

Journal of Social Science and Knowledge Horizons
(JSSKH)

journalofsocialscienceandknowledgehorizons.com

ISSN Print: 3105-6423 ISSN Online: 3105-532X

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://openjournal.org/)

Interpreting Political Satire in Dawn: A Relevance-Theoretic Study of Editorial Discourse (Dec 2024–Feb 2025)

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Abstract

The paper focuses on evaluating political jokes on the Dawn newspaper in the period between December 2024 and February 2025 using the Relevance Theory as an analytical tool. The study explores the extent to which authors employ irony, implicit meaning, contextual interpretation, and cognitive influence to satirize political events and government performance in Pakistan by using important satirical articles and opinion pieces on the topic. Relevance Theory where emphasis was given to optimal relevance assists in revealing how readers make inferences about the deeper meanings behind the literal meanings. The paper states that satirical discourse utilises a mutually understandable socio-political knowledge, cultural allusions, and practical conclusions to attract the attention of readers and increase the persuasiveness of commentary. It further discusses how satire influences the masses, challenges the establishment and enhances political consciousness at a time when there were electoral campaigns, issues in governance and power shifts. The results indicate that satire in Dawn serves as a cognitive and social-political instrument, which contributes to the media communication and journalistic criticism.

Keywords: Political Satire, Relevance Theory, Dawn Newspaper, Pragmatic Analysis, Media Discourse (2024–2025)

INTRODUCTION

Satire has never been irrelevant when it came to the way individuals criticize and exchange views, particularly, when political or social hardship occurs. Throughout history, from ancient literature to today's media, satire has helped individuals and communities challenge power, expose injustice, and engage in political debate—often through humor, exaggeration, or irony. The power of satire lies in the fact that it speaks the truth in the oblique way. It is able to express what may be too risky or controversial to express forthrightly. This is why satire is particularly significant in such countries as Pakistan, where a direct reproach toward powerful institutions, which can be a government, military, or judiciary can produce severe consequences even causing censorship or even legal prosecution. The newspapers and the media have

become some of the very significant areas where satire has found a place to manifest itself in the contemporary world. They provide a platform where writers, cartoonists and columnists can make comments about events that take place in the world and may include humor or sarcasm to make serious comments. Dawn is the oldest and the most widely read English newspapers in Pakistan which is one such platform. Dawn is characterized by evenhanded reporting, disciplined analysis and freedom of editorial comment. It frequently carries political cartoons and opinion columns which employ satire in drawing attention to governance, justice and governmental policy issues. Such satirical writings and illustrations can be witty, humorous and highly political to the extent of being country-specific. It is an important topic of linguistic and pragmatic investigation. So, this paper will employ Relevance Theory, developed by cognitive scientists Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in the 1980s, as a constructive way of explaining how actual communication occurs at all, especially when meaning is not made clear. This theory states that the search of relevance leads human communication. This implies that when a person communicates either by speaking, writing, or visually, he or she is never intending to pass information mechanically. Instead, they provide clues or cues which they hope to be understood by the audience through their own reasoning, background experiences and knowledge of the context. This is particularly evident in the case of communication in a natural language whereby, there is a lot that is said even when it has not been uttered. Listening or reading audiences resort to inference to get the actual sense of what the presenter is talking about. Relevance Theory states that psychologically we are prepared (conditioned) to believe that anything we come across in the domain of communication is relevant enough to be worth processing, and that we will be able to take some cognitive effect- i.e. what the theory refers to as a cognitive effect- out of it without going to the trouble of carrying out unnecessary mental effort. The Relevance Theory is based around two major concepts: processing effort and cognitive effects. Cognitive effects are what happens in the mind or what is realized by an individual. Processing effort instead is the amount of mental effort being required by the audience to get to that perception. Communication is said to be most relevant when it elicits as much cognitive consequences as possible with least processing efforts. This idea is especially helpful in analyzing satire, where the message is often hidden beneath humor, irony, or exaggeration. The satirical writers do not directly point the criticism in telling it directly but they leave it to the reader to interpret and deduce the meaning. It is this very process of cognition that is part of the pleasure of satire: the reader receives a satisfying intellectual stimulation of guessing correctly what the text actually meant, or rather, what the word play was. This paper will take a closer look at political satire written in Dawn during the period of December 2024-February 2025. This was the politically active time in Pakistan and this period was characterized with important debates on the governance, the coming elections and the court rulings and civil military relationships. Limiting the time span

to a small period provides the study with a specific insight into the way the satire was reacting to the real events and the way in which Dawn used cartoons in order to critique, to reflect and to attract people. The focus will be on the examination of meaning creation in the given cartoons, comprehension or interpretation of them by the reader and the explanation of the process through the Relevance Theory. The study also explores how visual elements like exaggeration, symbols, or familiar images work alongside language to deliver a message. It takes into account how the readers apply their prior background knowledge and assumptions in getting a coherent sense of what the cartoon is implying, and what this has to say about the correlation amid media, language and politics in Pakistan. On the larger scale, it is the goal of this research to demonstrate the importance of satire as a tool, which may be used as a mirror and a weapon a mirror that would reflect the state of the society, and a weapon against the establishment. It examines the influences of language and images through which one may express unpopular statements creatively and the way individuals react to the messages depending on their own knowledge and belief. The paper also notes that it is crucial to know pragmatics (or the study of the process of meaning making in the real communication setting) in the kind of media that makes use of humor, politics, and indirect criticism. This study therefore contributes to existing knowledge relating to the human ability to interpret complex messages in a difficult political climate using analysis of satire through the Relevance Theory model as applied to Dawn. It also contributes to the explanation of how media can influence the opinion of the majority, raise awareness, and provide a voice to the ideas, which otherwise could remain to be ignored. In the process, the study relates language, thought, and society relationally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The points that made both political satire and humour receive increasing interest in the academic sphere of knowledge include questioning the rule, ideological contradiction, and the power to draw the readers with the assistance of comedic elements and irony. Tesnohliokva (2021) states that political satire and humour are highly dynamic and developing spheres of cultural performance that cannot be observed in the light of traditional patterns, as these usually blur this way of humour and satire or depict it as numerous means of genre or even rhetoric. She critiques the earlier research on satire owing to its shortcomings in addressing issues such as the semantic and social impact of satire, since they are conveyed and viewed in a particular way by audiences. She forms the cultural sociological approach by stating that satire must be examined as a structure, which is self-sustaining and meaning-bearing and can immerse people emotionally and politically. Theory of Relevance was created by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in 1986 and updated in 1995. It sets the meaning of human communication as relative to the action of achieving maximum relevance. Speakers address the hearer through ostensive stimuli that guide the receiver to make a contextual assumption of sense, rather than purely encoding the

message to be sent across. This theory offers the best chance of analysing satire since it is normally built on implication, cultural references, and irony. The work of Noor, Rashid, and Latif (2024) allows studying the phenomenon of humour in a more comprehensive way by combining cognitive, pragmatic, and sociocultural approaches. Their article has pointed out that the phenomenon of humour is not merely a matter of aesthetics or amusement; in fact, it is an intricate cognitive process, and how a person treats humorous situations would vary depending on the circumstance, the culture, and the language. The article by Buranasamut (2020) explores the notion, traits, and perception of political satire in Thai media and provides an interdisciplinary view, including elements of journalism, media studies, and communication theory. His work is based on the two aspects of satire which inform and entertain through comical means to depict statements on politics in terms of theoretical means such as irony, caricature, and exaggeration. Of special interest is the distinction of two major forms of satire usage: Horatian (soft, humorous) and Juvenalian (rough and violent), and their role in audience reception and political interpretation. Kotze masterpiece about the use of cartoons as a tool in political communication, Kotze (1988) lays emphasis on the important role of political cartoons in the construction and expression of political news, especially in South Africa. The research he has done points to the fact that the role of cartoons as a particular type of political speech is significant as a minor instrument of the much larger process of political socialization. Dr. Syed Shujat Husain, Dr. Syed Maliha Begum, and Dr. Fazli Hussain studied the role of editorial cartoons in terms of political and social communication in Pakistani newspapers. In the study, the researchers used qualitative content analysis of editorial cartoons published in Daily Dawn and Daily Jang between the 1st and 30th of November 2022, with the aim of analysing how editorial cartoons reflect on news alignment, intellectual depth, and audience expectations. They learned that Dawn never lacked a dynamic editorial mode and the ability to blend national and international issues and to integrate them with a touch of satirical commentary as well. This is not the case with Jang, which focused mostly on the political issues of the country. The study was situated with respect to the Gratification Theory and the Magic Bullet Theory. In the article, Azimova Marjona Salim Qizi and Dustmurodova Sarvinoz carry out a detailed analysis of the problem of satire and satirical expressions in political speech, referring to the intricacies of the usage of these notions on both linguistic and socio-political levels. The satire, as portrayed in the paper, is not just a figure of speech but a higher form of cultural and communication approach transcending mere entertainment. Based on the Latin definition of the word Satira (mixture), satire is defined as a mixture of comedy and critique which is artificially balanced among each other, whose art stands together to exhibit the absurdity, hypocrisy, and irrationalities woven into socio-political structures. Its authors affirm that satire acts on many levels simultaneously not only linguistic, allegorical, ideological, etc. but also state that it is a twofold mechanism: it amuses and gets one to think. The significance of satire in

exposing ideological contradictions, opposing hegemonic discourses, and revealing fallacious and hypocritical tendencies in politics, government policy-making, and everyday rhetoric is noted in the paper. Satire proves itself as a mirror, given to society with all the guilt spots in a highly readable and subversive way.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology provides the conceptual framework of the study and establishes the way how the research will be organized and the tasks of the research are expected to be achieved. This study will utilize a qualitative, interpretive and descriptive research approach to analyze the political satire and humor through the lens of relevance theory. The research type is non- experimental so, it will concentrate on textual analysis of Dawn newspapers to explore both content and cognitive processes. The sample for this qualitative study will be taken from the Dawn newspaper collection from December 2024 to February 2025. From the population of these three months newspaper a sample of total 24 newspapers will be analyzed. As the data is secondary in nature, first the data will be closely read and then the analysis will be done from the selected sample.

DATA ANALYSIS

Article Title: *Bilawal condemns PTI as ‘party of extremists’*

In the article published on 7 December 2024, “*Bilawal condemns PTI as ‘party of extremists’*” written by Syed Irfan Raza, the author has presented satire by means of hyperbolism. Bilawal said as has not spent even one day... serving the people,” which means that the government has not done anything towards the people. This use of exaggeration satirizes PTI’s alleged inaction and failure in provincial governance. His next statement that there is no government in the province is a mocking dismissal of the authority of PTI in KP and cannot literally be interpreted but rather as a form of political chatter. According to Relevance Theory, by working on the basis of contextual knowledge of the fact that PTI has been voted in, readers understand that the ridicule is meant to be present with the recognition that the tone used is a sarcastic recognition of political theatre, but not a reported fact.

Title: Excerpt from *Akbar in Wonderland* by Umber Khairi

Source: Dawn, EOS Magazine

The novel published on December 8, 2024, *Akbar in Wonderland* written by Umber Khairi is a strong case of Juvenalian political satire, employing techniques of irony, realist parody, and narrative contrast to speak against the ideological polarization, corruption, and performative religiosity of Pakistani life. Using a sarcastic remark by the main character Akbar, who went on to say something like “*at least they do not lie and murder like the Jamaati types that one believed in,*” Khairi has exploited the concept of *echoic utterance*, where the readers are expected to think of a secretly humorous agenda behind the publicly-proclaimed agenda of hostility, which is all part of the tenets of Relevance Theory. Eid celebration represents a political fractiousness performed by those absurd fellows in a family who are exponents of contradictory

political views and conspiracy gibberish. For example, *"those feudals are black enough to bleed all the money out of Karachi"* is a satire on the political paranoia of urban people. Akbar is self-talking with ironic detachment to ridicule all the emotional labor of politically aware individuals who are fighting within the limits of ideologically constrained ecologies. His jibe about this that he is merely doing his work as a host and is merely putting on some entertainment is satirizing the scapegoating of dissenting critics in politicized families. The text relies on readers to infer deeper meaning from contradiction, tone, and pragmatic cues, aligning with Relevance Theory's emphasis on inferential processing over literal meaning. In general, the satire is less obvious and sharper; the critique is present in the form of indirect attack and narrative irony to present the moral hole of both political and domestic speech, which is why it is a good choice in this paper.

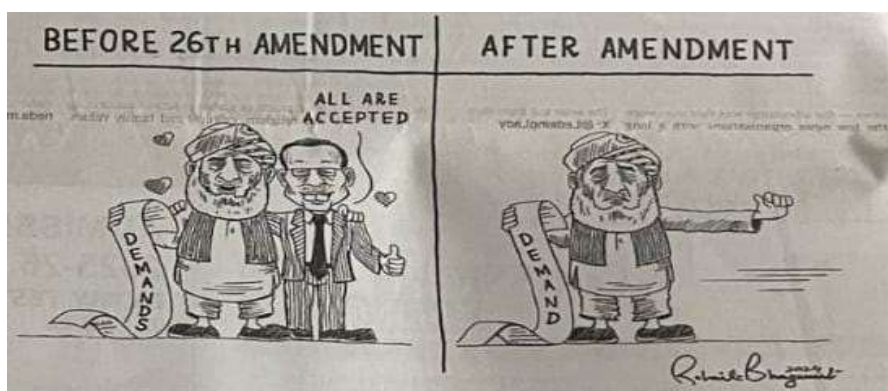
Saturday newspaper:

14 December 2024:

Article Title: PTI 'shaky' on talks after snub from Imran

Amir Wasim article(December 14, 2024), *"PTI Shaky on Talks After Snub by Imran,"* as the structure of the article consists of rather canonical political news, but the article may become good material for political satire as the situations and words used by the author present an ironic effect. The source of such cognitive dissonance is the failure to match the statement that PTI is not interested in having a dialogue with the performance of the parliament's procedures, such as the formation of a committee and visiting the Speaker. Comic exaggeration in statements such as *"Islamabad had become a no-go area to Pakhtuns"* manifests the futility of PTI's performance in its resistance. It is even satiric of the coherency in the party that Imran Khan himself was irked by his appearance as a controversial as stated *"friendly opposition"*. This type of humour can be characterised as incongruity-based humour, and this is due to the symbolic act of defiance between PTI and taking part in an institution. As Relevance Theory goes, such satire is inferential in its comprehension: the journalist presents ostensive cues that lead the reader to perceive contradictions and permits him or her to implicitly criticise PTI (our strategic indecisiveness, and our inflation of words). The critique in the article is therefore realized not with a humorous aim but instead through the involvement of the readers in the realization of irony; hence, meeting the intellectual requirements of political satire.

Political Cartoon



In this political cartoon published on 15 December 2024 by Rohail Baghawat, the fleeting relationship between the government and an Islamic leader, very likely to be Maulana Fazlur Rahman, in the enactment of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution is portrayed. At the onset of the cartoon, the religious leader is pictorially shown in a jovial fashion, being accosted by a politician who is carrying a scroll labeled with the word "demands," and the text is castigated as "All are accepted." This means that the government accepted all his terms to ensure that he supports it. In the latter part, after the amendment has been adopted, only a single demand remains behind, and the religious leader stands alone and unheard, portraying the fact that the alliance ceased to exist and he has also been cast aside. The cartoon is ironical in criticizing the manner in which political leaders strike deals with religious leaders to gain short-term satisfaction and discard them at their convenience once they have accomplished their objective. This is not stated in the cartoon itself, but the pictures suffice to give the readers an opportunity to superimpose what they have read on the recent political happenings. Relevance Theory makes sense of this sort of indirect communication, whereby context is employed to interpret the actual message. It shows how political satire can be applied to reveal the hidden truth of power, deception, and manipulation in politics by means of simple illustration.

Article Title: Digital Graveyard

In the article "Digital Graveyard", Farieha Aziz (Dawn, December 21, 2024) employs irony and metaphor to satirically attack the digital policies being followed in Pakistan and the controlling nature of the government. The title itself can be interpreted as a metaphor, since the country's digital scene is already a graveyard where digital rights and connectivity have been buried, literally. Dealing with the year 2024, Aziz jokes that at this point, the year was referred to as the dial-up years because someone took the landline receiver constantly, in the hope of sending humanity back in time, failed to hang up the phone, and it happened over and over and over again as stated "2024 was all about someone constantly picking up the receiver of the landline... and leaving off the hook, again and again," which is metaphor. It is an echoic utterance by Relevance Theory because it is a mockery toward the repeated attempts of the government to interfere. The next ironic statement is where she claims that "the

Digital Nation bill was tabled ... with sound and fury of unending speeches on internet connectivity," presenting a state of ill that contrasts the futuristic and positive-sounding language of the bill with the actual and too-often extremely bad service. This contrast is theatrical, exaggerated, and not true to task. Aziz ironically wonders, *"Is it supposed to be that companies and people can move to these special zones to have stable internet connectivity,?"* This is a rhetorically raised question and as ironic as possible, because it is exactly what such a policy has been like: exclusive and unrealistic. She further satirizes the government's justification for banning X by quoting State Minister Shaza Fatima's claim that only *"two per cent use X,"* then directly undercuts it by saying, *"What the minister fails to grasp is that... the ban on X is both a denial of access and freedom of expression issue,"* turning the official narrative into a target of ridicule. Finally, the article ends with an ironical statement that is rather explanatory, as it reads, *"tell all the copper to step aside and bring 5G,"* yet the choice to pull the plug is fundamentally a mindset issue, which implies that the problem lies not in technology but in authoritarianism a more serious problem that can more effectively be addressed through satire. These metaphors, ironies, and criticisms by implication are where Aziz provides the reader with insight into the difference between what is terminologically or claimistically declared and what is actually experienced. In doing so, the article emerges as a piece of political satire worthy of political analysis through the lens of Relevance Theory.

Article Title: PTI, rights watchdog take exception to military justice

This article published on 22 December 2024, uses indirect political satire in the resolution of hostile views in addition to ironical language and hyperbole. *Imran Khan* termed the military courts as a form of *"judge, jury and executioner"* and *Omar Ayub* as *"kangaroo courts,"* which echoed the language used by the official and thus helps in the readers realizing a problem in the military justice. The statement as given by *Asad Qaiser* saying that the judicial system is in a *"paralytic state"* is hyperbolic in nature and makes the readers doubt its accuracy which produces irony. The simple contrast of what is supposedly wrong or injustice of the *PTI* with how the government is playing on one occasion like a *"Sasta Christmas Bazaar"* helps to add to satire because how the wrongs of the world are smashed up with political spirit. Using the *Relevance Theory* the readers will be in a position to interpret satire by examining the statements as those that are echoing of official voices but one with a caustic direction to it. It is with this difference between the speech and the actual meaning that problems within the justice system and usage of power are assisted to be raised that are within the scope of the research to investigate how political satire assists to raise social and political issues.

Article Title: Small and great

In this article, Muhammad Ali Siddiqi (December 28, 2024), applies political satire to demonstrate how the world has been deprived of genuine leadership, with the leaders of the so-called great powers reduced to little boys. To expose the

contradictions in international political morality, the author uses irony and exaggeration, such as describing Benjamin Netanyahu as a professional in genocide devoid of a conscience as calls it a “*genocide expert without a conscience*”, while ironically referring to him as one of the great leaders. The American president is satirically portrayed as being “*more Zionist than the Zionists themselves*”, implying his excessive alignment with Israeli interests at the expense of justice. The phrase “*storied history*” is used sarcastically when quoting the president-elect’s threat to Hamas, suggesting the absurdity of framing violent military actions as part of a noble tradition. The ironic structure of the piece encourages readers to become more critical of Western hypocrisy, aligning with the concept of satire in Relevance Theory. Readers are prompted to recognize the satirical tone and interpret the underlying meaning by identifying the gap between what is said and the motives behind it.

Article Title: Why flash the bat at every ball

Abbas Nasir published article on December 29, 2024, in his article, resorts to the cricketing metaphor in his satire of reaction to perceived criticism by others on Pakistani politicians in general and on the politicians of PML-N in particular, i.e., their automatic reactions to whatever Trump advisor Richard Grenell is tweeting. They rushed to pretend defending themselves rather than pretending to be clever instead of being ignorant about the structure of the US lobbying. With sarcasm, the author compares this kind of activity with a cricketer who swipes any ball that he sees and faces probability of being put out. He is very critical of their unorganized activities when he says: “*they are not a wise man and should leave their storyline to people who know how to write and so can employ professionals.*” Satire is ironical and exaggerated. Relevance Theory even says that the readers are aware of the critic of the depth that is implied by metaphor. This failure can be further contrasted with success of the lobby of the AIPAC. The case in point is politicians finding it correct to complain about what goes on social media through tweets instead of taking the right lobbying channels of politics on a global consideration. This makes the article a high point in political satire containing obscure humor and metaphor.

Article Title: Falling temperatures

Section: Opinion

The editorial titled “*Falling Temperatures*” published on 4 January 2024, uses metaphor and irony to create political satire in a subtle way. The first line, “*There is a welcome chill in the political atmosphere,*” does not necessarily mean that it is a pleasant weather but also a humorous statement here that talks of the unnatural silence of the ongoing talks between the government and PTI. This use of ambiguity is also an indicator of the satirical remark that implies that the level of political discourse is so low in Pakistan that even the slightest sign of this is given as an alleviation. By using the Relevance Theory, the readers can understand that this “*chill*” is not only about the temperature but it is about thawing in fierce political debate. This satire rests on the idea that even the simplest political collaboration, like two

meetings, is perceived as an achievement, and this breaks the system. Such a metaphor helps the readers see through the literal meaning and see the criticism through the eyes of political instability and avoidable confrontation.

Article Title: KP has lost control over province, says Azma

This article published on 5 January 2025, is an example political satire, particularly indirect satire using ridicule and irony to highlight the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government's failure. Punjab Minister Azma Bokhari criticizes the KP leadership, suggesting that they are more concerned about a jailed leader than the province's rising terrorism and public welfare. One pointed example she provides is that the KP government, according to her, is more focused on a prisoner in Adiala Jail than on the province's actual needs. This line illustrates the misplaced priorities of the provincial government and brings shame upon it through comparison. It represents the Horatian type of satire, in which the tone is mocking yet gentle, designed more to expose incompetence than to condemn harshly. The humorous aspect lies in the contrast between what the government ought to be doing (combating terrorism and addressing public concerns) and what it is actually doing (showing loyalty to a jailed political leader). According to Relevance Theory, readers are expected to identify the object of criticism namely, the absurd neglect of civic responsibility in favour of political allegiance through contextual cues and inferred meaning.

Article Title: Peanut gallery

Shahzad Sharjeel's (11 January 2025), article "*Peanut Gallery*" uses soft humor and a poetic style to address serious political issues (Sharjeel, 2025). The article opens with a reference to how General Zia-ul-Haq described American assistance as a peanut, which serves as a subtle jab at U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who was once a peanut farmer. This remark is not an obvious joke; instead, the author invites the reader to infer the underlying implication. According to Relevance Theory, this is an example of satire, as the reader understands that Zia was not only criticizing the small sum of aid but also indirectly mocking the American president himself through background knowledge. Another instance of satire occurs when Sharjeel recounts two failed U.S. military operations one in Iran and another in Abbottabad. He describes *Operation Eagle Claw* "*ended up as a damp squib*", implying its failure. He also notes that American soldiers left behind the bodies of their comrades. This use of irony undercuts the image of the United States as a flawless military power. The satire functions through suggestion rather than explicit statement, relying on the reader to interpret the clues and grasp the deeper meaning of the narrative. Sharjeel further enhances the tone by quoting a melancholic verse from Ghalib about a burial at sea, subtly linking it to Osama Bin Laden's sea burial: "*Why could I not be put on the seabed...*" Though he does not make the connection overt, readers infer a layer of black comedy through the interplay between classical poetry and geopolitical action. This is an example of interpretive echo, where a reference is repeated in one context to make the audience think about another.

Article Title: Two side of the social media coin

The article published on 12 January 2025, *Two Sides of the Social Media Coin* by Abbas Nasir, employs political satire to critique both global and local abuses of media power. The writer draws a humorous yet thought-provoking comparison between Elon Musk's control over Twitter (now X) and the way the Pakistani government manages its media landscape. For instance, Nasir notes that Musk spent "\$44 billion to buy Twitter and then destroyed it," which is an exaggerated remark designed to provoke both amusement and critical reflection on the misuse of wealth and influence. Another satirical example is the claim that Musk tweeted to the "King of England to dissolve parliament," a clearly absurd statement that serves to highlight the reckless use of online power. The author describes this failure by saying that the media has been brought "to its knees," and "sledgehammer," this is a classic use of satire, as the government's weaknesses are highlighted through indirect humor rather than direct confrontation. According to Relevance Theory, the audience is expected to infer the deeper meanings from contextual clues rather than from explicitly stated criticism.

Political Cartoon:



In this cartoon by Zahoor (18 January 2025), *Imran* is shown as being concerned and weary when he is seated on a big chair and heavy chains and iron balls are tied to his legs. The picture is concerned with his and his wife *Bushra Bibi*'s conviction in the case of *Al-Qadir Trust* of the sum of 190 million pounds. It uses pictorials in a humorous way to portray how a leader who previously enjoyed too much power finds himself or herself tied in corruption claims. The cartoonist mocks at the bitterness of loss of power by presenting the large chains and dejected look as to how justice has caught up with him. What this communicates is that no man is above the law and not even influential heads of statuses can be spared when they do something wrong. The cartoon has a point of irony and exaggeration that viewers must remember that power comes and goes and responsibility cannot be avoided.

Article Title: Malik Riaz cannot evade accountability, says Khwaja Asif

This article published 19 January 2025, contains such indirect criticism and allusion to satire, namely, the manner in which Khawaja Asif speaks about the fact that Malik Riaz has been escaping violent accountability for quite long. The statement that "even

mentioning or airing their names is forbidden" acts as an echoic mention, where the speaker highlights the irony of media silence due to elite influence. *Relevance Theory* can help realize how such hints can be caught by readers, and there is criticism beneath the surface which is the partiality of justice, and how people who are already strong can literally get away with it. The article indirectly mocks the sudden moral stance of authorities, inviting readers to question whether real accountability will follow or if it is just another political move.

Article Title: Malik Riaz cannot evade accountability, says Khwaja Asif

This article published on 25 January 2025, contains such indirect criticism and allusion to satire, namely, the manner in which Khawaja Asif speaks about the fact that Malik Riaz has been escaping violent accountability for quite long. The statement that *"even mentioning or airing their names is forbidden"* acts as an echoic mention, where the speaker highlights the irony of media silence due to elite influence. *Relevance Theory* can help realize how such hints can be caught by readers, and there is criticism beneath the surface which is the partiality of justice, and how people who are already strong can literally get away with it. The article indirectly mocks the sudden moral stance of authorities, inviting readers to question whether real accountability will follow or if it is just another political move.

Political Cartoon



In 26 January 2025, a cartoon drawn by Rohail Baghawat depicted Donald Trump on a SpaceX rocket headed toward Mars, a visual that both astonished and alarmed SpaceX. The comic effect is heightened through exaggerated visuals and a preposterous scenario. This is a clear example of situational irony. Instead of addressing earthly political issues, it is humorous to imagine a world leader choosing to leave the world entirely. The cartoon reflects public frustration and disbelief over Trump's controversial policies and rhetoric, especially his tendency to avoid accountability. Through the concept of echoic mention, the cartoon mocks Trump and his ego-driven slogans, such as *"Make America Great Again,"* to the extent that even an alien planet might fear his arrival. From the perspective of *Relevance Theory*, the cartoon constructs its satire not by stating criticism directly, but by allowing the reader to infer that Trump's actions are so extreme that the only escape is to send him into space. Visual exaggeration and political context work together to help the viewer

decode the satirical message, highlighting the connection between humor and social commentary.

Political Cartoon



This animated film by Zahoor(1 February 2025) offers a satirical but also humorous commentary on the failure of communication between PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) and other political organizations. It has a very simplistic but effective visual: a man with the letters PTI written on his face walks away a table that has the word Talks written on it, and another man is seated and alone, holding a megaphone and shouting Come back!. They contribute to the humor through the overuse of speech and simple visuals, which depict the situation as anarchy and nonsensical. The comedy of the situation is found in the fact that it is pointless to scream at a person who has already gone away, showing that some political actions are pointless. The sentence of the call of coming back is rather a sentence of personal quarrel than the sentence of political discussion which makes the scene even more satirical. This cartoon criticizes the performance of certain political endeavors to restart communication as opposed to genuine intentions. The intended message is an easy one to get since it echoes the most recent happenings in the political scene involving PTI. Relevance Theory indicates that people perceive such communication using the background knowledge and understanding of the situation.

Editorial Title: Absent justice

The editorial "*Absent justice*", published on 2 February 2025, uses irony, rhetorical questioning, and metaphorical language to indirectly criticize the government's interference in the judiciary and the helplessness of legal institutions. "*The judges in the Islamabad High Court had issued an SOS*". It was rejected with *that casual indifference you know*, an invitation to a scene of despair that highlights the insensitivity of the government. This is ironical indeed. Similarly, the rhetorical question that *how the oldest of judges could be so powerless, and what could the common man do* leaves the reader wondering how fair the system of justice truly is, without stating it outright, but allowing the reflection to settle in the reader's mind. The editorial also follows a pessimistic and sarcastic tone when it asserts that it is deliberately remaking the judiciary to ensure that the status quo was advanced, an insinuation directed at the people in power that its institutions were being redesigned

to make it easier to act in their favor. The dystopia that is being into the dystopia is described in the hyperbolic metaphor all roads seem to be being leading into the dystopia that hints at the imminent totalitarian state and tyranny as a matter of routine. These words have not been intended to be read and understood literally, but indirect and stylistic implication is the intended meaning, to create concern and contemplation. Through this, the editorial makes no direct statement of the charge, rather, it causes the reader to come to an inference that the politicization of justice is a very disturbing phenomenon.

Political Cartoon



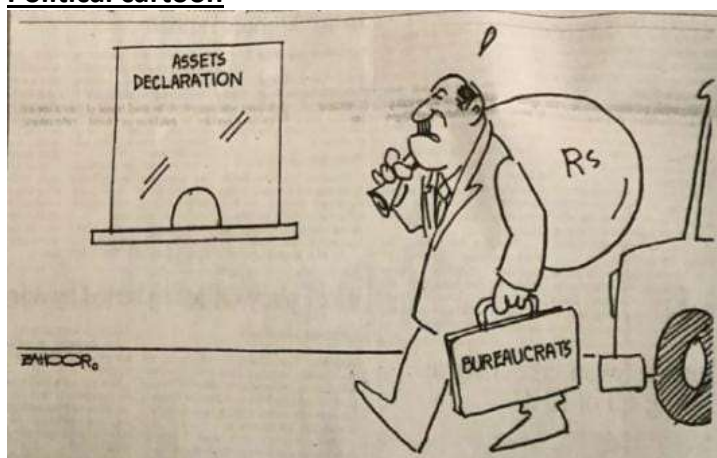
The message conveyed by this political cartoon by Zahoor (February 8, 2025) is strong because he uses Juvenalian satire to reveal the hypocrisy of waging war in the name of liberation. The photograph is a depiction of a hideous variant of the Statue of Liberty, where a face is replaced by a skull, and is posing in a world of devastation and demise. The caption is ironical and it is the US will conquer Gaza and turn it into the Riviera of the Middle East. This dramatic contrast of the visual horror and the euphemistic wording is the key to the satire and its implications are that military violence is usually camouflaged by the discourse of peace and development. The dark humor, stinging irony and grotesque parody of the cartoon subvert the symbol of liberty and turn it into a symbol of terror instead of hope. The cartoon particularly works according to the Relevance Theory, which states that the cartoon does not need any explicit explanation since the reader is left to assume that he/she can gain deeper information by applying the knowledge that he/she has already had.

Article Title: 'Democratic' ethnic cleansing

This article by Abbas Nasir published on 9 February 2025, uses irony and critical language to highlight the gap between democratic values and political reality, making it suitable for analysis as political satire. The satire is evident when the author states, *"Trump declared his ethnic cleansing plan of Gaza... when Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was beside him with a smug glued on his face,"* a depiction of the bizarre and casual treatment of highly serious matters. Another illustration is

where the article mentions that Europe became silent in offering guarantees to Israel, whose leaders are apparently unafraid of arrest despite international charges against them. The article also recalls what authorities and sympathizers claimed, including *Trump*, using the words, "*Trump apologists... began spinning his proposal as out-of-the-box thinking*," drawing attention to how severe human rights violations are concealed through political spin. This enables readers to reach deeper conclusions regarding the distortion of democratic ideals. This enables readers to reach deeper conclusions regarding the distortion of democratic ideals.

Political cartoon



This political cartoon by Zahoor published on 15 February 2025, satirically exposes bureaucratic corruption in a subtle yet impactful way, depicting a government official confidently walking past an "Assets Declaration" booth while carrying a suitcase labeled "Bureaucrats" and dragging a massive money sack marked "Rs." The cartoon is based on *Horatian* type of satire with light irony and exaggeration, brought in through the gap between bureaucratic accountability and actual practice. The physical humor is expressed through the arrogance of the official who unconcernedly disregards the precaution of being transparent, yet he is loaded with unaccounted money. Language-wise, the words used *Assets Declaration*, *Bureaucrats*, and *Rs* are not only straightforward but also loaded, and it rests with the viewers to gauge their own conclusion. The latent scathing examination being alluded to is that there indeed are mechanisms meant to keep people in check, but as things turn out, people in power choose to ignore the rules. The cartoon has an implied meaning of the allegory of routine corruptions and the performativism of bureaucratic transparency. The understanding of the audience that is to say, through whatever impression they may receive of real-world corruption by associating these images with what they have heard about corruption in general needs only a few words, since the setting preserves the image effectively, keeping the viewer visually engaged. Eventually, the reader will see that it is not just the picture of one man, but the image of institutional failure to regulate and report wealth truthfully.

Political Cartoon

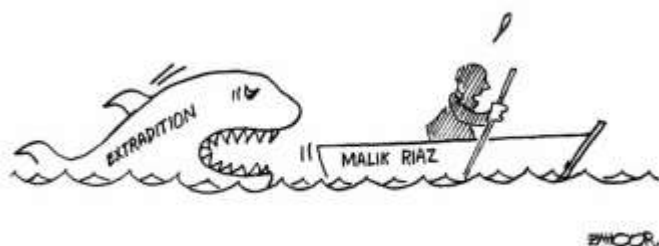


This political cartoon by Rohail Baghawat published on January 16, 2025, has used the Visual as well as linguistic satire in this political cartoon conveys the theme of restricted freedom and communication in a nuanced manner. The image depicts a prisoner sitting in a jail cell, posting a letter, while others push it through the bars into a mailbox, with stacked envelopes visible on the floor. The indirect humor and irony are in the comparison between being physically locked up and still being committed to the attempt to communicate implying an abstract limitation of the freedom of expression. This analogy refers to political prisoners, or censorship victims, in which the freedom of expression has been diminished to writing letters. The aesthetic parody of the cartoon is based on ridiculousness of these restraints, and humorously entangles the paradox of the so-called free people who exist in the environment where freedom of thought is strictly regulated. The language satire which is hidden behind the letter itself supports the annoyance and the irony of the inability to engage in the free communication. A more significant meaning is gained because the viewers can see into the action made by the prisoner as a metaphor to the general societal oppression. Relevance theory states that the cartoon employs the collective knowledge of culture and politics concerning censorship so that by the audience viewing the cartoon, the viewer is able to deduce the type of criticism that is intended; that even in the so-called free society, communication is usually curtailed in the name of order or the law.

The post titled Bromance on the Brink? by Rafia Zakaria (22 February 2025) is an article of political satire, which criticizes international affairs and the personal relationship between the leaders of the world. The very name of the play uses the playful term of bromance to satirize the alleged friendship between Narendra Modi and Donald Trump to set an ironic and humorous tone at the very beginning. The alliance is also satirized in the article, especially in its ironical statement that Modi is a long-time Trump fan, with whom he shares the trait of autocrats. This quotation is an apparent compliment but it is surrounded by irony to mean that their similarity in

their authoritarian style is an issue that is not a good point. Relevance Theory is useful in acquiring an understanding of the way the readers create an interpretation of the criticism they are meant to understand: the article does not explicitly criticize the admiration of Modi, but the context and the framing of the narration allows the reader to make such an interpretation independently.

The artist Zahoor (23 February 2025) in this political cartoon is touching on the issue of extradition of a high-profile Pakistani land developer; Malik Riaz, the founder of a company known to face numerous court cases and incidents of corruption. In the cartoon, a huge, threatening fish, with the title Extradition, is chasing a tiny, weak boat with the same title on which a horrified figure of Malik Riaz sits. This graphic overstatement becomes a kind of irony: a person who can be seen as strong is shown as weak and scared when dealing with the law. The cartoon is an amalgamation of verbal and graphic satire. The imbalance in size of the predator and prey makes the shift in power swift and immediate, whereas the grammatical form of the word directly using the term Extradition deprives the cartoon of any ambiguity and contributes to its message clarity. The ridiculousness of a man who used to be considered untouchable being hunted like an easy target is something to laugh at and yet provide a serious comment on the issue of systemic corruption and impunity of the elite. In the context of the Relevance Theory, this cartoon delivers its satirical message in an effective manner. It is based on the knowledge of the shared background i.e., familiarity of the masses with the name of Malik Riaz and the existing legal trouble to share meaning with minimal verbal use. The viewer will be expected to deduce the concealed criticism: that even the strongest one will one day be put to justice, and that public personalities can also escape responsibility. The humor of the cartoon is therefore based on both exaggeration and situational irony that this is a good illustration of political satire that is based on cognitive inferences, social commentary, and symbolic imagery.



Conclusion:

Drawing conclusions about this study, it can be noted that political satire in the Dawn newspaper is a strong mechanism of indirect political criticism, social analysis, and involvement. By analyzing selected articles and cartoons through the framework of Relevance Theory, it was found that satirists used irony, echoic mention, and implied meanings to communicate complex messages without directly confronting authority. The study revealed that satire express both the entertainment and informativity. It also reveals that satire has the power to say things without saying anything. Such satirical writings require the reader to make references from the writer's utterance visual, textual, or verbal on the basis of their common knowledge and background. Relevance Theory supports the understanding of the reading of satire because it concentrates on the most reasonable indicators using the least processing efforts. The paper proves that satire is used as a form of resistance especially in politically sensitive settings such as Pakistan, where it is used to form a public opinion without necessarily making an open confrontation as it can lead to censorship and legal action.

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