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Laughing Matters: The Global Politics of Humour

Wednesday 3 June 2026 15:00 (1h 30m)

This panel foregrounds humour as a significant force in global political life, with a particular focus on its affective and emotional dimensions. The papers reveal how digital visual cultures use humour to shape feeling, identity, and authority within international relations. From refugee memes in Germany to political cartoons in India and the affective charge of MAGA imagery in the United States, the papers highlight how humour does more than “just” amuse. It intervenes in the production of political emotion, negotiates belonging, and exposes deep ideological tensions in public discourse. The panel situates memes, GIFs, and cartoons within wider structures of governance, circulation, and perception. It shows how visual humour moulds collective feelings about migration, democracy, and national identity. The discussion traces how digital jest normalises affect, mobilises emotional communities, and reinforces or disrupts dominant narratives. Close attention to repetition, incongruity, and affective resonance in visual forms underlines the ethical and political significance of humour in world politics. The speakers draw on theories of humour and affect to show how the visual politics of humour influences emotional life on a global scale. It works as both a gesture of critique and an instrument of political control.

Track Classification: Emotions in Politics and International Relations Working Group