Humor's role is to reform aspects of these. On the one hand it includes, among other things, strengthening group relations, cultivating social intimacy, and reinforcing group cohesiveness. On the other hand, humor can be used to exclude members from the group (Ziv, 1984, p. 3). Humor in this sense can be a way of improving society, working as a social corrective by acting as a safety valve for the release of tensions and frustration. Satire, for example, conveys a social message, expresses many social problems and aspirations, and its aim is to educate through humor. In this book, satire in political cartoons, broadcast and the print media are exemplars in this regard.

Political cartoons, as discussed below, are also satirical representations that are essentially discursive and intertextual. They question power relations, indicate societal injustice, and reveal corruption. Satire enables cartoonists to tackle serious and sensitive issues in a way that motivate thinking, and encourage debate. It is utilized in political cartoons in several ways including highlighting specific characteristics or behaviors of political leaders by stressing the divergence between what leaders say and what they do, by ridiculing their actions, decisions, and statements, and by criticizing specific policies, ideologies, or societal issues associated with the leaders and political parties.

As such, satire has tremendous cultural significance in Indonesia, for example, with a long history of mixing comedy and satire into daily life through folklore, traditional performances, and oral storytelling (see Chap. 3). Political cartoonists have utilized satire to criticize Indonesia authority, and to express discontent of political leaders and policies, providing social commentary on governance, political climate, and socioeconomic challenges, that contribute to public discussions. Likewise, for more than two centuries satirical cartoons in Spain (Chap. 6) were able to serve as a loudspeaker and reference for transcendent issues such as the Franco dictatorship, democratic transition, territoriality, and anticlericalism. In Brazil, satire depicted in political cartoons was able to criticize Jair Bolsonaro's ultraconservative agenda (see Chap. 4), and also in Japan (Chap. 2) satire of contemporary socio-political discourses through *manga* played an important role in molding public attitudes and the agenda. In the broadcast media, satirical sketches in Poland include historical references, ethnic stereotypes, and representations of individual political leaders (Chap. 8), and in the print media, satire in Japan (see Chap. 12) is expressed in humorous verses that focus also on political leaders, policies, and political issues.

1.2.4.4 The Defensive Function

As a defense mechanism, humor is a means of providing us with a way to deal with our anxieties. Two characteristic forms of humor as a defense mechanism are identified, both assisting in protecting an individual's self-image and emotional balance. First, humor acts as a form of self-inoculation against what scares us in a form of "gallows humor" or "black humor," the type that makes light of a subject often considered taboo, serious, or painful to discuss; for example, death, crime, discrimination, terrorism, and genocide, including the Holocaust. It is instrumental in actively helping us to handle threats and horror instead of yielding to it, and can be described as the humor of survival (Ziv, 1984, p. 58). Here are examples of "black humor:"

"Did you hear about the guy whose left side was cut off? He's all right now."

In a bar, a guest and a German bartender were having a conversation. They talk for some time until they come to the topic of religion. "Yeah, I'm Jewish," says the man. The bartender is in shock: "I'm terribly sorry for the Holocaust, oh my God, we did horrible things to you." The Jewish man doesn't know how to react. It feels wrong to just respond with "It's okay..." The bartender cuts the silence first: "If there is anything I can do for you, just say." The Jew thinks for a moment. "Oh umm, could I possibly get free beer?"

The bartender: “Oh, I mean if I could I totally would, but the owner would kill me if he found out...”.

The Jew: “Yeah, don’t worry, it is not your fault. After all, you’re just following orders, right?”.

The second characteristic form of humor as a defense mechanism is self-disparagement or self-deprecating humor i.e., the ability to laugh at oneself or groups we belong to. By revealing the speaker’s weakness, self-disparaging humor aims at discharging any hostility towards themselves by impeding aggressive motives, gaining sympathy from others who identify with the humorist’s shortcomings, and at the same time enabling them to actively grapple with their fear and drawbacks. Sigmund Freud (1960, p. 111) noted that self-deprecating jokes by Jews point to the positive attributes of the Jewish people at the same time that they poked fun at perceived negatives. Here is an example in this context:

Two beggars are sitting side by side on the street in Rome. One has a cross in front of him, the other a Star of David. Many people go by, but only put money into the hat of the beggar sitting behind the cross. A priest comes by, stops and watches throngs of people giving money to the beggar sitting behind the cross, but none give to the beggar sitting behind the Star of David. Finally, the priest goes over to the beggar behind the Star of David and says: “Don’t you understand? This is a Catholic country. People aren’t going to give you money if you sit there with a Star of David in front of you, especially if you’re sitting beside a beggar who has a cross. In fact, they would probably give to him triple the amount just out of spite to you.”

The beggar behind the Star of David listened to the priest, turned to the other beggar with the cross and said: “Aaron, look who’s trying to teach us marketing.”

1.2.4.5 The Intellectual Function

Finally, based on wordplay and absurdities, intellectual humor provides temporary release from strict rules and rational thought, an escape to the absurd. The intellectual function of humor involves understanding and problem solving. Understanding is a part of the thought process, and the enjoyment of humor calls for an intellectual activity like the kind required in problem solving. Here are related examples:

Question: “How many dead are there in this cemetery?”

Answer: “Everyone.”

“Once I had multiple personalities, but now we are feeling well.”

“I used to be indecisive. Now I’m not sure.”

Two men are sitting in a pub and looking through the window.

One says, “Do you see the two ladies across the road? One is my wife and the other one is my mistress.”

“You just took the words out of my mouth,” replies the other.

Perhaps also included in this category is the Japanese *dajare* (literally, “word-play”), a linguistic device similar in spirit to a pun that relies on similarities in the pronunciation of words to create simple jokes. These homophones (and Japanese has plenty of these), have a different “spelling.” Most of the time the pun relies on the

phrase being spoken (different from writing when different kanji i.e., logographic Chinese characters, are used for the same sounds). Thus, while speaking, one can use context or explain later, but when writing something down, kanji specify the meaning apart from the pronunciation. *Dajare* are also associated with *oyaji gyagu* (literally “old man gag” or “old man joke”), which is the Japanese equivalent to dad (“old man”) jokes in English (see Toshiko, 2022).

Here are a few example of *dajare* that use the same syllables twice, carrying a different meaning the second time yet still making a somewhat coherent phrase and a completely meaningful sentence to make a pun:

Arumikan (aluminum can) *no ue ni* (on it’s top) *aru mikan* (an orange).
There is an orange [*mikan*] on an aluminum can.

Ikura (salmon roe) *wa ikura* (how much, regarding the cost of something)?
How much is the salmon roe?

*nyûyôku*² *de* (in New York) *nyûyoku* (taking a bath)
Taking a bath in New York

Sukii (ski) *ga suki* (like).
I like skiing.

Iruka (dolphins) *ga iruka* (are there)?
Are there dolphins?

Other *dajare* use similar sounds twice:

Futon (a Japanese style mattress) *ga futtonda* (blown away)
Futon was blown away

Or, sentences with more than one meaning:

Nê, (Hey) *chanto* (properly) *ofuro haitteru* (take a bath)?
Hey, do you take a bath properly?

Nêchan (your sister) *to* (with) *ofuro haitteru* (take a bath)?
Are you taking a bath with your sister?

Here, *nê* is used as an interjection, while *chanto* means “proper,” but the meaning quickly changes when combining both, as *nêchan* means “sister.”

1.3 Comparison and Stereotyping Aspects in Humor

1.3.1 Good and Bad Purposes

Considering the above theories on general humor, political humor can be employed for both benevolent and malevolent purposes. On the one hand, humor creates positive action (laughter) through a shared experience between the person providing the mirth

² A diacritical mark, for example, ê, ô, or û over the vowel indicates that it is a long vowel.

and the person enjoying the humor's benefits (the laughing person). Humor facilitates communication between individuals across social strata and hierarchies; it serves as a bonding tool and solidarity that ties people together, creates a friendly atmosphere in a given social group, a sense of belonging that can enhance teamwork in the workplace, a tool for healing, helping to relieve stress, and maintaining social justice (e.g., Friedman & Friedman, 2019; Warren et al., 2021).

Conversely, humor may serve as mocking discreditation and thus function as a tool for ridiculing, criticizing, demeaning, humiliating, belittling, and manipulating other people (Feldman, 2023a, 2023b). A political debaser can use "humor" i.e., debasing attack on a given victim, and then "protect themselves" by later saying to those who don't like such speech and criticize them: "I didn't really mean it; it was just in jest." (I thank Sam Lehman-Wilzig for his observation in this regard.) Such humor may stem from the need to reinforce one's own self, often at the expense of other people and relationships with them in order to enhance one's superiority, domination, and self-esteem. A large number of cases involve comparisons between good and evil, heaven and hell, and winners and losers, with rhetorical devices usually being employed, as discussed in the following section.

1.3.2 Stereotyping Groups and Ethnic Communities

Stereotypes, images, along with prejudice, enter also political humor in jokes regarding different groups of people, religions, classes, genders, and professions, as indicated in the following examples regarding "blond women," and then (ignorant) policemen:

A young, touring ventriloquist puts on a show in a small town. With his dummy on his knee, he starts going through his usual dumb blonde jokes.

Suddenly, a blonde woman in the third row stands on her chair and starts shouting, "I've heard enough of your stupid blonde jokes. What makes you think you can stereotype blonde women that way? What does the color of a woman's hair have to do with her worth as a human being? It's men like you who keep women like me from being respected at work and in the community, and from reaching our full potential as people. Its people like you that make others think that all blondes are dumb! You and your kind continue to perpetuate discrimination against not only blondes, but women in general, pathetically all in the name of humor!"

The embarrassed ventriloquist begins to apologize. The blonde then yells: "You stay out of this!... I'm talking to that little shit on your lap!!!"

Two policemen are standing on the street in New York City. A foreigner approaches them looking slightly panicked. "Parlez vous Francais?" He asks them. The policemen, not knowing a word of French merely shrug their shoulders at the man. Frustrated, the man asks them, "Ustedes hablan español?" Again, the policemen merely shrug. The foreigner continues with the same result with Dutch, Russian, and German. Eventually, he leaves, knowing that there's no hope for him to communicate with the officers. "I keep telling you we should learn more languages!" says one policeman to the other. "Why?" responds the other, "That man knows five, and it didn't get him anywhere."

Other examples include cultural stereotypes regarding naïve Native Americans, smart Jews, and “poor” Palestinians:

A Native American hitchhiker was picked up by a slick city man who was driving past the reservation.

As they were driving along, the Native American noticed a brown paper bag on the dashboard and inquired as to its contents.

The city man replied, “It’s a bottle of wine, I got it for my wife.”

The Native American looked forward at the road, nodded his head solemnly, and said, “Good trade.”

Two Jews were standing and talking on a Moscow street. One of them did not have official papers permitting him to be in Moscow at the time. When a police officer approached them to verify their documents, the Jew with the documents told his friend not to worry as he began to run from the officer.

The officer began to chase him. When he finally caught up, the officer asked him to show his documents, which he did. The officer asked him, “Why did you run away from me when you have the right documents?”

“My doctor told me to run one mile each day,” responded the Jew.

“But why didn’t you stop when you saw me running after you?” asked the officer.

“I thought your doctor told you the same,” said the Jew.

Question: “How many Palestinians does it take to change a light bulb?”

Answer: “None! They sit in the dark forever and blame the Israelis for it!”

1.3.3 Comparing National Groups

Likewise, here are examples of humor related to the concept of national character, defined as the traits apparent in the consciousness and behavioral tendencies shared by most of the population (e.g., Feldman, 1997). This is how cultural stereotypes find their way as classic jokes to illustrate differences in national character:

An international cruise ship, where every nationality in the world is represented on board, was sailing across the ocean. Suddenly, the ship springs a leak and begins to sink. The captain put the women and children in lifeboats. But there weren’t enough boats, so he had to persuade the men to jump into the water. One by one, the captain called up each national group, said something to them, then they jumped. Later, a reporter asked him, “How did you persuade each nationality to jump?” “It was easy,” explained the captain.

“To the American I said that if he jump into the sea, he’d be a hero.

To the British, if you jump you are true gentleman!

To the Australian, don’t be a wuss, all your mates are down there in the drink.

To the New Zealander, strap on this bungee cord—she’ll be alright!

To the Russian, all the vodka was washed overboard, I can see the bottles floating past...if you’re quick you can grab them.

To the French, please do NOT jump into the water.

To the German, according to regulations, all the men must jump into the sea.

To the Italian, beautiful woman are swimming in the sea!

To the Chinese, ingredients that look delicious are floating in the sea!

To the Japanese, everyone else has already jumped.

To the South Korean, the Japanese guy has already jumped.

To the North Korean, this is your chance to defect! This is your chance to go into exile!”

Another joke in this regard relates to the Japanese people, referring to their sensitivity to relations with others i.e., having a strong tendency to compare themselves with people from other countries, and a great concern about their image and the way others see them. The joke is about an international essay-writing contest endorsed by the United Nations on the topic of elephants.

The Englishman went for a few days to India and came back to write an essay on “The Manners of Elephants in India.”

The Frenchman went for a couple of hours to the Paris zoo and wrote about the “Love Life of an Elephant.”

The German disappeared into the library for several weeks and came back with a book on the “Physiological Structure of Elephants.”

The Spaniard wrote a scientific treatise on “The Elephant and the Art of Bullfighting.”

The Soviet writer wrote about “Elephants and Marxism.”

The American wrote about “How to Raise Elephants in your Backyard for Fun and Profit.”

The Pole wrote on “The Elephant and the Polish National Question.”

For the Japanese it took the longest time and he came back with two books. The first: “Effects of the Japanese Economy on the Elephant’s Life;” the second, much longer than the first, was entitled “What Do the Elephants Think of the Japanese.”

But this is not the end of the story. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cautioned that because of Japan’s low reputation it is better not to publish the books. And the Ministry of Education made sure that all other books from other countries were translated into Japanese.

The moral of the story is how sensitive the Japanese are about the opinion of others and how eager they are to learn from abroad (Thanks to Peter Berton; see also, Berton, 1998).

1.4 Creating and Exploiting Political Humor

Three groups—the public, politicians, and the mass media—employ humorous expressions in politics through different means in order to realize different goals.

The general public use humoristic expressions as a means of venting power and resisting the power structure and social injustice. As “the powerless,” they overtly try to make fun of the political system, institutions, and political oppressors that regulate, restrict, and discipline them. Humoristic expressions are a reaction of citizens to the stress they feel in this regard in their everyday life. Vehicles of such humor in Europe and the U.S. include artistic work in posters, photograph, pictures, and film (Baldi, 2024; Brzozowska & Chłopicki, 2024; Sills & Monaghan-Geerneart, 2024); and live shows performances such as satiric, comedy, and parody theater, and festivals and carnivals where groups compose and perform humorous and satirical lyrics, criticizing political powers from the local to the national levels, spreading quickly and widely through the internet and social networks (e.g., Rivas-Carmona & García-Manga, 2024).

Freud (1960) observed that jokes, for example, especially serve the purpose of aggressiveness toward, or defense from, people in high positions for the abovementioned reasons. Humor is thus used by those who have no political power as a means of political criticism, as methods of an individual challenging restrictive policies and stressful political situations, and as an instrument to get even with oppressors.

Consider, for example, the following joke that was told while U.S. President Donald Trump was in office:

An Israeli doctor says: “In Israel, medicine is so advanced that we cut off a man’s liver, put them on another man, and in 6 weeks, he is looking for work.”

The German doctor says: “That’s nothing, in Germany we take part of a brain, put it in another man, and in 4 weeks he is looking for work.”

The Russian doctor says: “Gentlemen, we take half a heart from a man, put it in another’s chest, and in 2 weeks he is looking for work.”

The American doctor laughs: “You all are behind us. Two days ago, we took a man with no brains, no heart, and no liver and made him President. Now, the whole country is looking for work!”

For their part, politicians are well aware of the power of humor. American presidents in particular, starting from George Washington and Abraham Lincoln through John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan (who was known as “*The Great Communicator*” and the “Master of the Joke,” see Harris, 2009), and Barack Obama, used humor while campaigning and in office (e.g., Phillips-Anderson, 2024)—probably because they knew that even a mediocre joke or a witty remark during congressional deliberations, public speeches, or media interviews can affect their interaction with the electorate and the public (Krasner, 2024).

In particular, when used wisely humor can affect politicians’ contact with the public along two dimensions. First, humor allows politicians to control the immediate social situation by focusing attention on themselves, re-establishing deference, and creating temporary unity in the audience. Second, humor enables politicians to decisively influence the audience’s perception of the potentially damaging issue at stake, thereby redefining the situation to the politicians’s advantage. Using witty remarks allows the leader to influence the choice of schema by which journalists and the wider public perceive the situation (Krasner, 2024; see also Feldman, 2022).

Last, the mass media—through which journalists, columnists, political pundits and critics, and subject matter experts (as well as general readers who contribute articles to the opinion column pages or letters to the editors, see Chap. 12)—create and spread humor. The printed media, newspapers and magazines provide the public with comic columns, humorous scripts, editorial cartoons, and *manga*. The internet includes such sites as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok that have turned into arenas for humoristic messages, cartoons, and jokes of politicians between each other and with the public (see Rastrilla et al., 2023).

Broadcast media too, including movies and in particular television, provide the public with humor in the form of comedy shows, standup performances, joke tellers, humorous advertisements, and witty comments. Most notably are televised satirical programs in the U.S., including late-night talk shows such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Saturday Night Live*, where politicians and aspiring politicians, their characteristics and customs, are the focus of the majority of jokes told, overwhelmingly negative in tone; relatively little humor concerns itself with policy or process (e.g., Baumgartner et al., 2014).

Such political satire or comedy constitute a very powerful force. Exposure to political humor in these channels matters as such programs serve as a major source of

news for viewers, especially youngsters. They enrich their viewers with knowledge of events and activities, affect their political attitudes and level of political involvement, prompting discussion about politics with friends, family, and coworkers, and influencing viewers' support for certain candidates. As this is known to politicians they try to appear on these programs to their own advantage (e.g., Baym & Jones, 2013; Compton, 2018; Feldman, 2013; Goldman, 2013; Ross & Rivers, 2017).

1.5 Overview of the Volume

Overall, three intellectual goals motivated this volume's contributors. The first is to clarify the relationship between culture (broadly defined, involving norms of behavior, attitudes, beliefs etc., in all walks of life) and political humor, as appearing in a variety of media. Accordingly, each author focused on one country, and examined how cultural factors (e.g., social structure, social relationship, historical experiences, religion, economic system, majority/minority relations, individualism/collectivism, and national character) affect the content, type, and style of the humorous expressions in the media in a given society.

The second goal is to probe the source of this humor: Who utilizes humorous expressions and for what reason? Chapters detail graphic artists, satirists, cartoonists, parody program writers, users of social networking services (SNS), comedians, journalists and columnists, and general readers, as their humorous expressions target politicians, the political system, minorities, and the "self." The third goal is to discuss the social, political, and psychological effect or potential effect of political humor in a given polity.

To these ends, the book is divided into three parts. The first part, *Humor in Political Cartoons*, gives particular consideration to the effect of culture on political cartoons published by daily newspapers, in magazines, and books. Chapter 2 examines the relationship between culture and political humor as reflected in Japanese *manga* in both directions. It first assesses how expressions of political satire and humor echo changes in Japanese cultural attitudes and the society's status quo, further detailing the extent to which graphic artists, satirists, and cartoonists have shaped popular attitudes about important historical events, thereby actively engaging in the political decision-making process. The chapter looks also at the way contemporaries' brand of graphic political humor utilized Japan's ideogrammatic culture to defamiliarize political norms and its role in directing attitudes towards the Japanese nation in the international arena.

Chapter 3 elaborates on political cartoons in Indonesia during the presidential periods of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo. By employing a Critical Discourse Analysis approach the chapter analyzes a selected collection of political cartoons to demonstrate the way the two presidents, their personalities and policies, were depicted in these cartoons, revealing the power of humor as a form of social commentary and political critique in Indonesia. Chap. 4 draws attention to the way an award-winning Brazilian cartoonist illustrated President Jair

Bolsonaro's administration. Considering the idea that humor is an important feature of Brazilian's cultural tradition, the chapter maintains that through cartoons political humor provided a form of criticism and opposition to Bolsonaro's anti-democratic and anti-human rights agenda. By condemning and ridiculing government actions, these cartoons raised awareness of important social and political issues, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the electoral system and democracy, conservative values, and the environment, contributing to a critical view and stance towards the central government.

Aiming at exploring how cultural dynamics operate through political humor in the Republic of Türkiye (Turkey), Chap. 5 focuses on the characteristics of humor through the political cartoons published during thirteen months in three satirical magazines. The analysis reveals diverse attitudes in the different magazines. In one, political authority is criticized by adopting elements of black humor, concern, and despair as prominent themes. The second inspires readers with hope, encouraging action especially among women, through editorial strategies that refer to a culture of struggle. In the third magazine, cartoons are mostly based on populist dualities, seeking to construct an alternative historical narrative. It utilizes cultural characteristics in the process of a neo-conservatist, political Islamist, cultural hegemony project, undermining the genre potential of Islamic humor.

Chapter 6 centers around the notion that humor and political culture have always been connected in contemporary Spain. It specifically analyzes the relationship between political culture and contemporary humor by looking at a selection of cartoons by Antonio Fraguas i.e., *Forges*, an influential artist who portrayed Spanish social and political reality over the past 50 years. The final chapter in this section, Chap. 7, presents the case of Australia, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis and Thematic Analysis to examine far-right political humor and its relationship to the country's culture. It details the way far-right humor is articulated, shaped, and transformed by the cultural context in Australia, shaped by (among other things) its settler colonial reality, its strong multicultural legacy, its proximity to Asia, and cultural, social, and political ties to the U.S. and the U.K.

The second part of the book, *Political Humor in Broadcast Media*, introduces case studies that examine the relationship between culture and political humor in Television, SNS, and YouTube. Chap. 8 looks at satire on Polish television by examining three case studies of popular, televised, parody programs. The chapter describes how historical references are readdressed for comic effect, and how stereotypes are reproduced to satirize ruling elites or expose personal immoralities and incompetence. Moreover, it reveals how satire draws on cultural schemes and metaphors of governance, power, and partisan politics, notably severely ridiculing autocracy and corruption. Political satire in Poland appears as supporting citizenship, on the one hand, by elucidating the processes behind the power, and weakening trust in politicians among citizens, on the other hand.

Focusing on Facebook, Chap. 9 assesses the degree to which sexist humor targeting female politicians appears in Facebook comments within the patriarchal culture of Montenegro. The analysis distinguishes between comments that prompted humorous reactions and those that reduced female politicians to sexual objects,

presented them as conforming to traditional gender roles in the society, or played on the stereotype of women's inferiority. It considers the former as humorous and the latter as sexist. Although a large proportion of the commentary was sexist, most often such comments were not recognized as humorous. Those that were recognized as humorous included references to women's bodies and appearance, the sexual objectification of female politicians, personality flaws stereotypically associated with women, and encouraging women to prioritize family over politics.

SNS is at the center of Chap. 10 that aims to identify the targets or the stereotypical victims that are culturally addressed in political humor distributed in Iran through social networks. Utilizing the Appraisal Model, the chapter details the extent to which social status, economic conditions, and religious views form political humor within the Iranian socio-political context. It reveals that the closed socio-political context within a country affects the selection of the targets and the tone of the humor. As for YouTube, Chap. 11 looks at comedic acts performed by Malaysian comedians that are also accessible via YouTube. The chapter probes the extent to which the essence of culture, including being polite, civilized, and maintaining/saving face, are related to the activities of two comedians. Based on Brown and Levinson's framework on politeness, the chapter suggests that off-the-record and negative politeness strategies prevail in the parody of one performer, and that the other's jests were unequivocal, direct utterances in which the communicative intent was clear, the targeted group was also clear in linguistic and contextual terms, exhibiting negative politeness. In both cases, restraint in the Malaysian context is observed.

The third part of the book, *Political Humor in the Print Media*, draws attention to Japanese and Argentine newspapers. Chapter 12 elaborates on *senryū*, satirical and humorous verses in Japanese dailies, as a manifestation of humor in this country. At the center of the chapter are 3,443 verses contributed by general readers as they were published in two national newspapers during 2022 and 2023. The chapter reveals that a large number of these verses focused on political issues, processes, and decisionmakers, as a vehicle to mirror public sentiment towards political institutions and leaders, policy initiatives and decisions, and society as a whole—on the one hand using such rhetorical devices as satire, irony, and ridicule, and on the other hand expressions of optimism, hope, and empathy. Chapter 13 discusses "*la grieta*" in Argentinian society, the deep and irreconcilable division fragmenting and polarizing the nation. It significantly affects political, social, cultural, and even beyond that, personal relationships—friendships, families, and workplaces in Argentina. Leading newspapers in this country align themselves with different sides of *la grieta*, adopting either a progressive, conservative, or a center-right stance, reflected in their satirical approaches through political columns and editorial cartoons. In this way, the chapter notes, the print media reinforced existing beliefs, deepening the ideological and political divide.

The fourth and final part of the book, *Conclusions* consists of one chapter suggesting guidelines and directions for future research in political humor. In particular, the chapter proposes several methodological questions regarding political humor research. These includes the extent to which political humor is addressed to both/all sides of the political spectrum, the elements underlying the effect of political humor,

the focus of its influence (governmental policy, personnel, and/or ideology, or on the general public), and the effect of a given medium on a specific social group.

It is the contributors' sincere hope that readers will find this book useful and that it will stimulate further research into the fascinating yet under-studied topic of political humor.

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