Political humor on TikTok

A mixed method approach to the use of humor by creators during the Dutch parliamentary elections

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ABSTRACT

Dutch political party leaders are Minecraft players, rappers, or simply silly, unserious individuals. At least, that is how they are represented in satirical sketches, lip syncing parodies, or memes. TikTok has increasingly become a creative outlet for creators to engage with politics. The platform has become one of the largest social media platforms, firmly embedding itself in the lives of Dutch citizens. TikTok becomes a groundbreaking stage where political conversations not only happen but also get embellished with a sparkle of humor. Given TikTok's sociocultural impact and its growing role in shaping political narratives, understanding how TikTok creators navigate the political landscape is crucial. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the research question: 'How do TikTok-creators use humor in videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023?'

Given that the platform is relatively new, yet has rapidly become one of the primary means for youth political engagement, this research is among the initial studies in this area. This study investigates: (1) the combinations of humor types and styles primarily found in TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch 2023 parliamentary elections, including the meaning-making styles and modes of engagement employed in them; (2) the use of humor types and attitudes towards the message or topic in these videos; and (3) the use of visual, audio, and editing elements to convey humor. This is accomplished through a mixed-methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 127 videos collected between two months before and one month after election day, November 22, 2023.

The analysis yields three main findings. Firstly, the predominant humor types in the sample are 'exaggeration' and 'silliness.' Secondly, 80.4% of all posts contain a referential message. Thirdly, political humor videos during the period of the Dutch 2023 elections consist of an almost even distribution of virals and memes, each with its own distinctive characteristics, that are enhanced by the use of audio, visual and editing elements. TikTok thus emerges as a platform where a broad spectrum of possibilities coexist: a blend of silly nonsense and a significant role in the media landscape as a space for substantive political discourse.

KEYWORDS: *political humor, user generated content, humor types, Dutch politics, TikTok*

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1. Introduction

Dutch political party leaders are Minecraft players, rappers, or simply silly, unserious individuals. At least, that is how they are represented in satirical sketches, lip syncing parodies, or memes. TikTok has increasingly become a creative outlet for creators to engage with politics. With approximately 6 million users in the Netherlands (TikTok, 2023), the platform has become one of the largest social media platforms, firmly embedding itself in the lives of Dutch citizens. Despite the perception among non-users that TikTok's sudden involvement in political expression signifies a collective political identity on the platform, political expression on TikTok is diverse and multifaceted (Herrman, 2020, para. 3-4).

Baumgartner (2022) highlights the persuasive power of political humor in shaping individuals' political views and engagement. Studies discussed by Baumgartner suggest that exposure to political humor, such as cartoons and satire, can influence perceptions of political figures and candidates, potentially impacting evaluations of politicians and attitudes. It has also been found to affect viewer engagement, efficacy regarding politics and audience attitudes towards governmental initiatives. More specifically for political satire on television, it influences the level of political cynicism, individuals' political knowledge, individuals' beliefs in their ability to understand and have an influence on politics, and intention to vote (Rill & Cardiel, 2013, p. 1742). This underscores the influential role of political humor in shaping public opinion and attitudes toward politics.

In a similar vein, Matthes and Rauchfleisch (2013) argue that humor on late-night television can influence perceptions of politicians (p. 608). It is a phenomenon often termed the "Tina Fey Effect" (ibid.; Esralew & Young, 2012; Young, 2011). Tina Fey, a renowned comedian, gained widespread recognition for her depiction of former Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin in a series of sketches aired on Saturday Night Live. Matthes and Rauchfleisch (2013) found that exposure to a televised political parody can decrease competence ratings of the politician portrayed (p. 608, 611). Additionally, audiences do not only assess politicians more negatively after seeing sketches like these, but in the case of the satirical portrayal of Sarah Palin it has been found that traditional news media took on the traits acted out by Tina Fey as Sarah Palin's own traits, and they formed the grounds on which she was commented on for her performance (Ödmark, 2021, p. 52). Political parody, in this case, can affect even traditional journalism, which is conventionally expected to maintain a high degree of veracity. Moreover, during the coverage of Sarah Palin's campaign, the media portrayed her and Tina Fey as rivals, constantly comparing them and emphasizing a "strategically framed psychological drama between the candidate and the comedian" (Young, 2011, p. 252). The coverage was hyper-personalized and combined entertainment with news to engage audiences. This demonstrates the breadth of influence wielded by political humor, exemplified in such sketches.

Furthermore, SNL sketches about David Paterson, New York's first blind and African American governor, shed light on the nuanced impact of political humor. Becker and Haller (2014) investigate the impacts hostile humor directed at Paterson by his impersonator as well as Paterson's own self-directed performance on SNL. Paterson was impersonated multiple episodes by Fred Armisen, and Paterson himself joined the SNL sketch for one episode. Disability advocates and media outlets feared that SNL's negative portrayal of Paterson could perpetuate stereotypes about disabilities and impact public perceptions (p. 41). The study shows different types of humor can shape public attitudes towards individuals in the political sphere. This shows the potential of political humor to both humanize and stereotype political figures, depending on how it is conveyed.

Moreover, user-generated content also influences decisions, ranging from relatively trivial choices such as selecting restaurants based on Yelp reviews to more consequential political decisions shaped by posts on platforms like Facebook (Luca, 2015, p. 563). This trend reflects a contemporary phenomenon where individuals increasingly turn to social media for political engagement, particularly adolescents (Ekström & Shehata, 2018, p. 740). Importantly, this does not necessarily denote a negative development. Contrarily, Loader and colleagues (2014) argue that these individuals should not be characterized as politically apathetic; rather, they are referred to as 'networked young citizens' (p. 143).

1.1 Research question

As politics transforms, so too does the way we engage with it. TikTok becomes a groundbreaking stage where political conversations not only happen but also get embellished with a sparkle of humor. Given TikTok's sociocultural impact and its growing role in shaping political narratives, understanding how TikTok creators navigate the political landscape is crucial. In order for researchers to explore the significance of TikTok in shaping contemporary political dialogue, it is first essential to know how it is used to highlight politics in a humorous way. This brings me to the following research question: 'How do TikTok-creators use humor in videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023?'

This research illuminates how the interplay between politics and humor contributes to shaping digital culture on TikTok. By analyzing the different uses of humor in TikTok videos and their visual, audio, and creative effects, the study reveals the ways humor is created and delivered, enhancing our understanding of the role of media features — particularly those of TikTok — in engaging audiences and creating comedic effects.

Humorous narratives are widely shared and remixed on platforms like TikTok, making them seem ubiquitous. This highlights the importance of understanding how such narratives contribute to

participatory media. This study seeks to explore participatory media, by analyzing TikTok videos which are social content shaping culture and public discourse.

1.2 Societal relevance

Medina Serrano and colleagues (2020, p. 264) describe that political communication on TikTok is dynamic and interactive. They show how users create a participatory environment where messages interconnect (p. 261). This is especially important since more and more people become part of this group of 'networked young citizens' and platforms such as TikTok become the place for the youth to be politically active, for instance to stand up for global causes, such as to stand in solidarity with Palestinians (Abbas et al., 2022, p. 287). Moreover, as Azman and colleagues (2021) state, especially since COVID-19, TikTok has emerged as a platform people go to for knowledge-videos as well (p. 19). The rapid speed with which TikTok grows as a platform for political discourse and the increase of people using the platform for information gathering, underscores the necessity for studies like this one to understand the content of the user generated videos on TikTok.

The findings of this study contribute to the broader understanding of digital cultures and the ways in which TikTok and humorous elements are used to create meaning. Understanding the use of humor in TikTok videos provides valuable insights into reaching and engaging audiences. This is particularly relevant as political parties and organizations increasingly use TikTok to connect with the public under their official accounts.

1.3 Academic relevance

For researchers, especially political scientists and sociologists, this study offers a piece of research bridging the fields of political communication and sociology by exploring how humor is used by creators in political contexts.

Humor has been a topic of philosophical study for decades, spanning from Aristotle's exploration of the value of laughter and humor and Plato's writing about the objectionability of it, to a contemporary widespread embrace of humor (Morreall, 2012). Likewise, psychology has extensively examined humor, particularly in exploring its effectiveness and its relationship with emotional health (Ruch & Raskin, 2008, pp. 18-19), and anthropology has addressed humor within diverse social and religious practices and traditions, recognizing its embedded nature (Oring, 2008, p. 183). But although humor has extensively been explored across these fields of study, it is, according to Zijderveld (1983a), the field of sociology that is also uniquely equipped to comprehend humor (p. 3). Sociologists scrutinize the nuances of daily life – routines, actions, ideas, and emotions we generally take for granted – much like humor does. Both sociology and humor serve as mirrors reflecting social contexts. In doing so, sociologists look for 'ideal types', overdrawn representations of

how humans are and do things, as a methodological tool. Similarly, humor, through trivial means such as wit and joke, sheds light on 'typical' behavior (ibid., p. 4).

Political humor is equally enduring, with studies ranging from Aristophanes in ancient Greece to the late Roman Republic and up to contemporary times. Research has delved into the persuasive force of political humor and its social functions (Innocenti & Miller, 2016, pp. 366-385; Meyer, 2000, pp. 310-331). The focus on political humor becomes particularly relevant in contexts such as the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023 and certainly in contexts of changing social media landscapes.

1.4 Outline

This thesis' chapter structure will now be outlined. In the second chapter forms the theoretical framework, which is a review of all the literature relevant to the concepts of user generated content, political humor and user generated political humor. The third chapter is the method chapter, which provides an in-depth explanation of the research design and the data collection and processing strategies of the mixed-methods content analysis employed in this study. The fourth chapter presents the results and is structured according to three sub-questions supporting the research question. The fifth and final chapter presents the conclusion with the main findings, points of discussion and limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

To address the research question regarding the use of humor in political contexts by TikTok users during the period surrounding the Dutch parliamentary elections, it is essential first to establish a comprehensive understanding of several foundational concepts. This includes an examination of user-generated content, an exploration of the nature and sociological approaches to political humor, and a review of the existing literature on user-generated political humor, encompassing all elements involved in its creation. This chapter will proceed to cover these topics in that order.

2.1 User-generated content

In the media landscape, user-generated content is referenced (1) by a degree of personal contribution, meaning users themselves contribute the content; (2) by being published and accessible to the public or a group; and (3) by not being created by professionals or through professional routines (Naab & Sehl, 2017, p. 1258). This can thus include comments on online articles or blogs, user-generated Wikipedia information, or online restaurant reviews. But we also see it more and more in user-generated short-form videos. TikTok is such a user-generated content-based platform and is characterized by a heightened emphasis on interactivity compared to many other social media platforms (Medina Serrano et al., 2020, p. 264). The platform is oriented towards humorous, creative, and interactive content, and facilitates this through various components, such as options for sharing and reusing sounds, applying filters, engaging in duets with other users, adding friends and sending them messages, and enabling live streaming with audience participation (Sánchez-Querubín et al., 2023, p. 191; 197; Anderson, 2020, pp. 7-12). Particularly, the platform is known for its focus on short-form videos, initially capped at 60 seconds, but recently expanded that range for users to ten minutes and with photo slideshows comprising multiple still images. TikTok even started testing with 60-minute long videos to a select group (Malik, 2024, para. 1).

It situates itself within a broad landscape of other platforms also characterized by user-generated content, such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Reddit. However, what is likely to be considered the primary platform similar to and preceding TikTok is Vine (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1873), a platform that was discontinued in 2017 but contributed a large number of memorable and iconic videos to the internet. These user-generated videos frequently referenced well-known cultural moments, or quotes or scenes from television shows or movies (ibid.) and primarily did this through humor, such as a joke, a (dance) move, a funny skit, or other means (Yarosh et al., 2016, p. 1432). Lasting no more than six seconds, the purpose of these micro-videos was for them to be highly spreadable and shareable (Guo et al., 2023, p. 32194). Viewers were enabled and encouraged to watch the videos repeatedly, because they continue looping (Attardo,

2023, p. 197). Numerous viral Vines that were also often parodied, transitioned into what we know as 'Internet memes'.

When talking about user-generated content, memes cannot be ignored. Memes have become an inevitable aspect of digital culture, encompassing various types of content that disseminates among users while simultaneously undergoing changes (Börzsei, 2013, p. 2). They are frequently characterized by being entertaining, multimodal, and simplistic (p. 5). In her book *Memes in Digital Culture*, Limor Shifman (2013) employs the definition of an Internet meme as "(a) a *group of digital items sharing common characteristics* of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created *with awareness of each other*; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed *via the Internet by many users*." (p. 8; Shifman's own italics). These digital items can thus be still images, potentially accompanied by text, or it may be audiovisual content like animations and short videos.

However, a distinction exists between mere viral content and memes. A viral refers to a self-contained cultural unit (e.g., a video, image, or joke) that is frequently replicated and disseminated in its original form, whereas an Internet meme invariably constitutes a collection of texts (Shifman, 2013, p. 56). Shifman highlights two potential misconceptions regarding the concepts of Internet memes and virals. The first point she raises is that these two concepts should not be seen as dichotomous; rather, they should be perceived as two ends of a spectrum upon which content can be found (p. 58). It is, for instance, quite plausible that a viral video may be copied and altered during its dissemination, and that, when coupled with the derivatives stemming from the viral video, the resulting collection of content will form an Internet meme. A viral video on its own may only represent a part of a meme. As the distinction between Internet memes and virals thus appears to be more nuanced, Shifman suggests a threefold classification (ibid.). Firstly, there is the *viral*, a singular unit of content (that can have derivatives) that is widely circulated. Secondly, the types of Internet memes could be further subdivided to include the *founder-based meme*. This type of meme is initiated by a particular textual, visual or audiovisual element, giving rise to multiple adaptations that make use of the 'founding' unit, but are not likely to surpass the popularity of it. Thirdly, there is the *egalitarian meme*; a meme characterized by various versions sharing the same content idea, or a certain formula, all spreading widely almost simultaneously, without such a distinct founding unit. To create and understand Internet memes one thus also needs to be what Milner (2012) calls 'meme literate' (p. 95). To engage with this type of content online, we no longer need merely digital literacy, but also subcultural literacy: being able to understand the social language of subcultural insiders (p. 107). The social context in which a unit of content is situated is often crucial for understanding the reference and/or the joke.

The second potential misconception Shifman addresses is that internet memes and virals are often described with active and passive formulations respectively, but, she argues, these descriptions

are inaccurate as both do involve engaged communication from users, albeit in different forms (2013, p. 59). While internet memes involve the adaptation of content, virals are also widely shared and added on by users with for instance meta-comments, including textual additions such as "Don't try this at home", while playing the original viral video (p. 60). Thus, virals and Internet memes should be perceived as different modes of engagement.

Regardless of the specific mode of engagement, user-generated content creates a participatory culture. Whereas the traditional media work according a 'filter-then-publish' type of production, user-generated content enables a 'publish-then-filter' model of participatory media, in which content is created and filtered through trial and error by users themselves, as these open systems "enable their participants to fail like crazy, building on the successes as they go" (Shirky, 2008, p. 246, as cited in Milner, 2012, p. 21). User-generated content enables greater reach, allowing messages to reach new audiences. It promotes more interaction between media companies and their audiences (Naab & Sehl, 2017, p. 1265), facilitating improved communication, expression and an amplified voice for both through textual, audio, visual and animated formats (p. 1269; Milner, 2013, p. 2388). In 2006, the magazine *TIME* chose 'You' as the person of the year, emphasizing the possibility for any normal person to engage in this participatory practice by updating their social media status or uploading a video on YouTube, would shift the public voice and lead to "an explosion of productivity and innovation" (Grossman, 2006, para. 7).

User-generated content has thus not only become a means of communication for creative content but also makes space for social and political expression. As we look into the nature of this content on TikTok, we must look into one of the ways such expression frequently takes shape: political humor.

2.2 Political humor

2.2.1 Defining political humor

In order to examine the use of political humor in such user-generated content, it is first necessary to delineate the essence of political humor and where it is commonly found. Humor refers to a variety of phenomena associated with amusement, laughter, wit, mockery, satire, and other good-spirited, or at times, malicious practices of mocking or playing with meanings, practices, and norms (Kuipers, 2008, pp. 374-375; Zijderveld, 1983b, p. 7). Humor is defined in various ways, as it is shaped by social contexts and it serves different purposes depending on the situation. In the realm of political communication, humor can serve pivotal roles. It can elevate the visibility and memorability of political messages, criticize, or ridicule political opponents, or facilitate the expression of critical perspectives or dissenting voices in political discourse (Kuipers, 2008, p. 375). As Kuiper states, in open societies, political organizations and social movements can strategically employ humor to

convey messages effectively, sometimes compelling politicians to address humorously raised topics with seriousness. In certain conditions, political conflicts are performed and dramatized in the realm of humor, integrating humor into the political landscape to highlight social divisions and disagreements (ibid.)

2.2.2 Political humor in contemporary media

Videos with political humor have attained widespread prevalence within contemporary media, spanning various platforms and influencing public discourse. One prevalent type is televised satire, seen in shows like *Saturday Night Live* (SNL). This form of political humor has enjoyed a longstanding tradition and is thus characterized by distinct variations among shows as well, with the more recent ones such as The Daily Show with John Stewart and The Colbert Report leading to different viewer experiences than the more traditional ones such as The Late Show and The Tonight Show (Rill & Cardiel, p. 1741). Unlike traditional late-night talk shows, these newer programs adopt a critical stance, using humor to examine political actions closely. They use parody and satire to invite their audience to critically examine and evaluate political issues. These shows tend to be more explicitly and primarily political compared to traditional late-night comedy shows, which often focus on personal traits of public figures (Hoffman & Young, 2011, p. 160). These differences in form, content, and audience may lead to different viewer experiences between more recent political satire TV shows and traditional ones.

2.2.3 Theories of humor in the social sciences

In her work 'The sociology of humor', Giselinde Kuipers describes the various theorizations of humor within the social sciences (2008, p. 368). Various scholarly approaches offer lenses through which humor is understood. For instance, adherents of a phenomenological approach perceive humor as a tool through which we interpret and construct social reality. As Zijderveld contends, humor involves playing with meanings: it tells us a distorted version of reality, but with that it gives us insights into that reality, enabling us to challenge established ideas about it (1983b, p. 7; Kuipers, 2008, p. 380). There are, however, also scholars that take on a functionalist approach to humor. They argue for the social function(s) that humor has. Kuipers identifies three: relief, control, and cohesion. Relief pertains to humor's ability to relieve tension in possibly strained interpersonal relationships, thus preserving social order (p. 369). Control refers to humor's role as a mechanism for social correction: joking and laughing highlights what deviates from societal norms, thus also controlling a social order (ibid.). Lastly, the cohesion function of humor involves creating or fostering solidarity, shared experiences and group identity (p. 370). Other scholars adhere to some form of incongruity theory for having the best potential to explain the concept of humor. According to this theory, humor

arises from the perception or identification of incongruity, wherein there is a breach of expectations or an introduction of surprise that creates a sense of contradiction or illogicality (Kuipers, 2008, p. 367). Within the realm of sociology, incongruity theory has been employed to understand how cultural and social factors shape what we find funny and how we learn to see these things as funny, but also how incongruities and their capacity for humor enable specific social functions (ibid.).

Hmielowski and colleagues (2011) take on these three functions from the functionalist approach Kuipers identified, as well as the incongruity approach, leading to their identification of four potential dimensions regarding an individual's affinity for *political* humor (pp. 101-102). They use it to explain the ways in which people may vary in their appreciation of such material. First, they note how incongruity serves as a common focal point in political humor. Appreciating incongruities necessitates an understanding of societal norms; particularly for comprehending political jokes this is crucial (p. 101). Incongruities and their potential for humor are also elucidate why aforementioned late-night shows and humor as used by, for instance, stand-up comedians are often perceived as funny by many individuals, as they frequently address socio-political inconsistencies through satire and irony (ibid.; Mohamed & Bnini, 2020, p. 27). Second, the control function is identified as the superiority dimension of an individual's affinity for political humor (Hmielowski et al., 2011, p. 101). Hmielowski and colleagues too describe how laughing at others (rather than *with* others) serves as a mechanism for pointing out others' wrongdoings. This is a common reason why individuals find political jokes humorous; when a political party they oppose or their supporters are ridiculed, they may find validation and solidarity in their own political affiliations or convictions or beliefs (ibid.).

Third, the relief function, as outlined by Kuipers, corresponds to what Hmielowski and colleagues call the anxiety dimension of political humor (ibid.). In this regard, humor serves as a tool for relieving or reducing anxiety in situations that may induce it, a phenomenon frequently observed in political humor due to the inherent tensions within politics. For instance, during election campaigns, individuals may experience anxiety stemming from challenges in understanding or engaging with political processes, anxiety regarding the "controversial, competitive, and sometimes taboo world of politics", or anxiety simply about the outcomes (Becker, 2016, p. 431). Political humor can thus serve as a coping mechanism in such scenarios. This demonstrates how humor can also serve psychological functions alongside social ones (Kuipers, 2008, p. 371). The fourth and final dimension set out by Hmielowski and colleagues (2011) is the social function of political humor for connecting with others, resembling Kuipers' cohesion function. Besides finding common ground in ridiculing others, humor can also strengthen social cohesion in the emphasis on shared political ideologies.

Hmielowski and colleagues (2011) use the four dimensions of affinity - incongruity, superiority or control, relief of anxiety, and cohesion - for political humor as potential factors in

predicting the consumption of political TV satire. However, these dimensions of affinity are relevant not only to humor consumption but also to its production. Comedians, authors, or other humor producers can intentionally use humor to achieve these dimensions in their work (Kuipers, 2008, p. 370). In addition to these functionalist and incongruity explanations of humor, there are other theories of humor, such as the conflict approach, that are subject to debate. This perspective suggests that humor frequently emerges during times of conflict or tension, functioning as a means to articulate social tensions (p. 372). In political discourse, humor is seen as a mechanism in addressing conflicts and debates. Political humor expresses social tensions, questions established norms, or criticizes authority in political debates (p. 375). However, critics argue that this approach misses the multifaceted nature of humor and overlooks its inherent ambiguity, allowing jokes to be interpreted in multiple ways (p. 377).

Political humor is thus constantly evolving, and scholars are continuously developing new perspectives on it, often stemming from general overarching theories (p. 393). Many studies also highlight the various aspects that together can explain humor: society can be influenced both by the cohesion function of humor, but also by the expression of conflict or the inciting of resistance aspect to humor. And these dimensions of humor may lead to a variety of humor types and styles. From dark humor ridiculing politicians, political parties, and their supporters to more light-hearted humor that people with shared ideologies can bond over. There is no single comprehensive theory of political humor (yet).

2.3 User-generated political humor

The diverse dimensions of humor through which politics are addressed, are reflected in the wide range of content users create online. Numerous digital platforms such as social media, podcasts, and online forums have massively democratized the creation and dissemination of political humor. Memes, gifs, and viral videos serve as vehicles for political commentary and satire, generated by users to engage other users. TikTok has also emerged as an optimal platform for participating in memetic culture with diverse objectives, ranging from spotlighting China's treatment of Uighurs to using humor to criticize politicians' inadequate responses to addressing pressing issues like climate change (Matamoros-Fernández, 2023, p. 1). The political content found on TikTok deviates from conventional notions of political expression due to its tendency towards humor or cynicism, colorfulness, frequent exaggeration, and incorporation of popular culture references (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023, p. 2).

The content on TikTok can be seen as an extension of Shifman's Internet meme (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1876). As a group of digital items sharing common characteristics, being created with awareness of each other via the Internet by many users, memes on TikToks can serve a political role

and even expand the range of participatory options in democracies (Shifman, 2013, p. 8; p. 144). Political participation has evolved beyond quantifiable actions, such as voting or joining political organizations, as the Internet and digital media have allowed for more mundane practices of being politically involved (p. 120). Online participation now also includes sharing political ideas in posts or in comments to others' posts. This not only expands the range of practices for participating in the political process or debate, but also broadens the scope of audiences encouraged to engage in it, particularly making a difference for younger demographics (Shifman et al., 2007, p. 467).

As Shifman (2013) argues, these Internet political memes have three interconnected functions: (1) persuasion and political advocacy; (2) coordinated action; and (3) modes of expression and public discussion (pp. 122-123), although viral videos also have the potential for political impact. Virality enables persuasion; people care what the people around them think about politics (p. 124). Political memes also empower citizens, not only because the Internet allows for easier communication and thus collective action, but also because social networks foster robust social ties, to the point that ordinary individuals are enabled to form collectives resembling established organizations. These collectives often come with general slogans that each individual personalizes, with memes serving as a bridge between the personal and the political, a phenomenon Shifman refers to as 'networked individualism' (pp. 128-129).

A striking example of this is the Occupy Wall Street Movement in 2011, characterized by the slogan 'We are the 99%' (i.e., the 99% of the ordinary citizenry opposite the 1% of unfairly rich people). Protesters voiced outrage over America's imbalanced distribution of wealth and opportunity (Anderson, 2021, para. 1). Online humor played a pivotal role in disseminating messages and coordinating actions through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, reddit, and Tumblr (Milner, 2013, p. 2357; p. 2362). Memes, particularly image memes, were employed to critique police actions, highlight political inconsistencies, and challenge the authority of official political discourse (pp. 2365-2366). The humor used was predominantly satirical and critical in nature and made use of popular culture references, contributing to an active, polyvocal public discourse (pp. 2360-2361; p. 2372). Discussions of politics increasingly go hand in hand with popular culture in memes, as a way for finding answers to societal issues (Börzsei, 2013, p. 23). As Milner (2012) writes: "political commentary in meme subcultures is a diverse mix of pop media intertextuality and politically charged interdiscursivity" (p. 254). In the case of Occupy Wall Street, pop culture references such as Jay-Z's lyrics or humorous reappropriations of Sesame Street characters joined the discourse.

And when image-based memes on the Internet humorously engage with politics, they often bear resemblance to the political cartoon or comics, even longer standing expressions of political humor (Börzsei, 2013, p. 18; pp. 22-23). Political cartoons are visual representations of political and societal discourse, typically characterized by exaggerated portrayals of politicians or other public

figures, commonly found in print media such as newspapers. These cartoons often employ humor, satire, and irony as rhetorical tools to convey messages about current events or societal dilemmas. Memes and political cartoons are both delivering social commentary through the use of humor, through which opinions are expressed, engagement is inspired and specific causes are advocated (p. 23). Comics are illustrated panels or strips telling stories. Like comics, memes use iconic imagery to depict events, a stylistic approach also seen in political cartoons. Comics have also more literally merged with Internet memes, as evidenced in examples such as the Rage Comics: funny stick figure comic strips that, with each panel, get more and more frustrated with everyday problems (Miltner, 2018, p. 414). The use of iconic visuals and humor in memes can be seen as an expansion of the communication style in comics, contributing to audiences' understanding and use of the visual language of humorous content (pp. 18-19).

However, besides memes, there are various other innovations or new 'genres' of humor that came with the Internet (Attardo, 2023, p. 49). The political cartoon, for instance, has evolved into webcomics, expanding beyond traditional strip formats or print media comics (p. 73). The Internet enables cartoons to reach niche audiences worldwide and allows for self-publishing. Additionally, short-form videos can also be seen as a key innovation associated with the Internet as well as with the smartphone, granting everyone access to cameras and a first-person camera view (p. 197). These short-form smartphone videos and their first-person camera view offer viewers a heightened sense of immersion, social presence, and entertainment (Wang, 2020, p. 7). Moreover, there are the compilation videos. America's Funniest Home Videos had already popularized this format, but with platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Vine, the reach of video compilations expanded and compilations became more organized around specific themes or topics, rather than being a random collection of funny videos. Video editing tools coupled with the ability to do quick searches on platforms like Google and YouTube has streamlined the creation of user-generated compilations (Attardo, 2023, p. 63). This trend is observable internationally, including in the U.S. 2020 presidential elections, where clips from audio-visual materials relating to the elections, such as fragments from televised press conferences, were extracted from their original context, compiled and remixed, resulting in humorous content (Sánchez-Querubín et al., 2023, pp. 195-196). Genres like these allow for various ways in which humorous political commentary or user-generated political humor can take shape.

2.3.1 Humor types and styles

Creators can employ a variety of strategies when using humor, approaching jokes in many different ways. There are numerous types and styles of humor that have been distinguished. Humor types refer to the different categories of techniques uses to create humor. Humor can be generated

through, for instance, exaggeration or sarcasm. Humor types thus describe the nature of the humorous content itself. Humor styles, on the other hand, refers to the style of communication that is used to convey the humor. This can be done through, for instance, mocking others or, on the contrary, by trying to get the audience to relate to the content of the joke.

One of the most elaborated typologies of humor types has been worked out by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004). They developed a typology of humor types in audiovisual media, by an already established, shorter typology based on one developed by Berger, with other existing literature on humor preferences and their own inductive analysis of humorous television commercials (p. 152). They identified a total of 41 different humor types, ranging from clownish behavior and peculiar faces and sounds to imitation and ridicule (pp. 153-154).

Different types of humor work most effectively with different types of media. Catanescu and Tom (2001) for example show that in advertising, silliness may be well received by the target audience, whereas sarcasm might offend the potential consumer (p. 94). In their article, they distinguish seven different types of humor: (1) comparison, meaning when two or more elements are put together to produce a humorous situation; (2) personification, when human characteristics are attributed to animals, plants and objects; (3) exaggeration, when overstating and magnifying something out of proportion; (4) pun, when using elements of language to create new meanings, which result in humor; (5) sarcasm, including blatant ironic responses or situations; (6) silliness, consisting of making funny faces to ludicrous situations; and (7) surprise, where humor arises from unexpected situations (p. 93). Some of these might be seen as categorizations of the humor techniques distinguished by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004, pp. 153-154). For example, their techniques 'clownish behavior', 'peculiar face', 'peculiar music', 'peculiar sound', and 'peculiar voice' could be categorized under Catanescu and Tom's (2001) type 'silliness'. These seven humor types were also taken on by Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015) in their analysis of the different styles and types of humor found in humorous memes on Facebook and their virality (p. 291). They additionally took on the four different humor styles as distinguished by Martin and colleagues (2003, pp. 52-54; Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 291): self-enhancing, affiliative, self-defeating, and aggressive humor.

In contrast to types, humor styles encompass the different uses and functions of humor in everyday life. These styles are categorized according to the process of the communication of the humorous act from the perspective of the humorist, the sender (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 290). The sender thus has a style of communicating their humor. For example, affiliative humor relies on witty banter and jokes to bring people together, while self-enhancing humor maintains a humorous perspective on life, finding humor in adversity. Aggressive humor involves making statements that may harm or alienate others, and self-defeating humor is rooted in self-

deprecating actions or statements to evoke laughter (p. 291). The results of Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong's study indicate that affiliative and aggressive humor styles dominate Facebook memes, yet the self-defeating humor style receives the highest average of likes and shares (p. 299). The humor types, on the other hand, provide a better understanding of the actual content of the humor. The typology of humor types was initially developed in the context of broadcast and print media (Catanescu & Tom, 2001, pp. 92-94), but it has since been adapted to other media formats, including social media and Internet memes (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 289; Razzaq et al., 2023, p. 685; Harlow et al., 2020 p. 1062). In these Facebook memes, the study found that sarcasm and silliness are the most used types of humor (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 300).

2.3.2 Humor mechanisms

Frequently, it is not merely the humor type itself that we find funny; the social context, the situation of the interaction, contributes to people's definitions of situations as humorous and funny (Zijderveld, 1983b, p. 25). Zijderveld gives the example of a sexual joke that has been widely circulated. The joke may not elicit much laughter, as it could be deemed inappropriate or no longer amusing, possibly appearing clichéd. However, if, for instance, a nun were to suddenly tell the joke, people might find it amusing. In addition to the relevance of who tells the joke, the situation is also crucial. Namely, if the nun were to tell the joke in the convent, it might not be as well received as it would outside of it.

Many studies thus also look for other mechanisms used in humorous content, which contribute to shaping the portrayal of humor. Katz and Shifman (2017), for instance, show that memes can often be distinguished as sensical or nonsensical (p. 829), each carrying a distinct type of meaning. Sensical memes are easily understood because of their 'referential meaning' (p. 830). Meaning is thus derived from reference to phenomena in the world, like social or political contexts. Examples could involve memes referencing icons from popular culture or offering commentary in such social or political contexts in a manner immediately recognizable for the audience. Nonsense lacks any such referential meaning. Nonsensical memes often no longer have a clear, direct, 'referential' statement about reality, often because unambiguous meanings have become more ambiguous because they are frequently shared and remixed (p. 828). Examples of nonsensical content are silliness in the use of language and speech - often creating new and creative (digital and memetic) dialect - or of one's body, or combining various incongruous textual and visual elements or interrupting conventional flows of messages to arouse surprise and to create new associations (pp. 830-837). However, a lack of referential meaning does not mean a lack of meaning altogether. Nonsensical videos, in fact, generate affective meaning, pertaining to the response elicited in the

audience prior to a clear conscious understanding of a message (p. 837). It often shows the connection to meme culture, which bonds digital communities, enhancing familiarity with cultural references (p. 838). Even political messages tend to dissipate, as political memes too increasingly lean towards nonsensical humor (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2022, p. 925), meaning that politics form the basis of the content, but the meme is focused more on, for example, the silly joke rather than a political message. However, a considerable amount of content also falls within the intersection of these two modes of meaning making, called 'play' or 'playful meaning making'. These cases are quite similar to what we usually understand as inside jokes (Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 827). Such content has a nonsensical essence yet also contains a referential message, comprehendible for those who are familiar with the digital culture and the nuanced layers of meaning inherent in memes, resulting from the remixed nature. As emphasized by Katz and Shifman, sharing content for fun does not necessarily imply that it is merely 'silly stuff'. Instead, it relieves the felt pressure to continuously generate new meaning (p. 839).

Besides looking at the manner in which meaning is conveyed by the maker, Nissenbaum and Shifman (2022) also investigate, for example, attitude, references to local contexts and aesthetic of production (p. 929). These humor mechanisms matter because they influence the ways audiences from different countries and cultures relate to global issues. Applying these to Internet users' online reactions to Donald Trump's election, Nissenbaum and Shifman found patterns in how people use humor to distance oneself from Trump (p. 935). By being negatively toned and satirically referencing Trump's aggressive immigration policies or his ideas about climate change, Internet users employ humor as a means of critique.

2.3.3 Visual features

The various aspects of humorous content on TikTok contribute to the storytelling capacity of the platform. By combining text, imagery, memes, and sounds, hyper-narrativity emerges and collective identities are created (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, p. 884). Visual humor is still underexplored, as most research focuses on verbal humor (Chandrasekaran et al., 2016, p. 4603; Loizou & Kyriakou, 2016, p. 102). However, visual signs might be one of the most important features in humorous content, as it is an element that transcends geographical boundaries and has the ability to resonate with people from diverse countries and cultures (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2022, p. 931). The humor in silliness, for instance, often relies mainly on the visual aspect of making funny faces or other body language (Catanescu & Tom, 2001, p. 93; Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 832). Similarly, gestures may constitute an entire joke (Norrick, 2004, p. 403). Furthermore, humorous mechanisms and types, such as exaggeration, contradiction and metaphor are commonly generated through both verbal and visual means (Tsakona, 2009, p. 1186). Exaggeration, for instance, may manifest through

overemphasizing certain physical traits of characters or situations. Visual cues can thus play a significant role in the narrative and shaping of humorous content.

2.3.4 Audio features

Audio is a significant feature of TikTok, where audio clips are referred to as 'Sounds'. While there is extensive literature on how, for instance, canned laughter in TV sitcoms and music and sound effects in comedies are influencers or indicators of humor (Bertero & Fung, 2016, pp. 5780-5784; Bore, 2011, pp. 24-34; Waddell & Bailey, 2019, p. 99), there is relatively little literature concerning the role of TikTok sounds as humor influencers or indicators. A TikTok sound may be self-generated by a user, it may be only the user's voice, or it can be a song. The sound also often originates from a quote in a film or series, such as *The Office*, or as can frequently be heard in Dutch TikToks, *Gooische Vrouwen*. They also frequently originate from other well-known political or cultural moments, which also includes sounds from videos from platforms like Vine.

The sound component within TikTok videos serves as a distinct element to the video that connects users to a network of people that have used the sound, which has the capacity for creating memetic competition (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1880). The sound groups all different videos while allowing for a great variety of iterations and mutations. Because the sounds are so easily shared, they encourage imitation and replicability. Users observe the possibilities presented and either mimic one another or infuse their own creative interpretations into the use of a particular sound. Because of the large network of videos featuring a particular sound, the contexts associated with that sound become more widely recognized, and stories are built and re-signified, and narratives and group identification are strengthened (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, pp. 885-886). New videos using the same sounds thereby contribute to and evoke the narrative associated with other videos that use the sound.

A song or other type of sound is therefore no longer solely something users can dance to or lip-sync with, but it also possesses the capability of three types of experiences through which music is understood: emotion, interaction, and usability (Feng et al., 2019, p. 3; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, p. 885). A sound can impact emotion, as it influences the attractiveness of dubbing the audio, which can also often be funny; it can enhance interaction, for instance, through the potential for imitation and liking; and the ease in switching between videos and editing powerful special effects are indicators of usability (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, p. 885).

Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2022, p. 897) also identified three aesthetic aspects of using sounds in TikToks, specifically in music challenges. The first is the frequently used syntagmatic aspect, where transitions and the use of filters and other effects is enhanced by the rhythm of the music. The second aspect is the kinetic mode, wherein the text of the audio is segmented to match a

specific image. Thus, whenever the meaning of the lyrics, for example, changes, so does the visual content. This effect was not often encountered. The third and last is the content mode, meaning that the content makes a direct reference to the audio used. These modes could extend beyond just music challenges (p. 902). The aesthetic aspects could also be applicable to humorous content, in which music or other sounds are used, to enhance the comedic effect of the message.

2.3.5 Creative effects and editing

The editing of videos is possible through cuts, transitions, special or visual effects, and animation, to enhance the visual presentation (Shrodes, 2021, p. 861). From cutting videos to splice them together into compilations, to incorporating animated or special effects, it is accessible to everyone through various free editing software and the capability to edit on nearly all smartphones (Attardo, 2023, p. 63). TikTok has their own options for editing videos. One of the most commonly used creative effects are the filters. These filters can be used by users to enhance the idea they aim to convey or the sound that they use (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, p. 890). Filters such as retro sepia colors are, for instance, used to enhance a 1950s mood in the video and switches between filters to the sound of the rhythm of the music are made to depict a changing scene, for instance from a calm to a club vibe. Together with the option of adding textual elements, stickers, and effects, such as personalized backgrounds resembling greenscreens and effects for smooth transitions, they form the most used editing options on TikTok (p. 892; Sánchez-Querubín et al., 2023, p. 191).

2.4 Conclusion

Having outlined the existing literature on user-generated political humor, the framework for formulating sub-questions is now established. To address the research question, this study aims to answer at least the following three sub-questions:

(1) What combinations of types and styles of humor are predominantly found in the TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023? What meaning making style and mode of engagement do such videos employ?

(2) How does the use of humor types and attitudes towards the message or topic in the video vary across different topics and politicians addressed in the TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023?

(3) How do TikTok creators use the visual, audio and editing elements to convey humor in the TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023?

3. Method

The research used a mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, to investigate how TikTok users employ humor in videos related to the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023. The reason for selecting this approach is rooted in the comprehensive nature of the research question, allowing both for the identification of patterns and a deeper interpretation and understanding of the relationships between various humorous aspects in videos and thus the way users employ the possibilities the platform offers to express ideas. The mixed methods approach allows for numerical data combined with more detailed, descriptive insights.

TikTok videos were chosen for collecting the data due to the platform's earlier described significant role in contemporary digital communication, especially among younger generations (Medina Serrano et al., 2020, pp. 261-264). As a popular medium for sharing ideas, TikTok is increasingly used to discuss political topics, often employing humor to engage viewers (Matamoros-Fernández, 2023, p. 1; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023, p. 2). Medina Serrano and colleagues (2020) characterize the politically engaged TikTok user as a "performer who externalizes personal political opinion via an audio-visual act, with political communication becoming a far more interactive experience than on YouTube or Instagram." (p. 264) This makes it an ideal context for studying the use of humor in relation to the Dutch parliamentary elections.

Content analysis was chosen to systematically examine and interpret the humor in TikTok videos. This allowed for both the quantification of recurring themes and patterns, such as common combinations of certain humor types with specific topics, and the exploration of exactly how users combine various elements through which humor is conveyed, such as visual cues, audio components, and textual aspects. Content analysis provides a structured approach to categorizing and analyzing this in a transparent and replicable way. The method is well-suited for examining how these elements of humor, which in the case of TikTok can be textual, visual and audio, lend themselves to convey messages.

The quantitative aspect of the analysis involved coding and quantifying different types and styles of humor, modes of meaning making, attitudes, aesthetics of production, modes of engagement, and modes of sound. This deductive approach, drawing upon existing literature on humor, allows for the comparison of findings with established frameworks, providing a clear insight into how humor is employed in this particular case on this particular platform. The qualitative aspect of the analysis focused on interpreting the meanings behind the choices for, for instance, sound and visual effects, providing a richer understanding of the users' strategies for creating a humorous effect.

3.1 Sample

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed, where only videos meeting predefined criteria were included. The selection of TikTok videos was guided by the criteria of reference to Dutch politics and of elements of humor. The sampling frame consisted of a list of TikTok videos identified through searches using relevant keywords (e.g., verkiezingen, politiek humor, tweedekamerverkiezingen). The videos were collected from a time frame of two months before to one month after election day November 22, 2023. The target population included all videos related to Dutch politics and posted during the Dutch parliamentary elections that featured humor. The sample size was determined based on the master's thesis methodological guide, which recommends analyzing between 90 and 150 minutes of video time to analyze. This range ensures that the sample is large enough to provide meaningful insights while being manageable for detailed analysis.

The final sample consists of 127 TikTok videos, with durations ranging from 5 seconds to 3 minutes and 36 seconds. This selection ensured a total of approximately 100 minutes of video content, meeting the recommended guidelines. This selection likely covers almost the entire field of relevant videos. Repeated searches and filtering ensured that the sample covered a comprehensive range of relevant videos, with new searches eventually leading back to previously identified videos, confirming the thoroughness of the sample. The approach thus led to a robust and representative sample, providing a solid foundation for the mixed methods analysis.

3.2 Data collection

The videos were collected manually. Since the collection was done from a private account, search options were managed, and personalized search was disabled to ensure that content appeared based solely on the search terms and not on personal app history. The carefully selected search queries used to identify relevant content included: 'verkiezingen', 'politieke meme', 'verkiezingsuitslag', 'peilingen', 'politiek', 'politieke parodie', 'verkiezingen meme', 'verkiezingen deepfake', 'verkiezingen nederland', 'verkiezingen2023', 'stemmen', 'politiek humor', 'tweedekamerverkiezingen', and 'politiek grappig'. These search terms were considered relevant and fitting by the author, with a sense of confirmation that the field was likely covered.

All videos posted within the specified time frame, characterized by humor and revolving around Dutch politics and the 2023 elections, or using images, videos, sounds, or imitations referencing politics or politicians, were stored in a secure place. The URL, screenshots of the stills (including the full caption), and the videos themselves were stored. However, the comment section and likes or frequencies of sharing were not taken into account in this study, as this data sample could be large enough to warrant a separate study.

Collection per search query ceased upon exhaustion of search results. Frequently, identical videos appeared across different search queries, in which case they were archived only once. The increasing overlap of videos indicates that a significant and substantial portion of the relevant video content in the field was likely covered. Some videos have since been removed, but by that time, all videos had been online for at least 4 to 7 months.

From an ethical perspective, this research ensured the privacy of the content creators. Usernames were never mentioned in the study, and only URLs were included in the dataset. This means that individuals who have made their accounts private or removed their content cannot be traced. Furthermore, given that this is a master's thesis, there was a deadline, and the posts had been online for at least four months, it was considered acceptable to analyze the stored videos even if they were later removed.

3.3 Data processing and analysis

The analysis began by examining all videos, during which the quantifiable variables were coded using Google Spreadsheets. Simultaneously, descriptions of the topics and popular culture references were written down. Successive readings of the data played an important role in the analysis. As new patterns or codes emerged, earlier videos were revisited to check for the presence of these patterns, ensuring consistency and thoroughness in the coding process. Any notable aspects of videos, such as editing styles or conceptual elements, were recorded for each video in notes. This ensured that the analysis remained open to new insights, apart from the already established categories the videos were evaluated on.

For the topics, the material was categorized at different stages using a combination of open, axial and selective coding. Initially, open coding was employed to identify the overall themes of the topic inherent to each video. Axial coding then identified the relationships between these themes. Finally, selective coding was used to extract the core themes that emerged from the data.

Several additional analysis strategies were employed, including comparing and contrasting videos. To implement these strategies and to further explore the various aspects of the videos, stills were printed out and consecutively grouped based on similarities in mode of engagement, humor type, or topic. This visual grouping helped answer the sub-question 'How do TikTok creators use the visual, audio, and editing elements to convey humor?' and identified notable patterns, contrasts, or exceptional cases. When a more thorough examination was required, the videos were revisited. The printed stills made the documentation of findings directly alongside them possible, making it easier to write down observations and insights. This method allowed for patterns or themes to be more readily identified: similarities between videos were visualized effectively by placing multiple stills next to each other in thematic groups.

3.4 Operationalization

In the analysis, multiple categories were coded, mostly deductively derived from literature. The analyzed categories are: humor type, humor style, meaning making, political figure, attitude, aesthetic of production, mode of engagement, popular culture references, and topic. Below, I will outline how the quantifiable variables and their corresponding codes were justified and derived.

3.4.1 Humor types and styles

To answer the first sub-question about the humor types and styles that are predominantly found in the TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023, it must be explained how the two variables were operationalized. The codes for humor type and humor style were taken on from literature. Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015) conducted an analysis of 1000 posts, examining the communication process of humorous memes on Facebook. The methodology used in the study involved quantitative and qualitative content analysis to identify the different styles and types of humor as well as their virality. The content analysis followed the descriptions of the seven types of humor. They also took on the four different humor styles as distinguished by Martin and colleagues (2003, pp. 52-54): self-enhancing, affiliative, self-defeating, and aggressive humor (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 294). Memes were analyzed according to schemes developed from the literature on the types and styles of humor by Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015, pp. 294-295). Given that this study also deals with the communication process of humorous content, these same typologies were adopted. In the coding process, operationalizations of the types and styles were slightly altered to fit the sample and additional humor types were added. The complete codes can be found in Table 1. The subsequent section will explain how existing coding frames were adapted in this research.

Table 1

Content analysis coding scheme

Humor type	Description
Comparison[a]	Putting two or more elements together to produce a humorous situation.
Exaggeration[a]	Overstating and magnifying something out of proportion.
Pun[a]	Using elements of language to create new meanings, which result in humor.
Sarcasm[a]	Including blatant ironic responses or situations.
Silliness[a]	Making funny faces to ludicrous situations, showing silly or clownish behavior, or using silly voices, sounds, or editing styles.
Surprise[a]	Humor arises from unexpected situations.
(Pointing out the) irony[b]	Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you're saying.
Satire[b]	Making a fool of or poking fun at well-known things, situations, or public figures.

Parody[b]	Imitating a style or a genre of literature or other media.
Malicious pleasure[b]	Taking pleasure in other people's misfortune; victim humor.
Imitation[b]	Mimicking or copying someone's appearance or movements.
Ridicule[b]	Making a fool of someone, verbally or nonverbally.
Repartee[b]	Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue.
Humor style	**Description**
Self-enhancing[c]	Maintaining a humorous perspective on life, finding humor in incongruities and adversity.
Affiliative[c]	Relying on witty banter and jokes to bring people together.
Self-defeating[c]	Is rooted in self-deprecating actions or statements to evoke laughter.
Aggressive[c]	Making statements that may harm or alienate others.

[a] Building on Catanescu and Tom's (2001, p. 93) and Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015, pp. 294-295)

[b] Building on Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004, pp. 153-154)

[c] Building on Martin and colleagues (2003, pp. 52-54) and Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015, p. 294)

For this sample, more codes were needed for humor type. In the process of coding, the initial seven types were deemed insufficient. There were videos that did not necessarily fit one of the seven types or were obviously another type of humor that *was* described by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004, pp. 153-154). During the coding process, these additional humor types were added on when encountered. Previous videos were subsequently revised, checking whether the added humor type occurred in an earlier video. Therefore, as the typology of humor techniques by Buijzen and Valkenburg already resembles some of the seven humor types - Catanescu and Tom's 'silliness', for instance, resembles Buijzen and Valkenburg's 'clownish behavior', 'peculiar face', 'peculiar music', 'peculiar sound', and 'peculiar voice' - additional humor techniques from their extensive list of 41 techniques were incorporated as humor types as well, including 'irony' (also often found as 'pointing out the irony' in the sample videos), 'satire', 'parody', 'malicious pleasure', 'imitation', 'ridicule', and 'repartee'.

As several types of peculiarity were observed similar to those techniques described by Buijzen and Valkenburg, the humor type 'silliness' has in this study thus been attributed with a broader definition, extending beyond merely Catanescu and Tom's "making funny faces to ludicrous situations''. Silliness also encompasses silly behavior, voices or the use of sounds and editing. As the humor type 'personification' from the typology by Catanescu and Tom (2001, p. 93) was not observed a single time in the sample, and additional humor types were adopted from (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, pp. 153-154), the analysis ultimately resulted in the thirteen identified codes, that can be found in Table 1.

To analyze humor styles, the definitions by Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015, p. 294) were adhered to. However, they constantly refer to the "creators of humour memes". Their description of a self-enhancing humor style is, for instance: "Creators of self-enhancing humour memes have a humorous outlook on life, to be amused by incongruities and maintain a humorous perspective in adversity." (ibid.) As the sample of this study also contains posts that are virals rather than memes, the humor styles were operationalized as though employed by *any* creator of humorous content, instead of merely creators of humor memes.

3.4.2 Meaning making styles

To analyze whether certain humor types more frequently either use a referential message or attempt to engage viewers by eliciting emotional responses, and to explore the combinations of humor styles and meaning making styles, it must be explained how the variable 'meaning making' was operationalized.

The variable 'meaning making' was analyzed based on the framework established by Katz and Shifman (2017), which identifies sensical, nonsensical, and playful ways of constructing an understanding of the meaning of the content within the viewer (pp. 828, 830, 838). Videos are labeled sensical when they possess a referential meaning. This implies that the meaning is derived from reference to phenomena in the world, like social or political contexts (p. 830). These types of videos are often funny because the references to the world or to politics are also understood by the viewer. This understanding allows the humor to resonate because the audience relates the content to familiar contexts. An example of a video in this sample receiving the code 'sensical' can be found in the full codebook (see Appendix A).

Nonsensical meaning engages the viewer through affective meaning. This type of content elicits an emotional response in the audience prior to a conscious understanding, often because unambiguous meanings have become more ambiguous when they are being so frequently shared and remixed (Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 828). According to Katz and Shifman, much of the nonsensical content is termed as such because it is difficult to discern what the content is attempting to convey about the world (p. 830). This may be because the content's primary goal is not to elicit a meaningful idea, but simply to amuse the audience. In this case, the viewer does not need an understanding of a reference to the world. An understanding of digital culture, however, could enhance a reaction in the viewer because of familiarity with other similar remixed content. An example of nonsense includes the use of silly language or phrases, often characterized by (intentional) mistakes or deviations from common language (p. 831). This type of communication often stands on its own, and their (humorous) intention is meant to be understood without interpreting a reference (p. 832).

Playful meaning making is understood as a crossroads of sensical and nonsensical meaning making, or of referential or affective meaning making respectively. Content falling into this category has a nonsensical essence yet also contains a referential message, comprehendible for those who are familiar with the digital culture and the nuanced layers of meaning (Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 838). A prime example exemplifying this concept can be found in the codebook (see Appendix A).

3.4.3 Modes of engagement

To clarify the nature of the videos that employ certain humor types, the first sub-question was supplemented with an analysis of the mode of engagement of each video. This approach reveals the actual content of a video: whether it is an adaptation of a widespread meme and thus uses a similar combination of humor type and style, or whether it is a standalone viral video.

Following Shifman (2013), the egalitarian meme, the founder-based meme, and viral content were distinguished under the mode of engagement (p. 59). A video was coded as viral, when it represents a singular unit of content that, despite potentially having derivatives, was widely circulated as an individual piece. A video received the code of egalitarian meme if the meme was characterized by various versions sharing the same content idea, or a certain formula, all spreading widely almost simultaneously, without such a distinct founding unit. To be coded as a founder-based meme, on the other hand, the meme had to be initiated by a particular textual, visual or audiovisual element. This founding unit would give rise to multiple adaptations that used the original element, but were unlikely to surpass the popularity of the founding unit itself. So, posts were coded founder-based memes when they made use of such an original element that has been the inspiration of multiple other posts as well. Founder-based memes make use of a founding memetic element. The mode of engagement was determined by looking at other videos. Frequently, patterns could already be found within the sample, making it possible to determine the type of meme. Other times, TikTok's search function was used to look for similar content, which could also determine if a video was simply viral, or indeed grounded in another meme or sharing the same content idea with other versions of memes.

3.4.4 Attitudes, topics, and political figures

To answer the second sub-question on how the use of humor types and attitudes vary across different topics and politicians addressed in the TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023, besides humor types, it must now also be explained how the variables attitude, topic and political figure were operationalized.

The attitude towards the message or topic in the video was coded. This pertained to the attitude of the message in the video, classified as either positive, negative, or neutral. This attitude

generally reflects the creator's stance towards the topic or the referenced political figure. The coding of the presence of political figures in the videos was done objectively, encompassing any type of reference, whether direct or more indirect, such as through the use of a piece of audio featuring a politician. Each video was coded as having no reference to a political figure, a reference to one specific political figure, or references to multiple politicians. Topics were analyzed through qualitative coding to capture the various themes presented in the sample.

3.4.5 Aesthetics of production, sound, and popular culture references

To support the qualitative research on how TikTok creators use visual, audio, and editing elements to convey humor in TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023, the variables 'aesthetics of production,' 'sound,' and 'popular culture references' were also quantitatively tracked in the coding process.

To ascertain the overall appearance of the content on TikTok specifically during the Dutch general elections of 2023, the aesthetics of production were also coded, drawing from the Twitter and Weibo research conducted by Nissenbaum and Shifman (2022). They defined user-generated aesthetics as including elements such as memes or remixed content, whereas professional aesthetics encompassed, for instance, caricatures or comedy skits. They found that 69% of their corpus had a user generated aesthetic and 22% had a professional aesthetic (p. 930). These definitions also apply to the categorization of content on TikTok. However, in the context of this research, user-generated appearance should also encompass videos such as quick front-facing camera recordings and similar low-quality, low-effort content, as this is a style of video making that is frequently encountered. A combination of inductive and deductive coding was conducted and the codebook was improved based on this. Nissenbaum and Shifman's scope was thus expanded with an addition to the descriptions of the concepts of user-generated and professional aesthetics which can be found in the codebook (see Appendix A), to include a broader range of user-generated content.

For the coding of the variable 'sound', the distinctions in modes of sound proposed by Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2022, p. 897) in their analysis of the use of music in TikTok music challenges were employed. They identified three modes of sound: the mode syntagmatic, where transitions and the use of visual filters and other effects is enhanced by the rhythm of the music; the kinetic mode, wherein the audio is segmented to match a specific visual; and the content mode, meaning that the content makes a direct reference to the audio used. Given that these modes could potentially extend beyond music challenges (p. 902), they were adapted and applied with a broader definition in this research. The sound modes were thus considered not only applicable to music but also to other audio and sound effects. The assessment of sound considered whether the creator used TikTok's feature to add any such sound to their video, distinct from the original audio of the video. .

'No music or sound effects added' was used when the sound was part of the original video, and the creator did not introduce any additional sound effects or audio elements. This includes cases where entire clips were edited together without any specific sound addition.

The definition of the content mode was retained, but with added flexibility to encompass a wider range of audio uses. The mode was also assigned when the audio is a more *in*direct reference, such as in a specific video where the comedic nature of the sound contributes to the sarcastic style of humor of the video. An explanation of this example can be found in the codebook (see Appendix A). Moreover, the content mode was chosen when the sound is a crucial part of the joke, essentially constituting the humor itself. In such instances, the sound's role was not simply supplementary or enhancing, but central to the video's humorous intent. This broader approach ensured that the full spectrum of sound use, from subtle background effects to central comedic elements, was comprehensively analyzed.

The syntagmatic mode was also given a broader definition, as the sound that enhances the use of filters, transitions and other effects can include various sounds beyond just music. For instance, sound effects can also serve this purpose. For the kinetic mode, any audio that was segmented to match a specific image was included. This meant that whenever the meaning of the lyrics *or* the style of the audio changed, the visual content changed accordingly, creating a dynamic interplay between sound and image.

Furthermore, popular culture references were tracked, with each video being marked as either having no references or including a description of the specific popular culture reference.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the study was important, given the complexity and multidimensionality of the concepts involved. To address this, most variables were based on existing literature, grounding the codes in already established distinctions. To address reliability, an intercoder reliability test was conducted. This test involved a second coder, a student in media studies, who independently coded a subsample of 10 videos. While some research suggests that a subsample should be at least 10% of the total population, other studies have selected their subsamples arbitrarily or based on convenience. Some argue that for large populations, a subsample of 5-7% is likely adequate (Lacy & Riffe, 1996, p. 964). In this context, the intercoder subsample used, which represents 7.9% of the population, is relatively small. However, given the substantial coding workload and the significant, voluntary, time already committed by the intercoder, it was deemed sufficient to use a subsample of 10 videos.

This subsample was selected randomly to ensure a diversity, as the videos are collected and therefore organized on search terms, and consecutive videos could be similar and thus similarly

coded. The variables coded included 'humor style', 'humor type', 'meaning making', 'attitude', 'aesthetic of production' and 'sound'. These variables were selected due to their susceptibility to subjective interpretation and the potential for coding discrepancies if the coding instructions were not sufficiently clear. The second coder coded the videos in Google Spreadsheets. The reliability was calculated with Krippendorff's Alpha (Marzi et al., 2024). The Krippendorff's Alpha varied from 0.593 for the variable 'humor style' to 1.000 for the variable 'aesthetics of production'. Full measures can be found in the codebook in Appendix A.

To address the sub-question regarding the combinations of types and styles of humor predominantly found in TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023, as well as how the use of humor types and attitudes vary across different topics and politicians in these videos, cross-tabulations were made. For the sub-question on how TikTok creators use visual, audio, and editing elements to convey humor, a qualitative analysis was conducted. The results of these analyses will be detailed in the following chapter.

<center>**4. Results**</center>

To effectively present the results and answer the research question, this results section is organized according to the sub-questions. The first part will, through the cross-tabulations derived from the analysis of humor types, styles, meaning-making styles, and modes of engagement, give answer to how humor is used by creators on TikTok. Following this, the main findings related to humor types, attitudes, topics, and referenced politicians will be presented. Finally, the results of the qualitative research on how TikTok creators use visual, audio, and editing elements to convey humor will be detailed.

4.1 Political humor types and styles in user-generated political humor videos

This section will answer the first sub-question 'What combinations of types and styles of humor are predominantly found in the TikTok videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023? What meaning making style and mode of engagement do such videos employ?'

From the content analysis of the 127 videos posted by creators on TikTok referring to politics during the three-month period around the 2023 Dutch general elections, 13 main humor types in videos were identified. Patterns can be observed between these types and the four humor styles – self-enhancing, affiliative, self-defeating, and aggressive. Examples of the patterns within and between humor types and styles are described below.

The findings, presented in Table 2, suggest that the most common humor types are silliness and exaggeration, which together account for 56.6% of the sample. The table shows that each humor type has their own distribution of humor styles that the humor type is often found together with. For instance, for posts with the humor type 'exaggeration', in 65.1% the creator employs a self-defeating humor style, whereas the vast majority of posts under the humor type 'silliness', namely 69.2%, has an affiliative humor style. A Chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between humor types and humor styles, X^2 (85, N = 127) = 341.005, p < .001. The results can thus give insight into the association between humor types and styles.

The most common humor style associated with the humor type 'exaggeration' is 'self-defeating', accounting for 65.1%. There is, as said, a statistically significant relationship, which can also be easily explained and exemplified, as self-deprecating actions or statements seem to easily be exaggerated to evoke laughter. A significant portion of these videos with a self-defeating humor style and exaggeration as humor type, share the same content idea: the wish or purported necessity for Moroccan-Dutch individuals, or other Dutch citizens of diverse backgrounds, to leave the Netherlands due to Wilders' party winning. This is a reaction to Wilders' immigration policies and often also a reference to his infamous 2014 statement "Do we want more or fewer Moroccans?"

(translated from Dutch by the author) Creators are joking around with exaggeration, by grabbing their passports or acting as if they are already on their way to what is or would supposedly be their homeland, creating humor out of their minority position.

Table 2

Cross-tabulation of humor types and styles, in percentages of total posts (and absolute numbers)

Humor type	Humor style				
	Self-enhancing	Affiliative	Self-defeating	Aggressive	*total*
Exaggeration	6.9% (10)	2.8% (4)	19.3% (28)	0.7% (1)	29.7% (43)
Silliness	2.8% (4)	18.6% (27)	4.1% (6)	1.4% (2)	26.9% (39)
Imitation	1.4% (2)	8.3% (12)		0.7% (1)	10.3% (15)
(Pointing out the) irony	2.8% (4)	2.1% (3)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)	6.9% (10)
Ridicule				6.2% (9)	6.2% (9)
Comparison	2.1% (3)	0.7% (1)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)	4.8% (7)
Surprise	1.4% (2)	2.1% (3)	0.7% (1)		4.1% (6)
Malicious pleasure				2.8% (4)	2.8% (4)
Sarcasm		0.7% (1)		2.1% (3)	2.8% (4)
Parody		2.1% (3)			2.1% (3)
Satire	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)			1.4% (2)
Repartee			0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)	1.4% (2)
Pun		0.7% (1)			0.7% (1)
total	17.9% (26)	38.6% (56)	27.6% (40)	15.9% (23)	100% (145)

Note. If multiple codes occurred within a single variable, they were included under each relevant category in the table, resulting in some categories being double-counted and the total number being higher than the number of content units in the population.

Of the videos that were encoded as 'silliness', the vast majority, 69.2%, exhibited the humor style 'affiliative'. Silliness frequently manifests as silly behavior and the silly use of sounds and editing styles. Affiliative humor relies on bringing people together with, for instance, silly jokes, and it does not always refer to actual political or social issues. Humor that does, often involves, for instance, incongruities or alienation from others, which are characteristics of the other humor styles. In this sample, the majority of the videos under 'silliness' thus do not address any such political or social issues. Good examples of this include TikToks that consist of compilations of humorous snippets from videos of politicians, such as debates or interviews, that are edited out of context and strung together to create a series of silly and amusing behaviors and statements.

However, silliness and exaggeration are not confined to that 56.6% of the sample; they are prevalent throughout a large number of the videos, even when a different main humor type has been coded. For example, exaggerated facial expressions or excessive use of question and exclamation marks, such as in a video with the textual element "No but how is PVV ??!??!?!? Leading in the polls" (translated from Dutch by the author), illustrate this trend.

4.1.1 Meaning making styles

Silliness predominantly applies to such videos with a nonsensical meaning making style. Nearly half of the videos coded as silliness, specifically 48.7%, exhibited a nonsensical meaning making style, as can be seen in Table 3. In comparison, 35.9% of these videos were categorized as playful, and only 15.4% as sensical. This distribution contrasts sharply with the overall sample, where 19.7% of the videos were nonsensical, 40.2% were playful, and 40.2% were sensical. The absence of context and referential meaning is thus a common characteristic of videos categorized under the humor type 'silliness'. This is exemplified by videos lacking discernible context and are purely silly, such as a video featuring an image of Geert Wilders with cartoonish drawings of the face, accompanied by a catchy song with the lyrics "Pa-pa-pa-paracetamol, not for the headache, but do it for fun" (translated from Dutch by the author), which are unrelated to the political figure Geert Wilders. Instead, his inclusion, in combination with the song, simply seems to enhance the effect of absurdity and randomness. The predominance of nonsensical meaning making in silly videos shows that the emphasis is on creating humor through randomness rather than through sensical narratives or specific real-world references. A Chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between humor types and meaning making style, X^2 (34, N = 127) = 79.543, p < .001. The results can thus give insight into the association between humor types and meaning making styles.

Table 3

Cross-tabulation of humor type and meaning making style, in percentages of the rows, i.e., the humor type (and absolute numbers)

Humor type	Meaning making style			
	Sensical	Playful	Nonsensical	*total*
Exaggeration	55.8% (24)	44.2% (19)		100% (43)
Silliness	15.4% (6)	35.9% (14)	48.7% (19)	100% (39)
Imitation	20% (3)	53.3% (8)	26.7% (4)	100% (15)
(Pointing out the) irony	90% (9)	10% (1)		100% (10)
Ridicule	33.3% (3)	44.4% (4)	22.2% (2)	100% (9)
Comparison	28.6% (2)	71.4% (5)		100% (7)
Surprise	50% (4)	37.5% (3)	12.5% (1)	100% (8)
Malicious pleasure	100% (4)			100% (4)
Sarcasm	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)		100% (3)
Parody		100% (3)		100% (3)
Satire	50% (1)		50% (1)	100% (2)
Repartee	100% (1)			100% (1)
Pun			100% (1)	100% (1)
total	40% (58)	40.7% (59)	19.3% (28)	100% (145)

Another example of silliness is a video in which a creator makes an exaggeratedly surprised face accompanied by the text "PVV is leading in the polls" (translated from Dutch by the author). This reaction is enhanced by a silly sound, typically used by other creators in silly videos as well, such as when expressing dizziness, showing animals doing funny things, or conveying a sense of foolishness

or an empty-headed feeling. However, this sample also contains numerous examples of silliness under the more narrow definition provided by Catanescu and Tom (2001), where silliness is limited to making funny faces in ludicrous situations, such as in a video, where the creator turns the camera towards his cat staring wide-eyed at the camera with the caption "pov: you hear the election results" (translated from Dutch by the author). These videos, however, were labeled as self-enhancing because of the creators' more sensible approach to finding humor in what they perceive as incongruity. The self-enhancing, self-defeating and aggressive humor styles were found in the more sensical videos, or at least in those that employed playful meaning making. Nonsensical videos were categorized under the humor style self-enhancing only once, under self-defeating only once, and under aggressive twice. The remaining 21 nonsensical videos, accounting for 84%, were classified as affiliative, as can be seen in Table 4. A Chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between meaning making style and humor style, X^2 (10, N = 127) = 43.757, p < .001. Since nonsense lacks referential meaning and employs an affective meaning making style, it often aligns with an affiliative humor style, which uses jokes and a sense of relating to others.

Table 4

Cross-tabulation of meaning making style and humor style, in percentages of the rows, i.e., the meaning making style (and absolute numbers)

Meaning making style	Humor style				
	Self-enhancing	Affiliative	Self-defeating	Aggressive	*total*
Sensical	30.8% (16)	17.3% (9)	26.9% (14)	25% (13)	100% (52)
Playful	13.5% (7)	32.7% (17)	40.4% (21)	13.5% (7)	100% (52)
Nonsensical	4% (1)	84% (21)	4% (1)	8% (2)	100% (25)
total	18.6% (24)	36.4% (47)	27.9% (36)	17.1% (22)	100 % (129)

4.1.2 Modes of engagement

Combinations of humor types and styles often follow the same concept of video creation. This phenomenon can be well explained by Shifman's (2013) concept of the egalitarian meme (p. 59). In fact, 58.8% of videos under 'exaggeration' were egalitarian memes, or mixes between virals and egalitarian memes or between founder-based and egalitarian memes, as can be seen in Table 5. For instance, the earlier described video with the exaggeratedly surprised face accompanied by the text "PVV is leading in the polls" (translated from Dutch by the author) shares its concept, sound, and nearly the same text with the similar video accompanied by the text "No but how is PVV ??!??!?!? Leading in the polls" (translated from Dutch by the author). Apart from the text being different and even contributing even more to the overall exaggeration, most aspects of the video are copied: both creators are silent, continuously move their eyes from one side to the other, visibly questioning something, use the same sound, and have the same camera view.

The high number of egalitarian memes among videos with the humor type 'exaggeration' can also be exemplified by the earlier described concept of videos on the wish or purported necessity for Moroccan-Dutch individuals, or other Dutch citizens of diverse backgrounds, to leave the Netherlands due to Wilders' party winning. These videos do not have one founding unit but are frequently shared and remixed. They build on each other: some creators show themselves ready with packed bags, others only show their passport in a humorous twist in their video, and yet others pretend to already be on a boat by using filters.

Table 5

Cross-tabulation of humor type and mode of engagement, in percentages of the rows, i.e., the humor type (and absolute numbers)

Humor type	Mode of engagement						total
	Viral	Viral/egalitarian meme	Egalitarian meme	Egalitarian/founder-based meme	Founder-based meme	Founder-based meme/viral	
Exaggeration	20.9% (9)	9.3% (4)	44.2% (19)	2.3% (1)	23.3% (10)		100% (43)
Silliness	69.2% (27)		10.3% (4)		15.4% (6)	5.1% (2)	100% (39)
Imitation	93.3% (14)				6.7% (1)		100% (15)
(Pointing out the) irony	90% (9)		10% (1)				100% (10)
Ridicule	66.7% (6)				22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)	100% (9)
Comparison	28.6% (2)	28.6% (2)	42.9% (3)				100% (7)
Surprise	25% (2)		25% (2)		50% (4)		100% (8)
Malicious pleasure	50% (2)		25% (1)			25% (1)	100% (4)
Sarcasm	33.3% (1)				33.3% (1)	33.3% (1)	100% (3)
Parody	100% (3)						100% (3)
Satire	50% (1)		50% (1)				100% (2)
Repartee	100% (1)						100% (1)
Pun	100% (1)						100% (1)
total	53.8% (78)	4.1% (6)	21.4% (31)	0.7% (1)	16.6% (24)	3.4% (5)	100% (145)

The cross-tabulation in Table 5 also reveals that the majority of posts are virals rather than memes (53.8%). Certain humor types, such as 'imitation' and '(pointing out the) irony', appear to be less suited for memes and more for virals. So, the content associated with these humor types tends to be new or standalone humorous material.

However, a Chi-square test was performed to test relationship between humor type and mode of engagement, X^2 (85, N = 127) = 95.300, p = .209, which shows that no association can be found. The null hypothesis that there is no relationship between humor type and mode of engagement can therefore not be rejected and the research hypothesis that there is a relationship cannot be accepted.

4.2 Humor types and attitudes across topics and political figures

To answer the question "How does the use of humor types and attitudes towards the message or topic in the video vary across different topics and politicians addressed in the TikTok videos?", it is essential to first explain the process of coding the topics. This allows us to identify the relevant topics and relate them to humor types and attitudes. The coding process began with video-specific subjects through open coding, which were then generalized through axial coding. Finally, selective coding reduced the topics to six overarching categories: 'election outcomes and polls', 'election dynamics', 'politicians' influence and image', 'nonsense', 'non-political, users' personal activities', and 'political issues'. The following sections will detail the development of these codes and their specific content and form an explanation of the coding process as can be seen in Appendix B.

4.2.1 Main topics in TikTok political discourse

The selective code 'election outcomes and polls' includes all videos that discuss the election results or the intermediate poll outcomes. This topic was most frequently the main topic, namely 40.2%, and is therefore a significant part of the political discourse on TikTok during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023. The open codes 'election results', 'election results/Wilders' policy on foreigners' and 'nerves about the election results' were synthesized to form the axial code 'election outcomes', highlighting the intersection of the electoral results, where the PVV won under Wilders, and stances on immigration and people with diverse backgrounds. Additionally, 'the influence of polls' and 'the position of the PVV in the polls' were merged to create the axial code 'election polls'. Together, these axial codes cover the wide range of humorous videos that represent the public's reaction, employing humor as a means to comment on election results and political forecasts.

The electoral process and the public's engagement with it are captured under the selective code 'election dynamics', accounting for 19.7% of the sample. From the open codes 'nescience about prime ministerial candidate NSC' and 'the 'fuss' surrounding the elections,' emerged the axial code 'uncertainties during election period'. This code captures the uncertainties and speculation during election time, particularly regarding prime ministerial candidates and the general atmosphere surrounding the elections. Additionally, a variety of open codes contributed to the axial code 'Voting experience,' including 'voting,' 'complexity of voting,' 'voters' behavior,' 'GenZ's behavior during elections,' folding of the ballot paper,' and 'voting guide'. These codes shed light on the diverse experiences and behaviors of voters, especially the younger generation, and the difficulties involved in the voting process itself. The selective code 'election dynamics' thus encompasses the dynamic nature of elections, from the uncertainties surrounding candidates to the less political voting experiences, such as practical struggles with the folding of the ballot paper.

The statements and behaviors of politicians and the portrayal of their public personas under the code 'politicians' influence and image' account for 16.5% of the sample. Videos including inappropriate jokes by Baudet during elections interviews, insults by Wilders in older debates or video messages, or Martin Bosma celebrating or joking about his new chairmanship collectively contributed to the axial code 'politicians' actions and quotes.' This code encapsulates the various actions and statements made by politicians, ranging from controversial jokes and insults to moments of more positive behaviors, which shape public perception and discourse. Videos referring to, for instance, politicians' looks or personality traits and the glorification or ridicule of them, form the axial code 'public image of politicians'. This selective sheds light on the more societal perceptions of political figures.

The topic description 'Non-political, users' personal activities' captures the content of videos that focus on aspects of users' daily lives unrelated to politics. Despite their non-political nature, these videos humorously reference politics. Specific topics such as partying, reporting sick from school, discussions with boyfriends, or school assignments combined form the axial code 'Non-political: users' personal life/activities.' This code stands apart from the other categories and thus also serves as a selective code on its own. It shows how users incorporate politics into the sharing of personal, everyday experiences, beyond the political sphere. This code accounts for only 3.9% of the sample, but encompasses five videos sharing their form, and that are akin to the style of a typical meme. In these videos, a clip or an audio snippet of a politician's statement is taken out of context and placed into a new one by adding a textual element. For example, one video shows Geert Wilders excitedly reacting to the exit poll indicating 35 seats for his party. The added text reads: "How many times have you called in sick this year?" followed by Wilders joyfully shouting "35!" It is a piece of content that is remixed by users. That piece of content is in the example given also a frequently shared clip, making it a founder-based meme. However, in some cases, the snippet taken from, for instance, an interview is humorous in the context it has been placed in, but has not frequently been shared, which does not necessarily make it a meme. Cases like this were labeled as virals. Videos with topics such as these reflect the young generation playing a significant role in the political discourse on TikTok.

References to 'political issues' represent 8.7% of the sample and cover various topics that are of importance within the political discourse. Videos about the childcare benefits scandal or otherwise unfairness of economic decisions were brought under the axial code 'controversies'. Other videos addressing political issues, such as gas winning in Groningen, the nitrogen issue, or Woke, come together to form the code 'policy issues'. Videos referring to incongruities in party plans or the coalition formation created the axial code 'party plans and governance'. Videos like these highlight the multitude of aspects of society that can be of relevance in political humor on TikTok.

The topic 'nonsense' includes videos that lack substantial or coherent content, making up 10.2% of the sample. Naturally, these videos also employed a nonsensical meaning making style. They often include randomness or absurdity in concept or editing. Despite seeming trivial, the contrast between a topic such as 'nonsense' and the videos under 'election outcomes and polls', that humorously address politics, reflects the wide range of content on TikTok, showing that TikTok is a platform where humor can be used to engage in playful discussions, but also where there is room for silliness and creativity.

Table 6

Cross-tabulation of topic and meaning making style, in percentages of the rows, i.e., the topic (and absolute numbers)

| Topic | Meaning making style | | | |
	Sensical	Playful	Nonsensical	
Election outcomes and polls	52.9% (27)	47.1% (24)		100% (51)
Election dynamics	68% (17)	32% (8)		100% (25)
Politicians' influence and image	23.8% (5)	19% (4)	57.1% (12)	100% (21)
Nonsense			100% (13)	100% (13)
Political issues	18.2% (2)	81.8% (9)		100% (11)
Non-political, users' personal activities		100% (5)		100% (5)
Other		100% (1)		100% (1)
total	40.2% (51)	40.2% (51)	19.7% (25)	

Before answering the second sub-question, it should be highlighted that the topics outlined above also help explain the earlier mentioned proportions of meaning making styles observed. As previously mentioned, the proportions - 19.7% of videos being nonsensical, 40.2% being playful, and 40.2% being sensical - indicate that the videos still contain sensical, referential meaning, albeit conveyed in a playful manner. These topics thus reflect the nature of the sample. Table 6 shows how certain topics that are more politically oriented than others, such as 'election outcomes and polls' and 'election dynamics' are indeed more frequently found with sensical meaning making styles, namely 52.9% and 68% respectively. The remaining posts under these topics all employ a playful meaning making style. A Chi-square test indicates a statistically significant relationship between topics and meaning making styles, X^2 (12, N = 127) = 111.801, p < .001. These results provide insight into the association between topics and meaning-making styles.

Given that the analysis focuses on political videos, it follows that humorous content would also contain political or societal references. A prime example of such playful meaning making is a specific video, in which references to real-world politics - specifically, the childcare benefits scandal (known in the Netherlands as the 'toeslagenaffaire' - are combined with nonsensical phrases and silly elements. For instance, the video depicts Mark Rutte, a prominent political figure, as a gaming

streamer playing Minecraft, presented in an amateurishly edited, low-quality picture, and includes an AI-generated voice and the nonsensical phrases: "Yes, I understand that you found the childcare benefits scandal upsetting, but it was also partly your own fault. You choose to be poor, of course." (translated from Dutch by the author) While certain elements of the video thus possess a referential nature, others, such as the Minecraft sounds and the amateurish moving of the mouth of the picture of Mark Rutte when 'talking', primarily elicit an affective reaction resulting in laughter.

4.2.2 Attitudes across topics and referenced political figures

The idea that the videos carry a sensical, or even political message or at least take a stance on the message or topic is supported by the attitudes expressed within them. The majority of videos are used to convey either positive or negative sentiments. The breakdown of these attitudes is as follows: 40.9% are neutral, 45.7% are negative, and 13.4% are positive.

A positive attitude can also be seen in videos where politicians are glorified without necessarily conveying a political message. For instance, in one video, both Thierry Baudet and Rob Jetten, two politicians often at odds with each other, are portrayed positively, by short clips of both set to 2Pac's song 'California Love' with smooth transitions. In such cases, there is no substantial political message, as it is unlikely that the creator tended to advocate for strong beliefs in both politicians' parties or ideologies.

A negative attitude is sometimes conveyed in a straightforward and direct manner, as in a video in which the creator verbally and exaggeratedly expresses their frustrations with the commotion surrounding the elections, by starting the video with "I'm sooo glad the voting is over. Can we finally just be a little kind again? I really didn't like it, man." (translated from Dutch by the author) Another example involves a creator reviewing statements from the voting guide (StemWijzer), writing "Voting guides are SHIT" (translated from Dutch by the author) and highlighting incongruities with shock sound effects and facial expressions. Often, however, creators also use more indirect ways of conveying a negative attitude towards the overall message or topic in the video, such as sound and visuals, as their primary means of communicating their opinions. For instance, one video writes "The Netherlands after the election results:" (translated from Dutch by the author) while showing a clip of two dancers from the Historical Dance Society performing the galliard, a Renaissance dance. This comparison suggests that the current electoral outcomes are reminiscent of historical times, implying a sense of deterioration.

In the aforementioned video, the creator expresses a negative view of the election outcomes, which is a common theme among the videos analyzed, as can be seen in Table 7. Specifically, 84.3% of the videos within the topic "election outcomes and polls" exhibited a negative

attitude. A Chi-square test reveals a statistically significant association between topics and attitudes, X^2 (12, N = 127) = 74.774, p < .001.

Table 7

Cross-tabulation of topic and attitude, in percentages of total posts (and absolute numbers)

	Attitude			
Topic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	*total*
Election outcomes and polls	4.7% (6)	33.9% (43)	1.6% (2)	40.2% (51)
Election dynamics	2.4% (3)	3.9% (5)	13.4% (17)	19.7% (25)
Politicians' influence and image	5.5% (7)	3.1% (4)	7.9% (10)	16.5% (21)
Nonsense		0.8% (1)	9.4% (12)	10.2% (13)
Political issues	0.8% (1)	3.9% (5)	3.9% (5)	8.7% (11)
Non-political, users' personal activities			3.9% (5)	3.9% (5)
Other			0.8% (1)	0.8% (1)
total	13.4% (17)	45.7% (58)	40.9% (52)	100% (127)

A substantial portion of these videos explored similar concepts. For instance, comparisons with historical times and discussions about leaving the Netherlands together constituted 48.8% of the negatively oriented videos on election outcomes and polls. Additionally, 15 of the 43 videos under 'election outcomes and polls' with a negative attitude, with various conceptual starting points, expressed emotions of surprise, shock, or despair, accounting for another 34.9% of the videos.

Additionally, a cross-tabulation of referenced political figure and attitudes was conducted, as illustrated in Table 8. Among the analyzed posts, 45.7% did not reference any political figure. Of those videos that did reference (a) political figure(s), Geert Wilders emerged prominently. Nearly half (48%) of the videos mentioning Wilders conveyed a negative sentiment, accounting for 9.4% of the entire sample. A Chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between political figures and attitudes, X^2 (20, N = 127) = 74.913, p < .001. The results can thus give insight into the association between referenced political figures and attitudes.

Table 8

Cross-tabulation of referenced political figure and attitude, in percentages of total posts (and absolute numbers)

	Attitude			
Political figure	Positive	Negative	Neutral	*total*
Geert Wilders	3.1% (4)	9.4% (12)	7.1% (9)	19.7% (25)
Mark Rutte			5.5% (7)	5.5% (7)
Thierry Baudet	2.4% (3)	0.8% (1)	2.4% (3)	5.5% (7)
Kok Chan	2.4% (3)			2.4% (3)
Martin Bosma	0.8% (1)	0.8% (1)		1.6% (2)
Caroline van der Plas			1.6% (2)	1.6% (2)
Other/Multiple	3.9% (5)	2.4% (3)	11.8% (15)	18.1% (23)
No	0.8% (1)	32.3% (41)	12.6% (16)	45.7% (58)
total	13.4% (17)	45.7% (58)	40.9% (52)	100% (127)

Noteworthy are the 7 mentions of Mark Rutte, who was not a part of the 2023 parliamentary elections but is still included in humorous content by creators. The attitude in all these videos remains neutral. Additionally, the 3 mentions of Kok Chan are surprising. Kok Chan, the party leader of Nederland met een Plan, founded in 2022 without gaining seats in the parliamentary elections, is not more popular politically than many other mentioned political figures. However, apparently, Kok Chan is deemed relevant enough to be the subject of humorous content. The attitude in all three videos was positive.

4.2.3 Humor types across topics and referenced political figures

Certain topics and political figures are not only often accompanied by specific attitudes, but they also frequently appear with one type of humor more than another. Likewise, certain humor types are more common in some combinations than in others. For instance, 85.7% of the videos with the humor type 'comparison' are about the election outcomes. The explanation of the egalitarian meme, as seen in the earlier example of people from diverse backgrounds joking about having to leave the Netherlands after Wilders' victory, is also applicable to the frequent combination of these two variables. Several videos with this combination share the same concept: the election results, viewed by these creators as predominantly right-wing and conservative, are compared to the Middle Ages or another historical era, often through text, historical costumes, or specific sounds.

Similarly, 41.4% of the videos under 'election dynamics' are coded with the humor type 'exaggeration'. A similar trend among these videos involves jokes about the difficulty of folding the large ballot paper, joking about voting being challenging because the ballot paper is even larger than the prescription for the contraceptive pill or about needing an origami degree or course to manage it.

The videos featuring the egalitarian meme of creators wanting to leave the Netherlands fall under the combination of the humor type 'exaggeration with the topic 'election outcomes and polls'. This combination is the most prevalent, making up 16.7% of the entire sample, as shown in Table 9. Exaggerated reactions to the polls and election results thus constitute a significant portion of the humorous videos about the 2023 parliamentary elections. A Chi-square test indicates a statistically significant relationship between humor types and topics, X^2 (102, N = 127) = 180.839, p < .001. These results provide insight into the association between humor types and topics.

Moreover, other notable observations include the fact that all videos employing the humor type 'malicious pleasure' are focused on election polls or outcomes. This suggests a tendency to use this humor type when discussing the competitive and often contentious nature of elections. Additionally, there is a relationship between the topic 'politicians' influence and image' and the humor type 'silliness'. Humor related to politicians' influence and image is predominantly conveyed

through silliness (52.4%), followed by ridicule (19%). This trend highlights the way creators often choose to refer to political figures in their videos: either by using them in a light-hearted, less politically substantive manner, or by mocking them through more direct criticism.

Examining the cross-tabulation of referenced political figures and humor types (Table 10), it becomes clear that humorous content around Geert Wilders is mostly created through the humor types of silliness (35.7), exaggeration (25%), and imitation (17.9%). This distribution indicates that creators frequently employ light-hearted, exaggerated, or mimicking portrayals in reference to Wilders. The high prevalence of 'silly' videos suggests that Wilders' persona, statements, or actions are not always approached with substantial seriousness.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the humor type 'ridicule' is used in one video referring to Thierry Baudet. However, 66.7% of the instances of ridicule occur in videos featuring multiple political figures. For example, in one video, both Thierry Baudet and Caroline van der Plas are mocked by portraying them as characters in a video game. Van der Plas is referred to as a "meat pig" (vleesvarken), and Baudet is called the "owl of Minerva," using "difficult Latin words!" (translated by the author) as his supposed game strategy.

However, there are also examples of videos where, for instance, Geert Wilders' words are used to ridicule Mark Rutte. In one video, the exit polls are shown with the VVD (the party under which Rutte was the former Prime Minister) dropping by 11 seats and the PVV (Wilders' party) rising by 18 seats. Wilders' previously spoken words, "Go do something else, Mr. Rutte. Take a nice trip around the world, find a nice girlfriend, buy a dog," are incorporated into the edit. In this way, Rutte is ridiculed while Wilders is simultaneously glorified.

Moreover, the cross-tabulations also elucidate the surprising videos about Kok Chan, whose party is not a major player as they did not secure enough votes to enter parliament, but whose persona evidently captures enough interest among creators to be brought to attention on TikTok. As indicated in Table 10 and through an evaluation of the specific videos mentioning him, content related to Chan predominantly employs forms of humor characterized by irony, exaggeration, silliness, and surprise. This shows that unconventional or less prominent political figures can still gain attention on social media platforms like TikTok through creative and humorous portrayals.

A Chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between humor types and referenced political figures, X^2 (170, N = 127) = 285.757, p < .001. The results can thus give insight into the association between humor types and references to political figures.

Table 9

Cross-tabulation of topic and humor type, in percentages of total posts (and absolute numbers)

Topic	Humor type													total
	Exaggeration	Silliness	Imitation	(Pointing out the) irony	Ridicule	Comparison	Surprise	Malicious pleasure	Sarcasm	Parody	Satire	Repartee	Pun	
Election outcomes and polls	16.7% (24)	6.9% (10)		2.1% (3)	2.1% (3)	4.2% (6)	3.5% (5)	2.8% (4)	0.7% (1)		0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)		40.3% (58)
Election dynamics	8.3% (12)	2.8% (4)	2.8% (4)	3.5% (5)			1.4% (2)			1.4% (2)				20.1% (29)
Politicians' influence and image	0.7% (1)	7.6% (11)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)	2.8% (4)	0.7% (1)			0.7% (1)					14.6% (21)
Nonsense		6.3% (9)	2.8% (4)				0.7% (1)				0.7% (1)		0.7% (1)	11.1% (16)
Political issues	1.4% (2)	3.5% (5)	3.5% (5)	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)				0.7% (1)					9.7% (14)
Non-political, users' personal activities	2.8% (4)				0.7% (1)									3.5% (5)
Other											0.7% (1)			0.7% (1)
total	29.9% (43)	27.1% (39)	10.4% (15)	6.9% (10)	6.3% (9)	4.9% (7)	4.9% (7)	2.8% (4)	2.1% (3)	2.1% (3)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)	100% (144)

Table 10

Cross-tabulation of referenced political figure and humor type, in percentages of total posts (and absolute numbers)

Political figure	Humor type													*total*
	Exaggeration	Silliness	Imitation	(Pointing out the) irony	Ridicule	Comparison	Surprise	Malicious pleasure	Sarcasm	Parody	Satire	Repartee	Pun	
Geert Wilders	4.9% (7)	7% (10)	3.5% (5)			1.4% (2)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)				0.7% (1)		19.6% (28)
Mark Rutte	0.7% (1)	2.8% (4)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)			0.7% (1)				0.7% (1)			7% (10)
Thierry Baudet	1.4% (2)	2.1% (3)		0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)		0.7% (1)							5.6% (8)
Kok Chan	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)		1.4% (2)			0.7% (1)							3.5% (5)
Martin Bosma	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)												1.4% (2)
Caroline van der Plas	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)												1.4% (2)
Other/Multiple		7% (10)	4.2% (6)	0.7% (1)	4.2% (6)				0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)		0.7% (1)	18.9% (27)
No	21% (30)	6.3% (9)	1.4% (2)	3.5% (5)	1.4% (2)	3.5% (5)	0.7% (1)	1.4% (2)	1.4% (2)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)			42.7% (61)
total	30.1% (43)	27.3% (39)	10.5% (15)	7% (10)	6.3% (9)	4.9% (7)	4.2% (6)	2.8% (4)	2.1% (3)	2.1% (3)	1.4% (2)	0.7% (1)	0.7% (1)	100% (143)

4.3 The use of TikTok's features

This section addresses the sub-question on how creators use visual, audio, and editing elements to convey political humor on TikTok. It proceeds to outline the main findings, which are categorized into three broader themes: the use of TikTok's features in viral content, in memes, and in the amplification of different types of humor.

4.3.1 The use of TikTok's features in virals

As previously demonstrated by the division of modes of engagement, the majority of posts (53.8%) are virals. This means they gain popularity due to their intrinsic humor, rather than being part of a widely spread meme. These posts often feature new jokes, humorous stories, or other standalone content that does not rely on memetic elements. Despite their uniqueness, these videos share common characteristics in how the humorous content is created. Firstly, many videos are compilations of snippets from debates, interviews, or similar sources, edited together into a single new video. Transitions between snippets are frequently enhanced with sound effects, such as up-tempo music, or visual editing techniques like flashes or zooms synchronized with the beat. In such compilations, politicians are often referred to as "a meme," "the goat" (Greatest Of All Time), "sigma" (a term akin to 'Alpha-male'; men who are highly successful, admirable, and live by their own rules (*Sigma male*, n.d.)), and other terms. These labels remove politicians from their traditional roles and highlight, for instance, their humorous comebacks. Such terms reflect the high degree to which modern language, which is possibly even more so digital and memetic language than everyday language, is used as humorous content.

Similarly, modern culture is also reflected in these viral videos through popular culture references. References to TV shows such as *The Office* or *Goede Tijden, Slechte Tijden*, and humorous videos known as *InternetGekkies* ('InternetCrazies') are frequently incorporated. The text from these sounds is often lip-synced by the video creators. Additionally, a lot of audio or audiovisual content featuring politicians becomes popular culture references themselves. Not only do humorous quotes from series or statements made by politicians form popular culture references, but references to games are also prevalent. A common example is the game *Minecraft*, as illustrated in the codebook under the playful meaning-making style (see Appendix A). The portrayal of politicians in these videos often resembles a modernized cartoon style, with exaggerated characterizations of politicians and their stances on political matters.

In addition to compilations and popular culture references, the use of AI is another recurring trend in viral videos. For instance, in videos using *Minecraft* visuals, edited photos of politicians are often paired with AI-generated voices. These AI-generated voices can make politicians appear to say anything, using their vocal likeness to create new statements.

In addition to viral videos, there are also numerous viral sounds. A significant 71.7% of all posts have music or sound different from the original audio added to them. For example, in one specific video mentioned earlier in section 4.2.2, a Renaissance dance is used as a comparison for the Netherlands after the election results. Although the original music the dancers performed to was also historical music, a more viral sound was added (4,468 other videos are also shared on TikTok using this specific sound), and the video was sped up for additional comedic effect.

4.3.2 The use of TikTok's features in memes

46.2% of all posts contained elements of either an egalitarian or founder-based meme, indicating a significant amount of sharing and remixing. This trend is also evident in the aesthetics of production: 93.7% of all posts displayed user-generated aesthetics, while only 6.3% exhibited a more professional aesthetic. This predominance of amateurish style reflects the variety and nature of content production on TikTok, which is typical of the platform's unique format.

Popular culture references also often constitute a meme. For example, a quote by Tjitske Reidinga, "Woah! Oh no, oh no, that really scares me" (translated by the author), is used in 1,140 TikTok creations, each with slightly different text added. For instance, one creator uses this sound to express surprise over poll results, while another uses it to illustrate "All of the Netherlands after the election results".

There are many memes that share the same conceptual idea and are obviously derived from each other, yet they vary widely. Nevertheless, certain concepts were clear trends during the 2023 elections. Three prominent examples include the previously mentioned comparison of the election results to the Middle Ages or other historical periods, jokes about being deported or wanting to leave the country, and struggles with folding the ballot paper. Another trend, that is supported and enhanced by the visual, audio, and editing elements that TikTok offers, is the clown theme.

This theme is a prime example of how creators use these elements to convey humor. Firstly, users frequently employ filters, specifically the clown filter, which uses artificial intelligence to overlay a mask on one's face. This filter appears in numerous videos, often serving as the entire message without needing an additional explicit joke. For instance, in a video where the text reads "Being a foreigner and seeing the PVV getting 35 seats at exit polls," the irony is conveyed in a silly way solely through the filter and the use of circus music as the sound. Among all posts adding a separate sound to the video, 58.2% were coded as 'content mode' for sound type, indicating that the sound constitutes or makes a reference to the content or vice versa.

Furthermore, these videos again often incorporate popular culture references, notably to *Bassie & Adriaan*, a Dutch children's television series about a clown and an acrobat. This repeated

use of popular references underscores the influence of cultural icons in the humorous content on TikTok.

4.3.3 The use of TikTok's features as an amplification of humor types

Lastly, the visual, audio, and editing elements are often observed as enhancing the type of humor used in the video. For instance, exaggeration in a joke about struggling to fold the ballot paper is amplified by adding a sound that is intentionally off-key and awkward, on TikTok called the "goofy ahh ringtone". In another video, sound effects are introduced to exaggerate the idea of surprise or shock. These effects are complemented by rapid changes in camera angles or focus, which underscore the intended comedic effect.

Primarily for the humor type 'silliness,' numerous elements can be identified that enhance this type of humor. Across a variety of videos, there are many silly elements present, even when the videos obviously needed to be assigned a different humor type code. Examples of these elements include intentionally overly amateurish editing, funny stickers and emojis, comical sounds like out-of-tune music or funny flute melodies, high-pitched voices and sped up video, or AI-generated speech. These silly elements thus appear to be a characteristic of the Dutch 2023 election humor videos on TikTok.

5. Conclusion

This study explored how TikTok-creators use humor in videos referring to politics during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023. By addressing the sub-questions into (1) the combinations of types and styles of humor found in the 127 videos, their meaning making style and mode of engagement, (2) the use of humor types and attitudes towards the message or topic in these videos, and (3) the use of visual, audio, and editing elements to convey humor, the research uncovered several main findings that illuminate the discourse of political humor on this platform. In this conclusion, these findings will be outlined, limitations of this study will be discussed, and recommendations for future research will be proposed.

5.1 Main findings

Many videos employing exaggeration were characterized as egalitarian memes, which may account for the frequent use of this humor type. For instance, one of the most common egalitarian memes during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2023 involved jokes about leaving the Netherlands following the electoral success of Geert Wilders' PVV party. Given the platform's emphasis on sharing and remixing, users often built upon each other's content, utilizing similar concept ideas and therefore the same humor types.

Both exaggeration and silliness were pervasive throughout the entire sample, underscoring their characteristic presence in political humor videos on TikTok. The light-hearted silliness manifested, for example, in on purpose low-quality editing by users. This humor type predominantly relied on an affiliative humor style, relying on witty banter and jokes to bring people together.

This also points to the variety of content on TikTok. While, on the one hand, the platform hosts a significant amount of nonsensical, silly, and affiliative humor, on the other hand, it also serves as a forum for users to express political viewpoints. Notably, among all topics, 'election outcomes and polls' emerged most frequently and was often addressed with a negative stance toward the subject.

Furthermore, unlike Nissenbaum and Shifman's (2022) observations regarding Twitter and Weibo content, where user-generated aesthetics constituted 69% and professional aesthetics 22% of their corpus (p. 930), this research presents different proportions reflective of TikTok's content landscape. Specifically, in this sample, 93.7% featured user-generated aesthetics, contrasting with only 6.3% showcasing professional aesthetics.

The second main finding is that, despite the assertions by Katz and Shifman (2017) regarding the prevalence of digital memetic nonsense (pp. 825-826; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2022, p. 925), this sample does show that humorous content is not yet entirely voided of the political message. While the nonsensical meaning making style was prevalent in the common humor type 'silliness', it

constituted only 19.7% of the total sample. In contrast, playful and sensical meaning-making styles each accounted for 40.2% of the sample. Many videos thus conveyed a referential message. After all, the research subject is politics. Still, it is intriguing to observe the contrast and diversity on TikTok, where both nonsensical silliness, as well as more sensical substantive contributions prevail.

However, it is thus important remain cautious with drawing conclusions here, as the sample was deliberately selected based on its relevance to politics, suggesting a tendency toward including a referential message in the humor content.

Politics are portrayed in a playful manner both through the use of humor styles and literal thematic representations. This study has identified emerging trends in the dynamics of political humor on TikTok. Users often follow each other in creating egalitarian memes, such as reenacting scenes from the Middle Ages to draw comparisons with election outcomes. Additionally, users engage in parody skits and incorporate politicians into game-like scenes through editing. The recurring circus theme further exemplifies these creative expressions.

This leads us to the third main finding of this study, which focuses on the distribution of engagement modes. The study reveals that 53.8% of the videos analyzed were virals, while 46.2% were categorized as memes, each revealing distinctive characteristics. Firstly, compilations play a significant role in viral videos, akin to practices observed during the U.S. 2020 presidential elections where clips from debates and interviews were extracted, compiled, and remixed for humorous effect (Sánchez-Querubín et al., 2023, pp. 195-196). This pattern is also a fitting description for the sample of videos related to the Dutch 2023 elections, where similar editing practices were employed.

Secondly, image memes predominantly feature iconic visuals accompanied by varying textual elements, such as those seen in Rage Comics (Miltner, 2018, p. 414) TikTok, however, exhibits great versatility in its remixing capabilities. Despite TikTok being a successor to platforms like Vine, which share a similar short-form video style, TikTok distinguishes itself through enhanced functionalities for communication, sharing, remixing, and participation in trends, allowing creators to express their creativity in diverse ways. TikTok enables users to respond to videos, share them, perform duets, or apply their own twist using sounds or filters employed by other creators with just a few clicks. This latter aspect is particularly prominent in the realm of political humor discourse in videos during the 2023 Dutch parliamentary elections.

As creators reuse sounds and filters, memetic videos emerge that build upon each other, highlighting prevalent themes such as the circus or clown motif, jokes of deportation or emigration, and comparisons with historical times, as expressions of negative sentiments surrounding election outcomes and polls. Lighter trends like folding of ballot papers also emerge.

5.2 Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study is subject to several limitations that merit consideration for future research endeavors. One possible concern is the potential influence of search terms on the composition of the sample. The selected terms were chosen independently, which may have introduced bias by directing the focus of retrieved videos. For instance, the search prompts 'verkiezingsuitslag' (election results) and 'peilingen' (polls)likely skewed the thematic diversity of the gathered content. The term 'politieke parodie' (political parody) possibly influences the humor type in the resulting videos and 'verkiezingen meme' (elections meme) the mode of engagement. Future studies could benefit from exploring alternative search strategies or employing multiple search criteria to mitigate such biases.

Another notable limitation involves the low intercoder reliability score observed for humor styles in this study. Humor styles, characterized by their complex nature, posed challenges in consistent classification between the author and the intercoder. To address this, future research should consider making a more robust operationalization of the styles and a clear and tested codebook, as that could possibly have been a reason for the inconsistent classifications. Such efforts could improve reliability.

Additionally, this study used a small subsample size for the intercoder reliability test. This smaller subsample was selected due to the labor-intensive nature of the intercoder coding process. By scaling up the sample size, researchers could enhance the reliability and validity of findings regarding the used variables.

Moreover, because of the Chi-square test performed with the cross-tabulation of humor type and mode of engagement, no relationship could be found between the two variables. Future research could employ alternative analytical approaches or refine the variables.

Future research could also aim to investigate the extent to which humor genuinely contributes to political discourse on TikTok, given that all videos analyzed in this study were humorous in nature. TikTok's involvement in political discussion might seem sudden (Herrman, 2020, para. 3-4); nevertheless, it would be intriguing to determine whether substantial, politically substantive contributions potentially constitute a significant portion of the platform's dynamics.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Variable	Explanation	Categories	Examples
Humor type (K-α 0.756)	What type of humor is used in the video? *Select multiple if applicable.*	**Comparison** Putting two or more elements together to produce a humorous situation (Catanescu and Tom, 2001, p. 93).	Comparing the election outcomes to societies of historical eras.
		Personification Attributing human characteristics to animals, plants and objects (Catanescu and Tom, 2001, p. 93).	-
		Exaggeration Overstating and magnifying something out of proportion (Catanescu and Tom, 2001, p. 93).	"I'm soooo glad that the voting is over. Now we can finally be nice to each other again. Really didn't find it funny, man" (translated by the author)
		Pun Using elements of language to create new meanings, which result in humor (Catanescu and Tom, 2001, p. 93).	Portraying Frans (also the Dutch word for 'French') Timmermans as a Frenchman with a beret, baguette, and the French flag.
		Sarcasm Including blatant ironic responses or situations (Catanescu and Tom, 2001, p. 93).	Geert Wilders saying: "Look what I have for you, dear Sigrid Kaag. Fly safely, okay, and take your position with you" (translated by the author), while gifting Kaag a broom.
		Silliness Making funny faces to ludicrous situations, showing silly or clownish behavior, or using silly voices, sounds, or editing styles.	The creator turning the camera towards his cat staring wide-eyed at the camera with the caption "pov: you hear the election results" (translated from Dutch by the author).
		Surprise	A creator saying she's voting for Rob Jetten,

		Humor arises from unexpected situations (Catanescu and Tom, 2001, p. 93).	but, by filming her ballot paper, showing she ticked Thierry Baudet's box.
		(Pointing out the) irony Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you're saying (or pointing out that someone else is doing this) (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 153).	A creator predicting the election results: "The Netherlands before the elections: We're totally done with the VVD!!! Election results: VVD is the winning party", while making a disappointed face.
		Satire Making a fool of or poking fun at well-known things, situations, or public figures (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 154).	Cutting up a press conference by Mark Rutte in such a way that he's supposedly saying problematic sentences.
		Parody Imitating a style or a genre of literature or other media (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 154).	Imitating street interviews by local broadcasters by acting out as stupid civilians.
		Malicious pleasure Taking pleasure in other people's misfortune; victim humor (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 154)	Laughing at "left-wing tears" for "losing" the elections, which outcome was more right-wing.
		Imitation Mimicking or copying someone's appearance or movements (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 153).	Mimicking Geert Wilders' voice.
		Ridicule Making a fool of someone, verbally or nonverbally (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 154).	In one video, both Thierry Baudet and Caroline van der Plas are mocked by portraying them as characters in a video game. Van der Plas is

			referred to as a "meat pig" (vleesvarken), and Baudet is called the "owl of Minerva," using "difficult Latin words!" (translated by the author) as his supposed game strategy.
		Repartee Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 154).	A funny conversation between an interviewer and people, with quick and witty reactions.
Humor style (K-α: 0.593)	What style of humor is used in the video? What is the sender's style of communicating their humor? *Select multiple if applicable.*	**Self-enhancing** Maintaining a humorous perspective on life, finding humor in incongruities and adversity (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 291).	The creator turning the camera towards his cat staring wide-eyed at the camera with the caption "pov: you hear the election results" (translated from Dutch by the author), finding humor in what they perceive as incongruity.
		Affiliative Relying on witty banter and jokes to bring people together (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 291).	TikToks that consist of compilations of humorous snippets from videos of politicians, such as debates or interviews, that are edited out of context and strung together to create a series of amusing behaviors and statements.
		Self-defeating Is rooted in self-deprecating actions or statements to evoke laughter (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015, p. 291).	Creators joking about being deported due to Wilders' party winning.
		Aggressive Making statements that may harm or alienate others (Taecharungroj &	A video in which the creator discusses that one in four people voted for the winning party PVV. He illustrates his reaction

			to it with a sound of disgust ("ew") and humorously suggests he might identify the voters by their white pointed hats.
Meaning making (K-α: 0.714)	In which manner is meaning conveyed by the maker?\n\n*Select multiple if applicable.*	**Sensical**\nReferential meaning, i.e. meaning is derived from reference to phenomena in the world, like social or political contexts (Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 830).	A video in which the creator discusses that one in four people voted for the winning party PVV. He illustrates his reaction to it with a sound of disgust ("ew") and humorously suggests he might identify the voters by their white pointed hats. Both utterances are best understood through the lens of the political reference.
		Nonsensical\nAffective meaning, eliciting a response in the audience prior to a conscious understanding, often because unambiguous meanings have become more ambiguous because they are being so frequently shared and remixed (Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 828).	A video featuring an image of Geert Wilders with cartoonish drawings of the face, accompanied by a catchy song with the lyrics "Pa-pa-pa-paracetamol, not for the headache, but do it for fun" (translated from Dutch by the author)
		Playful\nCrossroads of referential and affective meaning making; has a nonsensical essence yet also contains a referential message, comprehendible for those who are familiar with the digital culture and the nuanced layers of meaning	A video in which references to real-world politics - specifically, the childcare benefits scandal (known in the Netherlands as the 'toeslagenaffaire' - are combined with nonsensical phrases and silly elements. For instance, the video depicts Mark Rutte, a prominent political

		(Katz & Shifman, 2017, p. 838).	figure, as a gaming streamer playing Minecraft, presented in an amateurishly edited, low-quality picture, and includes an AI-generated voice and the nonsensical phrases: "Ja, ik begrijp dat je de toeslagenaffaire vervelend vond, maar het was ook wel een beetje je eigen schuld. Je kiest er zelf voor om arm te zijn natuurlijk." While certain elements of the video thus possess a referential nature, others, such as the Minecraft sounds and the amateurish moving of the mouth of the picture of Mark Rutte when 'talking', primarily elicit an affective reaction resulting in laughter.
Political figure	To which, if any, political figure is being referred to in the video?	No	
		Geert Wilders	
		Thierry Baudet	
		Mark Rutte	
		Kok Chan	
		Frans Timmermans	
		Sybrand Buma	
		Martin Bosma	
		Caroline van der Plas	
		Rob Jetten	
		Multiple	
Attitude (K-α: 0.843)	What is the most explicit attitude expressed in the video (e.g. towards a politician or the specific topic)?	Positive	
		Negative	
		Neutral	

Aesthetic of production (K-α: 1.000)	What is the appearance/aesthetic of the video?	**Professional aesthetics** The video has a professional appearance (e.g., comedy skits) (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2022, p. 930)	Steady camera angles, good lighting, etc., such as in the parody of street interviews by local broadcasters, acting out as stupid civilians.
		User-generated aesthetics The video has an amateurish appearance (e.g., memes or remixed content) (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2022, p. 930) and videos such as quick front-facing camera recordings and similar low-quality, low-effort content.	Videos taken with the selfie camera angle.
Mode of engagement	What is the place of the video in the participatory culture of viral videos and memes? *Select multiple if applicable.*	**Viral** The video is a singular unit of content (that can have derivatives) that is widely circulated (table 1: Shifman, 2013, p. 59)	A funny conversation between an interviewer and people, with quick and witty reactions.
		Founder-based meme The meme is initiated by a particular textual, visual or audiovisual element, giving rise to multiple adaptations that make use of the 'founding' unit, but are not likely to surpass the popularity of it (Shifman, 2013, p. 59)	The widespread video of singer Famke Louise as a response to the Covid policies saying "Only together can we get the government under control. I'm no longer participating. Free the people."
		Egalitarian meme The meme is characterized by various versions sharing the same content idea, or a certain formula, all spreading widely almost	Creators joking about being deported due to Wilders' party winning.

		simultaneously, without such a distinct founding unit (Shifman, 2013, p. 59)	
Popular culture reference	Does the video include (social, political, etc.) icons of digital culture that are immediately recognizable to the audience?	No	
		Yes	- Quote from The Office - Quote from actress Tjitske Reidinga - Etc.
Sound aesthetics (K-α: 0.729)	What aesthetic aspect is there to the sound used in the video? What role or mode does the audio have in relation to the video, its content, and its other features?	**Syntagmatic mode** Transitions and the use of filters and other effects is enhanced by the sound.	
		Kinetic mode The audio is segmented to match a specific image, i.e. whenever the lyrics or audio style, for example, changes, so does the visual content.	
		Content mode The content makes a (in)direct reference to the audio used or vice versa. For example, the sound adds to the humorous content or the sound itself is a or the humoristic element.	*Direct:* A video with the Bassie & Adriaan tune "Bye boys! Bye girls! That was it for now!" ("Dag vriendjes! Dag vriendinnetjes! Dat was hem dan al weer!") used by a creator to wave goodbye to the people that would (jokingly) need to leave the Netherlands after Wilders winning. *Indirect:* A specific video where the comedic nature of the

			sound contributes to the sarcastic style of humor of the video. A creator writing "Let me explain to you why it is a good thing for the Netherlands that the PVV won the elections" (translated by the author), while staying silent, with the use of a comedic, silly sound indicating that there will not come an explanation either.
Topic	What is the main topic the video is about? *See Appendix B.*	Election outcomes and polls	
		Election dynamics	
		Politicians' influence and image	
		Political issues	
		Non-political, users' personal activities	
		Nonsense	

Appendix B

Scheme of open, axial and selective codes of main topics in posts

Election results	Election outcomes and impact of immigration policy	Election outcomes and polls
Nerves about the election results	"	"
Election results / Wilders' policy on foreigners	"	"
The influence of polls	Election polls	"
The position of the PVV in the polls	"	"
Nescience about prime ministerial candidate NSC	Uncertainties during election period	Election dynamics
The 'fuss' surrounding the elections	"	"
Voting	Voting experience	"
Complexity of voting	"	"
Voters' behavior	"	"
GenZ's behavior during elections	"	"
Folding of the ballot paper	"	"
Voting guide	"	"
Inappropriate joke by Baudet during elections interviews	Politicians' actions and quotes	Politicians' influence and image
Insult in old debate by Wilders	"	"
Reposting of old Christmas video message by Wilders	"	"
Joke by Martin Bosma after getting the majority votes for chairmanship	"	"
Bosma celebrating his chairmanship	"	"
Politicians' looks	Public image of politicians	"
Personality traits politicians	"	"

Glorification of politician	"	"
The longevity of Rutte in politics	"	"
Nonsense	Nonsense	Nonsense
Partying	Non-political: personal life	Non-political, users' personal activities
Reporting sick from school	"	"
Discussion with boyfriend	"	"
School assignment	"	"
Childcare benefits scandal	Controversies	Political issues
Unfairness of economic decisions	"	"
Political matters, like gas winning in Groningen	Policy issues	"
Political matters, like the nitrogen issue	"	"
Political matters, like Woke	"	"
Ban on phones at school	"	"
Incongruities in party plans	Party plans and governance	"
Coalition formation	"	"
The 2021 elections	Other	Other