



## THE UKRAINE WAR IN WESTERN POLITICAL CARTOONS DURING THE FIRST YEAR AND A HALF OF THE CONFLICT

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### KEYWORDS

*Ukraine, Russia  
Russia-Ukraine War  
Political Cartoon  
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### ABSTRACT

*This article uses the methodology of multimodal discourse analysis, applied to a sample of 277 political cartoons from around the world, categorizing the most commonly used resources in constructing the Western message. For this purpose, 33 cognitive subframes have been established, covering a period extending beyond the first year of the conflict, from the days preceding the invasion to the assassination of Yevgueni Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner Group.*

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## 1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, with the Russian Army's incursion into the sovereign country from three different fronts, represents the return of armed conflict on European soil "since the Balkan Wars between 1991 and 2001" (Sánchez, 2022, p. 6). What is peculiar about this conflict is that it not only has a military component: "The outcomes of the war are determined not only on the battlefield but also at the discursive level" (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2023, p. 7265). This means that Russia intensified the hybrid attack that began with the annexation of Crimea eight years ago (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022, p. 1), including a massive campaign of disinformation. This practice is common in the Kremlin, which employs other alternative strategies (Kofman & Rojansky, 2015, p. 1) such as the use of intelligence agents or political provokers, economic blackmail, or cyberattacks (Dodonov et al, 2017, p. 106).

In this case, Russia constructed a narrative that aligned president Volodymyr Zelensky and, therefore, the entire political leadership of the country, with Nazism. Egbert Fortuin asserts that the main justification for starting the war "was the genocide of the Russian-speaking population by the Nazi government" (2022, p. 313). A study published by *The New York Times* verifies this claim: in the month Russia crossed the border of the neighboring country, the number of articles per day increased from about one hundred to an average of a thousand (Graph 1), all associating the Kiev government with national socialism.

**Graph 1.** Appearance of articles in Russian media linking Ukraine with nazism. The numbers shows that there is a hybrid war under way.



Source: Charlie Smart, 2022

At the time of writing this article, the capture of cities like Avdiivka is portrayed as a success in the Kremlin's campaign, despite the reported deaths of thousands of Russian fighters and the destruction of a significant number of armored vehicles, including modern T-90 tanks. In this regard, it is important to note that "the public in Russia and many other parts of the world are seeing only a highly distorted picture of the reality of the war" (Pavlik, 2022, p. 12). This is due to Russia's actions, which include blocking access to all Ukrainian websites or those critical of its military campaign (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2023, p. 7268), culminating in "the introduction of repressive laws that make referring to the Russian invasion as war punishable by up to 15 years in prison" (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022, p. 20).

Of course, propaganda actions are generated from both sides, although there are indications to believe that "Ukrainian counterpropaganda efforts are less effective than Russian propaganda" (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2023, p. 7281), which may be related to Russia's "still hold a significant part of the media space of Ukraine" (Karpchuk & Yuskiv, 2021, p. 118) until 2021, seven years after the loss of the Crimean peninsula. Nevertheless, we see that the latest summer counteroffensive, whose results have been scarce, has been defended by those hoping that Ukraine will emerge as the winner in Putin's war.

The propaganda scheme followed by the Russian government has been planned and is the result of a discourse that has been articulated for almost twenty years. According to Fortuin (2022, p. 323-339), this scheme begins with a first phase or frame in which the idea is instilled in the Donbas region that Ukraine is persecuting the Russian-speaking population, while nostalgia for the post-Soviet era of Russia is reinforced. A second phase spans from 2003 to 2014, during which the "Nazi-genocide" narrative is propagated, followed by a third phase, where Russia learns from the events of the colored revolutions

in Ukraine and Georgia, and a fourth phase extending from 2014 to 2022 where the term "Nazi-genocide-Russophobia" is adopted. At this point, the Kremlin "annexed Crimea and created separatist groups in Donbas" (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2023, p. 7266), destabilizing the country and influencing its rearmament and increased militarization. Following this, a fifth frame empowers the Russian army and authorizes it to commit crimes against the civilian population. This application of framing theory is important because it will be used similarly in the methodology of this study.

Since 2014, this situation has turned the conflict "into a virtual conflict between Russia and the West" (Brusylovska, 2015, p. 62), a context that has worsened since 2022 with thousands of economic sanctions and the delivery of military equipment to Ukraine. Therefore, understanding that the dissemination of propaganda involves three agents –the person who sends the message, the propagandist, and the propagandee (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2023, p. 7269)– it is interesting to analyze the Western response to the conflict in the media, especially in an element that has the capacity to generate both propaganda and counterpropaganda, and as clear peculiarities (which we will study further) as political cartoons.

## 2. Literature review: the political cartoons

The editorial cartoon and its narrative discourse are the subject of analysis in this work. Although the various terms used for this form of media may place it in the realm of humor - in Spain, it is known as "chiste" or "humor gráfico", while in Latin America it is called "caricatura", to name just two examples (Tejeiro Salguero & León Gross, 2009, p. 2) - the reality is that it is closer to the genre of opinion or commentary. This thesis is supported by studies such as those by Carabias (1973), Bond (1974), Gomis (1974), Morán (1988), Santamaría (1990), Armentia & Caminos (2003), León Gross & Travesedo de Castilla (2004), Tejeiro Salguero & León Gross (2009), or Suárez Romero (2015), which are recommended for further exploration. It should not be discredited that a serious issue like the Russian invasion of Ukraine is addressed through humor, as "it is a pragmatic phenomenon that affects humans in all areas of life" (Sánchez, 2022, p. 2), and in such a dramatic situation, it represents "resignation, acceptance, integration" (Tubau, 1987, p. 31).

It is evident that the editorial cartoon provides "a personal point of view" (Muñoz, 1994, 163) which, additionally, embodies "the highest degree of journalistic personalization, as only another genre of authorship, column writing, achieves" (León & Travesedo, 2004, p. 59-60). This demonstrates that "its purpose is to graphically express the opinion of its newspaper about the most current events" (Tamayo, 1988, p. 5), a task that, at times, develops into an "editorializing" character (Cebrián, 1992, p. 394), albeit in the form of a drawing (Morán, 1988, p. 153). It is also characterized by preserving and expanding the political stance of the medium, but without (almost) any limits, and with a greater array of resources to exercise criticism (Suárez Romero, 2015, p. 229). In contexts of high social polarization (wars being a perfect example), they can create "alternative spaces for citizen participation and political expression" (Vega Umaña, 2012, p. 99).

In the case at hand, the exact term to refer to is "political cartoons", a definition that considers its message within a limited cultural spectrum (losing the universality of comic humor as it is shared only by a single group). This manipulation of public opinion depends on its proximity to current events, and it may lead to "a partial understanding when they are separated from their original context" (Suárez Romero, 2015, p. 235) due to their ephemeral nature.

The fact that it is a drawn genre enhances its persuasion, a process expedited by the fact that "its perception is immediate and requires no effort" (Domenach, 1955, p. 50). Similarly, the use of semiotic elements means there is no single reading, but rather, based on one's own life experience, the reader interprets the statement, thus reinforcing or partially or completely modifying their particular way of assuming reality (Rodríguez & Velásquez, 2011, p. 49-50). Therefore, political cartoons are capable of generating "public sympathy towards the object of discourse" (Lausberg, 1984, p. 229), which is evident in the treatment of complex issues such as the economy:

The main references to the economic crisis in comic humor are strictly selected by a criterion of proximity. The aspects of the economy that most appear in comic humor are those that directly affect the readers of newspapers. Therefore, the most frequent reference to the economic crisis is

inflation, due to the increase in the prices of everyday or essential consumer products (Segado, 2008, p. 165).

The political leader, a key figure in a conflict interpreted as a showdown between Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin<sup>1</sup>, is an inseparable part of political cartoons. Reciprocally, these works, or more specifically their authors, contribute to the construction of their reputation and personality by affecting two elements that make up the political leader: "What he is and what citizens think he is" (Suárez Romero, 2015, p. 238).

The stereotyping plays a decisive role in the fabrication of the fictitious identity of a public figure, inciting public opinion to think that "all socialists are the same, all liberals are the same, all right-wing politicians are the same, and even all politicians are the same" (Martín Salgado, 2003, p. 230), regardless of their political coordinates. This typification is developed "by referring to cultural elements shared by the recipients" (Suárez Romero, 2015, p. 235), so it is assumed that there will be different codes from those of the Russian world.

It is interesting to note that political cartoons allow leaders to be represented with a series of characteristics identifiable by readers, either for good (intellectual and cultural alignment) or for bad (rejection). This aligns with Bouza's idea that there is a tendency to replace "a current of opinion with a leader, a party with a single political figure" (2012, p. 48), thus simplifying the assimilation of concepts through reductionism and personification. It is not surprising, then, that during the period from the annexation of Crimea in 2014 until February 2016 (a completely identifiable frame), the metaphorical representation of Putin has a negative conceptual load in pro-Ukrainian media: drunk, vampire, terrorist, or mafioso are some of the concepts associated with the Russian leader<sup>2</sup> (Semotiuk, 2019, p. 228). Similar to what happened with Hitler in his time, Putin graphically personifies everything against which the West fights, although it also stems from the fact that political cartoons, unlike advertising or propaganda, tend to highlight negative attributes over positive ones (Forceville, 2008, and Refaie, 2009).

During the same period, the representation of Zelensky or other Ukrainian political representatives is scarce, if not nonexistent, with the country being identified with a girl or woman, a house, or a chessboard (Semotiuk, 2019, p. 228). This can be explained by the iconic capacity of political cartoons, where personification allows for a wide range of metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1998, p. 72) and, consequently, interpretations of reality. In an analysis of political cartoons published in the newspaper *El País*, Sędek notes the following about Figure 1: "The metaphorical construction presented in the cartoon is based on the graphic scheme: the ending year is an old person, the starting year is a child" (2015, p. 120).

In the specific case of the Ukraine war, we find that political cartoons tend to align with one narrative or another. A study conducted on 27 cartoons published in 2022 concludes that major Chinese media not only sympathize with Moscow's cause but also absolve Russia of any blame for the invasion of its neighboring country (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022, p. 134).

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<sup>1</sup> Since the beginning of the war, the contrasting rhetoric of both presidents has been studied to demonstrate the intention of, firstly, justifying to their people every political decision made and convincing the world that supporting their respective sides is being on the right side of history (Buluc & Deac, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> This is deduced from a study where 489 words were analyzed.

Figure 1. Political cartoon of Elrich where personification is used.



Source: Sedek (2015, p. 120)

### 2.1. Multimodal discourse analysis and cognitive frames

The corpus of this work has undergone Multimodal Discourse Analysis (hereinafter ACDM), a technique focused on the "study of language in combination with other resources such as images, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, music, and sound" (O'Halloran, 2012, p. 76). Indeed, if there is still a distinction between humor based on traits external to language and humor solely based on language, it is for a simple methodological reason, as the digital world has normalized the combination of communicative formats (Sánchez, 2022, p. 4).

In this formula, which presupposes "different modalities such as (...) audiovisual or verbovisual metaphors" (Sedek, 2015, p. 115), semiotics plays a crucial role, integrating the meaning systems that constitute the reality of a culture (Halliday, 1978, p. 123). Although ACDM analyzes the relationship between different elements present in semiotic systems, in this study, we are interested in the association between text and image, as advocated in the works of Bateman (2008), Liu & O'Halloran (2009), Martinec (2005), O'Halloran (2012), Unsworth & Cleirigh (2009), or Uribe (2017), to name just a few examples. Therefore, of the nine modes mentioned by Magdalena Sedek (2015, p. 115), the verbo-pictorial modes, namely written language and static images, are of interest in editorial cartoons.

Of course, we cannot forget that visual metaphors are framed within the figurative thought described by Lakoff and Johnson in the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor (1980), which means that the interpretation of political cartoons has an added subjective component and depends directly on the reader (Agüero Guerra, 2013, p. 9). During the decoding of the message, the subject must first assume the relevance of the object, discarding the noise accompanying the message, which is based mainly on "graphic, verbal, typographic, and pictorial resources" (Rodríguez & Velásquez, 2010, p. 41), in order to focus on the political cartoon (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

The lack of information, which can lead to incongruity, is explained in the following paragraph:

During the process of decoding the content of cartoons, whose message results from the recreation of two incongruous scenarios (referred and fictional situations), the reader must rely on their linguistic knowledge and their ability to read visual language, which, in most cases, is constructed with visual and multimodal metaphors. In addition, the coherent and satisfactory interpretation of cartoons involves the activation of sociocultural assumptions, that is, cultural and contextual references shared between the author and the readers (Sedek, 2023, p. 98).

Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether these works are humorous or not, despite pursuing a humorous purpose: language does not allow for it to be determined, so it depends on "multiple factors such as the knowledge shared by speakers or the current events that help determine the situation" (Sánchez, 2022, p. 21). The success of communication depends on its fulfillment (Wilk-Racięska 2006,



p. 135), reinforcing the idea that "knowledge of the contexts of production and reception of cartoons" (Michel & Fortuny, 2014, p. 28) is fundamental.

This is not the only obstacle (the previous one may be in terms of analysis), as political cartoons combine events with an unreal world (the metaphorical world) "in such a way that the cartoons begin to act as a bridge between reality and fiction" (Şeđek, 2015, p. 117). There are other challenges, although inherent to this method:

The main challenges facing ADM include developing theories and analytical frameworks for non-linguistic semiotic resources, modeling social semiotic processes (especially intersemiosis and resemiotization), and interpreting the complex semantic space that unfolds and articulates transversally within multimodal phenomena (O'Halloran, 2012, p. 77).

## 2.2. Framing theory

According to this reflection by Kay L. O'Halloran, the ACDM would provide enough flexibility to be applied to a transversal element such as political cartoons, offering the possibility of modifying applications of this methodology in analysis samples very similar to those of this study. This versatility allows for the establishment of cognitive frames as contextual reference, a system of analysis derived from sociosemiotics (Zavala, 2015, p. 70) consisting of establishing pre-established frames that shape reality and are referred to as frames (Sádaba et al., 2008, p. 15). Following its origin in 1955 in interpretative sociology proposed by Erving Goffman (1955), the framing theory has been endorsed by contributions from renowned researchers such as Entman (1993), Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), Reese (2001), D'Angelo (2002) or De Vreese (2005).

Focusing on the Russian-Ukrainian war, some of the frames that have been established refer to the use of language by the Kremlin to influence public opinion (Fortuin, 2022). Others help to order the first fifteen months of the war in terms of propaganda:

During the first subperiod (days 1 to 53), Russia occupied large territories in Eastern and Southern Ukraine but was defeated in the battle of Kyiv, Ukraine's capital. The first period was a propaganda disaster (...). During the second subperiod (days 54 to 196), Russia concentrated on advancing on Donbas, but with little success. During the third subperiod (days 197 to 450), Ukraine commenced counterattacking and liberating some territories in the regions of Kharkiv and Kherson that were occupied by Russia during the first subperiod (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2023, p. 7268).

Although its traditional application has been the study of news appearing in printed or digital newspapers, the transmedia capacity of this theory could be applied to political cartoons.

## 3. Research methodology

The method used to analyze the political cartoons that make up the corpus of this work (277 units) has been the ACDM, and it has been developed in the four stages explained below:

1. Application of framing theory. The chosen frame is the first year and a half of conflict, specifically from the prelude to the war until the assassination of Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner Group. This decision has been made because, during the press review to establish the different frames, it has been detected that the period after the great summer counteroffensive of 2023 is very complex and its social and political components make it necessary to be studied in isolation. Based on the assumption that there is a large frame (the first year and a half of war), this time frame will be divided into several subframes or subperiods (Karpchuk & Yuskiv, 2021, p. 120), which represent what Watanabe defined as "pivotal events" (2017). Although most framing studies on Ukraine focus "on humanitarian aspects as well as placing a strong emphasis on the responsibility of Russian political leaders for the war" (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022, p. 4), this theory has been applied in works that have a different perspective, as in this case. In this research, we have already commented on some, such as one that analyzes online publications in *The Guardian* newspaper (Olayemi Abiodun & Precious Nwaoboli, 2023), another on the use of language in Russian propaganda (Fortuin, 2022), or a third focused on the information produced by Russian Today (Karpchuk & Yuskiv, 2021). A separate mention deserves a study where the perception of

Ukrainian and Syrian refugees in the European Union is evaluated (Ibáñez Salas, 2023), where framing theory has been fundamental. This versatility verifies that framing theory can be used in this study.

2. Selection of the sample based on the subperiods. The selection of these subframes will provide context to each of the political cartoons used in this study. The selected sample, which has a Westernist approach (there are other works that analyze the view of Russia and its allies (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022), has been obtained by tracing keywords referring to the subframes along with the "political cartoon" tag in both web search engines (mainly Google) and the X social network. This has allowed access to authors and media that maintained a critical stance toward the Kremlin's decisions.
3. Analysis of the sample. Once the selection of the political cartoons has been made, we will count which of the following verbo-pictorial elements of the semiotic language of these works appear, and to what extent: aggression, responsibility, economic consequences, game or struggle (Semotiuk, 2019, p. 284). It is important to note that two more elements are added: references to virility (assessing whether it is positive or negative) and diplomacy, a term widely used in this conflict. On the other hand, following what was studied in the theoretical framework, we will analyze to what extent the leaders of the two opposing factions appear (Putin and Zelensky) and the presence of other international figures, distinguishing between those that support Russia or Ukraine. Given the importance of the armed forces, their presence in this work will be studied. This system will be applied in each subperiod, which will allow evaluating the evolution of each of these elements over time. Table 1 includes an example of the application of the table to the first three political cartoons (PC1.1, PC1.2, and PC1.3) of the first subperiod (S1).

**Table 1.** Example of analysis sheet applied to the sample.

<b>S1. War drums</b>						
<b>Political cartoon</b>	<b>Aggression</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Economic consequences</b>	<b>Game</b>	<b>Struggle</b>	<b>Diplomacy</b>
PC1.1	X					X
PC1.2	X					
PC1.3		X				
<b>Total</b>	2	1				1
<b>S1. Leaders</b>						
<b>Political cartoon</b>	<b>Putin</b>	<b>Zelensky</b>	<b>Prorrussian leaders</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>Proukrain leaders</b>	<b>Who?</b>
PC1.1						
PC1.2	X					
PC1.3						
<b>Total</b>	1					
<b>S1. Military and civil presence</b>						
<b>Political cartoon</b>	<b>Russian army (people)</b>	<b>Russian military material</b>	<b>Russian civilians</b>	<b>Ukrainian army (people)</b>	<b>Ukrainian military material</b>	<b>Ukrainian civilians</b>
PC1.1		X				
PC1.2		X				
PC1.3				X		
<b>Total</b>		2		1		

Source: own elaboration, 2024.

#### 4. Discussion of findings

The analysis of Western news coverage of the war between Russia and Ukraine leads us to point out a total of 33 cognitive frames during the first year and a half of the conflict. These, which have allowed us to organize the political cartoons found in the search process, are listed in the following table:

**Table 2.** The 33 cognitive frames in which Western media organize the first year and a half of the War in Ukraine.

Frame	Reference	Frame	Reference
1	War drums	18	General Armagedón
2	Start of the invasion	19	Zaporiyia nuclear power plant
3	Divided West	20	Mobilization of Russian civilians
4	Refugee crisis	21	Attack on the Crimea bridge
5	China's support	22	Liberation of Jerson and Jarkov
6	Battle for Kyiv and the first russian defeats	23	Arrival of winter
7	Bucha and war crimes	24	Wagner Group terror
8	Lavrov, disinformation and other figures	25	Support from other authorities and countries
9	Gas threat and nuclear war	26	One yerar of invasion
10	Sinking of the <i>Moskva</i>	27	Second May 9th in war
11	Victory Day parade on May 9, 2022	28	The fall of Bajmut
12	Western arms and sanctions	29	Drones over Moscú
13	Finland and Sweden apply to join NATO	30	Nova Kajovka dam
14	Destruction of Mariúpol and Melitopol	31	Counteroffensive
15	Referendum in occupied cities	32	Waher rebelion
16	Dead of Gorbachev	33	Prigozhin assassination
17	Rusian army disaster		

Source: own elaboration, 2024

Once these subperiods have been established, Table 1 (located and described in the methodology section), has been applied to the entire sample, consisting of 277 political cartoons.

**Table 3.** Shows the presence of verb-pictorial elements and other parameters present in the political cartoons and the percentage they represent with respect to the sample, consisting of 277 units.

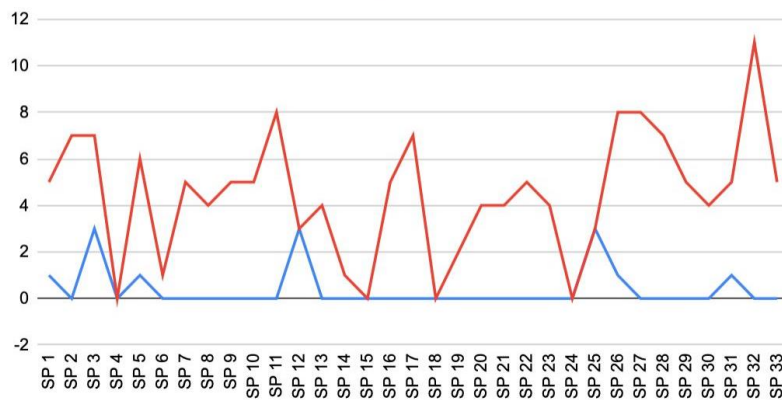
Verb-pictorial elements		Percentage
Aggression	207	74,7
Responsibility	56	20,2
Economic consequences	21	7,5
Game	8	2,9
Bear references	16	5,8
Virilidad	34	12,3
Diplomacy	33	11,9
Leaders		Percentage
Putin	143	51,6
Zelensky	12	4,3
Prorrussian leaders	43	15,5
Proukranian leaders	19	6,9
Military and civil presence		Percentage
Russian army	93	33,6
Russian stuff	87	31,4
Russian citizen	18	6,5
Ukranian army	18	6,5
Ukranian stuff	18	6,5
Ukranian citizen	42	15,2

Source: own elaboration, 2024

From Table 3, it is evident that among the verb-pictorial elements, "aggression" is the most represented concept, present in almost 75 % of the political cartoons. It is significant that the next element, "responsibility," appears in 20 % of the sample units, which represents a difference of more than half of the 277 political cartoons analyzed. It is interesting to note that the other five indicators together account for 60.6 % of representations, nearly 15 % below the first.



**Graph 2.** Comparison of the representation of Zelensky (blue) and Putin (red) in the located subperiods.

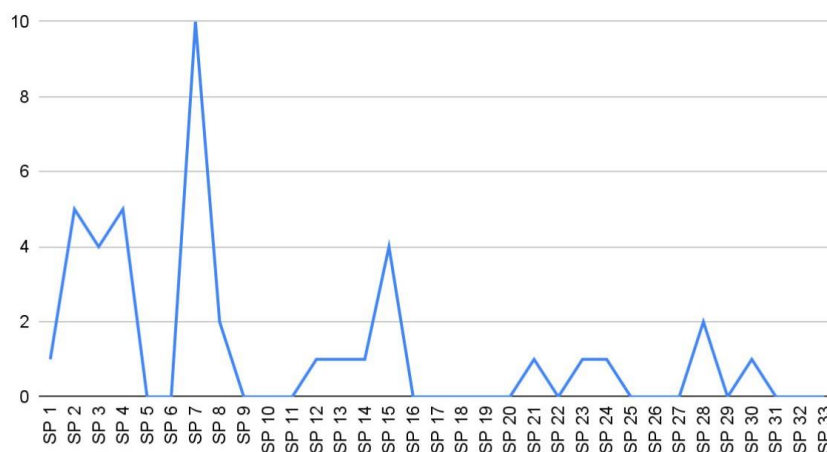


Source: own elaboration, 2024

On the presence of leaders, there is an unequal treatment between Putin and Zelensky: while the former appears in 50 % of the sample, the latter barely reaches 4 % of the total (Graph 2). Although the difference between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian leaders is less evident (we are talking about 15.5 % and 6.9 %, respectively), it is clear that those aligned with the Russian campaign are more present in the work of Western artists. The most represented pro-Russian figures are Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner Group assassinated in 2023 (17); Xi Jinping, president of China (8); Sergei Shoigu, Russian Defense minister (5); Sergei Surovikin, former commander-in-chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces (4); Donald Trump, US presidential candidate (4); Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign minister (3); Alexander Lukashenko, president of Belarus (1); tzar Nicholas II (1); Valery Gerasimov, chief-of-staff of the Russian General (1) and Ramzan Kadyrov, leader of Chechnya (1).

Finally, in the section dedicated to civilian and military presence, it is observed that the Russian Army (33.6 %) and its war material (31.4 %) are represented to a greater extent than the Ukrainian, although in a large part of the political cartoons, dead soldiers and destroyed or damaged equipment are shown. The two parameters together account for 65 % representation, a very high number compared to the portrayal of Ukrainian warfare. On the other hand, the civilian population of the invaded country appears in 15.2 % of the sample. The representation over time is shown in Graph 3:

**Graph 3.** Representation of the Ukrainian civilian population in the analyzed political cartoons.



Source: own elaboration, 2024.

## 5. Conclusions

The work of Western cartoonists, which is highly critical of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, helps to create a discourse where two well-defined blocs are detected: Putin and the entire sphere of power

surrounding him (including his armed forces) and what Sergei Lavrov, the minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, defined as the "collective West" (2023, p. 106). This latter concept is supported by several factors, such as the scarce representation of Zelensky in the analyzed political cartoons, which contrasts with a notable presence of the Russian president, who appears in more than half of the sample. The same applies to the Ukrainian Army and defense forces, including their military equipment, as despite holding their own against the invading forces, they have little presence in the sample.

This resource not only makes the Ukrainian campaign feel universal in the Western world but may also conceal an attempt to evoke greater empathy for the violence suffered by the attacked country. Although measuring the impact of these political cartoons on the audience requires further studies (which could be the objective of a future line of research), the fact that the most used verbo-pictorial element is "aggression" is evidence of intentionality.

It is significant that the presence of civilians is greater than that of other Ukrainian representations, including president Zelensky. This resource, along with the previously mentioned verbo-pictorial element, shifts the focus of the consequences of war onto the people, who are prioritized over other issues such as economic consequences or virility (an important issue considering that it involves a confrontation between two male presidents). However, this resource diminishes over time (as seen in Graph 3), to focus on the characters who, from the perspective of the West, are responsible for this situation: Putin and those considered his allies.

**Figure 2.** Putin is portrayed with a decadent virility, oblivious to the disaster of his army during the Russian withdrawal from the city of Kherson. Source: Andy Davey, Political Cartoon Society.



Source: Andy Davey, Political Cartoon Society.

The president of Russia is directly blamed as the architect of the war in Ukraine, although he is portrayed as a victim of self-deception who is oblivious to the disaster experienced by the Russian Army in the neighboring country. Although Ukraine has suffered defeats and continues to lose territory at the time of writing this work, the studied works focus on the debacle of the military forces commanded by Putin, showcasing a decadent masculinity (Figure 2). Similarly, his acolytes and he (including the soldiers) are depicted as a gang of ruthless and brainless butchers, overwhelmed by the disaster of a war they have initiated. Therefore, it is not surprising that most armored vehicles and tanks appear damaged, and Russian fighters are poorly prepared and injured, if not dead.

The targeting of Putin as the responsible party for the war is a way to erode his figure, still popular in some Western sectors. This would explain why the presence of the bear as a metaphor for Russia is scarce (it is present in 5.8 % of the sample), which dissociates the determinations of an individual (Putin) from those of a country that, albeit timidly, shows its rejection of a war it does not understand and that has isolated them from the rest of the world.

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