

Drawing the Conflict: Global Political Alignment in Editorial Cartoons on the Russo-Ukrainian War (2014–2022)

Iurii Melnyk

Correspondence: Iurii Melnyk, Department of Foreign Press and Information, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine.

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Abstract

This article examines global representations of the Russo-Ukrainian war (2014–2022) through the lens of cartoons as a form of visual political communication. While political cartoons have long been recognized as instruments of propaganda and public discourse, their cross-national patterns in contemporary conflicts remain underexplored. To address this gap, the study analyzes a corpus of 1,862 cartoons produced by 413 cartoonists from 56 countries, collected from online media, galleries, and social platforms. Using a systematic coding scheme, cartoons are classified into three categories – pro-Ukrainian, pro-Russian, and neutral – based on the narratives they reproduce. The analysis reveals a clear predominance of pro-Ukrainian representations (68.4%), compared to pro-Russian (17.2%) and neutral (14.3%) positions. This pattern is consistent across most world regions, although regional variation is observed, particularly in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, where pro-Russian and neutral perspectives are more visible. The findings also demonstrate that cartoonists from countries directly involved in the conflict (Ukraine and Russia) exhibit significantly more polarized and consistent positions, while those from other regions tend to combine or alternate between narrative perspectives. In addition, cartoons produced within the conflict zone employ locally specific symbols, memes, and references that are largely absent from global representations. The study contributes to research on visual political communication, media framing, and global information asymmetries. It also highlights the role of cartoons as active agents in shaping international interpretations of conflict.

Keywords: political cartoons, visual political communication, media framing, Russo-Ukrainian war, political alignment, propaganda, war discourse

1. Introduction

1.1 Cartoons as a Humorous Weapon in the Information War

By the 19th century the cartoon had secured its function as an important weapon in the political arsenal. N. G. Howe examined the images of leading politicians (Fox and Pitt the Younger) portrayed by British cartoonists at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (The Golden Age of English satirical print). Of the many techniques that cartoonists used at that time it's enough to mention just one: "Depicting politicians with individuals known for their radical views was a useful tool for the caricaturists when it came to producing negative images of an individual or politician and this method could be put to good use in the creation of propaganda." (Howe, 2019, p. 165).

In the 1890s in France, cartoons were a component of the uncompromising controversy surrounding the so-called Dreyfus affair. The researcher E. Everton (2012, p. 388–389): "More than has been generally acknowledged, the Dreyfus affair was a profoundly visual event... Caricature could convey who was dreyfusard or antidreyfusard (and who was not), how dreyfusards and antidreyfusards reacted to certain situations, and what dreyfusards and antidreyfusards believed, thereby fostering a sense of communal identity derived from association and familiarity with broadly drawn types."

In the 20th century, the potential of cartoon was well understood by the totalitarian regimes of that time. The most expressive example from the German National Socialist press was the weekly tabloid *Der Stürmer*, known for publishing anti-Semitic cartoons. In addition to its large circulation (600–800 thousand copies at its peak), Julius Streicher's weekly was distributed through special *Stürmerkasten*, wooden cases, in which the latest issue was displayed behind a glass panel (Ahlheim, 2023). In 1945–46, the editor of the weekly was one of the 24 accused at the Nuremberg Tribunal. He was sentenced to death specifically for propaganda. Philipp "Fips" Rupprecht, who was *Der Stürmer*'s only permanent cartoonist, was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

According to R. L. Bytwerk (2001, p. 56), "the cartoons were certainly the most striking element in the *Stürmer*." Streicher

realized the value of visual material: “The message of a cartoon or photograph could be absorbed in seconds, not the minutes necessary even for the brief *Stürmer* articles.” Vinicius Liebel (2010, p. 71) notes that the psychological mechanisms launched by *Der Stürmer* through its cartoons are relevant in our time: “Because of their work with mental elements, advertising and propaganda have a direct influence on the worldview and the imaginary, i.e. they play with the mental images that already exist in the worldview. Changing or manipulating these ideas is the main focus of the work of ideologists, propagandists and everyone else who works with advertising.”

Propagandists of the Third Reich also spread cartoons and other visual propaganda through posters. Their goal was to glorify Hitler personally, to praise the social achievements of the Third Reich and its victories on the fronts in the war, or to strengthen the campaigns against the “enemies of the state and the people.” Moreover, “the longer the war lasted, the sharper became the contours of the enemy’s image. Anti-semitic slogans took an extreme form.” (Król, 1999, p. 407).

The Soviet press, ridiculing foreign phenomena – capitalism, imperialism, fascism, etc. – developed a whole system of repeating images that became easily recognizable: a capitalist in a top hat, Mussolini with a characteristic jaw, Chamberlain in a monocle. Feliks Kon, the editor-in-chief of the Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil*, in 1931 characterized Soviet cartoons as follows: “A sentry, armed with a pencil and vigilantly observing the class enemy preparing a new intervention and exposing its methods.” (Golubev, 2008, p. 172). According to a Soviet critic of the interwar era V. Polonsky, “cartoon belongs to the most accurate type of weapon. Cartoon kills with laughter.” (Golubev, 2003, p. 479).

The power of cartoon was used not only by the media of undemocratic governments, but also by their opponents. An example could be the anti-Soviet cartoon in the press of Ukrainian rebels during WWII (Mykhalevych, 2021), Polish underground cartoon of the 1980s directed against the Jaruzelski regime (Schlott, 2008), or the modern cartoon in the Middle East, where it is “a peaceful weapon to fight authoritarian regimes”, “both disconcerting and dangerous to the government” (Flores-Borjabad, 2018, p. 320–328) or “ideological weapons against ISIS terrorism” (Issa, 2022, p. 488).

As in the past, so today, cartoonists are persecuted for their illustrations:

— In 1898, the German magazine *Simplicissimus* published a cartoon of Kaiser Wilhelm II by Thomas Theodor Heine. The cartoonist was sentenced to 6 months in prison (Stenzel, 2016);

— Turkish President Erdoğan has repeatedly sued cartoonists and media that published cartoons of him. E. E. Aviv (2013) describes seven lawsuits for cartoons of Erdoğan between 2002 and 2008.

— In 2015, Chinese cartoonist Jiang Yefei was deported from Thailand to China and sentenced to 6.5 years in prison for cartoons that were critical of Chinese leader Xi Jinping (Creery, 2018).

The scandals and controversies surrounding cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed, show the significance of this visual genre. In 2005, cartoons of the Muslim Prophet were published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. Subsequently, in the heated atmosphere created by the media (Powers, 2008), the world community was divided into defenders of Muslim values and defenders of the principles of freedom of speech. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims took to the streets to protest against the cartoons. On the other hand, during 2005–2006, more than a hundred outlets around the world reprinted the cartoons from *Jyllands-Posten* or published their own variations. For many editorial offices, the decision to take part in this manifestation of solidarity led to a large number of dismissals, resignations, arrests and detentions of journalists or suspensions and closures of outlets.

In 2015, a high-profile terrorist attack was carried out against the editorial office of a French weekly, *Charlie Hebdo*, because of the anti-Islamic cartoons it contained. This revived the controversy about Muslim and liberal values, which was reflected in the work of cartoonists as well: the American cartoonist Garry Trudeau (2015) criticized *Charlie Hebdo* for the false absolutization of the principle of freedom of speech and for the mean act of “ridiculing the non-privileged”. By contrast, his colleague Daryl Cagle made a series of illustrations in support of *Charlie Hebdo*, including a cartoon of Garry Trudeau standing over the graves of the slain cartoonists, urging them to admit their guilt. Iran’s response to both cartoon scandals was the organization of international cartoon contests for the best cartoon on the subject of the Holocaust (in 2006 and in 2015). In both cases, the contests caused a sharp reaction in different parts of the world. An unexpected, asymmetric, response to the 2006 Iranian contest was the Israel’s contest for the best anti-Semitic cartoon (Broder, 2006).

T. Husband (2013) notes the crucial role of cartoon in wartime: “Images define a war. They capture a moment in time and lodge it in the nation’s memory. Your cartoon would have to resonate with the soldier, the sailor and the candlestick-maker as well as the airman at the front, the factory girl, the farmer and the retired banker on air raid duty.” According to Y. Mikhailova (2008, p. 156–163), during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the Japanese public wanted to hear about their army’s victories, so the cartoon was an ideal propaganda tool: “To meet this demand for “good news,” stories had to be invented. Here cartoons opened up enormous possibilities since the genre itself permitted unlimited possibilities for exaggeration and invention. So, while cartoons did not necessarily convey any real facts, they did express strong emotions about the war, something their authors knew would appeal to their readership.”

In the conditions of the World War I, visual propaganda was one of the most important tools of national consolidation (Green, 2014), as well as a way to “dehumanize the enemy” and to ensure the “glorification of national leadership”, according to L. S. Caswell (2004, p. 14–29), who continued: “Negative caricatures of enemy leaders during war generally are of two broad types: those that poke fun at them and make them look foolish and those that demonize and vilify them.” Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemaekers, by depicting real and fictional German atrocities in Belgium during World War I, played an important role in turning the American public against the German Kaiser and his army. During World War I and II, before the entry of the United States, anti-war, isolationist discourse was popular among American cartoonists, such as L. D. Bradley. However, once a country has already entered the war, an anti-war cartoon or one critical to the government, could be seen – even in democratic countries – as undesirable and dangerous:

— During the World War I, in 1917, the American cartoonist, Art Young, was charged by the federal government for critically depicting both sides of the war in one of his illustrations in the monthly *Masses*, (Mouly & Spiegelman, 2017);

— During the World War II, in 1942, the British cartoonist Philip Zec (who mainly attacked the Nazis with his illustrations in the *Daily Mirror*) published a cartoon that was interpreted as an attempt to show that oil companies were profiting from the lives of British people. This cartoon provoked a debate in parliament, and Churchill's government nearly closed the newspaper (Hodgson, 2017, p. 111).

Numerous other examples can be cited where cartoon was an important propaganda weapon in the struggle between countries which were used at active war:

— David Low became famous for his cartoons depicting Hitler and Stalin. Low's satire hurt Hitler so the latter included the cartoonist in the Gestapo list of people to be exterminated (Streicher, 1966, p. 211);

— Palestinian Naji Al-Ali's cartoon child character, Handhala, became a recognizable symbol used long after his death by supporters of Palestine in its war against Israel (Barnes, 2019);

— North Korean media ridiculed South Korean politician Yoon Suk Yeol, in a deliberate attempt to influence the results of South Korean elections (Chung, 2022).

Based on the above examples, one can see that the cartoon is an important tool of information warfare, which has been used for centuries and continues to be used, for different purposes and in different contexts. These are, in particular:

— The struggle between conflicting values (e.g. liberal vs. Muslim; freedom of speech vs. respect for religion);

— The struggle between ideologies (e.g. Nazi Germany against Jews; the USSR against capitalists and fascists; in general, totalitarian state against its “enemies”);

— The struggle of opposition against a totalitarian/authoritarian government (underground Ukrainian cartoons of the 1940s, Polish cartoons of the 1980s, Arab cartoons today);

— Internal political struggle in democratic countries (e.g. Whigs vs. Tory; Dreyfusards vs. anti-Dreyfusards);

— The foreign policy struggle (Iran vs. Israel).

In the conditions of an active war, cartoons also play a number of important functions:

— Depiction of the war in a favorable light – regardless of the real events at the front (e.g. the Japanese cartoons of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905);

— Ridiculing and demonizing the enemy; Sowing hatred before and during the war (e.g. Louis Raemaekers against Kaiser's Germany during WWI);

— Conducting anti-war propaganda (e.g. Luther D. Bradley);

— Undermining the official line of the belligerent country (e.g. Art Young in the US during WWI, Philip Zec in the UK during WWII);

— Waging an information war against countries and their governments (e.g. David Low against Hitler and Stalin; Naji Al-Ali against Israel; North Korean cartoonists against South Korea).

There are different opinions on the question of just how significant political cartoons are, as a factor in the information war, in the context of the expansion of modern “multi-media”, with a battery of new formats such as internet memes. While both forms rely on visual compression, humor, and intertextuality, they differ significantly in terms of their communicative function. Internet memes are decentralized, anonymous artifacts of participatory digital culture. As Shifman (2014, p. 15) argues, they function as a form of “(post)modern folklore” that thrives on social network distribution (Johann & Bülow, 2019, p. 13–14). Defined by their “viral” logic (Dawkins, 1989) and reliance on “collective creation, circulation, and transformation” (Milner, 2016, p. 14), memes are inherently fluid, with meanings that are subject to constant reinterpretation through replication and modification.

By contrast, editorial cartoons are anchored in institutional media contexts. Unlike the ephemeral and bottom-up memetic culture, cartoons are curated, and embedded within longstanding traditions of journalistic commentary and political discourse. As “a form of journalistic comment” (Press, 1981, p. 14), functioning within the realm of opinion genres (Salguero & Gross, 2009), they have long relied on the identifiable authorship of the cartoonist to legitimize and anchor their message. This distinction has important analytical implications: whereas memes generate fragmented and rapidly evolving signals, editorial cartoons tend to offer more stable and deliberate articulations of political positions. Consequently, cartoons can be understood as distinct, semi-institutionalized forms of visual communication that bridge journalism, satire, and ideological expression.

1.2 Cartoons in the Context of the Russo-Ukrainian War

The Russo-Ukrainian war confirms that the political cartoons still “reflect and metaphorically illustrate the relations between countries. Thus, by studying cartoons, it is possible to relatively accurately determine the intentional field of international relations” (Radina, 2022, p. 132). The Russo-Ukrainian confrontation, which has been ongoing since 2014, has its own rich system of frames and humorous techniques. For example, Russia is most often depicted in the image of Putin, the Bear or Matryoshka (Bührmann, 2016, p. 147). The full-scale phase of the war, which began on February 24, 2022, sharply intensified the process of understanding and explaining events and phenomena in the war between the two countries with the use of cartoons, both within Ukraine and Russia (Shevchuk, 2023, p. 26; Klumbyté & Yermieieva, 2024) and abroad, for example in Jordan (Al-Dala’ien, Al-Shboul, Aldowkat, & Al-Takhayinh, 2022) or Turkey (Workman, 2022).

The eight-year period of latent war between the two countries (2014–2022) is over, which provides an opportunity for its study. It included the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, as well as political, diplomatic and economic confrontation. Since 2014, both the Russian and Ukrainian sides of the conflict have developed narratives that interpret the events and phenomena of this war in a way that is beneficial to them. The cartoons by different cartoonists from different countries is a relevant cross-section of the information war between the two.

The purpose of the article is to outline the political alignment of world cartoonists in the Russo-Ukrainian war for the period 2014–2022.

Achieving the purpose involves work in three directions:

1. Classification and characteristics of cartoons in the corpus according to their political alignment (pro-Ukrainian, neutral or pro-Russian);
2. Classification and characteristics of cartoonists in the corpus according to this parameter;
3. Study of the correlation between the origin of the cartoonists (country or region of the world) and their political alignment. For this purpose, the corpus is divided into 8 cultural-geographical regions (Western Europe, Eastern Europe, US & Canada, Australia & New Zealand, Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America) plus Ukraine and Russia as participants of the war.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an understanding of editorial cartoons as an authorial, hand-drawn form of communication that expresses “personal perspectives about current events using visual metaphors” (Caswell, 2004, p. 14), with a clearly defined persuasive function (Medhurst & Desousa, 1981, p. 198), as well as a narrative function (“speaking pictures”) (Edwards, 1997, p. 43–76). In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, cartoons serve as carriers of a range of narratives (Morales Domínguez, Zurita Andión, & Arrufat-Martín, 2024, p. 105) that can be systematically categorized into three groups: pro-Ukrainian, pro-Russian, and a third category, referred to here, for the sake of simplicity, as “neutral” (also encompassing impartiality, ambiguity, pacifism, as well as any other frames, the use of which indicates a neutral / uncertain / absent position of a cartoonist in the Russo-Ukrainian war). Within the framework of this article, the political alignment of each specific cartoon or cartoonist is understood as the reproduction of pro-Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or neutral narratives.

Framing theory (Entman, 1993) provides an important foundation for this study, positing that media texts do not merely reflect reality but actively construct it by selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient. As Shariff (2007, p. 187) notes, “how an issue is framed establishes the criteria of relevance to be applied, ideological pathways to be preferred, values to be upheld or scorned, or interests to be served or opposed.” In this sense, editorial cartoons can be understood as a form of visual news discourse that operates as frames by employing rhetorical devices such as metaphors, catchphrases, and symbolic depictions to capture the essence of political issues or events graphically (Greenberg, 2002, p. 183). As Ezegwu, Ntegwung, Nwodu, and Nengi (2022, p. 62) further argue, framing in cartoons is performed through verbal and visual devices by which cues are selected, emphasized, excluded, and elaborated in the presentation of issues. Complex political events are thus condensed into symbolically structured representations that

foreground particular interpretations of the conflict while marginalizing others.

The study also draws on the Narrative Policy Framework (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018), a theory of the policy process that conceptualizes political debates as structured narratives composed of recurring elements such as heroes, villains (Jones, 2010), victims, and plots. This approach enables the systematic identification of competing interpretations of the Russo-Ukrainian war, as different cartoons assign roles, responsibility, and moral evaluation in distinct ways. Within this framework, political alignment can be understood as a manifestation of underlying narrative structures: pro-Ukrainian, pro-Russian, and neutral cartoons correspond to different configurations of narrative elements and, consequently, to different interpretations of the conflict.

Research on the specifics of visual forms of communication in terms of the dissemination of political ideas has been conducted, among others, by Messaris (1997) and Fahmy and Kim (2008). More specifically, the role of political cartoons in conveying political messages in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war has been examined by Morales Domínguez et al. (2024), Semotiuk (2023), and others. Building on these contributions, there is a need for a comprehensive study that would incorporate a broader empirical base.

3. Methodology

This study is based on an original corpus constructed through an exhaustive search strategy, aiming to capture the full range of publicly available cartoons on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict within the specified period (from spring 2014 to February 24, 2022). The data collection process involved a long-term and systematic search using search engines, including Google, Baidu, and Yandex, as well as the examination of cartoons published in online galleries, on online media websites, and across social media platforms. The search was conducted using a set of keywords and keyword combinations in different languages, including “Ukraine,” “Russia,” “Putin,” “Zelensky,” “MH17,” and “Normandy Format,” among many others (combined with “cartoon”/“caricature”) related to key events, actors, and diplomatic processes associated with the conflict. As a result, a corpus of 1,862 cartoons authored by 413 cartoonists from 56 countries was formed (the authorship of 40 cartoons remains unidentified).

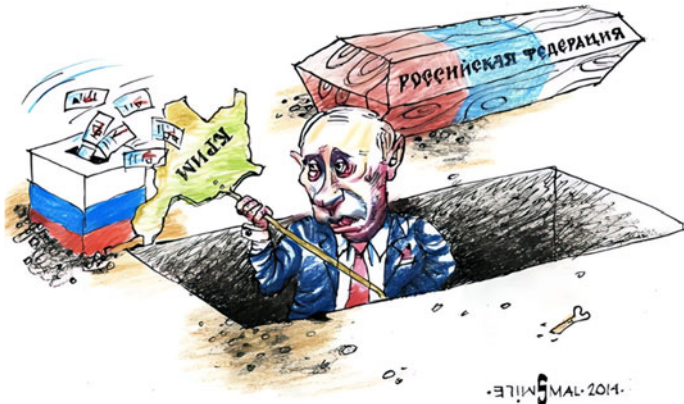
It is taken for granted that the political sympathies of a specific cartoon cannot be both on the side of Ukraine and Russia in the conflict. Cartoon 1 by Vitaliy Podvitsky depicts the reunification of Crimea and Russia through a bridge and with a truck driving over it. The message of the cartoon is clearly pro-Russian. Ukraine does not appear in it in any way, but from the cartoon it is possible to draw the conclusion that the author does not sympathize with Ukraine, does not believe that the annexation of Crimea was illegal and does not regard Ukraine as a victim.

In cartoon 2 by the same author, the situation is the opposite: the only character of the cartoon is the Ukrainian Crimean Tatar politician Refat Chubarov. He has a blue and yellow bandage on his arm, which serves as a marker of his affiliation with the Ukrainian side. He is trying to light a fire in Crimea, which suggests the efforts of Ukraine to destabilize the peninsula. The message of the cartoon is clearly anti-Ukrainian. Russia does not appear in it in any way, but from the cartoon one can draw the conclusion that the author sympathizes with Russia. Thus, the first cartoon is not only pro-Russian, but also anti-Ukrainian (despite the fact that Ukraine is not depicted in it), and the second is not only anti-Ukrainian, but also pro-Russian (despite the fact that Russia is not depicted in it).



Cartoon 1 (“Crimea”; “Good luck!”, “Russia”); Cartoon 2 (“Crimea”); both by Vitaliy Podvitsky

Similarly, the pro-Ukrainian character of cartoon 3 entails its anti-Russian orientation, and the anti-Russian character of cartoon 4 entails its pro-Ukrainian orientation. Therefore, within the framework of this study, a pro-Russian orientation is equated with an anti-Ukrainian one, and vice versa.

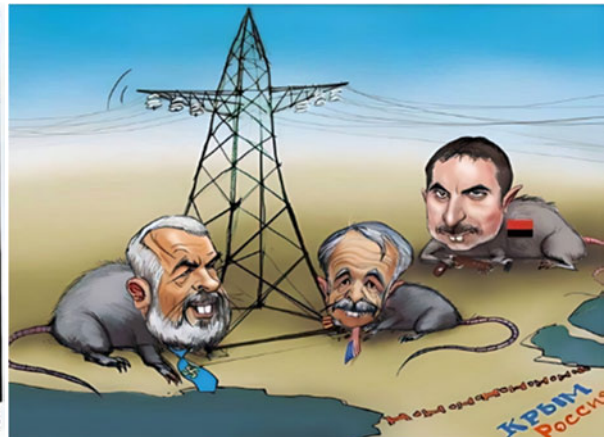


Cartoon 3 by Yuriy Zhuravel; Cartoon 4 (“Crimea”; “Russian Federation”) by Oleg Smal

The criterion for classifying a cartoon, and then on that basis the cartoonist, as pro-Russian (anti-Ukrainian) or pro-Ukrainian (anti-Russian) is based on his or her reproduction of a narrative, that embodies a particular understanding of the events and processes in the Russo-Ukrainian confrontation. An indirect sign of the orientation of a cartoon is the way it depicts not only the participants, but also the mediators in the conflict, the USA and/or the EU, therefore the portrayal of these latter two is also included in the list of narratives.

A pro-Russian (anti-Ukrainian) cartoon is one which: A) takes the side of Russia regarding the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas; B) Reproduces at least one of the pro-Russian (anti-Ukrainian) narratives:

1. Ukraine, the Ukrainian government, or the Ukrainian army is the aggressor in Crimea and the Donbas (Cartoons 5–6).



Cartoons 5 by Igor Kolgarev; Cartoon 6 (“Crimea”; “Russia”) by unknown author

2. Fascism/Nazism reigns in Ukraine (Cartoons 7–8);



Cartoon 7 (“Ukraine”) by Aleksey Bondarev; Cartoon 8 (“Unique, political, Ukrainian nation – HEIL!”) by Alexandr Gorbarukov

3. Russia is saving Crimea and Donbas from Ukraine (Cartoons 9–10);



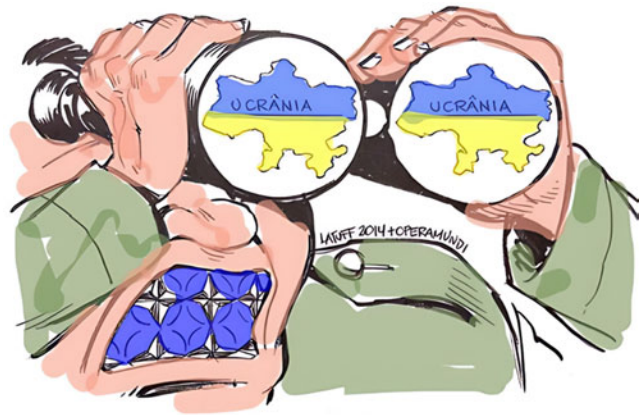
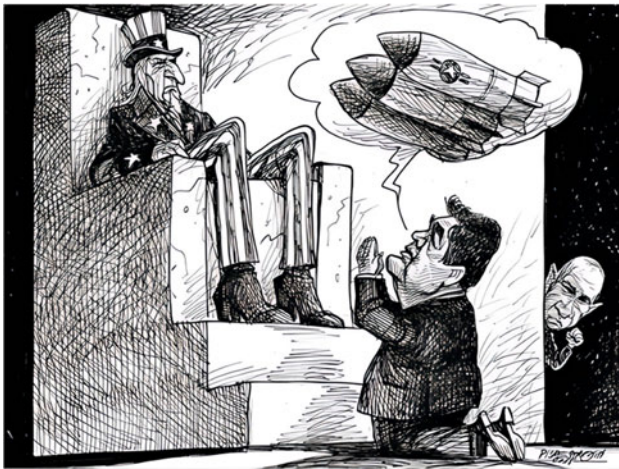
Cartoon 9 by Vitaliy Podvitskiy; Cartoon 10 by Sergey Mironov

4. Crimea and the “republics of Donbas” separated from Ukraine voluntarily; Ukraine is a failed state, unable to hold together on its own and fallen prey to its fascist government (Cartoons 11–12).



Cartoon 11 by Igor Kolgarev; Cartoon 12 (“Loan! Another loan!”, “Kherson! What are you doing?”, “Whoever is the last to remain has the debt!”) by Vitaliy Podvitskiy

5. The USA and/or the EU are using Ukraine; inciting it against Russia; turning it into their vassal; are the main culprits of the situation in Ukraine, are aggressors against Ukraine, constitute an obstacle in the way of Ukrainian-Russian friendship. (Cartoons 13–14).



Cartoon 13 by Petar Pismestrovic; Cartoon 14 ("Ukraine") by Carlos Latuff

6. Anti-Russian sanctions are ridiculous and have no effect on Russia (rather they harm the Western countries that impose them) (Cartoons 15–16).



Cartoon 15 ("You! Give me that!"; "Crimea"; "Ukraine"; "Be careful, Vladimir"; "Yes! We will warn you if you continue"; "We won't play marbles with you anymore!") by Jeff Ysope; Cartoon 16 ("Oops!"; "Sanctions"; "My Limbo course is paying off") by Thomas Meitsch

7. At the peace talks, Ukraine is a puppet of the West (Cartoons 17–18).



Cartoon 17 by Yevgeniy Kran; Cartoon 18 (“Minsk agreements”) by Alexandr Gorbarukov

A pro-Ukrainian (anti-Russian) cartoon is one which: A) Takes the side of Ukraine on issues such as the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas; B) Reproduces at least one of the pro-Ukrainian (anti-Russian) narratives:

1. The Russian government and its army are the aggressors having invaded Crimea and Donbas (Cartoons 19–20).



Cartoon 19 by Maarten Wolterink; Cartoon 20 by Dave Granlund

2. The Russian president is a scoundrel (thief, murderer, rapist) (Cartoons 21–22).



Cartoon 21 by Marian Kamensky; Cartoon 22 by Dario Castillejos

3. The Ukrainian army is defending its country from invaders (Cartoons 23–24).



Cartoon 23 by Lindsey; Cartoon 24 by Yuriy Zhuravel

4. The “republics of Donbas” have no legitimacy and are governed from Moscow (Cartoons 25–26).



Cartoon 25 (“LPR Plotnitsky”; “My representatives for direct contact with Kyiv!!!”; “DPR Zakharchenko”) by Oleksiy Kustovsky; Cartoon 26 (“The West is pretty pissed”; “Donetsk Luhansk”; “We’d better worry about the East”) by Kostas Koufogiorgos

5. The USA and/or the EU are trying to help Ukraine (cartoons 27–28);



Cartoon 27 by Luo Jie; Cartoon 28 by Petar Pismestrovic

6. Anti-Russian sanctions harm Russia (cartoons 29–30);



Cartoon 29 by Sergey Elkin; Cartoon 30 (“A schnapps, please...”; “The West”; “We’ve run out of schnapps!!”; “Crimea”) by Kostas Koufogiorgos

7. Russia behaves inappropriately during peace negotiations: violates diplomatic norms, denies the obvious (cartoons 31–32).

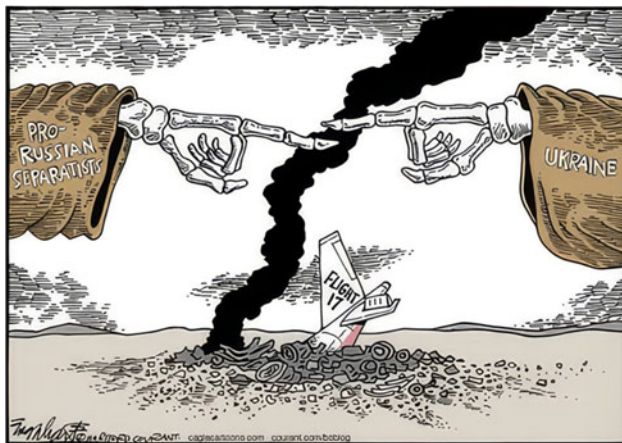


Cartoon 31 (“I am for disarmament! But they don’t want...”; “DPR LPR”; “OSCE”) by Olexiy Kokhan; Cartoon 32 by Yuriy Zhuravel

At the same time, there is a category of cartoons that cannot be attributed to either of the two described categories, due to the impartiality, neutrality, or uncertainty, of cartoonists. Such cartoons are classified into a third category, which is called “neutral” from here on.

A neutral cartoon is one which demonstrates at least one of four characteristics:

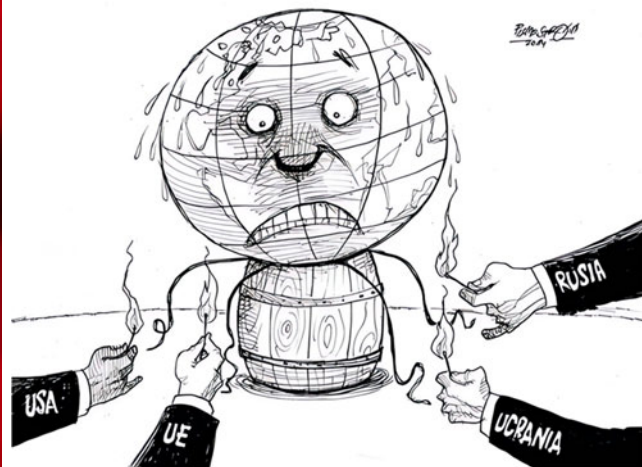
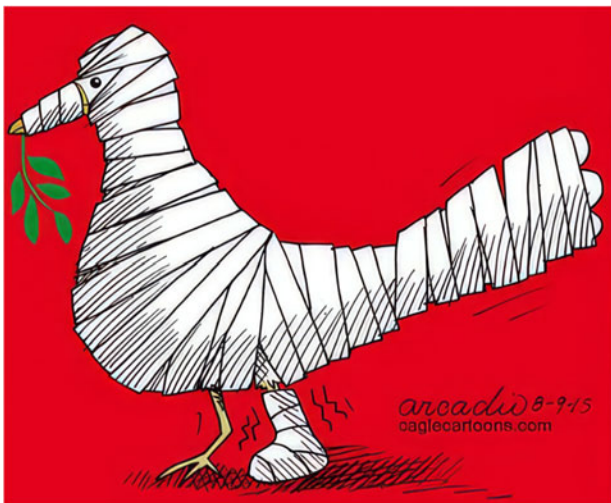
A) Does not take sides in the conflict; does not make a distinction between “forces of good” and “forces of evil”; portrays the war in Ukraine as a competition between two or several forces, none of which appears in a favorable light by comparison with the other (cartoons 33–34).



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Cartoon 33 by Bob Englehart; Cartoon 34 by Pascal Kirchmair.

B) Does not repeat Russian or Ukrainian narratives about the annexation of Crimea or the war in Donbas and/or distances itself from both the pro-Ukrainian and the pro-Russian visions of reality (cartoons 35–36).



Cartoon 35 by Arcadio Esquivel; Cartoon 36 by Petar Pismestrovic.

C) Combines pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian narratives. For example, cartoon 37, in which the EU/NATO throws Ukraine off the cart (Russian narrative #5) while Russia in the form of a pack of wolves bites Ukraine (Ukrainian narrative #1) is a combination of narratives, so it is counted among the neutral cartoons. The cartoon 38 is also a combination of these narratives.



Cartoon 37 by Arend van Dam; Cartoon 38 ("I saw it first!!") by Kostas Koufogiorgos

D) Reproduces narratives that show no signs of being pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian.

A common example is the theme of the weakness of the US/EU/collective West against a strong Russia. For example, Martin Sutovec and Marian Kamensky focus on the helplessness of the EU and the power of Putin. There is no clear positioning of the cartoonist on the Russo-Ukrainian confrontation. Therefore, the cartoons cannot be unequivocally interpreted as either pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian (cartoons 39–40).



Cartoon 39 ("Don't worry, Vladimir! We don't have an EU army to deploy immediately!") by Marian Kamensky;
Cartoon 40 by Peter Brookes

Thus, according to the criteria described above, all cartoons in the corpus are divided into three groups:

1. Pro-Ukrainian (=anti-Russian);
2. Pro-Russian (=anti-Ukrainian);
3. Neutral.

The coding of the cartoons constituted a time-consuming and methodologically rigorous process. Each cartoon was coded independently by at least two persons in accordance with a clearly defined coding methodology mentioned above. In cases of discrepancy, the differences were discussed and resolved through consensus. The coding of cartoons containing captions in any languages not comprehensible to the researcher (and, at times, depictions of nationally specific symbols and memes) required consultation with native speakers of the respective languages and/or representatives of the relevant countries.

4. Research Results

According to the research results, 1,274 cartoons turned out to be pro-Ukrainian, 267 are neutral, and 321 are pro-Russian. Dividing up the cartoons according to the regions of the world from which they originate, shows that pro-Ukrainian position outnumbers pro-Russian and neutral ones in all of them, except Russia (see table 1).

Table 1. All cartoons by regions

	Pro-Ukrainian		Neutral	Pro-Russian	Total
US&Canada	260	82.8%	41	13	314
Australia & NZ	28	84.8%	3	2	33
Western Europe	423	73.6%	108	44	575
Eastern Europe	69	75.8%	20	2	91
Middle East	12	60%	7	1	20
Asia	45	57%	18	16	79
Africa	9	52.9%	6	2	17
Latin America	38	59.4%	17	9	64
Ukraine	315	94%	9	11	335
Russia	60	19.3%	34	217	311
Unknown (world)	15	62.5%	4	4	23
Total	1274	68.4%	267 (14.3%)	321 (17.2%)	1862

4.1 Western Europe

Western Europe is the largest region in terms of the number of cartoons (575). In the region there are 126 cartoonists from 16 countries. The country with the highest number of both cartoons (20) and cartoonists (123) is Germany (see Figure 1).

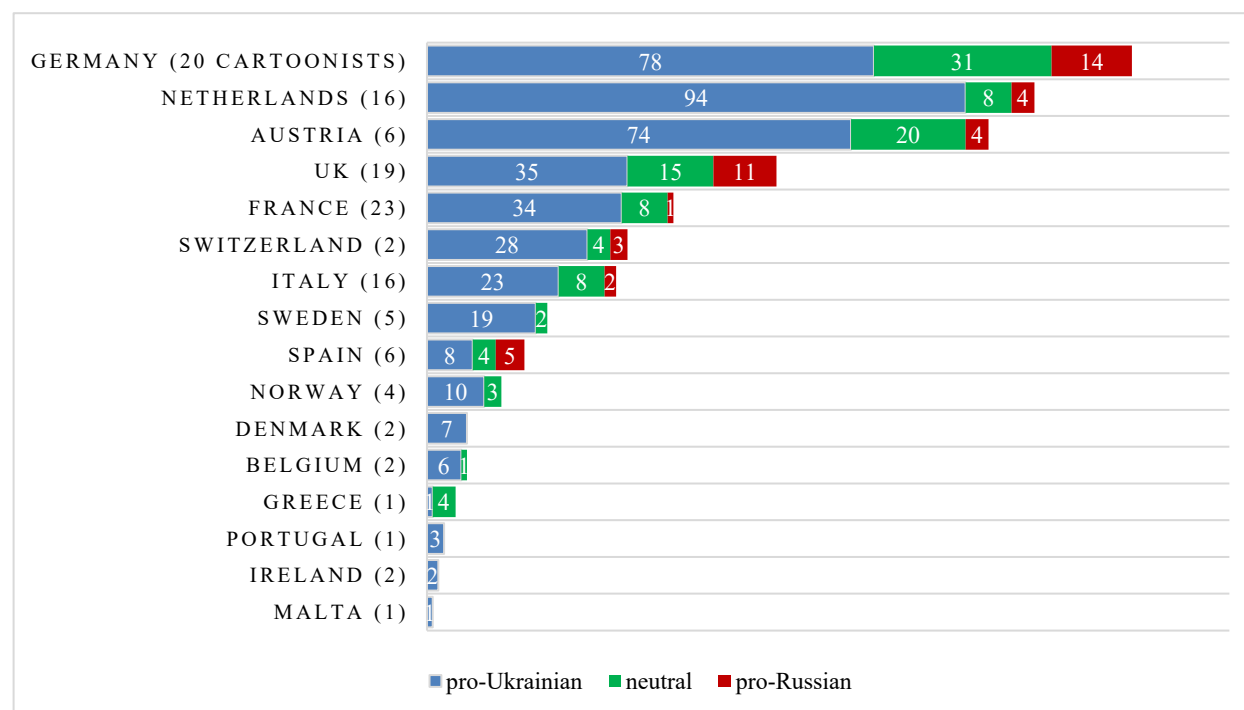


Figure 1. Number of cartoons from Western Europe

In this region, out of 44 pro-Russian cartoons, 8 belong to the brush of Aleksei Talimonov, a cartoonist with a Ukrainian and Russian background, who lives and works in the UK, and is therefore classified as a British cartoonist. The second pro-Russian cartoonist after Talimonov is Miguel Villalba Sánchez (Elchicotriste) from Spain with five pro-Russian cartoons. Elchicotriste tends to see Russia as a victim of the machinations of the US, Soros, Freemasons, international capital (Monsanto), and Ukraine as a tool directed against Russia (cartoons 41–42).



Cartoons 41–42 by Elchicotrist

All other Western European cartoonists have 1–2, at most 3 (Petar Pismestrovic) cartoons with a pro-Russian viewpoint, and so no basis on which to draw a conclusion about their consistent pro-Russian/anti-Ukrainian position. For example, Martin Erl (Germany) in one of his cartoons condemned the supply of weapons to Ukraine by the US, but in four others he depicted the annexation of Crimea with a Bear's paw attacking it. He also showed the eccentricity of Russia's position at the negotiations through a special, (not quite) round table, put appetites for East Germany in Putin's mouth and ridiculed Putin's intentions to "save" Donetsk (cartoons 43–44).



Cartoon 43; Cartoon 44 ("Weapons for the ceasefire in Ukraine"; "Recommended by leading Nobel Peace Prize winners!"); both by Martin Erl

4.2 Eastern Europe

In the region of Eastern Europe, there are 91 cartoons by 19 cartoonists from 8 countries (see Figure 2).

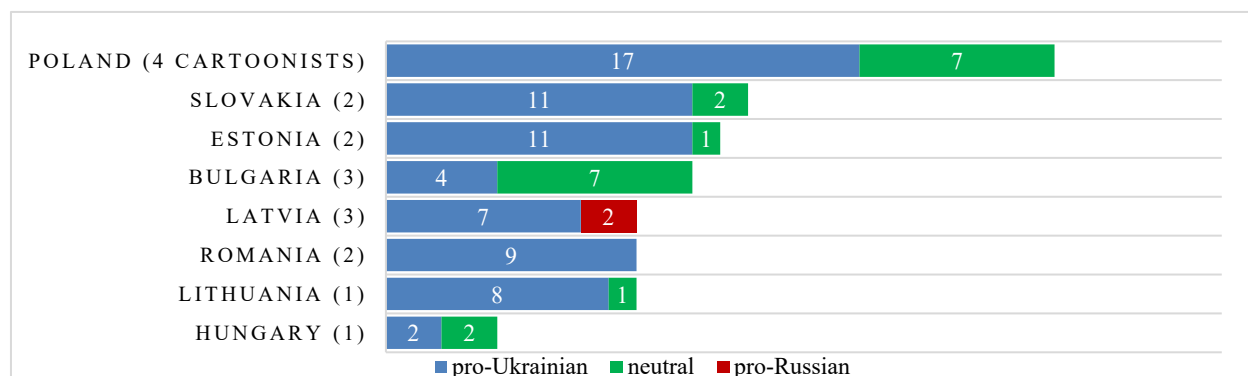
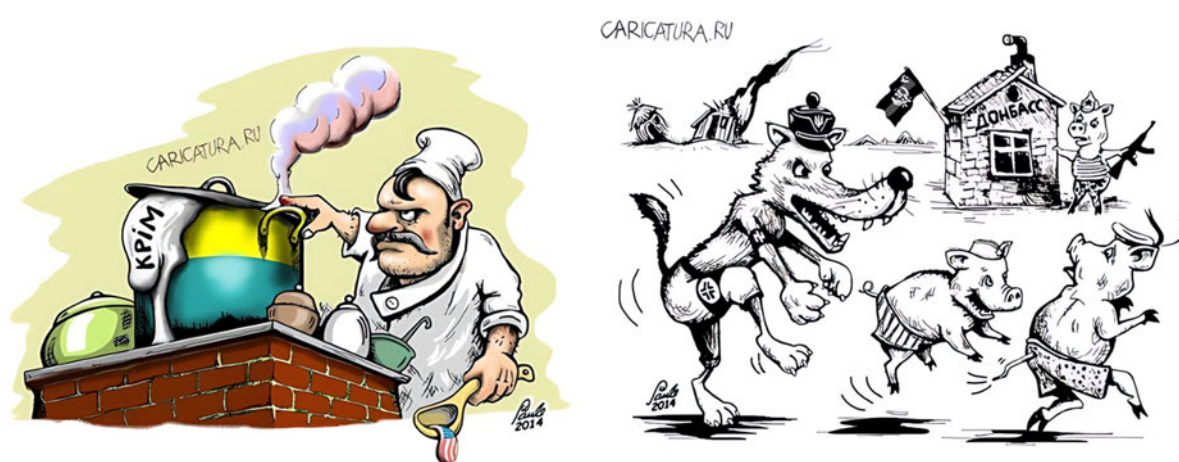


Figure 2. Number of cartoons from Eastern Europe

In this region, there are only two pro-Russian cartoons, both by Uldis Saulitis (Latvia). These cartoons show the responsibility of the US for the “boiled mess” in Ukraine and for the secession of Crimea, while also pointing to the responsibility of Ukraine / “Ukrainian Nazis” for the secession of Donbas (cartoons 45–46).



Cartoons 45 (“Crimea”); Cartoon 46 (“Donbas”); both by Uldis Saulitis

Cartoonists from Eastern Europe with a predominance of neutral cartoons compared to pro-Ukrainian ones are Christo Komarnitski (Bulgaria) and Andrzej Milewski (Poland). Neutral cartoons by Christo Komarnitski are an attempt to see the Ukrainian situation as a struggle of geopolitical forces for domination over Ukraine (cartoons 47–48).



Cartoons 47–48 by Christo Komarnitski

The “neutrality” of Andrzej Milewski’s cartoons mainly express irony over the helplessness of Western countries to deal with Russian aggression or to help Ukraine.

Pro-Ukrainian cartoons predominate in the case of all other cartoonists of Eastern Europe. The dominant topic of them is the aggression, militarism, barbarism, and hypocrisy of Russia and President Putin personally.

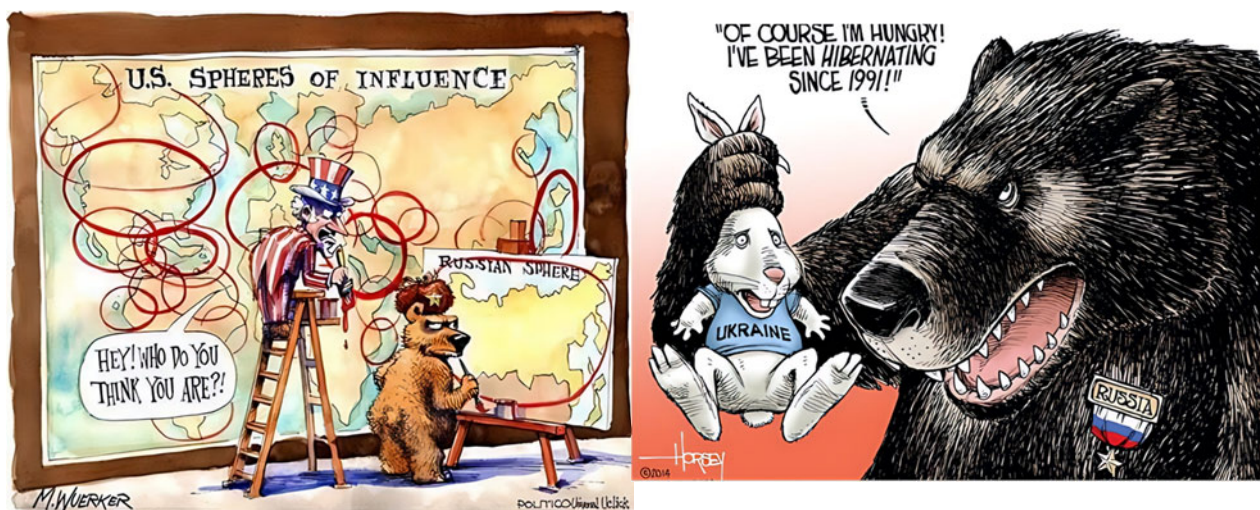
4.3 US & Canada

In the US & Canada region, there are 314 cartoons by 19 cartoonists. Canada has 6 cartoons by five cartoonists. Of all the cartoons from the region, 260 (82.8%) are pro-Ukrainian, 41 (13.1%) are neutral, and only 13 (4.1%) are pro-Russian.

There is not a single systematic pro-Russian cartoonist in the region. Matt Wuerker is the only one who has more than one pro-Russian cartoon, which is two. In both of them, he depicts the wars and other international sins of the US, against the background of which the condemnation of Russian aggression against Ukraine seems inappropriate (cartoon 49). The neutral cartoons depict the impotence of the US to do anything about Russia, although without sympathy for Russia/Putin (this is how neutral cartoons about ineffective sanctions differ from pro-Russian ones on the same topic). The examples are the cartoons by Jerry Holbert and Kevin Siers.

The main focus of pro-Ukrainian cartoons is Putin, who: hits, bites or eats Ukraine in a wide variety of ways; swallows, tramples, strangles, shoots or undermines Ukraine; buys Ukraine at the meat market (Tom Toles), breaks into a Ukrainian

door, breaks the window of the “Ukraine” store (Lisa Benson), undermines the sovereignty of Ukraine (Dave Granlund), cooks Ukraine on the stove (John Cole), drives over Ukraine on a tank (Patrick Corrigan), takes Ukraine’s “Crimea” purse (Daryl Cagle), throws a grenade into the baby carriage marked “Ukrainian War” (Jeff Danziger).



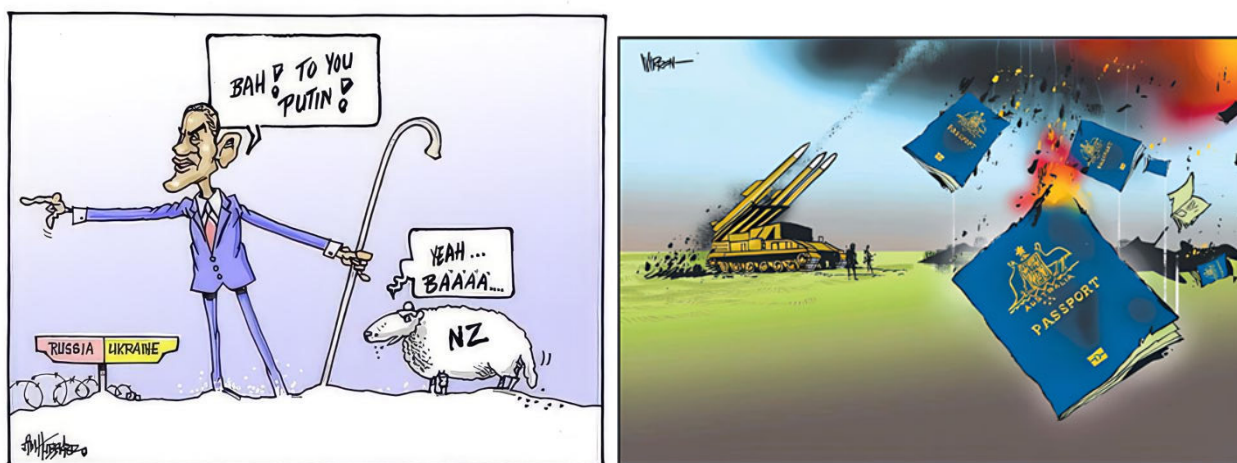
Cartoon 49 by Matt Wuerker; Cartoon 50 by David Horsey

4.4 Australia & New Zealand

There are 33 cartoons in the region by 17 cartoonists. There are 28 pro-Ukrainian cartoons from the region, 3 neutral ones and 2 pro-Russian ones.

Both pro-Russian cartoons were penned by Jim Hubbard (New Zealand). This cartoonist chides the US for its imperialism, which is depicted as much greater than Russia's, and mocks New Zealand's sanctions against Russia. Neutral cartoons from the region illustrate the helplessness of the US (Paul Zanetti), lack of interest in the Ukrainian issue (Dean Alston) and the role of New Zealand as a puppet of the US (Hubbard again) (cartoon 51).

Popular themes include Putin/Russia's decision to go to war against Ukraine (Peter Lewis), Putin/Russia's outrageousness (Alan Moir), and unsuccessful attempts to hide the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine (Tom Scott). Separately, it should be noted that the topic of the downing of Boeing MH17 over Donbas (Peter Broelman, Mark Winter, John Spooner, Jos Valdman, Warren Brown), is proportionally more widely represented in this region compared to others, which is natural given the number of Australians on that flight (cartoon 52).



Cartoon 51 by Jim Hubbard; Cartoon 52 by Warren Brown

4.5 Africa

In the region, there are 17 cartoons by seven cartoonists: 9 pro-Ukrainian, 6 neutral and 2 pro-Russian. The author of both pro-Russian cartoons is Godfrey “Gado” Mwampembwa (Tanzania). To his pen also belong 3 pro-Ukrainian and 1 neutral

cartoon. In one of the pro-Russian cartoons, Gado depicted Ukraine as one of the flames that Obama is unable to extinguish (reproducing/expressing the Russian narrative about the war in Ukraine being purely a Ukrainian problem, which Russia had nothing to do with creating). Gado also depicted Putin with a pro-Russian separatist in his pocket (reproducing the Ukrainian narrative that the war was organized and conducted by Russia).

In addition to one neutral cartoon by Gado, two more neutral cartoons are by Nayer Talal Nayer (Ethiopia), two by Sherif Arafa (Egypt), and one by Doaa Eladl (Egypt). Neutral cartoons can be reduced to two themes: the confrontation over Ukraine between geopolitical powers and the emphasis on the US as the main negative player, but with a simultaneous negative portrayal of Russia/Putin.

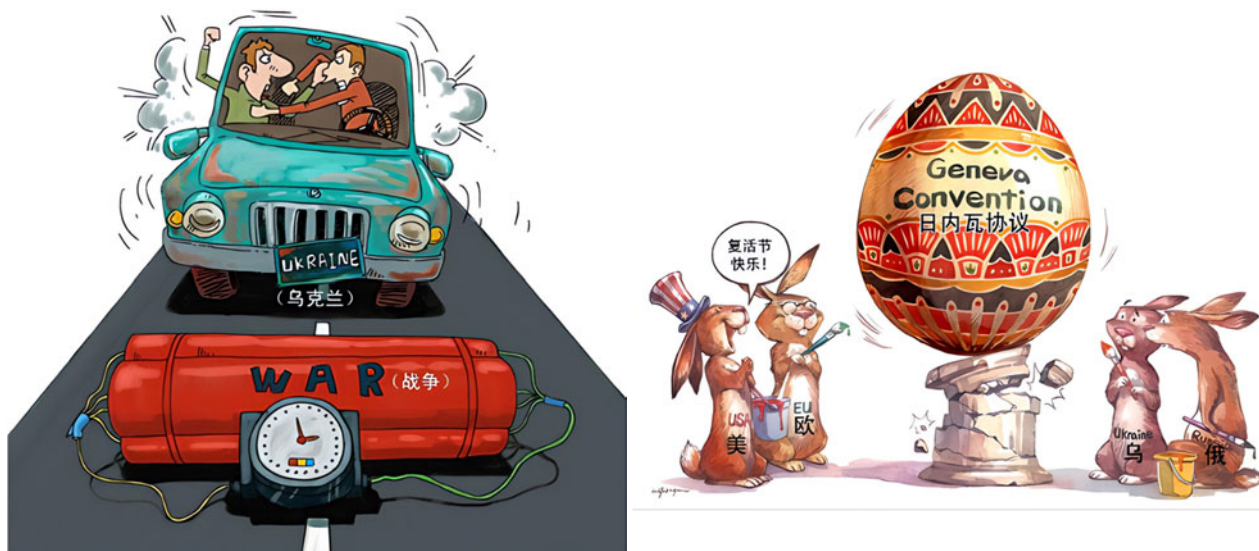


Cartoon 53 by Doaa Eladl; Cartoon 54 by Sherif Arafa

Pro-Ukrainian cartoons in Africa are by Gado and Djamel Lounis (Algeria) – 3 cartoons each, as well as Nayer Talal Nayer from Ethiopia and another Algerian cartoonist Ghir Hak (Radie) – one each. The most popular theme is the aggressiveness of the Russian Bear.

4.6 Asia

There are 79 cartoons from the region by 22 cartoonists: from China, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, India, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan. Of these, 45 cartoons are pro-Ukrainian, 18 are neutral and 16 are pro-Russian. Asia and Latin America are the regions with the largest number of pro-Russian cartoons outside of Russia itself. On the other hand, in Asia there is only one systematic pro-Russian cartoonist, namely Nikolay Sviridenko, who accounts for 11 of the 16 pro-Russian cartoons. In his cartoons, Sviridenko sees the US as the main culprit of the bloodshed in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian leadership as puppets of the US.



Cartoon 55 by Li Feng; Cartoon 56 ("Happy Easter!") by Li Min

Stéphane "Stephff" Peray from Thailand has the largest number of cartoons on the Ukrainian issue. All 13 are pro-Ukrainian: 9 of them depict a brutal, self-confident Putin in episodes related to Ukraine, another two depict the Russian Bear in the same context. Among the pro-Ukrainian cartoonists in the region there are Paresh Nath (India) and Rodrigo

de Matos (China). These authors often note the way that Russian energy resources that come to Europe, influence the configuration of forces.

4.7 Middle East

There are 20 cartoons from the region, authored by 9 cartoonists from Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Israel. Of these cartoons, 12 are pro-Ukrainian, 7 are neutral, and one is pro-Russian. The author with the largest number of drawings is Hassan Bleibel from Lebanon (5 pro-Ukrainian and 3 neutral). This author's cartoons combine a portrayal of Putin's brutal aggression against Ukraine with an equal emphasis on the situation in Ukraine seen as a confrontation between Russia and the EU.



Cartoons 57–58 by Hassan Bleibel

The same combination of pro-Ukrainian and neutral narratives in different cartoons by the same author can be found elsewhere in the region, in particular, in the case of Erhan Yalvaç (Turkey).

4.8 Latin America

In the region, there are 64 cartoons by 25 cartoonists from ten countries: 38 pro-Ukrainian, 17 “neutral”, 9 pro-Russian (see Figure 3).

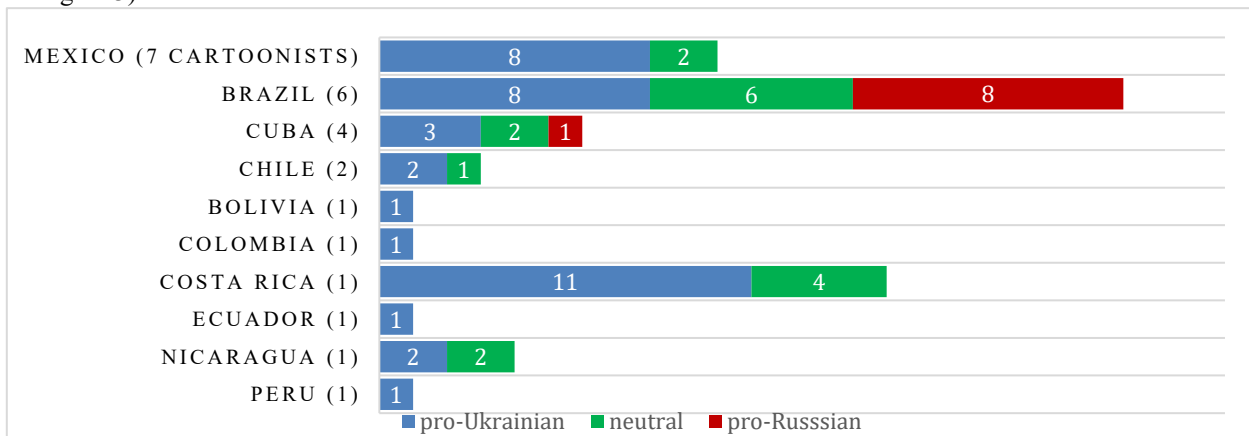
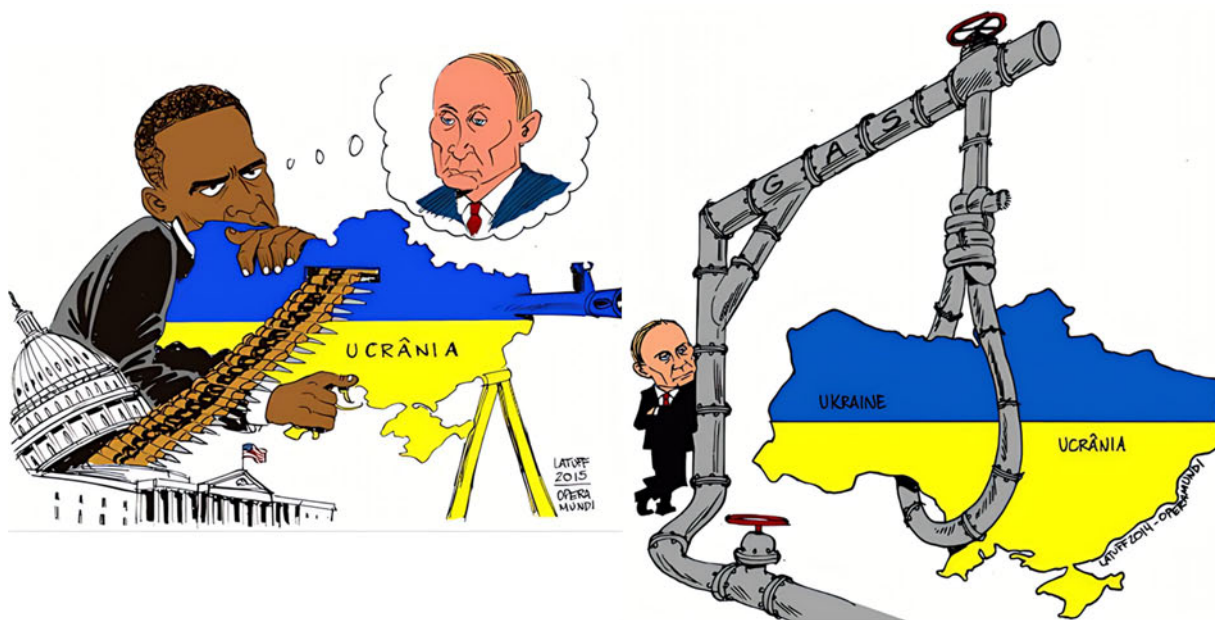


Figure 3. Number of cartoons from Latin America

Carlos Latuff, the author of 7 out of 9 pro-Russian cartoons in the region, is not so clear-cut. In his cartoons, he accuses the US of sticking its nose into Ukraine or using Ukraine as a weapon against Russia; he accuses the Ukrainian army of Nazism, and the Ukrainian elite of trying to sell Ukraine. Less often, Latuff sees the situation as a struggle for Ukraine between Russia and the West (5 cartoons of this kind). Even more rarely, he holds Putin responsible for MH17 and for the attempt to strangle Ukraine with a gas pipeline.



Cartoons 59–60 by Carlos Latuff

Other cartoons from the region include attempts to express solidarity with Ukraine in a visual form, like Luis Yanes and Steph Gio (Mexico); condemn Russia, like Julio Carrión Cueva (Peru), Raul Grisales Guaico (Colombia) and Angel Boligan (Mexico); or take the position of an impartial observer, like Alfredo Martirena Hernandez (Cuba) and Aldo Fiestoforo (Chile).

4.9 Unknown (world)

23 cartoons (of which 16 are pro-Ukrainian) do not have a specific authorship, and therefore cannot be attributed to any of the regions. Among them, the motif of an aggressive Russia dominates. Among the pro-Russian cartoons there is an attempt to attribute responsibility for MH17 to Ukraine. Among the neutral ones there is a cartoon that suggests that the war can be interpreted in different ways: Ukraine sees a monster, whereas Russia sees a butterfly.

4.10 Ukraine

In the case of Ukraine 94% cartoons are pro-Ukrainian. In total, 28 Ukrainian cartoonists are the authors of 328 cartoons (another 7 cartoons are of unknown authorship).

The most consistent pro-Russian cartoonist is Vitaly Shcherbak (6 pro-Russian cartoons out of 6). This author depicts: the Ukrainian President, Poroshenko, kissing NATO's foot; the same Poroshenko unable to ensure peace in Donbas; the Ukrainian military shelling peaceful houses in Donbas; Western journalists ignoring the bloodshed in Donbas; the Ukrainian side as responsible for the MH17 disaster. Poroshenko's aggression against Donbas is portrayed by Andriy Sayenko, who also ridicules Ukraine's military capabilities. Valery Momot mocks Ukraine's subordinate international position in the negotiations concerning Ukraine itself.

Among the neutral cartoons, there are illustrations by Alexander Dubovsky on the topic of tension on the Russo-Ukrainian border. In the drawing by Dmytro Skazhenyk, the American Eagle and the Russian Bear are tearing Ukraine apart. Volodymyr Kazanevsky depicts a gas pipeline with the EU and Russia balancing on the back of an unfortunate and small Ukraine.

In the pro-Ukrainian cartoons one can often see themes, symbols, and memes that are understandable in Russia and Ukraine only. For example, Ukrainian cartoonists – Oleksiy Kustovsky, Yevgeniya Olijnyk, Andriy Petrenko, Yuriy Zhuravel, Night Separator, Oleg Smal and many others – use the ribbon of St. George as a marker of Russia.



Cartoon 61 by Serhii Fedko (“Are you on vacation like me or just lost?”); Cartoon 62 by Volodymyr Solonko (“They are not here 2014–2019”; “These Muscovites have some strange surnames!”). Both reflect common memes about Russian troops in the Donbas, who “spend their vacation in Ukraine”, “got lost”, “are not there”

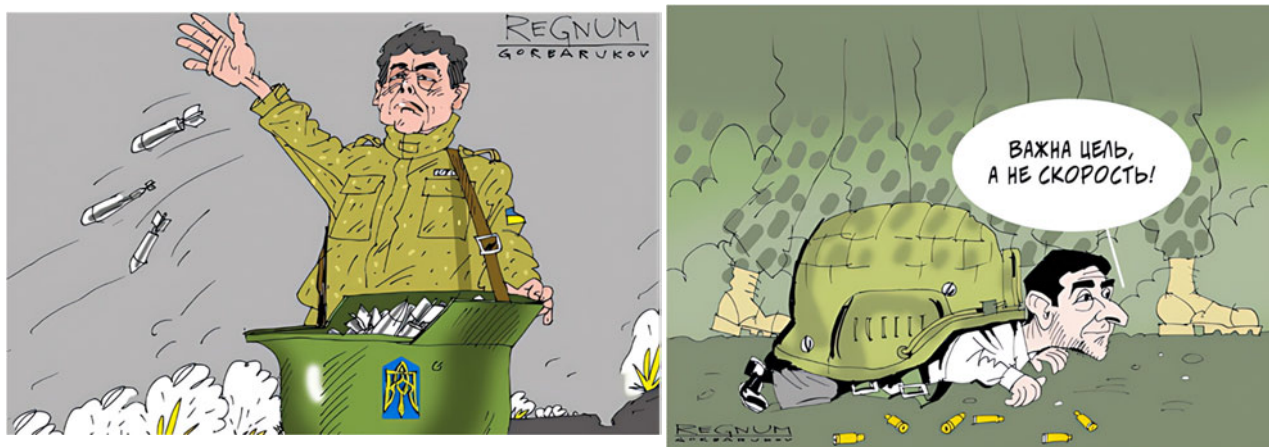
Ukrainian authors tend to portray not only Putin (although he is the most frequent-target), but also the leaders of the “republics of Donbas”, who are completely unrecognizable to other countries, as well as lesser Russian figures such as Peskov, Lavrov, Shoigu and the like, or Ukrainian politicians, especially pro-Russian ones. The themes of the harmful influence of Russian television, or the injustice (“blindness”) of the OSCE in Donbas, are also exclusively Ukrainian.

4.11 Russia

There are 217 pro-Russian cartoons in the Russian part of the corpus, which is 70% of the total number of images by Russian cartoonists.

In many ways, the Russian cartoons mirror the Ukrainian ones: they use symbols and memes to designate the Ukrainian side, which are not found anywhere else. An analogue of the ribbon of St. George (the marker of Russia in Ukrainian cartoons) is the red and black colours that Russian cartoonists often use to designate the Ukrainian side. Russian patriotic cartoons with the dominant theme of triumph mirror their Ukrainian counterparts. In the Russian part of the corpus there is also the motive of the “blindness” of the OSCE in Donbas, this time for Ukraine’s benefit.

Vitaliy Podvitskiy, Igor Kolgarev, Vyacheslav Shlyakhov and many others in their illustrations exploit the image of a Ukrainian criminal, who at the same time turns out to be a failure in all his evil endeavors (attempts to keep Crimea under control, harm Donbas, join the EU). His “supervisors” from the US, the EU, and NATO look just as ridiculous.



Cartoon 63; Cartoon 64 (“The goal is important, not the speed”); Both cartoons by Aleksandr Gorbarukov depict Ukrainian presidents Poroshenko and Zelensky

Among Russian cartoons, a separate phenomenon is the portfolio by Sergey Elkin, most of whose cartoons are pro-Ukrainian. This cartoonist primarily focuses on the person of President Putin and the negative consequences of the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas.

4.12 Cartoonists

Considering the cartoonists represented by ten or more cartoons (there are 40 of these in the corpus), 17 of them are “hardline” (all cartoons are classified as having the same political alignment), and 23 cartoonists are the authors of illustrations that are represented in two or in all three variants of political alignment. The cartoonists from Ukraine and Russia in this context demonstrate significantly stronger intransigence compared to the representatives of other countries (see Table 2).

Table 2. The share of “hardline” cartoonists in Ukraine and Russia compared to other countries

	Number of cartoonists represented by 10 or more cartoons	Of these, number of cartoonists with the same political alignment in all the cartoons
Ukraine	10	8 (80%)
Russia	4	3 (75%)
Other countries	26	6 (23%)

Each of the 413 cartoonists in the corpus is represented graphically according to the following parameters: political alignment (presence in Figures 4–6), number of cartoons (bubble size), and belonging to a region (colour).

Among cartoonists with a significant number of cartoons in the corpus there are slightly more of those who are represented in two or all three variants of political alignment (23) compared to the intransigent ones (17). At the same time, in the first group the distribution of cartoons by political alignment is quite rarely close to even, as in the case of Carlos Latuff (4 pro-Ukrainian – 5 neutral – 7 pro-Russian), or in the case of Petar Pismestrovic (8–10–3). Much more often, a cartoonist has one political position, from which he occasionally retreats, as in the case of Mauro Biani (7–2–1) or Paolo Calleri (8–2–1). The cartoonists from Ukraine and Russia in this context demonstrate significantly stronger intransigence compared to the representatives of other countries.

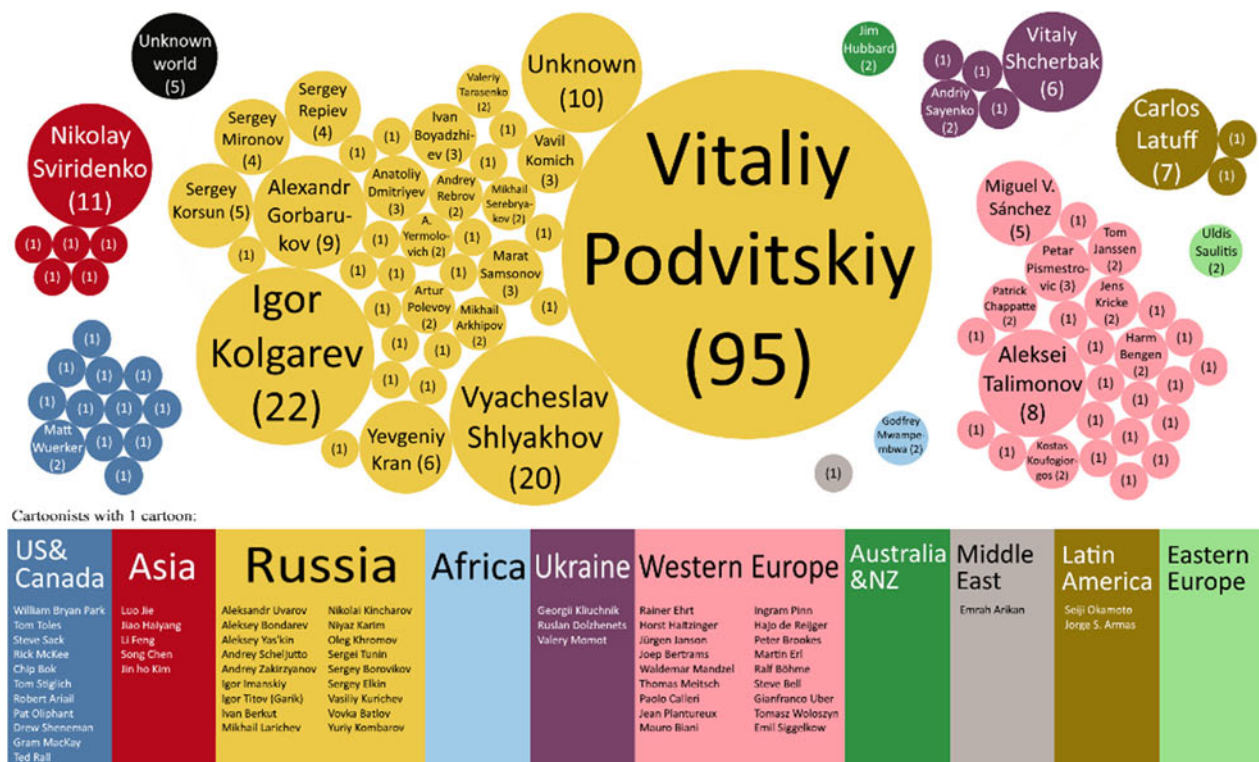


Figure 4. Pro-Russian cartoons

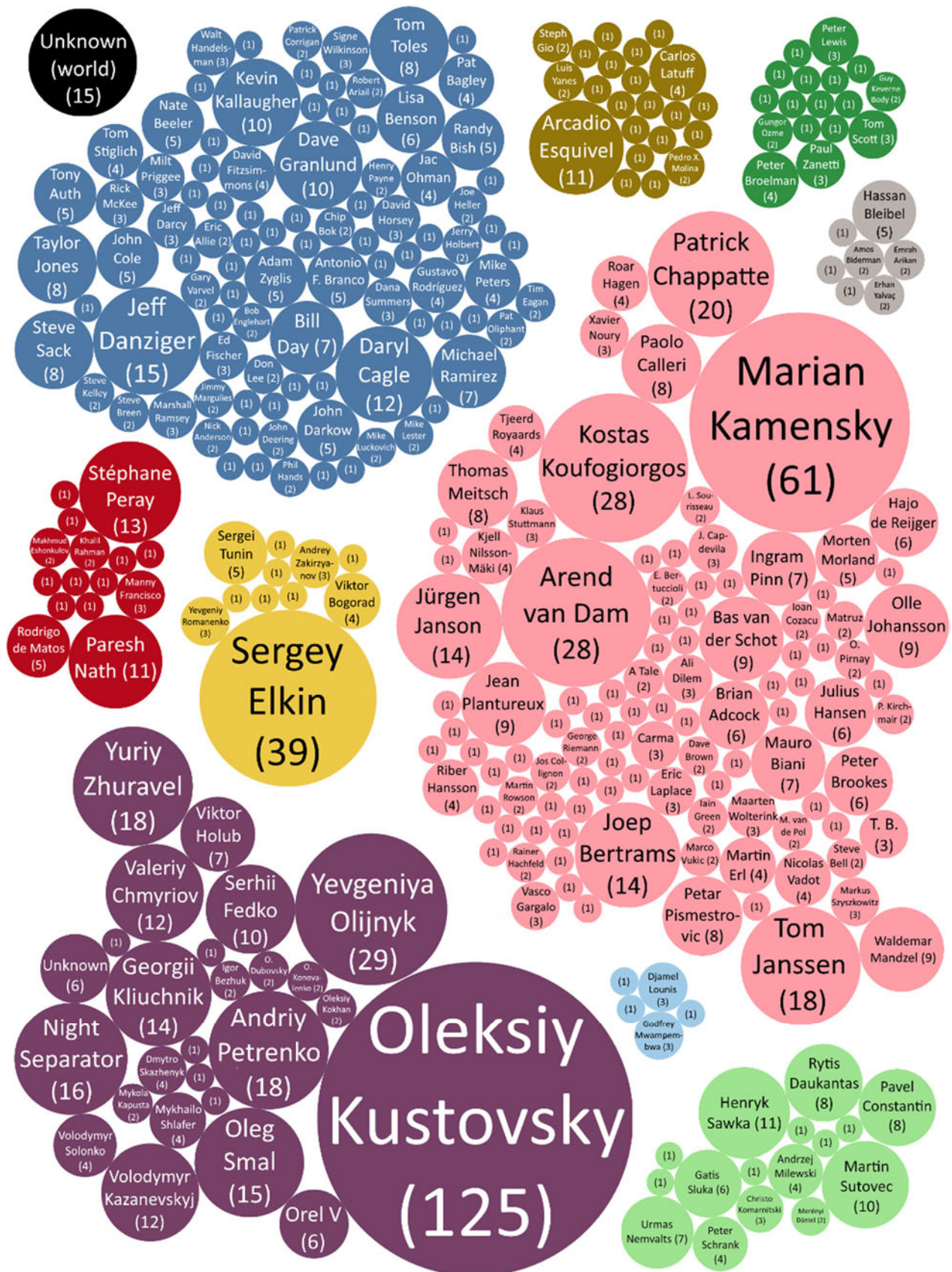
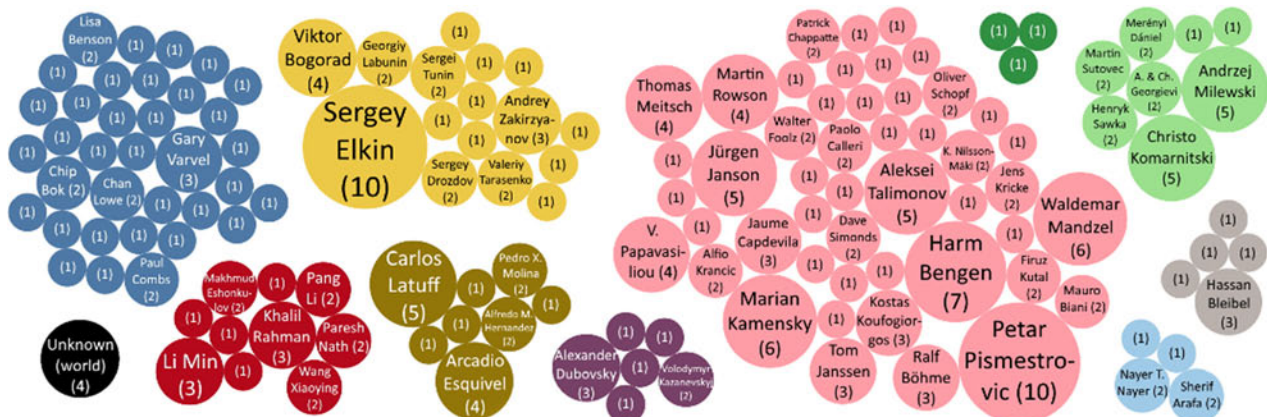


Figure 5/1. Pro-Ukrainian cartoons

Cartoonists with 1 cartoon:

US&Canada	Asia	Russia	Africa	Ukraine	Western Europe	Australia & NZ	Middle East	Latin America	Eastern Europe		
Matt Wuerker Glenn Foden Matt Davies Robert J. Matson Gary McCoy Jeff Kotlerba Steve Benson Jim Morin Harley Schwadron Bob Gotrell Bruce Plante Chris Britt Christopher Perez Clay Bennett Dan Wasserman Mike Keefe Darrin Bell David Donar Mike Smith Mike Turner David Gothard John Pritchett	Deb Milbrath Dick Kulpa Ed Hall Gary Brookings Rik Sansone Rob Rogers Roman Genn Jen Sorensen Scott Stantis Shan Wells Jillian Albright Chris Britt Joseph Rank Tim O'Brien Kirk Walters Christian Daigle Larry Wright Lee Judge Yasha Harari Paul Fell Paul Slep	U Min Luo Jie Jiao Huiyang Harry Harrison Heng Kim Song Jia Qiang Sinan Cheah Zukhruf A. Hogue Geup shi ni seo teu	Alesha Stupin I. Miroshnichenko Mikhail Zhilkin Sergey Korsun Yuriy Busagin Aleks Shoha	Nayer Talal Nayer Ghir Hak (Radie) M. Jumanne	Ruslan Dolzhenets Andriy Leichenko Anel Brate V. Cherpak Lindsey	Miguel V. Sánchez Vagelis Papavasiliou Gianfranco Ober Mario Natangelo Tomaz Woloszyn Corinne Rey Aurélien Froment Bart Rozenaard Mark Seicuma Burkhard Mohr Peter Wellman Martyn Turner Chris Riddell Christian Adams Max Mulvany Cinzia Poli Mike Flanagan Niels Bo Bojesen Norrie Oliver Feicke Jan-Erik Ander Sergio Staino S. Charbonnier Steven Camley Janusz Majewski Joseba Arbelaz	Emmanuel Chaunu Otto Max Eoin Kelleher Eric van der Wal Paolo Lombardi Frédéric Gezienus Bruining Gianlorenzo Ingrami Gilles Lafitte Heiko Sakurai Philippe Soulas Pierre Ballouhey Pierre Pasma Pierick Juin Herbjørn Skogstad Renaud Luzier Islem Jon Tomaschoff Andrea Silioni Andres Wadaupe Andy Dawey T. Espesteingher Jeff Ysope JKL Trix	Jim Hubbard Dean Alston Mark Knight Mark Winter Pete Kreiner John Spooner Jos Valdman Alun Moir Alastair Nisbet Malcolm Paul Evans Warren Brown	Gunduz Agayev Stavro Jabra Emrah Arkan	Alfredo Hernandez Carlos A. da Costa Aldo Hiestoforo Mario Fuentes Carlos Falco César Mejías Dario Castillejos Oswaldo G. Gomez Paco Blaca Fabian Emmanuel Frank Arbelo Fuiza Raul Grisales Renato Almeida Julio Carrido Cueva Lederly Mendonça Angel Boligan	Jerzy Wasukiewicz Adam Polkowski Traykov Popov Lubomir Kothra Valli Ivan Zengus Zaharans

Figure 5/2. Pro-Ukrainian cartoons



Cartoonists with 1 cartoon:

US&Canada	Asia	Russia	Africa	Ukraine	Western Europe	Australia & NZ	Middle East	Latin America	Eastern Europe		
Taylor Jones John Darkow John Cole Rick McKee Pat Bagley Jimmy Margulies Robert Anail David Horsey Ed Fischer Mike Lester Steve Breen Steve Kelley Jerry Holbert Bob Englehart Glenn Foden	Matt Davies Robert J. Matson Gary McCoy Jeff Kotlerba Steve Benson Jim Morin Harley Schwadron Ben Garrison Matt Biers Christopher Weyant Jake Fuller Kevin Sims Tobias Dials Tom Toles John Pritchett	Manny Francisco Luo Jie Li Feng Daniel Frio Miel	Aleksandr Troitskiy Alexandr Zudin Valentin Bezruk Vladimir Stanovskiy Vyacheslav Gayday Maryana Novikova Yuriy Sayenkov Sergey Mironov Vovka Batlov	Geoffrey Mwampembwa Doaa Eladi	Dmytro Skazheny Ruslan Dolzhenets Georgii Kiluchuk Unknown	Alberto Scalfella Arend van Dam Joep Bertrams Ingram Pinn Roar Hagen Steve Bell Eric Laplace Marco Vukic Markus Szyszkowitz Michiel van de Pol Olivier Pimay Pascal Kirchmair Martin Shovel	Laurent Sourisocou Mario Natangelo Corinne Rey Derek Brettell Paride Puglia Hélène Missilou Hervé Pinel René Pétillon Santi Orue Job van der Molen Jürgen Tomicek Hajo de Reijger	Paul Zanetti Jim Hubbard Dean Alston	Erhan Yalvag Mohammad Kargar Shehriyar Dadajov Ali Divandari	Luis Yanes Carlos A. da Costa Aldo Fiastoforo Pepo Almonte	Rytis Daukantas Peter Schrank

Figure 6. Neutral cartoons

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the importance of analyzing the Russo-Ukrainian War through the lens of editorial cartoons, given their distinctive role as both media artifacts and instruments of information warfare. Based on the classification of 1,862 cartoons by political alignment, a clear asymmetry emerges: 68.4% of the cartoons are pro-Ukrainian, 14.3% neutral, and 17.2% pro-Russian. This distribution reflects a broader global tendency to frame Russia as the aggressor and Ukraine as the victim, suggesting that editorial cartoons largely align with the dominant international political consensus while simultaneously amplifying it.

At the level of visual narratives, the mainstream perspective consistently portrays Russia as the aggressor, often personified through recognizable symbols such as President Vladimir Putin, the Russian bear, or military equipment (a Russian tank, etc). Ukraine, by contrast, lacks a single stable visual embodiment and is represented through a diverse range of metaphors, including national symbols, geographic outlines, and allegorical imagery. Alternative narratives reverse this framing, depicting Ukraine as an instrument of Western influence and Russia as a counterforce. However,

such interpretations remain significantly less widespread outside Russia itself.

The study also identifies a third category of “neutral” cartoons, which, rather than expressing pure objectivity, tend to reproduce specific meta-narratives. These include depictions of Ukraine as a battleground between Russia and the West, the perceived inability of Western actors to influence the conflict, or generalized condemnations of war detached from questions of responsibility.

Regionally, the data reveal both convergence and variation. In North America, Europe, and Oceania, pro-Ukrainian cartoons dominate (reaching around 75%), while in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, their share remains substantial but less pronounced (50–60%). In these regions, a higher presence of neutral and pro-Russian narratives points to alternative interpretative frameworks, often influenced by anti-Western sentiment, geopolitical skepticism, or differing historical experiences. This pattern underscores the existence of global information asymmetry, where the same conflict is understood through diverse ideological lenses. As was particularly evident during the full-scale phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war after 2022, in these regions of the world – speaking in broad strokes and without delving into details – it was indeed significantly more common, compared to Western countries, to express pro-Russian sympathies and to adopt a neutral stance in the conflict. It can be argued that, in this case, the position of cartoonists from the Global South reflects the attitudes of their respective governments and societies.

A significant distinction emerges between cartoonists from countries directly involved in the conflict and those from outside it. Ukrainian and Russian cartoonists demonstrate a markedly higher degree of ideological consistency and rigidity, reflected in the low proportion of neutral cartoons (2.7% in Ukraine and 10.9% in Russia). This can be attributed to their direct exposure to the war, domestic media environments, and the mobilising function of visual satire. In contrast, cartoonists from other regions tend to adopt more pluralistic or interpretative approaches, often combining or alternating between different narratives.

The research further highlights the divide between globalized and localized visual languages. Cartoons produced outside the conflict zone rely on universally recognizable symbols and figures, enabling broad transnational communication. By contrast, Ukrainian and Russian cartoons frequently incorporate culturally specific references, memes, and contextual markers that are less accessible to external audiences.

Overall, the findings confirm that editorial cartoons remain a relevant and powerful medium in the digital age. Despite competition from memes and other visual formats, they continue to shape public understanding of complex geopolitical events by combining symbolic condensation, emotional resonance, and political messaging. Their capacity to simplify, personalize, and dramatize conflict ensures their enduring significance as tools of global political communication and information warfare.

5.1 Limitations

While the study aimed at achieving the most comprehensive coverage possible, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. First, the corpus cannot be considered fully exhaustive, as it includes only those cartoons that were publicly available online and accessible through search engines, digital archives, and platforms at the time of data collection. Cartoons published offline, behind paywalls, or not indexed by search engines may therefore be underrepresented or absent. Second, the dataset is characterized by temporal and geographical imbalances: a disproportionately larger share of cartoons originates from the initial years of the conflict (2014–2015), while fewer examples are available from later years. In addition, the corpus shows a geographical imbalance, with cartoons from Europe and North America being disproportionately represented. Underrepresentation of African, Asian, South American cartoons partly reflects structural factors (linguistic barriers, lower digitization, media infrastructure), although this can be partly explained by less intensive media coverage of the topic in these regions, particularly before 2022.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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