

# Visual Satire as a Mode of Political Protest: A Social Semiotic Analysis of Anti-Trump Political Cartoons

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## Abstract

This study investigates visual satire as a way of political protest in anti- Trump political cartoon images. The data are four satirical cartoon images collected from various internet websites to criticize Trump's authority and public image. The study adopts the social semiotic model developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design. The analysis focuses on how visual elements such as color, framing, social distance, facial expressions and symbolic objects work together with verbal signs to deliver political messages. The findings indicate that visual satire is a powerful technique used to express political resistance and shape public opinion. The cartoon images depict Trump as irresponsible, authoritarian and socially harmful by using irony, exaggeration, and negative symbolism. Consequently, the study concludes that satirical cartoon images aren't only artistic expressions, but also ideological instruments that reflect public protest.

**Key words:** Visual Satire; Social Semiotics; Donald Trump; Political Cartoons.

## السخرية البصرية كأسلوب للاحتجاج السياسي: تحليل سيميائي اجتماعي للرسوم

### الكاريكاتورية السياسية المناهضة لترامب

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كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية/ جامعة بابل / العراق

## المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة السخرية البصرية وسيلة للاحتجاج السياسي في الرسوم الكاريكاتورية المناهضة لترامب. وتتكون البيانات من أربع رسوم كاريكاتورية ساخرة جمعت من مواقع إلكترونية مختلفة لانتقاد سلطة ترامب وصورته العامة. وتعتمد الدراسة على النموذج السيميائي الاجتماعي الذي طوره كريس وفان ليون (٢٠٠٦) في كتابهما "قراءة الصور: قواعد التصميم البصري". ويركز التحليل على كيفية تفاعل العناصر البصرية، كالألوان والتأطير والمسافة الاجتماعية وتعبيرات الوجه والرموز، مع الإشارات اللفظية لإيصال رسائل سياسية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن السخرية البصرية أسلوب فعال للتعبير عن المقاومة السياسية وتشكيل الرأي العام. وتُصور الرسوم الكاريكاتورية ترامب على أنه غير مسؤول، ومتسلط، ومُضر اجتماعياً، باستخدام السخرية والمبالغة والرمزية السلبية. وبناءً على ذلك، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الرسوم الكاريكاتورية الساخرة ليست مجرد تعبيرات فنية، بل هي أيضاً أدوات أيديولوجية تعكس الاحتجاج الشعبي.

**الكلمات الدالة:** السخرية البصرية؛ السيميائية الاجتماعية؛ دونالد ترامب؛ رسم كاريكاتوري سياسي.

## 1. Introduction

Visual communication plays a crucial role in political protest as it is employed to express resistance and influence public opinion. In the digital age, cartoon drawings, caricature, memes, posters, and other visual materials are considered as powerful elements for political activism. During Trump's presidency, anti-Trump political cartoons became a powerful element of visual satire by using colors, images, symbols, and texts to communicate criticism. Besides, these political cartoons employ various techniques such as irony, humor, symbolism, and exaggeration to highlight messages related to authority, democracy, and social issues [1,p.:16].

Visual satire functions as a way of expressing meanings by using various modes such as images, gestures, typography and spatial arrangements. On the other hand, social semiotics offers a useful way for showing how these visual and verbal elements work together to create persuasive messages. As such, anti-Trump political cartoons function as artistic and social political texts that reflect social criticism, power relations, cultural values, and collective identities within protest movements [2,p.:55].

The significance of this study lies in its role to the fields of discourse analysis, political semiotics, and visual communication. It shows how visual satire can influence political awareness and criticize authority. The study may also be useful for students and researchers interested in media studies, cultural studies, political communication, and multimodal discourse analysis. Consequently, this study seeks to address the following questions: (1) What are the most effective social semiotic resources used in anti-Trump political cartoons? (2) How do visual resources contribute to the production of satire? (3) What role does color play in constructing the meaning of these political cartoons? (4) What is the role of typography in reinforcing the satirical message? (5) How does visual satire employ as a persuasion technique in anti-Trump political cartoons? Answering these questions allows to analyze the major social semiotic resources used in anti-Trump political cartoons, to examine how visual resources create and communicate satire, to identify the role of color in constructing the meaning in political cartoons, to explore how typography reinforces the satirical message, and to investigate how visual satire functions as a persuasive technique in anti-Trump political cartoons.

## 2. Social Semiotics

Social semiotics is a subfield of general semiotics that shows the ways in which the meaning is created through social and cultural contexts. Building on Saussure's theory, social semiotics highlights the idea that the process of communication is affected by social processes. Therefore, language is affected by social power. when power changes in society, our language and other systems of communication can also change [3,p.:62].

Individuals do not limit their communication to just words and gestures. They also utilize spaces and lines in diagrams, mathematical symbols in formulas, notes and rests in music, fabrics and colors in clothing, steps in dance, spatial elements in architecture, plays and moves in games, and various other symbolic forms and actions. They express meaning through speaking, drawing, composing, choreographing, dressing, moving, constructing, and playing-each done meaningfully by employing the resources provided

by their community (such as words, lines, notes, steps, and moves) in ways that resonate with others in that community. We apply these same patterns to interpret the activities of others.

Each community has its own semantic practices for meaning-making. Such practices encompass the various behaviors members of the community engage in actions that hold significance within that context. They represent forms of behavior that are repeated over time. Any attempt to understand a word, an object, or an action follows one of the semiotic practices of your community. These practices can take many forms, including speech, drawing, building, or gestures. Semiotic practices are the most important elements of social semiotic theory.

From a social semiotic viewpoint, meanings are conveyed through material forms by utilizing semiotic resources. This suggests that our communication arises from two interconnected processes: the production and interpretation of these semiotic resources. Semiotic resources are defined as "the activities and artifacts that are used to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically (with our vocal apparatus, gestures, through facial expressions, etc.) or by using skills (such as ink, pen, paper, computer hardware and software, fabrics, sewing machines, and scissors etc.)" [4,p.:43]. Thus, semiotic resources are seen as the tangible outcomes of the process of meaning-making; they represent the materialization or realization of meanings [5,p.:55].

### 3. Social Semiotics and Political Cartoons

Language is considered as a social semantics as it is used to express social relations, cultural dimensions, and ideological meanings. Social semantics relies on the ways people employ social resources to communicate meaning within various contexts, including colors, gestures, images, and typography. This method highlights that communication always carries political and cultural meanings. As such, social semantics focuses on understanding the meaning of the signs and how they are used within social contexts [6,p.:64].

Political cartoon images play a crucial role in communicating political messages by combining visual and textual elements. They are employed to influence public opinion. They are also used to persuade audiences and challenge political figures. During Trump's presidency, these cartoon images served as a crucial technique that are used to resistance, protest, and political activism. Besides, social semantics shows how these cartoons images are employed to produce meaning and influence public perception.

In addition to their artistic value, anti-Trump cartoon images function as powerful techniques of political protest and social resistance. They are used during elections, political protests, and social movements. They address issues in American society such as gender, race, immigration, and democracy. Consequently, these cartoon images encourage people to understand and respond to political issues. Also, these cartoon images employ symbolic representation and emotional appeal to convey political meanings. By using exaggerated facial expressions, caricatures or visual signs, anti-Trump political cartoons portray him as a figure associated with negative social and political ideas including racism, corruption, authoritarianism, and social division. These visual elements function as significant instruments in shaping public opinion and

influence audience perception. Therefore, social semantics shows how these visual signs create meaning and encourage critical interpretations of Trump's political identity.

Color functions as an important semantic resource used to construct political meanings in anti-Trump political cartoons. Dark colors such as gray, black, and red are employed to create meanings associated with aggression, fear, danger, or authoritarianism. In contrast, white and blue colors symbolize peace and democracy. From a social semantics viewpoint, color is not decorative; rather, it communicates meanings that influence people interpretation and shape views' perceptions [7,p.:10].

Typography and slogans are important semiotic components in anti-Trump political cartoons. The protest written texts such as "Resist", "No Hate", "Dump Trump" and "Not My President" are frequently employed in bold capital letters and font styles to enhance the intensity of the message. From a social semiotic perspective, these textual elements work together with visual components to create a multimodal text in which different modes contribute to meaning-making. By using this multimodal technique, anti-Trump political cartoons function as a persuasive way that communicate emotional and political meanings.

Representation and visual interaction are fundamental concepts within social semiotics theory. Political figures are often depicted in ways that can strongly influence audience interpretation. In some anti-Trump cartoons, Donald Trump is shown gazing directly at the viewers with aggressive facial expressions, generating what is called "demand image", where the participant demands some attention, response, empathy, or agreement. In other cartoon images, he is depicted in dark shadows and separated from national symbols like the American flag. This symbolizes detachment from the national unity. These visual techniques construct the relationship between the viewer and the political messages.

Composition and layout are importance elements in the construction of visual messages. The arrangement of these visual signs and symbols can create emphasis and ideological hierarchy. Elements placed at the centre of an image are portrayed as the most dominant, whereas the elements positioned at the edges may indicate weakness. In anti-Trump cartoon images, the president Donald Trump is placed at the centre of the image to draw the viewer's attention. Other visual elements of protest are arranged around him to represent collective resistance. Such arrangements attract the viewer's attention and strengthens the persuasive impact of the political message.

Anti-Trump political cartoons function as essential components of contemporary social and political movements in American society. They are employed during periods of debates surrounding racism, immigration, gender equality, and nationalism. From a social semiotics perspective, anti-Trump political cartoons aren't only artistic products; rather, they are ideological forms of communication employed in political and social debates. They communicate attitudes, reinforce collective identities, and encourage political participation through visual persuasion.

Consequently, social semiotics functions as an effective method for analyzing these political cartoon images as multimodal texts that express ideological messages by using verbal and visual elements. By using various semiotic resources such as symbolism, color, typography, representation and composition, these political cartoons construct

political identities and influence public opinion. These political cartoons also act as persuasive texts within social and political conflicts [8, p.:55].

#### 4. Satire

Satire is a technique of criticism used to promote improvement. In terms of humor, satire intentionally employs comic elements to make an attack [2,p.:66]. Ashworth [9, p.:101] suggests that satire creates humor to address serious issues. It is also employed to communicate a moral message by using jokes and criticism. Socially, satire serves as a method for reducing egos and expressing social criticism. Culturally, satire attacks issues by exaggerating specific events based on identifiable facts. Consequently, satire is a form of humor often used to mock and criticize its targets. It is a pervasive process of social and political critique that establishes in various forms [10,p.:55].

##### 4.1 Types of Satire

Satire can be categorized into several types:

1. **Aggressive:** it is constructed by using echoic elements to identify a target for attack. It is based on purposeful distortion. It is also linked with aggressive actions, including mocking and intentional humiliation.
2. **Comic:** it represents a form of behavior that enables others to make fun of a victim. So, this gives them a sense of superiority among audiences. It frequently appears as a joke that deals with serious issues to create a comic sense.
3. **Incisive:** it is a flexible analytical tool that can be applied in various contexts depending on the topic being studied.
4. **Invective:** it is regarded as powerful communicative forms of human language. It relies on techniques, including curses, strong verbal abuse, and harsh criticism. It is mainly utilized as a powerful tool to attack and criticize others.
5. **Ironic:** satire is generally classified as a form of irony, as it employs ironic expressions to argue for or against behaviors, ideas, incorrect individuals, or beliefs.[11,p.:68]

##### 4.2 Functions of satire

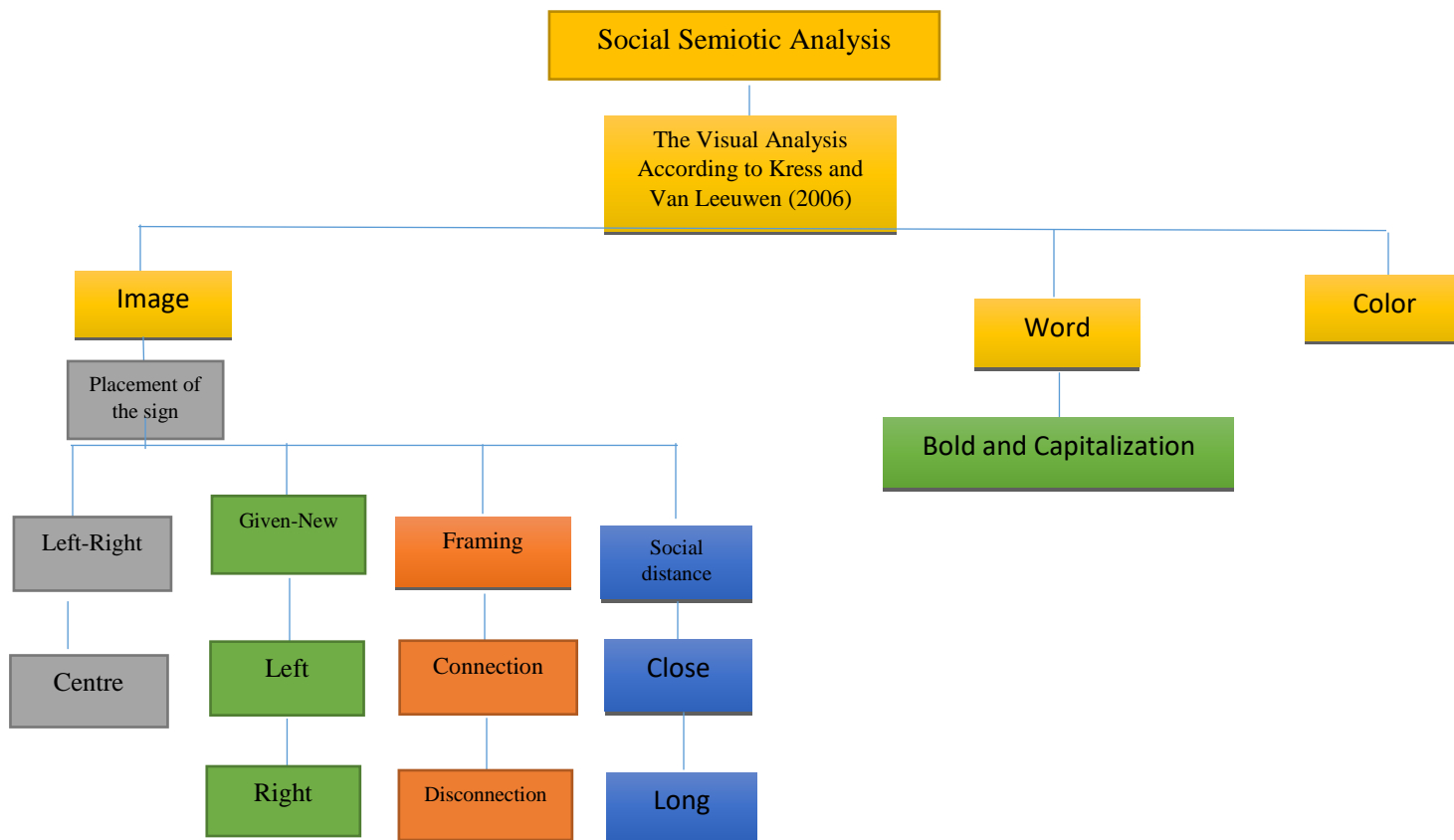
Satire is utilized in several types of texts to achieve specific aims and functions, as mentioned below [12, p.:89]:

1. **Critique:** satire is a technique used to criticize people, behaviors, or institutions by highlighting their mistakes. Also, it is a persuasive tool used to deliver messages and promotes social progress. In addition, it is a way to reveal weaknesses and faults.
2. **Reformative:** satire seeks to compare real-life situations with an ideal standard. It also shows the gap between what is said and the reality by using humor and criticism. In turn, it promotes social progress. This technique can also address individuals, beliefs, institutions, or society in general.
3. **Humorous:** satire is an artistic technique that employs language to make people laugh. It also encourages people to think in a critical way. It portrays situations to reflect social values and human behavior in an exaggerated way. Besides, it encourages people to challenge beliefs and behaviors.
4. **Mocking:** it is a type of satire that uses negative feelings to hurt or insult the audience.

5. **Assertive:** satire is a form of assertion that performs assertive functions. Its aim is always to grab the viewer's attention rather than to convince him in what is said.

## 5. The Model

This section introduces an adopted model based on Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. It focuses on three major elements: image, word, and color.



**Figure (1) The Model of Analysis**

### 5.1 Image

An images functions as part of the system of signs in visual communication. It may include sounds, colors, words, or other visual elements. Most studies focus on elements that are similar to words in images. In contract, Barthes indicates that images can be understood even without written texts. Although, culture plays a crucial role in determining the meaning of an image, it does not completely control it. Besides, Dyer states that images contain additional meanings beyond their literal meanings. Besides, images can be categorized into multiple subtypes:

#### 5.1.1 Placement of the signs

This type of images indicates that the position of signs plays a crucial role in determining the meaning of an image. The location of the represented participants affects the delivered message. Consequently, this arrangement carries the "information load", which affects the reader's perception. This can be achieved by using iconic and linguistic signs together.

### 5.1.2 Given-New

Kress and Van Leeuwen distinguish between two types of information: **Given** and **New**. **New information** refers to new and unfamiliar elements that are presented for the first time. **Given** deals with ideas that are already known and familiar to the audience.

### 5.1.3 Framing

Framing is a technique used to refer to the separation of the elements within an image. This separation can be achieved by the absence of colors, frame lines, or shape variation. In contrast, the absence of framing clarifies that the elements are to be understood as a single unit of information.

### 5.1.4 Social Distance

This method represents the space between the represented participants. It also reflects the type of the relationship between individuals. A close distance highlights the idea that one can easily touch the other, indicating the strong connection between them. This closeness enables the viewer to see the image carefully. "Frame size" originates from the concept "proxemics" in everyday interactions. Besides, images are described as "offer", where the participants are shown as sources of information.

## 5.2 Word

Words play a crucial role in visual communication. To Hodge and Kress, the meanings expressed through different sentence patterns and word classes can also be employed visually by using different colors and compositional structures. Besides, words can be categorized into two subtypes:

- a. **Capitalization and bold style:** capitalization is a way of writing, where all letters are written in an uppercase to emphasize and attract the viewer's attention. In contrast, bold style is used to focus on important ideas and thoughts by making the letters thicker than the regular text.
- b. **Formal and informal language:** formal language is a means of writing that can be employed to communicate meaning by using specific syntactic structures within official contexts. By comparison, informal language depends on ordinary speech and familiar expressions in everyday interactions to facilitate and create familiarity among speakers.

## 5.3 Color

Color serves as a powerful technique in the process of non-verbal communication. It is utilized to grasp the viewer's attention. It is strongly associated with meaning and psychological effects. It is employed to symbolize places, people, or objects. It is also used to represent social status. Visual images can carry cultural beliefs and stereotypes. Besides, color associations can vary among cultures and societies, indicating political, social, and commercial values.

## 6. Data Collection and Analysis

The sample of this study consists of four anti-Trump political cartoon images taken from various internet websites. These cartoon images were intentionally selected depending on specific social semiotic features that are relevant to the objectives of this study. The selected data employs visual satire by using different techniques including: symbolism, irony, caricature, and exaggeration. It also reflects political and social issues related to the president Donald Trump such as racism, immigration, public discourse, and leadership. Besides, they contain multimodal resources which are essential for social semiotic analysis: gestures, facial expressions, color, typography, and composition.

## Image (1)



Figure (2) We are Protesters

This political cartoon is produced by Mike Luckovich in January 2017. It depicts Trump speaking to a huge crowd in front of a government building. It reflects the widespread anti-Trump protests in response to the inauguration of Donald Trump. The cartoon humorously shows Trump's claim by saying "OBAMA NEVER DREW CROWDS LIKE THIS!", but the crowd shouts "WE'RE PROTESTERS!!". This contrast generates strong visual satire by showing the difference between Trump's belief and the reality. Trump interprets the large crowd as public support, but the crowd's response reveals the fact that it is actually opposing him. Besides, the cartoon employs different social semiotic techniques to communicate its message. The cartoon uses satire, irony, and symbolism to transform a political event into a persuasive protest that challenges Trump's political authority. Consequently, the cartoon serves as a form of political protest that criticizes Donald Trump's policies and highlights the opposition that generated at the beginning of his presidency.

The *placement of the sign* plays a significant role in constructing meaning. In this cartoon, Donald Trump stands on the left side in the foreground. His speech is seen first. It seems important. The crowd is on the right side in the background. The truth becomes clear through their response "WE'RE PROTESTERS!!". This spatial shift from left to right guides the viewer to understand the difference between his speech and reality. So, his claim is incorrect. Although Trump is closer and clearer, the crowd's size shows their real power. Consequently, the distance between them indicates that he is disconnected from the people.

The cartoon presents familiar and new ideas through its *given-new* approach. On the left side, Donald Trump with his claim "Obama never drew crowds like this!" represents the given-information, which is presented as known or accepted. The crowd on the right side represents the new, which provides an important information. Their reply "we're protesters!!" reveals the truth which challenges Trump's claim. It also reveals the public opposition against Trump's inauguration and encourages viewers to question his speech. Consequently, this method not only arranges information, but also supports both the satirical criticism and the political protest employed in this cartoon.

In terms of *framing*, the meaning of the cartoon is constructed by distinguishing how visual elements are separated or combined. In this cartoon, the absence of framing between Donald Trump and the crowd clarifies the visual relationship between them. So, they are presented within the same scene. However, the separation is established between the opposing speech bubbles. This ironic contradiction generates visual satire by showing the difference between Trump's belief and the crowd's response. It also reinforces the idea of political protest by depicting the crowd as a unified group against Trump's authority and policies.

With the *social distance*, Trump is depicted at a relatively close shot which allows viewers to recognize him clearly. In contrast, the crowd is shown at a long distance. It highlights their collective identity rather than individual characteristics. This visual arrangement clarifies the visual satire through the ironic contrast between Trump's claim and the crowd's speech. Simultaneously, it acts as a form of political protest by depicting him as isolated in his interpretation, while presenting the crowd as a unified force of opposition.

Concerning the *words*, they play an essential role in shaping the meaning of this cartoon. It consists of two verbal elements: Trump's belief, "Obama never drew crowds like this!", and the crowd's reply, "We're protesters!!". This verbal contrast generates visual satire through irony and contradiction. In addition, the words also function as a form of political protest by highlighting the public opposition to Trump's presidency.

Finally, *color* plays an essential role in this image. It is used to communicate the message and attract attention. The president Donald Trump appears in noticeable colors. His bright yellow hair and the dark suit makes him stand out as the center of attention. In contrast, the crowd is drawn in very light and gray colors. These colors make them look less important and more like a single group. They also symbolize public opposition, which is a form of political protest against Trump's leadership. This contrast in colors creates visual satire by showing Trump as isolated in spite of standing before a large crowd of audiences.

### Image (2)



**Figure (3) Racial Unrest**

This cartoon was produced by the cartoonist Adam Zyglis in 2017. It symbolizes the racial conflicts in the United States during Trump's presidency. It is produced to address issues such as racism and social inequality. It portrays the president Donald Trump as a

fire chief standing behind a burning building labelled "Racial Unrest". The fire refers to racial tensions, while the firefighter uniform symbolizes responsibility. The unused hose represents neglect. Thus, the contrast between Trump's position and his action towards the crisis forms visual satire by depicting him as incapable of solving the problems. Simultaneously, it serves as a form of political protest by criticizing the government's response to stop the racial conflicts and solve this crisis.

The meaning of this image is formed by *the placement of the signs*. The president Donald Trump is placed on the left, suggesting power and responsibility for dealing with the crisis. His position makes him dominant and noticeable. In Contrast, the burning building labelled "racial unrest" on the right side represents the actual problem. This visual shift from left to right highlights the contract between political authority and the social crisis. The disconnected fire hose between Trump and the burning building symbolizes the failure of the leadership to provide an effective solution. The cartoon employs visual satire by portraying Trump as a fire chief who is unable to stop the fire. It also serves as political protest by showing the failure of the government to address racial conflict and social division.

In terms of *Given-New*, the meaning of this cartoon is shaped by the arrangement of the visual elements. The president Donald Trump is positioned on the left as the Given information. It represents power and authority. On the right, the burning building functions as the new, which reveals the real issue of "racial unrest". This arrangement highlights the president's role and the reality of the crisis.

In this cartoon, *framing* is weak because Trump and the burning building are connected together by the fire hose. This refers to the visual relationship between the leadership and the social problem. The disconnected hose indicates the idea that Trump fails to resolve this issue. The cartoon uses visual satire by describing Trump as a fire chief who is unable to stop the fire. As a form of political protest, it criticizes Trump's inability to respond to the racial tensions.

Using *social distance*, the president Donald Trump is shown at a medium-close distance. So, the audience can clearly see his details. On the other hand, the burning building and chaos are far in the background and less clear. This long shot creates a sense of detachment. It also indicates that the president Donald Trump is not paying enough attention to the consequences of the crisis.

The concept "*words*" in this cartoon is an essential component in shaping its meaning. The phrase "racial unrest" on the burning building clearly refers to the chaos in the background. At the same time, the written text "law and order" on the fire truck reflects control and authority. This contrast between these two phrases generates visual satire. It highlights the gap between speech and reality.

The use of *colors* in this cartoon plays an essential role in shaping its meaning. The bright red and orange are used to draw attention. It symbolizes danger, conflict, and violence. In contrast, the colors of the fire truck and the president are calmer. These colors reduce their visual impact, and suggest ineffective leadership. This contrast contributes to the visual satire by showing Trump as someone responsible for solving the crisis but incapable of doing so.

## Image (3)



Figure (4) Crisis Creator INC

This cartoon is created by the American cartoonist Adam Zyglis in January 2019 during the political controversy surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the longest government shutdown in U.S. history. It shows Trump as an industrial machine labeled "Crisis Creator Inc.", which is responsible for creating crises such as "Border Emergency" and "Government shutdown". The visual satire is achieved through Trump's claim "Manufacturing is Back" and the negative results emerging from the conveyor belt. By using irony, metaphor, and caricature, the cartoon criticizes Trump's presidency and serves as a political protest against his policies.

The meaning of this cartoon is created through *the placement of the signs*. The political leader occupies the center of this image, which makes him the most noticeable element. His position shows his control and power. The texts labelled "Border Emergency" and "Government Shutdown" on the belt appear on the right side, which means that he is responsible for creating these actions. The small figure is placed far away. He looks small and less important. This placement highlights that the political leader is the generator of the consequences of these issues.

According to the *given and new* principle, the meaning of this cartoon is shaped by the arrangement of the signs. The left side represents the given information that are familiar and well-known. On the other side, the information is new and important. In this cartoon, the text "manufacturing is back" on the left side gives a positive statement. The right side shows the opposite results. This contrast creates irony and humor.

Concerning *framing*, the meaning is shaped by the connection or separation of the visual elements. In this cartoon, Donald Trump, the machine, and the problems are strongly linked through a continuous visual process. This indicates that they operate as one entity. The absence of framing highlights the fact that "Border Emergency" and "Government Shutdown" are directly associated with Trump's presidency. The cartoon uses visual satire by employing various techniques such as irony, metaphor, and caricature. The irony arises from Trump's claim, "Manufacturing is Back," while the machine manufactures problems instead of progress. Therefore, the image functions as political protest by criticizing his actions.

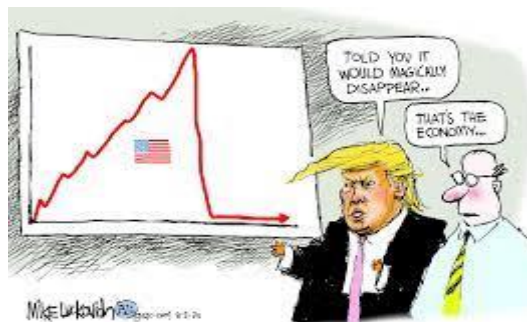
The *social distance* in this cartoon is employed through a medium shot that enables viewers to see Trump's details and the machine clearly. This shot makes a sense of involvement between the viewers and the participants. It encourages them to engage directly with the political message. Simultaneously, it allows viewers to stay as a critical

perspective. The machine occupies a huge part of the scene. This size enables Trump appears prominence, which enhances his responsibility for producing the crises.

For *Words*, they play a crucial role in shaping its meaning and guide the audience's understanding. Trump's speech labelled "Manufacturing is back" shows success and positive achievements, but the machine produces negative products such as "Border Emergency" and "Government Shutdown". This contradiction forms irony, which is a crucial feature of visual satire. As political protest, the cartoon criticizes Trump's actions and highlights the crises associated with his leadership.

The machine labeled "Crisis Creator Inc." appears in dark and grey colors, which gives negative and serious senses. In contrast, red color used in Trump's tie attracts the viewer's attention. It also symbolizes conflict and danger. These colors indicate that Trump's leadership is connected with crisis and conflicts. By using the combination of color, metaphor, and irony, this cartoon generates visual satire and serves as a form of political protest against Trump's authority.

#### Image (4)



**Figure (5) That's the Economy**

This cartoon is created by Mike Luckovich in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The president Donald Trump appears pointing at a graph. It represents the economic decline in the united states. Trump's comment "Told you it would magically disappear" refers to an ironic contrast between his speech and the reality. The main satirical technique is verbal irony used to show the gap between Trump's claim and the actual events. It also serves as a political protest to criticize the government's responses to a national crisis.

*The position of the signs* plays a crucial role in shaping the image's message. The graph appears on the left side, which makes it the main focus. It symbolizes the sharp decline of the American economy during the pandemic. On the right, Trump appears pointing at the graph. Besides, the other character stands behind and gives more explanation. The dialogue reveals the contradictory statement between what is said and the truth.

*Framing* is constructed by the space between the visual elements. In this cartoon, Trump, the graph, and the speech bubbles are visually linked within the same visual frame to guide the viewer's attention to the cause and effect relationship between the president Donald Trump and the economic sharp decline.

Concerning *the social distance*, this cartoon is depicted at a medium shot, which enables the viewers to see Trump and the graph clearly without making an intimate

connection between them. The viewer is depicted as an observer rather than a participant. This arrangement enhances the visual satire by showing the contrast between Trump's claim and the economic decline. The political protest is also employed to challenge the political decisions and their economic consequences.

The **words** in this cartoon play a significant role in delivering the satirical message. Trump's speech labelled "I told you it would magically disappear" reflects his claim that the statement of the economic decline is temporary and simple. In contrast, the response "That's the economy" reflects the consequences of this crisis. The contradiction between the verbal text and the visual image of the collapsing graph generates **visual satire**, as the words contradict the reality shown in this cartoon.

Finally, **Color** plays a crucial role in attracting the viewer's attention. The red line of the graph represents the economic sharp decline and instability. It also symbolizes danger and economic decline. The red flag associates the issue directly to the United States. Trump's dark suit contrasts with the bright graph. These colors enhance the idea of visual satire by showing the ironic contradiction between Trump's statement and the negative reality.

## 7. Results and Discussions

The analysis of the selected sample highlights that visual satire functions as a powerful technique of political protest through the use of different social semiotic elements. The cartoonists use different multimodal resources to communicate criticism and shape negative representations of Trump's personality among audiences such as color, caricature, gestures, exaggeration, irony, metaphor, and textual elements. These visual elements encouraged audiences to critically evaluate his activities and policies.

One of the most significant findings is that exaggeration and caricature were the most common social semiotic techniques used in all four political cartoon images. Donald Trump was visually portrayed with exaggerated facial expressions and expressive gestures to refer to aggression, dishonesty, and incompetence. These visual distortions strengthened the critical and humorous impact of the cartoons.

Visual satire was created by the use of irony and contradiction between visual and verbal elements. In the first political cartoon image, Donald Trump is portrayed addressing a large crowd by stating "Obama never drew crowds like this!". However, the crowd immediately responds "We are protesters". This ironic contrast challenges his speech and produce a satirical effect. It also highlights the gap between his claim and reality. Consequently, the cartoon transmits satire into political protest that criticizes Trump's political behaviors and policies. It also focuses on the importance of political opposition in democratic societies.

The visual satire is employed to criticize social and political issues. In the second political cartoon image, Donald Trump is depicted as a fire chief. The building labelled "Racial Unrest" burns uncontrollably behind him. Ironically, the unused hose represents disconnection. Visual satire is produced by the use of symbolism, irony, and role reversal. The cartoon reflects the role of the firefighter. Instead of solving the problem, Trump is portrayed as an incapable leader. He is responsible for allowing the crisis to

continue. He is an ineffective leader and unable to confront racial issues. Therefore, this cartoon functions as a form of political protest that challenges political authority and encourages public debates about governmental policies.

Metaphorically speaking, visual satire is also employed by transforming Trump into an industrial mechanism that continuously produces crises. In the third political cartoon image, Trump is depicted as the main source of political, social, and economic problems. The cartoon satirically criticizes his political behaviors and actions that constantly create conflict and instability. Besides, the cartoon functions as political protest by depicting Trump as the main source of social and political tensions. It also serves as a political protest against Trump's authority. The visual message symbolizes public opposition and political criticism.

Visual satire is also constructed by the use of irony and symbolism. Although political leaders are expected to improve the economic growth, the fourth cartoon image links Donald Trump to the sharp economic decline. This contrast creates a satirical message by highlighting him as the source of economic problems. Besides, the cartoon serves as a political protest by criticizing Trump's economic policies. It also encourages audiences to question his policies by presenting the economic decline as a strong evidence of his ineffective leadership.

Overall, the findings reveal that anti-Trump political cartoon images employ various social semiotic resources effectively to communicate persuasive political messages. By utilizing visual satire, cartoonists criticize Trump's authority, shape public opinion, and express ideological perspectives.

## 8. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that visual satire serves as a crucial technique of political protest in anti-Trump political cartoon images. By using exaggeration, symbolism, irony, humor, metaphor, and contradiction, cartoonists criticize political authority and encourage public reflection on social and political events. Rather than functioning merely as entertainment, the cartoon images work as a persuasive tool of political communication that express ideological activism and shape public opinion toward Trump's policies.

It highlights the effective role of social semiotic theory for understanding how meaning is produced in political cartoons. Following the model of Kress and Van Leeuwen, the analysis indicates that visual meaning is constructed by the use of social semiotic resources with textual elements. These resources work together to deliver political and social messages in highly effective ways. It also shows the important role of political cartoons as multimodal texts that transform visual communication into a form of political opposition and public engagement, indicating how social semiotic resources can be intentionally used to create persuasive protest messages.

**CONFLICT OF IN TERESTS****There are no conflicts of interest****References**

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