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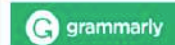
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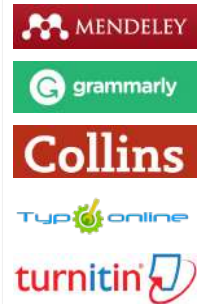
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**AN IMAGINARY LAUGHTER:
THE PORTRAYAL OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN INDONESIAN
MAGAZINE COVERS**

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Abstract

This study employs critical discourse analysis to examine how political cartoons are portrayed on Indonesian magazine covers. The study aims to explore how political cartoons construct and reinforce dominant ideologies, satirize political figures, and engage with societal issues. Using a qualitative approach, the study examines visual and textual elements in selected magazine covers, specifically Tempo. The study scrutinizes humor, symbolism, and caricature as rhetorical devices to convey political messages and critique power structures. It also investigates how cartoons use the synergy between image and text to shape public opinion and influence political discourse. The study's findings reveal how political cartoons on magazine covers serve as a platform for dissent, challenging dominant narratives and providing alternative perspectives. Admittedly, the analysis uncovers the strategies used by cartoonists to navigate the boundaries of freedom of expression in a politically charged environment. This study offers valuable insights into the visual representation of political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers, contributing to critical discourse analysis. It highlights the potential of cartoons as tools for social critique and democratic engagement, providing a deeper understanding of the role of humor and satire in political communication.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis; humor; Indonesian magazine covers; political cartoons; satire.*

INTRODUCTION

Political cartoons are an incredibly potent weapon in the arsenal of visual satire, capable of encapsulating multidimensional socio-political issues within a single image (Feldman, 1995; 2000). In Indonesia, political cartoons have emerged as a highly



significant medium for delivering social commentary, offering a witty and insightful perspective on the power dynamics and governance of the country. The covers of Indonesian magazines provide a wide-ranging and diverse array of visual representations that aptly mirror the nation's political landscape.

Political cartoons are extremely potent social commentary that utilizes humor, satire, and caricature to convey political messages and scrutinize power structures (Young, 2017). They represent a visual form of rhetoric that encapsulates intricate socio-political issues and encourages audiences to engage in critical dialogue (Tsakona, 2009). In Indonesia, political cartoons have emerged as a significant feature of magazine covers (Lent, 2014), providing a platform for portraying socio-political events and figures. This literature-review part delves deep into the present scholarship on political cartoons, critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA), and the portrayal of political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers.

Political cartoons have an extensive and significant history in political communication. Esteemed scholars such as Ostrom (2007), Witek (2022) and Sonay (2023) emphasize their role in shaping public opinion, rallying support, and questioning dominant narratives. Political cartoons are not just a form of entertainment but a critical tool for encouraging citizens to engage in thoughtful contemplation and democratic discussion. Their ability to distill intricate concepts into a single image makes them accessible and powerful in various cultural and socio-political settings. It is imperative to recognize and utilize the potency of political cartoons in shaping public discourse and promoting democratic values.

CDA provides a useful framework for understanding the socio-political implications of political cartoons. According to Fairclough (2013), CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that analyzes the relationship between language, power, and ideology. CDA aims to uncover hidden meanings, ideological biases, and power dynamics within texts through a detailed examination of linguistic and non-linguistic aspects (Wiess & Wodak, 2007). This approach is particularly relevant in the study of



political cartoons, as it allows for a nuanced analysis of the visual and textual elements that shape their messages (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Researchers have effectively utilized CDA to study political cartoons in various scenarios. For instance, Harun et al. (2015) examine how political cartoons depict power relations that challenge dominant ideologies, particularly through humor and satire. Similarly, Daniels (2007) delves into the use of caricature and symbolism in political cartoons, revealing how these visual tools communicate socio-political messages and criticize power structures. These studies irrefutably demonstrate the value of CDA in uncovering the socio-political significance of political cartoons and exposing the covert power dynamics at play.

Futhermore, the role of political cartoons in Indonesian magazines has gained significant interest. Researchers Putri (2018), Hasanah & Hidayat (2020), Nugraha (2022), Rahman (2022), and Triputra & Sugita (2016) have explored this topic and discovered that these cartoons provide alternative perspectives, challenge those in positions of authority, and encourage public discourse. These studies stress the importance of considering the socio-political context and historical background in which these cartoons are produced and consumed. In addition, they highlight the crucial role of humor and satire as powerful rhetorical tools for scrutinizing political figures and societal issues.

This study utilizes CDA as a theoretical framework to thoroughly explore the political and social significance behind the visual representations on magazine covers. By considering the broader sociopolitical context and historical background in which these covers are created and consumed, we aim to expose the many layers of meaning they possess. Our objective through this research is to gain a profound understanding of the interplay between humor, politics, and power in Indonesian society. Our findings provide insight into how political cartoons can function as potent tools for dissent, critique, and democratic engagement.

This research holds immense significance for CDA by shedding light on the visual representation of political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers. Despite numerous



studies on political cartoons in different contexts, very few have explored Indonesian magazine covers as a platform for political satire. This research aims to bridge this gap and offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of humor and satire in political communication. The findings provide an in-depth interpretation of the socio-political implications of these visual representations and are thus crucial for understanding the larger discourse.

Our study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze a wide range of magazine covers in Indonesia to explore how political cartoons use humor, satire, and caricature to challenge dominant narratives, expose inequalities, and provoke critical discourse while navigating the limits of freedom of expression. We are determined to answer three key research questions: (1) what visual and textual elements do political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers used to convey political messages, satirize political figures, and address societal issues; (2) how do political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers combine image and text to shape public opinion, influence political discourse, and navigate the limits of freedom of expression; and (3) how do political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers construct and reinforce dominant ideologies, power dynamics, and socio-political implications?

METHODS

This study takes a qualitative approach using CDA to examine the portrayal of political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers. The research methodology involves several steps. Firstly, sample selection: the Indonesian magazine, *Tempo*, was chosen to obtain a representation of political cartoons on magazine covers. The sample includes magazines from several years, political orientations, demographic groups, and topics/events. Secondly, data collection: magazine covers featuring political cartoons were collected from the selected publications. The coverage period is from January 1st, 2020, to July 1st, 2023. Digital copies were retrieved from <https://majalah.tempo.co/>. Additional data, such as related articles or editorials, were also collected to provide context.

Thirdly, visual and textual analysis: each magazine cover underwent a detailed visual analysis. The analysis considered symbolism, caricature, humor, and other visual



devices in political cartoons. The textual analysis involved examining the accompanying text, headlines, captions, and other written elements on the magazine cover. The interplay between image and text was examined to understand how they contribute to meaning and socio-political implications. Fourthly, critical discourse analysis: based on the principles of CDA, the analysis focused on identifying underlying power relations, ideologies, and social constructs within political cartoons. The examination involved deconstructing the visual and textual elements and identifying metaphors, symbols, stereotypes, and other rhetorical devices used to convey political messages. The analysis also explored how political cartoons engage with and challenge dominant narratives, satirize political figures, and address societal issues.

Lastly, interpretation and findings: the findings of the analysis were interpreted and discussed in the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework of CDA. The interpretation involved identifying the socio-political implications, power dynamics, and ideological construction embedded within the political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers. The findings were presented comprehensively and cohesively, supported by relevant examples from the analyzed magazine covers.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study unequivocally demonstrates how political cartoons in Indonesian magazines are a powerful tool for social and political commentary. The portrayal of these cartoons underwent a rigorous critical discourse analysis, revealing three critical aspects: (1) the strategic use of visual and textual elements in political cartoons on magazine covers, (2) the way these elements work together to shape public opinion and substantially influence political discourse, and (3) the unyielding reinforcement of dominant ideologies through political cartoons on magazine covers in Indonesia.

Visual and Textual elements of Political Cartoons in Indonesian Magazine Covers

Indonesian magazine covers heavily rely on visual and textual elements to convey political messages, satirize political figures, and tackle societal issues. Political institutions, policies, and figures are commonly criticized through humor and satire (*see*



Figure 1), with caricature being a prevalent technique to exaggerate physical features and traits (*see* Figure 2). Using animals or objects as symbols is also employed to represent abstract concepts and highlight specific issues (*see* Figure 3). The combination of images and text is essential in shaping the overall meaning of the cartoons, as captions and accompanying text provide additional context and reinforce the intended message.



Figure 1. Humor and Satire

As Figure 1, the cover published on 25 June 2023 ruthlessly criticizes political corruption by a group of politicians in a satirical and humorous manner. The cartoonist effectively employs both textual and visual elements to convey their message. The words *Korupsi BTS Memancar Sampai Jauh* are used to mock the corruption in the procurement of communication network infrastructure in a clever and satirical way. The phrase *Memancar Sampai Jauh* ridicules corrupt behavior that spreads like an internet signal. Additionally, the visual elements consist of four human silhouettes, a head symbol, and a picture of a signal-transmitting pole. The human silhouettes satirize the syndicate in the internet tower procurement budget game, while the head symbol represents the minister in charge of the state project.



Figure 2. Caricature

In the cover published on July 2nd, 2023, it is evident that Figure 2 uses a combination of visual and textual elements to criticize the political elite powerfully. The cartoonist boldly employs *Ekspansi Politik Dinasti Jokowi* to satirize the Indonesian president's family, who have brazenly entered politics in various provinces and cities. Furthermore, the cartoon features four caricatures, including the president, his two sons, and his daughter-in-law, all of whom are portrayed in a highly critical manner.



Figure 3. Symbolism

The cover, published on April 30, 2023, features Figure 3, a satirical cartoon that uses text and visual elements to mock politicians. The cartoon portrays a political figure rumored to be running for president with the words *Selap-selip Ganjar*. Additionally, four caricatures are present, including a character and a buffalo, along with a colored background representing a political party symbol. The first caricature is of a political figure rumored to be the next president of Indonesia. The second caricature shows the



head of state riding a buffalo, symbolizing a political party. The third figure is a woman, representing a former president and current party leader, pulling the buffalo ridden by the head of state. The fourth caricature portrays a political figure with ambitions to become the country's leader, pushing the buffalo from behind.

Furthermore, analyzing political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers shows the different visual and textual elements used to convey political messages, satirize political figures, and address societal issues. These elements play a crucial role in creating an impact and making the cartoons effective in communicating their intended messages. Political cartoons use humor and satire to criticize political figures, institutions, and policies (Attardo, 2001). Satire is a way of commenting on society, using irony, sarcasm, and exaggeration to expose the flaws or contradictions of political actors and their actions (Attardo, 1994). Humor captures the audience's attention and makes complex political issues more understandable.

Caricature is another powerful visual element in political cartoons to satirize political figures. Cartoonists create recognizable and often amusing portrayals of politicians by exaggerating physical features, mannerisms, or character traits (Balakrishnan et al., 2019). Caricature not only adds an element of entertainment but also serves as a form of visual shorthand, allowing viewers to quickly identify and understand the target of the cartoon's criticism (Boukes et al., 2015). In addition, symbolism is also used in political cartoons to represent abstract concepts or specific issues. Symbols condense complex ideas into a single visual element (Weydmann & Großmann, 2020). For example, a broken scale might symbolize a lack of justice, while a ticking time bomb can represent an impending crisis. These symbolic representations add depth and layers of meaning to the cartoons, allowing for multi-faceted interpretations.

The text complements and enhances the visual elements in political cartoons, providing additional context, reinforcing the intended message, and clarifying the cartoonist's viewpoint. Captions, speech bubbles, and accompanying text create a comprehensive and impactful message, amplifying the cartoon's political message and engaging the audience on multiple levels (Echeverria & Rodelo, 2023). Political cartoons



on Indonesian magazine covers draw attention to social injustices, corruption, or policy failures. They stimulate public discourse, raise awareness, and challenge the status quo. By visually representing these issues, cartoons offer alternative perspectives, provoke critical thinking, and encourage dialogue among readers. However, it is important to note that interpreting visual and textual elements in political cartoons is subjective and can vary among individuals. The broader context and diverse interpretations among different readers must be considered in a comprehensive analysis of these elements.

In conclusion, the visual and textual elements in political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers are carefully crafted to maximize their impact and effectively communicate political messages. By employing humor, satire, caricature, symbolism, and the interplay between image and text, these cartoons offer a powerful means of engaging with political figures and addressing societal issues (Sen & Hill, 2007). A critical analysis of these elements provides insights into the impact and effectiveness of political cartoons as a medium for political communication and social commentary within the Indonesian context.

The Synergy Between Image and Text to Shape Public Opinion and Influence Political Discourse

Political cartoons are a powerful tool in shaping public opinion and discourse in Indonesia. They effectively convey complex messages to a wider audience through imagery and text (*see* Figure 4). Satire and humor enable cartoonists to critique political figures and policies without confrontation (*see* Figure 5). Cartoons use metaphors, symbolism, and caricature to critically comment on socio-political issues, challenging dominant narratives and offering alternative perspectives (*see* Figure 6). However, cartoonists must be cautious and navigate the boundaries of freedom of expression, as challenging entrenched power structures can have serious repercussions.



Figure 4. To Convey Complex Messages Succinctly

The cartoonist's intention in Figure 4 on the cover, published on January 22, 2022, was to simplify the complex political issues currently affecting the country. Both textual and visual elements were utilized to convey the message. The words *Duet Maut* were used to satirize the existence of two ministers with business backgrounds. The cartoonist suggests these two ministers may use their positions to benefit their businesses or sectoral groups. The visual element in the cartoon features two actors playing together in a project diorama, representing various government projects managed by the two ministers.



Figure 5. To Critique Political Figures and Policies

Figure 5 on the November 20, 2022, cover features a cartoon that sharply criticizes government policies. The cartoonist boldly conveys their message through a combination of visual and textual elements. The words *Kilau Pembiayaan Hijau* are used to identify the misguided government policy at issue. The cartoonist forcefully denounces the government for succumbing to global political pressures and making the wrong policy



decision. The visual element depicts a massive hand mercilessly peeling away the skin of the globe, specifically in the Indonesian region. This hand symbolizes the power of the world or global policies. Using a dollar knife to peel the apple illustrates the dominance of the global market or capitalism, undermining Indonesia's prosperity.



Figure 6. To Provide a Space for Critical Commentary

Figure 6, published on the cover on November 6th, 2022, intentionally provokes criticism of politicians' behavior in the public sphere. The cartoon's textual and visual elements work together to satirize the behavior of political elites attempting to gain power through elections. *Koalisi Rapuh Penyokong Anies* is the text used to convey this message. The visual elements consist of three main actors and supporting components. A caricature of a politician rumored to be a candidate for state leader is attempting to maintain balance in the middle of two vehicles speeding down the road. The second and third actors are caricatures of political party owners, each driving a vehicle, while a caricature of another political party follows behind in a bus.

Moreover, the analysis of political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers highlights how they combine images and text to shape public opinion, influence political discourse, and navigate freedom of expression. Using visual and textual elements in these cartoons creates a powerful and effective medium for conveying political messages and addressing societal issues (Dyner & Chovanec, 2021; Nugraha, 2020). Political cartoons combine images and text to enhance their impact (Mahadian & Hashim, 2022). The visual elements immediately grab the viewer's attention, while the accompanying text provides additional context and clarifies the cartoonist's perspective (Droog & Burgers, 2023).



This interplay between image and text creates a comprehensive and cohesive message, effectively communicating the intended political message (Dynel, 2013).

Humor, satire, and caricature are commonly used in political cartoons to shape public opinion. Humor makes political issues more accessible, while satire allows cartoonists to critique political figures and policies through irony, sarcasm, and exaggeration (Funch, 2010). Caricature creates recognizable depictions of politicians and adds entertainment value. These techniques engage with the audience's emotions, forming opinions and influencing their perspectives on political matters (Wang & Feng, 2023). Political cartoons also play a role in influencing political discourse by introducing alternative perspectives and challenging dominant narratives. They serve as a platform for dissent, encouraging critical thinking and questioning existing power structures. The visual and textual elements work together to stimulate debate and prompt a reevaluation of societal norms and political systems.

Political cartoonists must also navigate the boundaries of freedom of expression. They often use satire and metaphorical language to critique without explicitly crossing legal or cultural limits (Hill, 2013). Symbolism and indirect communication allow them to express dissent and challenge authority while maintaining plausible deniability (Holbert et al., 2011). However, cartoonists must be mindful of potential consequences and operate within acceptable expression boundaries.

In conclusion, political cartoons in Indonesian magazine covers effectively exploit the synergy between image and text to shape public opinion, influence political discourse, and navigate freedom of expression. These cartoons engage with the audience's emotions, provoke critical thinking, challenge dominant narratives, and provide alternative perspectives. They serve as an essential medium for political communication, facilitating democratic engagement and contributing to a more vibrant and diverse public discourse within the Indonesian context.



Construction and Reinforcement of Political Cartoons on Indonesian Magazine Covers into Dominant Ideologies

Analyzing political cartoons showcased on magazine covers in Indonesia reveals their crucial role in creating and upholding dominant ideologies, power dynamics, and socio-political implications. These cartoons frequently depict political figures, social groups, and events in ways that align with prevailing narratives and power structures (*see* Figure 7). Symbolism and metaphors are employed to convey specific messages and ideologies (*see* Figure 8). For instance, influential figures are often portrayed as larger-than-life characters, while marginalized groups may be depicted as weak or inferior. These visual representations serve to reinforce existing power dynamics and social hierarchies (*see* Figure 9).



Figure 7. To Align with the Power Structures

Figure 7 on the February 12, 2022 cover is a powerful cartoon that effectively conveys a message about the crucial need for government oversight. Through a combination of textual and visual elements, the cartoonist masterfully delivers a scathing critique of the government's plan to relocate the national capital. The inclusion of the words *Lagak Kompak Ibu Kota* serves as a biting satire, highlighting the flaws in the government's decision-making process. The visual elements are equally impactful, with the main actors being the president and two contractors who are given specific instructions. These contractors are believed to be the heads of the special autonomous region of the national capital. Overall, the cartoon provides a striking portrayal of the



planning of the capital city, making it a must-see for anyone concerned with the future of our country.



Figure 8. To Convey Specific Messages and Ideologies

The March 19, 2022, issue of Figure 8 delivers a clear message through a thought-provoking combination of text and imagery. The cartoonist aims at the negative lifestyle of high society individuals close to politicians and the rampant consumerism and hedonism present in Indonesian society. The cartoon's focal point depicts three individuals in two luxurious cars. Two are young businesspeople who flaunt their wealth on social media, while the third is a fraud suspect who recklessly tosses around dollar bills. The cartoonist wittily satirizes these businessmen's social circle with the words *Muda, Kaya, Tersangka*.



Figure 9. To Reinforce Existing Power Dynamics



The cartoonist's work in Figure 9 on the cover, published on March 5, 2022, boldly addresses Indonesia's current political power dynamics. His cartoon skillfully integrates textual and non-textual elements to convey his message. The text *Malu-mau Menunda Pemilu* is a scathing satire aimed at a minister aspiring to alter Indonesia's presidential term system. The visual element features four actors in a concert or orchestra setting, with one actor playing the conductor, symbolizing the minister who frequently organizes state administration affairs. The other two actors represent the political parties that unthinkingly follow the conductor's instructions. Finally, with only his hand visible, the president's cut-out figure holds the partiture, completing the cartoon's powerful imagery.

Furthermore, the cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers hold immense power in constructing and reinforcing dominant ideologies, power dynamics, and socio-political implications. These cartoons shape public opinion, influence political discourse, and reinforce existing power structures. An important finding from analyzing these cartoons is their portrayal of political figures in alignment with prevailing ideologies and power dynamics. Cartoons often depict powerful figures, such as political leaders or elites, as larger-than-life characters to symbolize their authority and dominance (Surahmat et al., 2023). In contrast, marginalized groups or individuals may be portrayed as weak, subordinate, or even invisible, perpetuating their marginalized status within society (Stewart, 2015).

Symbolism and metaphors are commonly used in political cartoons to communicate complex political concepts in a concise and accessible manner (Landreville, 2015). National flags or political party symbols may be used to represent larger political ideologies or allegiances (Feldman, 2023), reinforcing dominant ideologies and serving as visual cues for audiences to interpret the intended message. Political cartoons also provide a platform for expressing dissent, critiquing social injustices, and raising awareness about pressing matters (Lalancette, M., & Small, 2020). They highlight social inequalities, corruption, or policy failures, bringing attention to issues that mainstream media may overlook or downplay. Political cartoons stimulate public discourse and encourage critical engagement with socio-political problems by doing so (Piata, 2016).



However, it is crucial to critically analyze the role of political cartoons in constructing and reinforcing dominant ideologies. While they provide a platform for social critique and alternative perspectives (Morgan, 2010), they can also perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce existing power imbalances (Meibauer, 2019). A nuanced understanding of the socio-political context in which these cartoons are produced and consumed is essential for interpreting their messages accurately.

Overall, political cartoons are significant in shaping public opinion, reinforcing existing power structures, and engaging with critical societal issues in Indonesian society. Examining the construction of these cartoons provides insights into the complex relationship between politics, culture, and power dynamics, contributing to a deeper understanding of Indonesian society and its socio-political landscape.

CONCLUSION

The critical discourse analysis of political cartoons on Indonesian magazine covers has revealed their significant socio-political implications, power dynamics, and ideological construction. These cartoons' visual and textual elements construct and reinforce dominant ideologies, satirize political figures, and engage with societal issues in the Indonesian context. Political cartoons employ humor, satire, caricature, symbolism, and the interplay between image and text to convey political messages, shape public opinion, and influence political discourse. They challenge dominant narratives, provide alternative perspectives, and stimulate critical engagement with socio-political problems.

However, the research has limitations in terms of sample selection and subjectivity of interpretation. Future studies could expand the sample to include a broader range of magazines and explore the audience's reception and interpretation of political cartoons. The need for a nuanced interpretation of political cartoons considering the cultural and historical contexts highlights the importance of further research into their evolution and societal significance. In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of political cartoons as a form of social commentary and political communication. They have the potential to challenge authority, stimulate critical thinking, and foster democratic engagement. Uncovering the complexities of political cartoons and their impact on



Indonesian society through further research can provide a richer understanding of their significance.

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