



## How political, satirical cartoons illustrated Australia's *WorkChoices* debate

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### ABSTRACT

Political cartoons are a ubiquitous form of satire which assists the public to interpret political life. This study examined the tone and content of 107 political, satirical cartoon images published in mainstream Australian newspapers in 2005 and 2006. The cartoons illustrated the sweeping reforms of the industrial relations system at a turbulent time in Australia's political history. We investigate two dimensions of a sample of widely published cartoons—tone and content—using an established typology. We find that the images were

conveyed in a moderate tone in that they were more about poking fun at and questioning authority and power, rather than simply describing the issues on one hand, or demonstrating any revolutionary fervour on the other. The cartoons' content represented many of the concerns and issues being voiced by employer groups, government, opposition, unions and the media at the time. The images were an important part of the wider political discourse and potentially a mechanism through which industrial relations was placed squarely in the minds of working Australians.

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