

Comedy and International Relations: The Rise of Humour in the Global Public Sphere

International Relations has long been portrayed as a realm of ‘serious politics’. Among realists, the appropriate aesthetic of ‘the international’ is more often tragedy than comedy. So why study humour in global politics? This workshop will bring together an international and inter-disciplinary set of scholars working across the broad contours of global politics to ask about the role of humour and satire. It begins from three separate, but related observations, that can inform discussion. Firstly, there is an increasing academic interest in the role of popular culture, in general, and of comedy and satire, in particular, in representing, normalising and, in certain instances, *contesting* wider social and political structures. Secondly, we observe that states and political figures are increasingly drawn to the use of comedy in public communication. From Boris Johnson’s ‘oafish wit’, to Theresa May’s ‘dancing’, from Donald Tusk’s endless cherry banter, to Vincente Fox trolling the US president, politicians seem to have embraced the capacity of humour to ‘cut through’ the traditional silos of ‘stuffy’ politics in order to engage wider demographics. Thus, thirdly, we would point to the changing nature of the mediatised global public sphere and its role in shaping, driving, and providing affective resonance to the public discussion of global politics. On this view, the language of comedy and satire can connect larger populations with a perceived ‘centre’ of politics via satirical memes, hashtags, and gifs. The world is on fire, but ‘this is fine’. We anticipate a range of questions:

- What explains the rise of comedy/satire in international politics/diplomacy?
- Is the ironic, self-aware nature of such comedy/satire indicative of any wider changes in IR, such as the maturing of cultural diplomacy, or the emergence of a more reflexive state/political identity?
- Does the everyday language of comedy provide a more inclusive route into global politics for different/new populations? Could satire provide new ways of thinking about resistant agency in global politics?
- How do we think about comedy in post-colonial contexts? Is there an emergent euro-centrism in the association of comedy with politics, i.e. as an extension of ‘free speech’?

We invite participants to address these and other questions in a spirit of exploring the importance and potential of comedy in global politics. The aim is to provide a forum for learning about the (wide) range of cases and geographical contexts in which comedy might inform the content and practice of IR.