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Multimodal Media Tools of Popular Geopolitics: Russian Politics in Foreign Media Cartoons[1]

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Abstract. The article focuses on political cartoons about Russia and analyses the potential of multimodal media texts as tools of popular geopolitics. The author also employs Stuart Hall's concept of propaganda, considering the text of a caricature from the semiotic perspective. The integration of the theoretical fields of popular geopolitics and propaganda is substantiated, since not only do political cartoons form stereotypes about politics and international relations among media readers, but they also perform propaganda functions, conveying the point of view of the information platform on Russian politics and Russia. The empirical base of the study includes 242 political cartoons from Russian- and English-language foreign media, posted in the public domain on the internet in 2020–2021, the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Political cartoons are analysed through expert evaluation and the use of interdisciplinary classifiers. The obtained empirical results were subjected to statistical processing, including the identification of correlations. The results demonstrate that foreign media political cartoons about Russia and Russian politics create two different images of Russia. The first description is typical for English cartoons where Russia appears in the context of international relations, mostly its ties with the United States; and the target character in English cartoon is the Russian president. English-language cartoons are more often focused on harsh criticism and the use of schematized images. Moderate criticism dominates in Russian-language cartoons published by foreign media; the target characters are not only the president, but also other representatives of Russian society. Thematically, Russian-language cartoons are constructed in the context of Russia's domestic political problems; the field of education is usually the most intentionally "negative." According to the study, Russian-language cartoons of foreign media demonstrate the most complex and rich visual code and use Aesopian language. In conclusion, the author highlights the importance of further studies of the tools of popular geopolitics, as well as the need to improve the practice of creating multimodal media texts in the logic of the Russian understanding of geopolitics.

Keywords: political cartoon; Russia; Russian politics; political communication; multimodal text; media; propaganda; popular geopolitics.

[1] English translation from the Russian text: Radina N. K. Mul'timodal'nye mediynye instrumenty populyarnoy geopolitiki: rossiyskaya politika v karikaturakh zarubezhnykh SMI. *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. 15(4). P. 130–150. https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2022-4-85-130-150

The current demand for political cartoons in digital media can be explained by its key functions: to entertain, reduce aggression, set a political agenda, and present a person or group's version of politics and history (Volskaya 2017; Melnikov 2018; Chikaipa 2019; Hasanah, Hidayat 2020). And the genre continues to develop thanks to its multimodality[2] and the fact that it is produced in digital format: political caricatures are easy to produce and replicate using digital media; moreover, global platforms are created that compile collections of satirical comics from various publications around the world, including Cartoon Movement, Today's Comics Online, *Politico*,[3] and others (Borjabad, Ruiz del Olmo 2020).

The present study focuses specifically on new (that is, digital) formats of political cartoons that make these multimodal texts as accessible to readers as possible (and thus able to influence the maximum number of readers). In addition, it uses quantitative methods of studying such cartoons, which allows us to identify patterns in their creation and describe empirical models related to Russian politics.

International Relations in the Context of Political Cartoons: Caricatures and Propaganda

The dictionary definition of "political cartoon" is a visual text reflecting reality through the prism of a comic effect.[4] As a rule, political cartoons are accessible and expressive, containing key political attitudes, draw a picture of the "political world" which implicitly refer to objects of the real world. And they do not require any specialized knowledge on the part of the reader to understand and appreciate them.

Just like other multimodal media texts (memes, comics, posters, etc.), political cartoons represent an empirical field for the study of popular geopolitics, analysing the ways in which (stereotypical) geopolitical ideas and attitudes are created in society, which can then be used by those engaged in geopolitics to get society to adopt and accept their actions (Rech 2014; Pickering 2017; Saunders 2017).

Political cartoons focus primarily on presenting a depiction of international relations at a given point in time (see, for example: Ivanova 2018; Melnikov 2018; Svechnikova, Aleynikov 2019), as well as on the portrayal of specific politicians who embody the "image of the opposition" or the "image of the enemy" (Aksenov 2020; Rogozinnikova 2018). Research suggests that political cartoons reflect and metaphorically illustrate relations between countries. As such, studying political cartoons allows us

[2] A multimodal text is one that takes the form of websites, presentations, instant messaging systems and social networks, each of which operates according to specific laws. In Russian linguistics, the term "creolized text" is also used, and a theory of creolization is being developed that analyses the interaction of two codes – verbal and visual.

[3] Some of the internet sites containing collections of satirical comics include Cartoon Movement (cartoonmovement.com), Today's Comics Online (gocomics.com), and Politico (politico.com).

[4] Prokhorov A. M, ed. 1984. "Political cartoon". In *Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia. P. 547.

to determine, with a relatively high degree of accuracy, the intentional field of international relations (Pitlovanaya 2016). Additionally, some believe that political cartoons form media stereotypes about international relations among readers, build a system (image) of the global political picture of the world, and create a controlled imaginary reality, which can only be expected when the tools of popular geopolitics are employed (Kultysheva, Zhuravskaya 2016; Rech 2014).

Since modern digital media communication has "grown" alongside "new media," as well as new forms of multimodal media text (such as memes), one might doubt the effectiveness of political cartoons as tools for creating an image of the political world. However, when comparing old and new forms of multimodal texts, researchers are optimistic about the influence of political cartoons: in their opinion, political cartoons continue to be an important element of the political communicative field, and this makes it possible to shape political and international relations, as well as to incite people to political activity and even perpetrate terrorist attacks (Balakina 2021).

As for stereotypes in international relations, digital communication gives people easy access to information while authors of messages undertake the same tasks with the "new" media they faced with the "old, but still digital" media: to create, in a highly competitive environment, memorable "content," influence, and become a go-to voice when it comes to dissecting the reality around us. One effective tool of influence is multimodality, the poly-coded nature of the digital text: information that for whatever reason cannot be conveyed using words can be expressed (or enhanced) using a picture, or by combining images and words (Denisova 2019). The multimodality of political cartoons explains why these texts are of particular importance in the context of practicing political propaganda.

Researchers typically use the term propaganda in the negative sense, as a distorted and biased presentation of facts. Disinformation, fake news, and other elements of information wars are routinely labelled propaganda. At the same time, "propaganda," according to the dictionary definition, is not unequivocally a lie or disinformation, but is rather associated with the dissemination of political, philosophical, scientific, artistic and other views and ideas in order to introduce them into the public consciousness and spark practical action on a massive scale.[5] With propaganda, the only thing that matters is intentionality: information (views, values, etc.) is presented in the context of the social interests of the group promoting it. At the same time, in the (modern) social constructivist understanding of the surrounding world, subjectivity and bias (intentionality) are considered to be basic conditions for perceiving and understanding reality (Makarov 2003). Propaganda is any informational construction of reality which, as a result of subjectivity, creates a "certain image of the world," a specific point of view.

[5] A. M. Prokhorov (ed.), "Political cartoon," *Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1984), p. 1063.

The scientific literature offers various models of propaganda – models that often do not contradict one another – which explain how exactly "points of view" are constructed and clarify the various aspects of this process. The model developed by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman explains that the information field is constructed by screening out information through the filters of interests of media owners and their advertisers (how a "consensus" opinion is created in society) (Mullen, Klaehn 2010; Pedro-Carañana 2011), which successfully correlates with the "agenda setting" model (Manzoor, Safdar, Khan 2019). Jacques Ellul's theory demonstrates how everyday life itself is created with the help of various information technologies, and that the goal of propaganda is to change people's behaviour (Alves 2014). Stuart Hall's decoding model shifts the emphasis to the inseparable connection of information with the features of understanding (the semiotic aspect), and the process of decoding and understanding the content of propaganda, including errors or "reading between the lines" (Shaw 2017).

Looking on political cartoons as a propaganda tool, many researchers point to their effectiveness in this capacity (Tsykalov 2012). That said, there are still not enough works that attempt to explain, based on a significant corpus of texts, exactly how political cartoons function, what causes this propagandistic effect, and whether or not such cartoons are constructed differently depending on the subject or audience (Semotiuk 2019). Yet, if we analyse the map of "imaginary geopolitics" and the stereotypes in international relations political cartoons shine a light on, as well as calculate the propaganda potential of such cartoons, it becomes clear that knowledge about their essential characteristics is essential.

This article aims to explain, with the help of empirical models, how political cartoons about Russia and Russian politics are constructed in the foreign media for Russian and foreign (English-speaking) audiences, as well as to describe attitudes in the field of international relations and ideas of territoriality (specifically Russia) published using multimodal media texts (political cartoons) in terms of their role as propaganda.

Methodology and Research Materials

The present study is predicated on a combination of several concepts. Our analysis of stereotypes about relations between countries conveyed in political cartoons ("imaginary geopolitics") can be traced back to the groundwork laid by popular geopolitics, which studies the impact of geopolitical images on mass culture and the formation of geopolitical stereotypes in society (Okunev 2012). The propaganda potential of political cartoons was analysed with due account of the possibilities afforded by decoding a semiotically enriched text, that is, based on the propaganda model developed by Stuart Hall (Shaw 2017). Our decoding of the multimodal (or creolized) texts of political cartoons in the process of empirical analysis leans heavily on the logic of the theory of creolization (Volskaya 2017; Ebzeeva and Dugalich 2018).

The empirical base of our study is made up of 242 political cartoons that first appeared in the Russian- and English-language foreign media in the public domain on the internet (freely accessible collections of cartoons from Deutsche Welle, CartoonStock and LiveJournal from 2020–2021), extracted with the help of the keywords "Russia," "Russian politics" and the equivalents of these words in Russian. Of these political cartoons, 92 were aimed at English-speaking readers, and 150 were targeted to the Russian-speaking audience. Insofar as freely accessible collections do not always indicate the publication for which a cartoon was originally created, we have ignored the ideological leanings of the texts in our analysis.

The texts of political cartoons were analysed using the peer review method based on the Interdisciplinary Classifier for Quantitative Media Research Based On Political Cartoons (Radina 2021). This classifier is focused on collecting information from the verbal and visual codes of political cartoons and consists of four blocks: (1) metadata; (2) general information (background knowledge, presuppositions, the targets and topics of cartoons, criticism, metaphors, humour); (3) the verbal code of the political cartoon (precedence, intertextuality, intentionality of the text, etc.); and (4) the non-verbal code of the political cartoon (colour, techniques used to convey the image, imagination, visual precedence, intertextuality, framing of the action, intentionality of the visual part).

The political cartoons were analysed by five experts (psychologists, political analysts, and political linguists) in order to minimize subjectivity in the interpretations. Using the classifier, these experts noted the elements of the cartoons that characterize the verbal and non-verbal messages encoded in them, entering the data obtained into a matrix. A statistical analysis was then carried out (using the contingency/correlation coefficient for binary features: $-1 \leq$ r-Pearson ≤ 1), and a system of correlations was created that highlighted connections in the construction of political cartoons among authors. For the purposes of creating a political cartoon model, only those coefficients that indicated strong correlations ($/r/ > 0.50$) were taken into account.

It was assumed that the tense situation between Russia and other countries (the "Collective West") during the period of sanctions (first introduced in 2014) and the coronavirus pandemic (but before Russia's special military operation in Ukraine) would lead to Russia's policy being presented as dangerous and destructive (in other words, negatively) in order to project a consolidated "image of the enemy," regardless of the intended audience – Russian people (in cartoons appearing in Russian in foreign media) or people from other countries (in English). In the meantime, different audiences determine the differences in the targets of the political cartoons (that is, Russian politics is "bad" in different ways, depending on whether the target audience is Russian- or English-speaking), support (and form) various negative stereotypes about Russia, and employ various "tools" to construct "influence."

The Main Features of Political Cartoons About Russia

According to our findings, the interpretation of a political cartoon requires a basic knowledge of politics and the ability to make logical connections (political and logical presuppositions dominate political cartoons). Almost half of the political cartoons are direct references to specific facts (56%), while the remainder illustrate the general context of international relations (44%).

Our experts divided the key characters of political cartoons about Russia in the foreign media into the following groups: Russian business, the Russian people, and the Russian government. One out of every ten political cartoons presents a collective image of Russia, with Russian civil society and foreign politicians playing peripheral roles in such cartoons. In terms of people, the key characters in political cartoons about Russia included the country's president (40% of all cartoons) or another public figure (39%), the president of another country (approximately 25% of all political cartoons), and foreign politicians or public figures (almost one half, when counted together with Russian politicians). Specific people and social groups are mostly depicted in political cartoons about Russian politics in a negative light: "they are all bad" ("we are not okay, and neither are they.")

As for the reconstruction of political interactions and relations, most cartoons deal with U.S.–Russia relations (these make up approximately one third of all political cartoons), as well as relations with various kinds of destructive forces, including the coronavirus pandemic (over one half of cartoons). Relations with the EU and CIS countries, as well as with China and other states, make up an insignificant part of the political cartoons we looked at.

Thematically (note that some themes could overlap), the political cartoons produced during this period (from the start of the sanctions regime against Russia and up to the COVID-19 pandemic) focused on the following issues: biopolitics and governance in the context of new challenges (over one third of all political cartoons); society's bitterness and distrust of the authorities (over one third); healthcare (approximately one third); education (approximately one third); social issues (approximately one third); science (approximately one third); and the incompetence of the authorities (one in five political cartoons). No political cartoons dealing with migration issues and stereotypes about the Russian national character were found among those published during this period.

Thus, the political cartoons published about Russian politics by foreign media outlets during 2020–2021 served to reinforce stereotypes about the country and its inability to solve its own (domestic political) problems. Since a key feature of the genre of the political cartoon is the ridiculing of mistakes, problems and shortcomings of the target, determining how stereotypes about Russia are formed (which are offered to Russian-speaking and English-speaking readers) requires that we consider Russian- and English-language sources in a comparative context.

Statistically significant differences between English and Russian cartoons were found in the targets of the ridicule. For example, the Russian government ($p \leq 0.001$) and Russian business ($p \leq 0.05$) appeared more frequently in Russian-language political cartoons. At the same time, the Russian president was significantly more likely to be the target of jokes and satire in English-language cartoons (in 59% of cases) compared to Russian-language cartoons (29%; $p \leq 0.001$). However, the same was true of presidents of other countries (40%, compared to 11%; $p \leq 0.001$), as well as other foreign politicians (15% of English-language cartoons, compared to 3% of Russian-language cartoons; $p \leq 0.001$). We can thus conclude that the targets of satire in the Russian- and English-language political cartoons of foreign media are different.

As regards the topics of the political cartoons, there are significant differences in the descriptions of social inequality and social justice (0% for English-language texts and 8% for Russian-language texts; $p \leq 0.05$), the incompetence of the authorities (3% and 25%, respectively; $p \leq 0.001$), and discontent among the people (0% and 7%; $p \leq 0.05$). English-language political cartoons dwell far more on relations between Russia and the United States (63% of English-language texts and 11% of Russian-language texts; $p \leq 0{,}001$). Consequently, international relations come up more frequently in English-language cartoons.

As for dispositions, Russian-language cartoons published by foreign media outlets are significantly more likely to refer to the intentions and plans of their targets (20% of English-language texts and 47% of Russian-language texts; $p \leq 0{,}001$), while English-language cartoons highlight the behaviour (70% and 52%; $p \leq 0.05$) and relationships (60% and 22%; $p \leq 0.001$) of their targets. In terms of subject matter, Russian-language political cartoons are more "psychological" and make predictions about future events, while English-language cartoons focus on clarifying the current state of affairs.

Russian-language political cartoons are significantly more likely to have a moderate critical potential (65%, compared to 37% of English-language texts; $p \leq 0.001$), while English-language cartoons are typically focused more on scathing criticism (17%, compared to 1% for Russian texts; $p \leq 0.001$).

In terms of the structure and use of figurative tools (metaphors, precedent texts, localization of humour, etc.) in the creation of political cartoons, no statistically significant differences were found. Artifactual and anthropomorphic metaphors were the most commonly used in Russian-language political cartoons (24% and 19%, respectively), while the breakdown of the most commonly used types of metaphors in English-language caricatures looks like this: anthropomorphic metaphors (19%), naturemorphic metaphors (15%), and artifactual metaphors (14%). This means, in all cases, imagery is built around the image play between the human imagination and the human form. Symbolic objects are also used as material to feed the reader's imagination, and animalistic images (such as the stereotypical image of a bear) can also frequently be found in political cartoons.

As far as intentionality is concerned, significant differences between caricatures in Russian and English are found in two evaluative positions only: in the intention expressing disagreement (noted in 14% of English-language cartoons, and 5% of Russian-language cartoons; $p \leq 0.05$) and approval (21% and 9%, respectively; $p \leq 0.05$), which makes English-language political cartoons more contrasting in their assessments.

In terms of visuals, the colour preferences (colour or black-and-white) of English- and Russian-language cartoons are more or less equal (76% colour vs. 20% black-and-white for English texts, compared to 80% and 17%, respectively, for Russian texts). However, Russian satirical cartoons employ the "emphasis" (42% compared to 7%; $p \leq 0.001$) and "typing" (7% and 18%; $p \leq 0.05$) techniques far more frequently, while the creators of English-language cartoons prefer schematization (24%, compared to 9% for Russian-language texts; $p \leq 0.001$). This means that Russian-language caricatures tend to generalize or exaggerate using non-verbal means, while the picture in English-language is more often than not an ordinary illustration that does not carry any additional meaning.

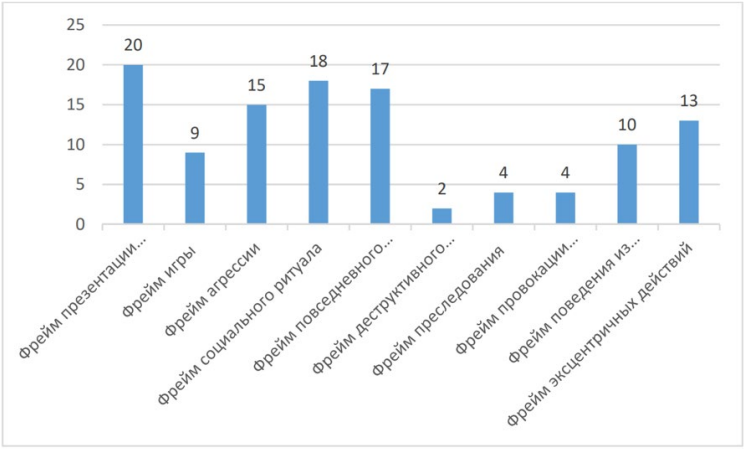
Political cartoons intended for the Russian-speaking audience also tend to use precedent visual texts (in 34% of cases, compared to 8% in English-language texts; $p \leq 0.001$) and visual intertextuality (15% and 4%, respectively; $p \leq 0.05$) more frequently than those intended for the English speaker. This suggests that Russian-language cartoons make frequent use of "Aesopian language" (precedent visual texts and visual intertextuality contain non-verbal "hints" and create a semantic context without having to explicitly articulate criticism).

Independent and more in-depth research into the obvious differences in approaches to creating the visual part of political cartoons intended for Russian- and English-speaking audiences published by foreign media outlets, since these differences may be put down to sociocultural traditions in the presentation of visual satire, as well as to the individual illustrator's style.

Inasmuch as political cartoons always tell a story, our experts were asked to identify the action frames in the works (Fig. 1).

Our experts concluded that satirical cartoons about Russian politics published during the pandemic were not unequivocally negative. Their "messages" were typically wrapped inside a description of the difficulties people were confronting in the context of everyday life ("social ritual frame" – 18%; "everyday social interaction frame" – 17%; "professional behaviour frame" – 10%; and "game frame" – 9%). Significant differences between English- and Russian-language political cartoons were identified in frames relating to presentation and self-presentation (28% of texts intended for English-speaking audiences, compared to 15% of texts intended for Russian-speaking audiences; $p \leq 0.05$), the persecution frame (0% and 6%, respectively; $p \leq 0.05$) the professional behaviour frame (20% and 5%; $p \leq 0.001$), and the eccentric actions frame (0% and 21%; $p \leq 0.001$). The eccentric actions frame, which is found exclusively in Russian-language caricatures, is most likely a sign of the author's style as a key illustrator creating Russian-language content for Deutsche Welle. The profile of action frames is mostly

similar, although it is worth noting here that Russian-language political cartoons are more diverse in the types of frames they use (where we see persecution, eccentric actions, etc.).



фрейм презентации…	presentation and self-presentation frame
фрейм игры	game frame
фрейм агрессии	aggression frame
фрейм социального ритуала	social ritual frame
фрейм повседневного социального взаимодействия	everyday social interaction frame
фрейм деструктивного…	destructive… frame
фрейм преследования	persecution frame
фрейм провокации…	provocation… frame
фрейм поведения из профессиональной сферы	professional behaviour frame
фрейм эксцентричных действий	eccentric actions frame

Figure 1. Key Action Frames in Cartoon Images (%)
Source: Compiled by the author based on research results
Note: Several action frames were often identified in a single political cartoon, which is why the total percentage of occurences exceeds 100%

The people depicted in the cartoons were recognizable, usually due to their characteristic appearance (65% of English-language and 65% of Russian-language texts), as well as to verbal markers – various kinds of captions (41% and 25%; $p \leq 0.01$) – and symbols (16% and 30%; $p \leq 0.05$). Since identity is problematized through the image, our experts concluded that around half of the texts they looked at (50% of the English cartoons and 47% of the Russian cartoons) pointed to the personal identity of the target of the cartoon, while over a third of English-language cartoons highlighted their ethnic or civic or ethnic identity (39%, compared to 19% of Russian-language texts; $p \leq 0{,}001$), and one in five Russian-language caricatures referenced the political identity of the person in question (21%, compared to 15% of English-language texts; these differences are not significant). Our experts did not find any reference to class and religious identity, which belong the economic elite.

Thus, our primary comparative analysis of the collection of satirical cartoons about Russian politics (English- and Russian-language cartoons published by the foreign media) reveals that they are, on both a meaningful and constructive level, different types of multimodal texts. Political cartoons aimed at English-speaking readers typically refer to Russian politics in the context of international relations, most often targeting the Russian president. They are more scathing and to the point in their assessments, and more willing to use verbal support, as if illustrating their own positions, using the context of everyday life and "norms" to prop up their point of view.

Political cartoons aimed at the Russian-speaking audience and published in the foreign media reference social problems in Russia. Their targets are far reaching (representing Russian society), and they are more restrained in their assessments overall, opting for prognostics over descriptions. In addition, the authors of such works are more willing to use the visual component of the creolized text, and do so with greater diversity, framing the action in the caricature (emphasizing its destructive nature), and using the non-verbal component of the medium to convey their message in creative ways.

As a rule, Russian-language multimodal cartoon texts are read by Russian-speaking readers, while English-language cartoons are accessible to readers in other countries (outside of Russia). At the same time, groups of educated Russians who are interested in a non-Russian take on Russian politics have more than a passing knowledge of English-language media (including political cartoons). Likewise, foreign experts who know Russian are able to interpret the texts of Russian-language cartoons. Our analysis suggests that Russian-speaking readers will nevertheless be more interested in political cartoons published for the Russian audience (judging by the collection of cartoons we have looked at), for these texts are saturated with meanings through metaphor and intertextuality, reproducing recognizable cultural codes. However, this phenomenon requires an independent psycholinguistic study that explains the suggestive, hidden impact of multimodal texts in the native language on political cartoons.

The differences between satirical cartoons about Russian politics published by foreign media outlets for Russian- and English-speaking audiences were taken into account in the framework of a correlation analysis in the construction of a general model. This allowed us to identify the main links between the components of the texts of political cartoons (regardless of whether it is in Russian or English).

Empirical Models of Satirical Cartoons about Russian Politics in the Foreign Media

Since the work of our experts involved analysing various elements of the texts of political cartoons, correlations between elements were obtained through mathematical processing and analysis, some of which turned out to be stable (strong connections: $/r/ > 0.50$). This suggested to us that there are a number of known (or unspoken, non-reflected) rules that caricaturists use when creating images. Some political cartoons,

for example, require a certain level of background knowledge of science on the part of the reader to be interpreted correctly, and these are typically linked to harsh criticism (r=0.41 – a positive moderate correlation). Meanwhile, political presuppositions (understanding the complexities of political communication, etc.) are not required to understand Russian-language cartoons published by foreign media outlets (r= –0.38 – a negative moderate correlation).

At the same time, background knowledge of literature and the arts consists of familiarity with works of fiction (r=0.66), precedent texts (r=0.41) (including knowledge of famous quotes (r=0.42)), and visual precedent texts (r=0.52) (Fig. 2). If jokes are used as precedent texts, caricaturists use them to create an image that visually soothes the reader (r=0.42).

Острая критика; r=0.41	Harsh criticism; r=0.41
Научные фоновые знания	Scientific background knowledge
Знание знаменитых цитат; r=0.42	Knowledge of famous quotes; r=0.42
Лит.-худ фоновые знания	Background knowledge of literature and the arts
прецедентные тексты; r=0.41	Precedent texts; r=0.41
Виз. прецедентные тексты; r=0.52	Visual precedent texts; r=0.52
Произв. худож. литературы; r=0.66	Works of literature; r=0.66

Figure 2. Empirical Model of Background Knowledge in Caricatures
Source: Compiled by the author based on research results

The most stable links between the elements of political cartoons tuned out to be those that concerned the visual part of the multimodal text. Thus, black-and-white caricatures used figurativeness (r=0.49), and typically contained obvious approval of the person depicted in the image (r=0.71), which could be expressed visually (r=0.67), and they would often be used to emphasize the national or ethnic identity of the characters (r=0.53) (Fig. 3).

Colour caricatures differ from black-and-white ones in all respects (r= –0.9 – a strong negative correlation), rely more often on the personal identity of the person depicted (r=0.48), and are almost never used to convey approval of the characters (r= –0.67 – a strong negative correlation).

Black-and-white caricatures with a colour accent are often used to express approval of one or more of the parties presented in the cartoon (approval: r=0.53; visual approval: r=0.41).

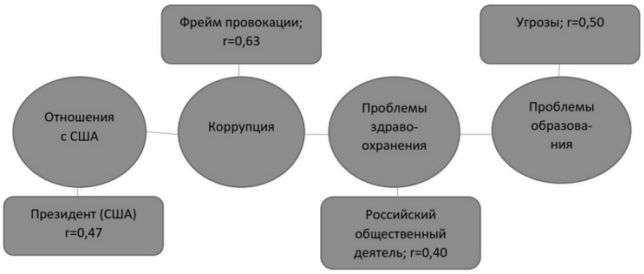
Образные; r=0.48	Figurative; r=0.48
Одобрение; r=0.71	Approval; r=0.71
Национальная принадлежность; r=0.71	Nationality; r=0.71
Персональная идентичность; r=0.48	Personal identity; r=0.48
Чёрно-белая карикатура	Black-and-white caricature
Цветная карикатура	Colour caricature
Чёрно-белая с цветовым акцентом	Black-and-white with a colour accent
Одобрение; r=0.53	Approval; r=0.53
Визуальное одобрение; r=0.41	Visual approval; r=0.41

Figure 3. Empirical Model for the Use of Colour in Political Caricature
Source: Compiled by the author based on research results

When it comes to applied popular geopolitics in multimodal texts, it is especially important to create an image of another territory (another country) on the basis of a key problem that personifies this territory in a caricature.

Thematically, strong correlations are concentrated around the following popular topics" "relations with the United States" (foreign policy); and "corruption," "problems in the healthcare sector" and "problems in the education sector" (domestic policy) (Fig. 4).

Correlational relationships reveal the logic behind creating political cartoons. In the context of relations with the United States, the image of Donald Trump is used as a character (r=0.47), the topic of corruption is, unsurprisingly, associated with provocation and fraud (r=0.63), problems in the education sector are closely associated with threats and intimidation (r=0.50), and healthcare issues are represented by various public figures, members of the government, etc. (r=0.40). Thus, the issue of education was used to intimidate and bully readers through political cartoons about Russia published in the foreign media in 2020–2021. Notably, stable ties were formed on the basis of different determinants ("relations with the United States" / "U.S. President" = substantiation; "corruption" / "provocation, fraud" = a form of implementation; "problems in the healthcare sector" / "Russian public figures" = personalization), and only correlations that unite education and intentions point to the super-target of the political cartoon.



отношения с США	relations with the United States
президент США; r=0.47	U.S. President
фрейм провокации; r=0.63	provocation
коррупция	corruption
проблемы здравоохранения	problems in the healthcare sector
российский общественный деятель; r=0.40	Russian public figure
угрозы; r=0.50	threats
проблемы образования	problems in the education sector

Figure 4. Empirical Model of Political Cartoon Themes
Source: Compiled by the author based on research results

Political cartoons about Russia and Russian politics that appear in the foreign media can thus be divided into two blocks. Of course, the foreign media is viewing and assessing Russia "from the outside," influencing the creation of auto-stereotypes (for Russian-speaking readers) and hetero-stereotypes (for English-speaking readers). Consequently, the tools of popular geopolitics are also successfully inscribed in the context of propaganda, making it possible to communicate certain attitudes and ideas. If we analyse the texts of popular geopolitics from the point of view of propaganda, then it is important to determine which concept of propaganda allows us to consider the logic of the formation of an "imaginary geopolitical context" in the most productive manner.

* * *

Popular geopolitics is a relatively new reflexive field of critical geopolitics that allows us to analyse and build "imaginary worlds" and create a general understanding of certain territories. In this context, as a number of studies point out, the country of Russia appears as a complex and ambivalent image of a bear in the multimodal texts of political cartoons published in the foreign media (Kipina, Plotnikova, Tulaykina 2018; Ulyanov, Chernyshov 2015; Lazari, Riabov, Zakowska 2019). At the same time, research today shows that the image of a bear in caricatures is typical of how Russia was viewed in the past (in the discourse of military conflicts), while more "peaceful discourses" are rather anthropomorphic (Pitlovanaya 2016). In our study, the zoomorphic metaphor about Russia was found in a limited number of English-language caricatures only, and was absent entirely from Russian-language cartoons published

outside Russia. The need to construct an image of Russia not only during periods of open confrontation or military conflict, but also in more peaceful times, requires new images to be created.

When analysing political cartoons, researchers often turn to images of the president, the "ruler" (Aksenov 2020; Mikhailova 2015). One study in particular posits that the image of the Russian president in political cartoons is used as a backdrop for criticizing the leaders of their own countries (Rogozinnikova 2018). The study also demonstrated that the figure of the president is indeed often the target of satire (particularly in English material), while in political cartoons the image of the president is often presented in the context of his relationship with other world leaders (the "communication among equals" rule applies here). However, no quantitative markers suggesting a more positive image of the Russian president (compared to other leaders) were found.

Studies of political cartoons also involve an analysis of action frames (Semotiuk 2019). However, the research papers that we were able to find looked at caricatures dealing with the special military operation in Ukraine, so the frame associated with aggressive behaviour was used a great deal. Conversely, a large number of the frames in our study concerned everyday behaviour (the pandemic was at its peak during 2020–2021), meaning that the frame of aggression was relevant, but was not the most important factor.

A significant part of the research on political cartoons touches on the issue of propaganda (Aksenov 2020; Tsykalov 2012). These works see the political cartoon as a propaganda tool, but without first making it clear which concept of propaganda was used in the analysis of texts. In this work, we attempted to decode the creolized texts of political cartoons and identify the established patterns of their creation (using the concept devised by Stuart Hall). However, studying the decoding process itself requires a social-psychological analysis, for the differences between the author's intentions and the readers understanding of the political cartoon can be significant.

The similar focus on the structure of political cartoons in terms of the caricaturist's interests (the analysis of the author's style) is also popular among researchers (Mikhailova 2015). Looking at the tools they employ, it seems important to work out how the caricaturists adapted the position of the media outlet they were working for to their own reading of reality. Our study found that the propaganda tasks of "imaginary geopolitics" are solved differently depending on the audience. Russian-language political cartoons produced for foreign media are "creatively non-verbal" – they use various kinds of visual techniques to convey ideas without explicitly stating them in words. This allows us to connect the idea of creative industries (Kaverina, Gretchenko, Gretchenko 2019) with popular geopolitics, that is, to consider the whole complex of multimodal texts (political cartoons, memes, comics, animations, etc.) not only in the context of analysing their impact on the Russian-speaking reader, but also, and actively, in the context of building an "imaginary world" outside Russia. In the world of geopolitics, the creative industries play a soft power role, a role that cannot be overstated.

As for the limited number of studies in the field of popular geopolitics, especially comparative studies, this may be due to the difficulties of analysing complex poly-coded and semiotically enriched texts. This problem could be resolved through inter-disciplinary research based on an expert assessment and the use of classifiers that are relevant for the analysis of multimodal texts, taking both the expectations of linguistics and the needs of the political and social sciences into account.

* * *

In conditions of international tension and information war, when for various reasons (for example, the territorial remoteness) society cannot directly observe and evaluate events, it is important to be able to put forward one's own version of what is happening in such a way that it is accepted by the majority while at the same time being consistent. Multimodal texts (cartoons, memes, comics, etc.) are perfect for this purpose, as they have a multifaceted effect, conveying a message at both the verbal and non-verbal levels.

This study proceeds from the hypothesis that both Russian- and English-language political cartoons about Russian politics published in foreign media present problems related to Russia in a negative light. A comparative analysis of the multimodal texts of political cartoons in these two languages showed that, regardless of the ideological orientation of the media, they nevertheless pursue somewhat similar (criticism), yet at the same time different, goals.

Foreign media outlets successfully employ political cartoons to influence the attitudes of their readers. English-language political cartoons depict Russia in terms of its foreign policy, most often in the context of its relations with the United States. In times of heightened tension (but not direct conflict), images used in the past (the image of the "Russian bear," which is in demand whenever there is a direct confrontation with Russia) fade into the background. Instead, the images of the country are personalized, and that of the Russian president is the most popular in satirical cartoons.

Russian-language cartoons published in foreign media present Russia in a different light. The main topic of the caricatures is the domestic political life of the country, and non-verbal and Aesopian language are the predominant means of communicating the intended messages. "Popular geopolitics" in these cartoons is constructed as a critical ectype of Russia's domestic policy, in contrast to the "popular geopolitics" of English-language caricatures, which focus on criticism of Russia's foreign policy.

Political cartoons about Russian politics are used, depending on the language, to shine a light on different topics, strike different targets, and use different logic to interpret facts. The Russian-language cartoons we have looked at in this paper are ironic (but not sarcastic), metaphorical, and, at the level of cultural codes and meanings, are rooted in Russian culture (which allows them to play on "cultural stereotypes"), while the English-language cartoons are sharper (more critical) and less ambiguous. Our initial hypothesis was thus partially confirmed, suggesting that foreign media, through

the use of political cartoons, are building more complex strategies for influencing different audiences.

Our findings suggest that Russian-language political cartoons published by foreign media outlets have greater potential to influence Russian readers, as they rely on intertextuality and cultural texts that are familiar to most people (precedent texts), and because their criticism is softer and less direct (unambiguous and to-the-point) than that found in English-language texts, although this requires verification and further research.

Our study also revealed patterns that unveil notional "rules for creating political cartoons." However, additional work to compare different corpuses of cartoons assembled on the basis of various topics and in different languages, etc., that use quantitative methods to study multimodal texts, are required in order to detail and clarify these "rules."

The fact that much information is freely available in the public domain today gives us the opportunity to pose specific research questions, the answers to which will eliminate any fear of informational influence and allow us to engage in a "dialogue" with it instead. Russian research in the field of popular geopolitics can be used for the creative practice of producing political cartoons: it is important to not only study how geopolitical images of the world are created by those who are hostile towards Russia, but also to look for productive ways to construct their own geopolitical images using modern multimodal texts as tools.

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