Research article / Научная статья

Visual Metaphor:
Likeness of Unlike Things in Cartoons

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Abstract. The concept of metaphor is presented and analyzed in relation to the phenomenon of political cartoons. Guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, developed by Lakoff and Johnson as the theoretical framework, this study aims to examine how metaphors in political cartoons function as essential components in conveying complex socio-political messages. Through a meticulous exploration of the likeness between two seemingly unlike entities — perceiving one through the lens of the other — this study argues that cartoonists leverage visual metaphors, along with a diverse array of humor, symbolism, and irony, to illustrate societal conflicts and critique political realities, all while effectively conveying nuanced messages in a concise manner. A significant achievement of this study is the development of two comprehensive tables that categorize prevalent source and target domains in the metaphoric conceptualization of political cartoons, accompanied by relevant examples that elucidate their application in this context. The findings reveal how cartoonists utilize these domains to critique social realities and evoke cognitive responses from audiences. By categorizing and providing context for these metaphoric structures, this study not only enhances the understanding of visual metaphors but also contributes significantly to the scholarship on visual rhetoric in political communication.

Keywords: media, editorial cartoon, political cartoon, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), mass communications, journalism

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Визуальная метафора:
сходство непохожего в карикатурах

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Аннотация. Понятие «метафора» представлено и проанализировано применительно к феномену политической карикатуры. На базе концептуальной теории, разработанной Лакоффом и Джонсоном, изучено, каким образом метафоры функционируют в политических карикатурах, а также конструируются и транслируются сложные социально-политические послания. Благодаря тщательному исследованию сходства между двумя, казалось бы, непохожими объектами — восприятием одного через призму другого — показано, как карикатуристы используют визуальные метафоры, языковые символы и другие средства юмора и иронии, чтобы иллюстрировать социальные конфликты и критиковать политические реалии, передавая нюансы лаконично и эффективно. Значительным достижением исследования является разработка двух таблиц, где классифицируются преобладающие «источники и мишени» метафорической концептуализации, приводятся соответствующие примеры и объяснения контекста. Полученные результаты показывают, как критикуются социальные реалии, какие когнитивные реакции они вызывают у аудитории. Категоризация и анализ контекста не только углубляют понимание метафор, но и задают новую парадигму изучения визуальной риторики политических коммуникаций.

Ключевые слова: СМИ, редакционная карикатура, политическая карикатура, теория концептуальной метафоры, массовые коммуникации, журналистика

Introduction

Metaphor suggests perceiving one entity or concept through the lens of another, facilitating a comparison between two that are otherwise unrelated. Metaphor is a highly influential linguistic device that improves language by generating impactful and captivating effects on the audience. Through the creation of shocks and surprising connections, metaphor enhances language's expressive power and makes it easier to communicate feelings. By drawing comparisons between a complex subject or scenario with a more familiar one,

artists can express their creativity and persuade audiences to perceive it in a different light.

Metaphors are utilized across disciplines and genres, in order to achieve a variety of communication objectives, such as explaining objects to others (*the heart is a motor*), ascribing abstract concepts or intangible phenomenon to physical objects (*Life is a highway*), influencing individuals (*this automobile is as quick as a leopard*), or getting readers a bit carried away (*Her tears were a river flowing down her cheeks*). Metaphoric cognition is a fundamental aspect of human experience and nature and plays a crucial role in discourse. It can be used as the foundation for innovative theoretical ideas or as artistic and creative tools with a purposeful and communicative role (Downing, & Mujic, 2009; Hidalgo-Downing, & Mujic, 2020; Iriskhanova, 2011; Shilina, & Zarifian, 2023; Tabatabaei, & Ivanova, 2022; Tameryan et al., 2018; Zarifian et al., 2022).

There is widespread agreement on the fundamental structure of metaphor, notwithstanding the wide variety of theoretical viewpoints and assertions regarding metaphor interpretation. It's regarded as a rhetorical device when one specific entity, which is called the target, is perceived in terms of another entity, which is known as the source. Therefore, processing a metaphor entails comprehending or experiencing the target from the perspective of the source. Accordingly, the structure refers to at least two domains, X and Y, that share a metaphorical association (as opposed to a literal analogy): *X is Y*, where one domain (X) functions as the target and the other (Y) is the source and serves as the vehicle. This comprehension and experience are the result of two processes: firstly, the source and target of the two entities must be respectively distinguished, and secondly, to determine whether characteristics of the source are intended or designed to map onto the target, correspondences between the entities that originate from two diverse domains must be identified. The second process is typically referred to as cross-domain mapping.

With the pioneering research of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors have been considered a conceptual phenomenon rather than a language one. Burke (1969, p. 503) articulates metaphors as "devices for seeing something in terms of something else". The simple framework of perceiving one entity through the lens of another, allowed researchers, notably in Lakoff and Johnson's studies, to advance metaphor terminology towards the "understanding and experiencing" processes (Lakoff, & Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

Through an exhaustive analysis, this article contributes to the fields of semiotics and linguistics by providing insights into the dynamic interplay between language, context, and social meaning. The forthcoming empirical analysis aims to further elucidate how cartoons fulfill distinct communicative functions and exhibit the application of specific metaphors that facilitate the mapping of complex political events into more familiar contexts, thereby enhancing our understanding of the power of visual rhetoric in political communication.

JOURNALISM. THEORY OF MEDIA

Materials and Methods

To determine an appropriate theoretical framework for investigating visual metaphors in political cartoons, this article will delve into the impact of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) on the field of metaphorical research. This theory has led to a shift in focus from verbal to conceptual aspects of analysis. Within the framework of the CMT, which Lakoff and Johnson developed, metaphor has been extensively studied in the past several decades by other academics like Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009, p. 19).

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory is based on several key principles. Metaphor is primarily viewed as a cognitive mechanism that involves understanding a domain of experience, known as the target domain, in terms of a more concrete domain, referred to as the source domain. A metaphor is essentially a mapping, or a fixed set of conceptual correspondences, between the source and target domains, where one or more features of the source are projected onto the target (Benczes, 2021; & Kövecses, 2020).

Crisp (1996, p. 79) suggests that the utilization of CMT in the analysis of editorial and political cartoons becomes more complex due to the presence of visual metaphors. These forms present theoretical challenges for scholars who argue that metaphors are purely conceptual in essence, as highlighted by Gleason (2009, p. 438). The author emphasizes how the unique and spontaneous nature of visual metaphors gives them a foundation that is inherently uncertain. Turner (1991, p. 14) addresses this by advocating a reading of visual metaphors in accordance with classic literary theories of metaphor by claiming that their ownership of distinct languages leverages regular linguistic similarities, resulting in unique mental processes. Although the CMT framework will be employed later in the next analysis, the author agrees with Gibbs' (2011, p. 543) argument that conceptual metaphors alone do not create the fullest interpretations of all metaphors, partly due to the lexical, grammatical, socio-cultural, and visual restrictions that dictate in metaphorical discourse.

To recapitulate, according to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor assumes a decisive role in cognition and language by shaping human experiences through cognitive mechanisms, organizing our thoughts and knowledge. Consequently, metaphors not only shape the way we think but also possess the ability to influence our perception of reality, impacting how individuals approach and understand specific topics.

Results and Discussion

In the following, this article provides several examples to demonstrate how the metaphoric structure "X is Y" is wielded in political cartoons to create vivid comparisons that convey deeper meanings or critiques. This metaphoric conceptualization enables cartoonists to depict complex issues in a simplified manner, making them more accessible and engaging for the audience. The source domain constitutes a conceptual realm that is both familiar and comprehensible

to the audience. Kövecses (2010, p. 18) contend that the optimal source domains are those that are distinctly defined and readily recognizable to audiences. Typically, it encompasses a concrete, tangible notion derived from quotidian experiences. The target domain refers to the conceptual realm that the cartoonist intends to analyze or critique. This domain is frequently characterized by its abstraction or complexity, rendering it less accessible to the audience.
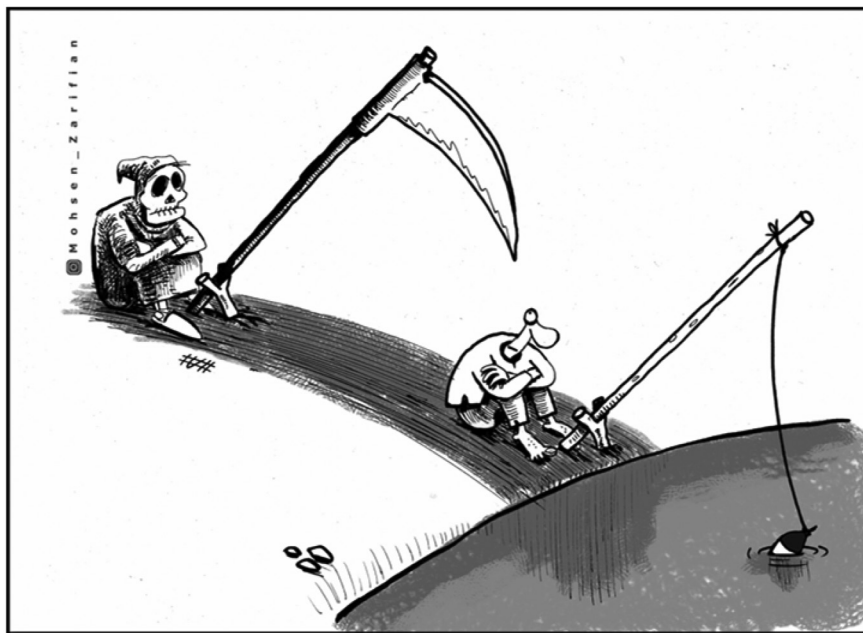

Figure 1. The concept of death is metaphorically depicted as a fisherman, while human is analogous to fish

Source: Cartoon by Mohsen Zarifian.

In a comprehensive approach, this study provides two tables that categorize prevalent source and target domains evident within the metaphoric conceptualization of political cartoons, accompanied by relevant examples that elucidate their application in this context[1]. Table 2 illustrates the extensive range of target domains accessible to visual creators in articulating psychological or mental conditions, social groups, dynamics, or processes, and individual experiences or occurrences to audiences, enabling such intangible abstract concepts to resonate with audience interpretation[2].

As an instance, in a cartoon representation of a politician as a juggler, the source domain is identified as juggling, which is a well-known and tangible concept, while the target domain pertains to politics, a more abstract notion. The

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[1] In the link below, table 1 presents a taxonomy of the dominant source domains in the metaphoric conceptualization of political cartoons and provides some illustrative examples. https://drive.google.com/file/d/13xcRuGxnX7ZtmRxTrkIwv8SAc3Mm3jw5/view?usp= sharing

[2] Table 2 in the provided link, presents a classification accompanied by illustrative examples of prevalent target domains in the metaphoric conceptualization of political cartoons. https:// drive.google.com/file/d/1AohA0TA_i5RXVaYjWnacJH5VviXohQgu/view?usp=sharing

idea that the politician is attempting to balance several conflicting interests or obligations, much like a juggling artist who balances several balls, is highlighted by the mapping between the two domains. Figure 1 shows that the abstract notion of death (utilizing symbolism and the technique of personification), wielding a large scythe, is portrayed as a fisherman attempting to catch or "reap" human soul, which is conceptualized as fish. The metaphorical expression can be articulated as *Grim reaper (death) is fisherman* and *Human is fish*.

Figure 2. Cross-domain mapping; characteristics of the source domain (fly and soar) are designed to map onto the target domain (prisoner)

Source: Cartoon by Mohsen Zarifian.

The mise-en-scène depicted in Figure 2 exemplifies another instance of the likeness between two apparently unlike entities and perceiving one through the lens of the other. By emblazoning two wings on the wall of a prison, the cartoonist establishes a metaphoric connection between the depicted prisoner as target domain and a bird as source domain. The metaphorical expression is encapsulated by the phrase *The prisoner is bird*. This conceptual relationship gives rise to new meanings, commentary, and novel, multi-layered interpretations, suggesting that the prisoner will ultimately break free from the walls, be released, and soar.

In another cartoon (Figure 3), Mohsen Zarifian utilizes the "reversal" technique of ideation, which presents the opposite of the conventional sequence, hierarchical structure, and chronological order of events. By replacing a human figure with clothing and depicting it suspended on a hanger, the cartoonist articulates the metaphor that the *Human is attire*, underscoring the notion that in contemporary society, fashion may hold greater significance than foundational principles or ethical standards, thereby accentuating the displacement of values.
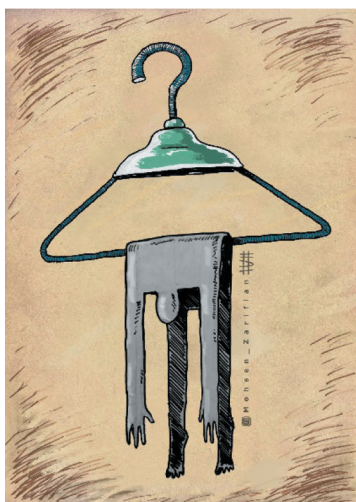
Figure 3. *Replacement* and *reversal* technique of ideation
Source: cartoon by Mohsen Zarifian.

Figure 4. Metaphoric coexistence of two contradictory entities
Source: cartoon by Mohsen Zarifian.

The article now explores the metaphoric interpretations of a cartoon depicting a tree with axes at the ends of its branches (Figure 4). The imagery evokes themes of tension between growth and destruction, the conflict between nature and humanity, and the duality of tools that can create or harm. The cartoonist articulates how this could reflect the idea that the products of our actions may be harmful and contradictory to their origins, prompting philosophical reflections on existence and progress. The metaphoric phrase is *Ax is fruit*, and in a deeper layer of interpretation, phrases are suggested to encapsulate these themes, such as *The fruit is a pest for the tree*, *Creation is a mirror that reflects unintended consequences, the result is a wolf disguised in the sheep's clothing of progress*, and *The creation is a double-edged sword*, emphasizing the complexity of intention and outcome in our creations.

According to Elisabeth El Refaie (2015, p. 9) (2003), people rely on their personal experiences of physical sensations and interactions to understand abstract and intangible concepts. This process of "embodiment" is crucial in creating meaning and is even fundamental to the way we use linguistic metaphors. In other words, our bodily experiences and sensory perceptions serve as a foundation for making sense of complex and abstract ideas. Kövecses (2010) suggests that by using such domains, image creators help viewers come close to the reality their metaphors are meant to represent. The simplistic depictions of this universe allow audiences to access areas of relevance when creating more abstract and sophisticated concepts. Nevertheless, the extent of synthesis achieved by the two domains may constrain the ultimate visual representation, referencing Laura Downing and Blanca Mujic's hypothesis that partial correspondences accentuate particular attributes of the source domain while obscuring those that do not align with the creator's focus and interest (2009, p. 63).

The conceptual nature of metaphor indicates that, in addition to language, images, sounds, and gestures may all trigger metaphors and serve as starting points for metaphoric conceptualization. The concept of the form is extended to "the mechanism or lens through which the topic is perceived" by Foss (2004, p. 299) in order to explain how visual metaphors are able to produce semantic links between topic and communicative vehicle. By combining "aphoristic and judgmental" visuals or text, political cartoon metaphors can be concurrently multi-modal, according to Dominguez (2015, p. 435). Bounegru and Forceville took a more radical approach, subdividing the form into mono and multi-modal forms depending on the topic's relationship to the associated communicative vehicle. Metaphors can be thought of as being mono-modal by projecting their concepts into the visuals of the cartoon; both the topic and the vehicle are "predominantly cued in the visual mode" (Bounegru, & Forceville, 2011, p. 212). Bounegru and Forceville's sub-division of metaphor will boost reader comprehension of the form's informative capacity in reinforcing knowledge and opinion, in tandem with its ability to engage uninformed audiences through creative expressions delivered via covert, persuasive methods.

At this juncture, the discussion focuses on laying the cognitive and linguistic groundwork for understanding the use of metaphors in editorial cartoons. Echoing the views of Feldman and Narayanan (2004) and Forceville (2006), this approach considers form a rhetorical, flexible force that is beneficial to imagery and larger society. To characterize the predominant generic structure of metaphoric conceptualizations in cartoons, examine how visual metaphors are used to make a point stance or convey a point of view, and adopt a discourse pragmatic approach that emphasizes the communication objectives of cartoonists when choosing various metaphoric expressions, efforts will be made in these directions. By doing this, the forthcoming study and subsequent empirical analysis aim to elucidate how cartoons fulfill distinct communicative functions and to exhibit the application of specific metaphors that facilitate the mapping of complex political events into more familiar contexts. This process enables creators to depict the unfamiliar or concealed (target domains) through familiar and observable concepts as source domains (Reeves, 2005, p. 23—30).

The immediate social context, encompassing the aspects of life that typically center on notions such as gender, socioeconomic status, social class, occupation, education, and similar themes, can undoubtedly have a profound impact on metaphorical conceptualization (Kövecses 2020, p. 96). In view of this, the present paper advocates for a reconsideration and reevaluation of the contextual factors that influence metaphor usage and delve into how metaphors emerge in response to the unprecedented challenges posed by emergency situations, such as the pandemic, while analyzing their contextual and modal dimensions.

Having said that, some studies argue that metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but are deeply rooted in social and cultural contexts, which shape their meaning and effectiveness (Semino, 2021). Cartoonists creatively utilized metaphors to convey the absurdities and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As is observable in Table 2, political cartoons can offer metaphoric conceptualization like pandemic as a war, illustrating the virus as an invading army, with health officials portrayed as soldiers on the front lines, engaging in combat against the unseen enemy. These cartoons provided a relatable lens through which audiences could navigate the complexities of lockdowns and social distancing. They illustrated themes of isolation and uncertainty through imagery like empty streets and masked figures, using humor to cope with fear and anxiety (Seixas, 2021; Wang, 2021).

Scholars examine various metaphorical constructions deployed in public discourse regarding COVID-19, highlighting the role of context in how these metaphors shape public perception and behavior (Abdel-Raheem, 2021). Furthermore, this article underscores the complexity of the situation, noting that the choice of metaphor can significantly influence the emotional and cognitive responses of individuals and communities. It is imperative to acknowledge that comprehending these dimensions may deepen our understanding of the mechanisms by which metaphors contribute to the construction of societal narratives in times of crisis.

Political cartoons serve as a powerful medium for articulating complex political sentiments through visual metaphors. The prevalent source domains utilized in political cartoons provide a complex array of imagery that deepens the comprehension of political narratives, concerns, and issues. The taxonomy in Table 1 reveals dominant source domains such as *Everyday Life*, *Nature*, and *Abstract Concepts*, which facilitate a nuanced understanding of political dynamics. Drawing upon animals, machines, buildings, and journeys, cartoonists effectively create metaphors that resonate with the audience by linking familiar experiences to complex political phenomena. For instance, metaphors drawn from domestic life, such as a political figure depicted as a chef stirring a pot labeled "National Budget", illustrate the intricacies of financial management and personal gain in governance, serves to critique their ability to blend various fiscal ingredients without losing control, thus making abstract economic concepts more relatable. In a comparable manner, Utilizing the competitive nature of games and sports — portraying elections as races or boxing matches — highlights the antagonistic character of political contests, demonstrating the strategies, competitiveness, and risks inherent in the political arena.

Nature as a source domain delivers captivating pictures for depicting societal instability or disasters. By depicting issues like the refugee crisis as a flood or political controversies as storms, cartoonists highlight the widespread and chaotic nature of these events, capturing the urgency and emotional weight behind them. Similarly, metaphors involving animals allow for the characterization of nations and their leaders, imbuing abstract political entities with personality traits that reflect their perceived global roles and behaviors, such as representing the USA as a bold eagle, representing freedom and courage, or Russia as a bear, symbolizing its power.

The use of machines as a source domain adds another layer of meaning, illustrating governance as a large, malfunctioning system that emphasizes

bureaucracy's challenges. By depicting politicians as robots, cartoonists can critique the perceived lack of empathy and emotional connection within political systems. Furthermore, metaphors involving buildings imply the structural integrity — or lack thereof — of political apparatus, with cartoons like a house of cards symbolizing instability and vulnerability, while bridge-building metaphors carry connotations of dialogue, cooperation, and reconciliation.

This study expounds that in the realm of political cartoons, the utilization of target domains serves as vital frameworks for encapsulating complex societal issues into visually vivid and memorable images. Each target domain highlights a specific area of concern, allowing cartoonists to engage with audiences by drawing striking analogies between abstract ideas (target domains) and familiar concepts (source domains). Table 2 expands on this analysis by categorizing the prevalent target domains in political cartoons, revealing how politicians can be portrayed in various roles, including as puppets controlled by external forces or as professionals like chefs or doctors who are responsible for societal well-being.

Depicting politicians through various occupations, such as chefs or doctors, not only serves to humanize them but also critiques their roles and responsibilities in addressing societal problems like public policy and public health. For instance, the portrayal of politicians as animals (technique of zoomorphism) grants cartoonists a superiority stance and the power to degrade the depicted person and harshly criticize. Also, cartoonists might draw politicians as jugglers to critique their behaviors and decisions, while metaphors related to economics and social issues highlight the complexities of governance and societal challenges. Likewise, portraying political figures as puppets accentuates themes of agency and manipulation, implicitly criticizing the hidden forces that manipulate and exert control over decision-makers. This framing facilitates critical commentary on their effectiveness and accountability.

It is important to stress that the interplay between source and target domains in political cartoons not only enriches public discourse but also invites audiences to uncover underlying meanings and assumptions, as well as to distinguish the power dynamics among various social groups, political figures, and institutions. Furthermore, it encourages the analysis of the dominant ideologies that are being promoted or challenged. By means of this intricate web of metaphors, political cartoonists shed light on the complexities of political life, fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in governance and society. The effectiveness of this medium lies in its ability to provoke thought, inspire dialogue, and critique authority while remaining accessible to a broad audience.

Conclusion

By exploring the evolution of metaphor, this article demonstrated how the form has been developed a simplistic comparison presupposition into an intensive, modern language that can be effectively used in both verbal and visual contexts. In outlining the functions and rationale of metaphor, as a replacement

for "seeing something in terms of something else", discussions endeavored to prove that could be regarded as "bringing together the whole of one thing with the whole of another, so that each is looked at in a different light". Such objectives are accomplished via conceptual mappings of the source and target domains, and the resulting object, which in this paper is the focus of the cartoon, signifies a variety of cognitive pathways carried within each domain in conjunction with the metaphorical orientation supported by the metaphor builder.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that metaphors assume a decisive role in political cartoons as a sophisticated mechanism for conveying complex socio-political messages. The study also demonstrated how the explanatory power of a CMT-driven framework aids in identifying the broadest range of conceptual pathways available to and employed by cartoonists. This theoretical framework facilitates a closer examination of the non-verbal motivating factors that underlie cartoon metaphors. By employing Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a guiding framework, this research contributes to the discourse on visual metaphor analysis, highlighting the dynamic interplay between humor, critique, and cognition in cartoons, which serve to critique societal conflicts and political realities. The conceptual mapping between source and target domains serves as a fundamental process through which cartoonists communicate nuanced ideas, allowing audiences to grasp abstract concepts through familiar and tangible representations.

A significant contribution of this study is the detailed categorization presented in two tables. The first table outlines dominant source domains, while the second identifies prevalent target domains, providing illustrative examples that demonstrate how the metaphoric structure "X is Y" is employed to create vivid comparisons and convey deeper meanings. The introduction of metaphoric domains in two comprehensive tables enriches our analytical endeavors, illustrating how structured mappings facilitate the audience's understanding of intricate issues.

Framing political actors and movements as journeys taps into the narrative of progress and overcoming obstacles, inviting audience empathy for the challenges faced by politicians and constituents alike. Together, these diverse source domains enrich the metaphoric landscape of political cartoons, enabling audiences to engage with intricate political issues in a more tangible and accessible manner. By means of these striking depictions, cartoonists formulate persuasive analyses and reflections that mirror and shape societal attitudes and discussions. Overall, the diverse target domains leveraged in political cartoons allow for multi-layered commentary, making complex topics more digestible and prompting critical thinking among the audience.

Ultimately, the intricate interplay of visual and verbal elements in political cartoons serves as a testament to the enduring significance of metaphors in shaping public opinion and fostering engagement with socio-political issues. Through this exploration, we gain valuable insights into how political cartoons not only reflect but also shape the socio-political landscape, making them an indispensable component of contemporary discourse.

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