

How do political jokes differ between totalitarian, post-totalitarian and authoritarian regimes?

The political joke, a weapon which the Spanish people have used with merriment and well-aimed irony, blossoms again. All Spain is overflowing with an endless stream of stories against the regime and its men.

– Grandizo Munis, ‘Franco’s Dilemma (February 1941)’¹

Do the kinds of political joke that get circulated in a polity depend on the structure of the regime? Is it plausible to regard political jokes as to some extent a function of the political regime type? This paper looks at three regime types and attempts to characterise the differing compositions of political jokes in each of them. The typology of regimes used is that of Linz and Stepan’s *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*² and the jokes are categorised according to a state/regime/ideology distinction. After establishing the parameters of the enquiry, I proceed by explaining the reasoning behind the central hypothesis, elaborating the role of ideology in each regime type and setting out theoretical models which serve to justify the assumptions upon which the hypothesis rests. I then

¹ Grandizo Munis, ‘Franco’s Dilemma (February 1941)’, trans. Bernard Ross, *Fourth International*, Vol.2, No.3 (Whole No.10), March 1941, pp.69-71, available at: <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/munis/1941/02/franco.htm>>, retrieved: 1st Jan 2006

² Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

elaborate the methodology with examples and conclude by analysing the results and areas for further development.

Christie Davies argues that jokes cannot be assumed to have a clear-cut political agenda:

Attitudes, motives, intentions and feelings will differ from one individual to another and even from one joke-telling session to another, for they are ephemeral qualities of particular situations. Any joke can be used in a very large number of different ways even without altering the text by changing the manner in which it is presented.³

Nevertheless, there are undoubtedly many jokes made under totalitarian and post-totalitarian as well as authoritarian type regimes which do seem to be “about” the political circumstances. Satire may be defined as the “use of ridicule, irony, sarcasm etc., in speech or writing to expose and discourage vice or folly”⁴ and political satire flourishes even in repressive political climates. It is said, as for example by Manuel Vicent, that the non-democratic regime feeds humour:

El humor nace de la sugerencia, del peligro, de la segunda intención, de pisar el parque sagrado. Ciertamente, cuando la democracia permite que se la ataque de un modo directo está sentenciando a muerte al humorismo.⁵

³ Christie Davies, *The Mirth of Nations* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p.6

⁴ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, seventh edition, ed. J.B. Sykes (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1982), p.930

⁵ Manuel Vicent, *Triunfo* (1982:18); cited here by Juana I. Marín-Arrese, ‘Humour as Ideological Struggle: The View from Cognitive Linguistics’, 8th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference: Cognitive Linguistics, Functionalism, Discourse Studies: Common Ground and New Directions, University of La Rioja, Spain, Friday 25th July 2003; available at <<http://www.ling.arts.kuleuven.ac.be/iclc/Papers/JuanaMarinArrese.pdf>>; date retrieved: 1st January 2006, p.10; The translation provided by Juana I. Marín-Arrese is as follows: “Humour is derived from allusions, from danger, from double meanings, from stepping on sacred ground. Truly, when democracy allows a direct attack on herself, she is sentencing humour to death”.

Of the varieties of humour recorded as having occurred under these political systems this paper specifically examines jokes (as opposed to comic books, films, comic songs, caricature, cabaret, etc) for a number of reasons. On the practical side, jokes have in many cases been transcribed and anthologised, they are relatively independent of their tellers and their immediate context, and thus they are manageable semiotic units of which large numbers can be processed and compared with relative speed. Of great importance for theoretical implications, jokes are widely (and often very quickly) circulated and may therefore offer some insight into an otherwise opaque interpersonal area of cultural exchange and hidden political activity within the life of the nation.

Hypothesis

Totalitarian regimes have a relatively dominant ideological component – in the Linz and Stepan typology they are partly defined by their characteristically “Elaborate and guiding ideology that articulates a reachable utopia”⁶. This represents a stronger ideological

⁶ Linz and Stepan (1996), p.44

commitment than the struggling faith and disaffection of post-totalitarian regimes; and contrasts with the loosely articulated “mentalities”⁷ of authoritarian regimes.

The following theory articulated by Henry Jenkins represents one of a number of explanations for how and where jokes occur – in this case, with relation to ideology:

Jokes, tend to cluster around points of friction or rupture within the social structure, around places where a dominant social discourse is already starting to give way to an emergent counter-discourse; jokes allow the comic expression of ideas that in other contexts might be regarded as threatening.⁸

If the Jenkins assessment holds true then one would expect most ideology-based joking within the post-totalitarian regimes since it is within post-totalitarian regimes that there is a “growing empirical disjunction between official ideological claims and reality”⁹.

Conversely, if the ideal type of the authoritarian regime truly embodies a weaker relationship to ideology within the regime compared with both totalitarianism and post-totalitarianism, then *ceteris paribus* this should be reflected in a comparatively diminished incidence of ideology-related political jokes within authoritarian regimes as against totalitarian and post-totalitarian regimes. This latter hypothesis depends on an assertion. It posits that different degrees of regime-ideological engagement across different

⁷ *ibidem*

⁸ Henry Jenkins, *What made Pistachio Nuts?* (Columbia: New York, 1992), p.251; cited by Maggie Andrews, ‘Butterflies and Caustic Asides: Housewives, comedy and the feminist movement’, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg (London: Routledge, 1998), p.51

⁹ Linz and Stepan (1996), p.48

regimes types are likely to make their effects felt at the grassroots level and that one way this will happen is by rendering lived experience qualitatively different under each regime. Furthermore, it assumes that the range of jokes in circulation is somehow responsive to and reflective of this texture of the national life within a given polity. We will return to the kinds of theoretical framework it may be possible to argue for in the section on theoretical assumptions.

The hypothesis being advanced is that the proportion of jokes told which relate to the political ideology of the regime will vary according to regime type in descending order as follows: post-totalitarian, totalitarian, authoritarian.

In practice, one cannot control for all of the other independent variables – such as severity and accuracy of regime-repression, availability of sites for performing joking behaviours, etc. – all other things are not equal. Furthermore ideal types of regime are precisely that and are not conveniently instantiated in empirical cases of typological purity. This is not to mention the problem of data collection. The methodology generates what is necessarily an approximate and quite subjective representation of the proportions of

different kinds of humour circulated under the different regimes. It should suffice to say that the nature of the validation attainable for the hypothesis is limited by these factors.

Regime types and ideology

This study uses the typology of major modern political regimes put forward by Linz and Stepan in *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. In this classificatory system, possible modern regime types are democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism and sultanism. Their distinctiveness can be adumbrated along four dimensions – namely those of pluralism, ideology, leadership and mobilisation. Since the major modern regime types are ideal types, it is perfectly possible for an actual regime to sit astride categories. An example of the latter would be pre-1989 Poland which Linz regarded as “closer to the authoritarian regime type than the totalitarian or the standard post-totalitarian”¹⁰.

¹⁰ Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000), p.5

Ideologically the totalitarian regime type according to Linz and Stepan is one in which there exists an “Elaborate and guiding ideology that articulates a reachable utopia. Leaders, individuals, and groups derive most of their sense of mission, legitimation, and often specific policies from their commitment to some holistic conception of humanity and society”¹¹. In this paper, the 12 years of National Socialist rule in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe – the Third Reich – is treated as a regime of this type. The regime specifically asserted the supremacy of an Aryan race and thereby sought to legitimise itself and to realise dominance over the world. Anti-Semitism provided the ideological counterweight to the glorified master race.

In the post-totalitarian regime type the relationship with ideology is altered and the key theme is a loss of faith. Linz and Stepan summarise the situation thus:

Guiding ideology still officially exists and is part of the social reality. But weakened commitment to or faith in utopia. Shift of emphasis from ideology to programmatic consensus that presumably is based on rational decision-making and limited debate without too much reference to ideology.¹²

From the point of view of humour this is a particularly interesting period in the psychology of a political community since it represents a time of “growing empirical disjunction

¹¹ Linz and Stepan (1996), p.44

¹² *ibid.*, p.44

between official ideological claims and reality”¹³. As this disjuncture produces disaffection, cognitive dissonance and lessened commitment even on the part of cadres, the mask begins to slip. Politically, post-totalitarian regimes typically face a crisis of legitimacy which is contingent upon the efficacy of state delivery – in a manner by which democratic regimes are not. Linz and Stepan explain: “Since democracies base their claim to obedience on the procedural foundations of democratic citizenship, as well as performance, they have a layer of insulation against weak performance not available to most post-totalitarian or authoritarian regimes”¹⁴.

The question of what to count as post-totalitarian is about the application of ideal types to empirical cases. The sources I will be using for Soviet-related humour include a collection published in 1978¹⁵, a 1988 anthology of humour from Soviet Jews and a 1990 study of East European political jokes. Faced with the countries of Eastern Europe in 1996, Linz and Stepan labelled this “Post-Communist Europe” and elaborated as a distinct type the post-totalitarian regime. Going back earlier, the co-authors note that “As many Soviet-type regimes began to change after Stalin’s death in 1953, they no longer conformed

¹³ *ib.*, p.48

¹⁴ *ib.*, p.49

¹⁵ The 1979 sequel was omitted since it lacked consistent translations

to the totalitarian model, as research showed ... Empirically, of course, most of the soviet-type systems in the 1980s were not totalitarian”¹⁶. It is a moot point whether an anthology which was compiled and published in 1978 represents the jokes of a USSR closer to the post-totalitarian than a totalitarian regime type by that stage. Did the award of Hero of the Soviet Union, the order of Lenin and the Gold Star to Leonid Brezhnev on his 70th birthday in December 1976 represent the personality cult of a leader who invoked fear or rather whose self-aggrandisement would be met with apathy? Based on my reading of the situation and of Linz and Stepan’s remarks, I made the decision to regard all of these sources as presenting jokes from a post-totalitarian regime.

Poland appears as the locus for jokes included in both the humour of the Third Reich and of Eastern Europe. The argument made by Linz and Stepan that Poland has represented the one Eastern European country closer to authoritarianism than to totalitarianism¹⁷ will be overlooked on the following basis. Certainly in the case of Third Reich jokes, occupied Poland falls within the Nazi regime. Regarding Polish incidences of political humour within the Eastern European collection from 1990, the source relied upon

¹⁶ ib., p.41

¹⁷ ib., p.255

is the anthology by C. Banc and Alan Dundes, *You Call This Living?*¹⁸ which documents variations according to country for each inclusion. The nature of the source means that the post-Soviet “Polish” jokes encountered in this study are consistently variants upon jokes circulating more widely in Eastern European states.

The authoritarian regime according to Linz also has a distinct relationship to ideology. Authoritarian regimes come to power by co-opting some of the legitimacy of pre-existing institutions and elite groups¹⁹. Their (limited) political pluralism and often extensive economic and social pluralism is a function of the civil society institutions that predated them. However these legacies constrain the articulation of a radically totalising discourse:

The real question to ask is, What power arrangements seem to prevent ideological articulation in such regimes? In our view the complex coalition of forces, interests, political traditions, and institutions – part of the limited pluralism – requires the rulers to use as symbolic referent the minimum common denominator of the coalition.²⁰

There is therefore a structural impediment to a coherent regime ideology within the authoritarian regime that becomes manifest in certain absences:

¹⁸ C. Banc and Alan Dundes, *You Call This Living?: A Collection of East European Political Jokes*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990)

¹⁹ Linz (2000), p.47

²⁰ *ibidem*, p.164

The student of an authoritarian regime would be hard pressed to identify explicit references to ideas guiding the regime in legal theorizing and judicial decisions in non-political cases, in art criticism and scientific arguments, and would find only limited evidence of their use in education.²¹

The example of authoritarianism used for this study is Spain under the Franco regime from 1936 to 1975. While three sources were found, the total number of jokes available was disappointingly low at 36, despite also searching for Spanish language material. Efforts made to source political jokes in translation from Portugal under Salazar (1932-68) and from Greece during the Junta years (1967-1974) were unsuccessful.

Theoretical assumptions

Given the relatively high levels of subjectivity involved methodologically in categorising the political jokes in this study, the conclusions drawn must necessarily be tentative. However, it will be useful to make explicit the theoretical groundwork in order to delineate the spirit of the enquiry and suggest what may be at stake.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.163

- 1.) Especially in repressive regimes, political jokes can provide spaces for the articulation of non-official or counter-official ideas which may more closely resemble private sentiments.
- 2.) The range of political jokes in circulation under any given government will to some extent resonate with the lived experience of the joke-tellers under that political system.
- 3.) Different regimes types will offer a different set of possibilities conducive to the making and telling of jokes as a function not only of levels of repression etc., but by virtue of the modes in which their state/regime relationship and their configurations of pluralism, ideology, leadership and mobilisation present points of friction or rupture within the social structure as typically experienced by the citizen.

There are numerous and diverse theories of humour and of jokes. In the paper ‘Risky Business: Political Jokes under Repressive Regimes’²², the folklore anthropologist and humour specialist Elliott Oring examines six possible explanations for why people tell political jokes. To outline them, the first – essentially null – hypothesis would be that political jokes are much like other forms of joking and should be regarded simply as

²² Elliott Oring, ‘Risky Business: Political Jokes under Repressive Regimes’, *Western Folklore*, (Summer 2004); available at: <http://www.looksmartfamilytree.com/p/articles/mi_qa3732/is_200407/ai_n14687876>, retrieved: 1st January 2006

aestheticised reworkings of the raw materials of quotidian life. The second would be that political jokes make it possible to speak the politically unspeakable. The mechanism at work here is put succinctly by Deborah Tannen: jokes “are useful conversational devices for saying things indirectly because they are deniable. The teller can always invoke the defense, “I was only joking””²³. Thirdly – and sharing a kinship with Freudian understandings of humour – political jokes may function as a safety-valve to release the energy otherwise directed towards repression. Fourthly, political jokes may be thought of as revolutionary acts told to mobilise dissent.

Fifthly, political jokes in repressive regimes could be regarded as fulfilling a need to overcome the cognitive dissonance encountered in everyday life between ideology, “pretense misrecognition”²⁴ and empirical experience. Oring cites Alexei Yurchak’s claim that this represents in essence a self-mocking humour which, “exposed the coexistence of two incongruous spheres, official and parallel, and the subject’s simultaneous participation in both”²⁵. Such a hypothesis is also in keeping with Mary Douglas’ view of humour as

²³ Tannen (1985), p.69; cited by Hank Johnston, ‘Talking the Walk: Speech Acts and Resistance in Authoritarian Regimes’ (2001), p.12; available in *Repression and Mobilization: Smpc-Social Movements, Protest & Contention*, chapter 5, ed. Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, Carol Mueller (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp.108-138; also available at: Centre for International Development and Conflict Management website, <<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mobandrep/papers/johnston.pdf>>, retrieved: 1st January 2006, p.12

²⁴ Alexei Yurchak’s term, cited here by Oring, which represents a form of doublethink – Oring mediates: “People recognised the falsity of the official ideology but had to pretend that they did not”. Oring (2004); available at: <http://www.looksmartfamilytree.com/p/articles/mi_qa3732/is_200407/ai_n14687876>

²⁵ Alexei Yurchak, ‘The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretense, and the Anekdot’, *Public Culture*, 9 (1997), p.180

serving to speak about aspects of the social structure which require attention²⁶ and working to reduce cognitive dissonance across “realms of experience”²⁷.

Finally, the sixth possible understanding of political jokes as put forward by Oring is that they carve out a space for the self – what James Scott would call an “alternate moral universe”²⁸ – which provides a brief respite from the otherwise ever-present psychological penetration of the regime. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Scott explores and elaborates the strategies available to the weak and which together can constitute what he posits as an infrapolitics which may escape censure or documentation. Of this infrapolitics he remarks, “Under the conditions of tyranny and persecution in which most historical subjects live, it *is* political life”²⁹. This would construe political joking in such contexts as a process of re-making the self. Is it to negate the fusing of public and private – which Mabel Berezin remarks as the defining poetics of Italian fascism – that political joking is performed?³⁰

We may add to this other theories, including Tannen’s linguistic supplement that jokes are also used to “foster solidarity and trust between the interlocutors by pointing to

²⁶ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1975), p.154

²⁷ *ib.*, p.95

²⁸ James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p.240; cited by Oring (2004); available at: <http://www.looksmartfamilytree.com/p/articles/mi_qa3732/is_200407/ai_n14687876>

²⁹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale, 1990) p.201

³⁰ Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997)

shared frames for interpretation and signalling good will”³¹. For our purposes it is pertinent only to ask, “What kind of theoretical explanation of the joking phenomenon is it necessary to believe in, in order for the three assumptions made above to be plausible?” For the assumptions to hold, we must assume only that the political context of the telling, hearing and circulating of political jokes is in some way relevant to what jokes do. On the theoretical side, all but the null hypothesis admit of this analysis. Beyond this, each approach provides an explanatory rationale for what is taking place, should the assumptions be found to hold. It would also be fruitful to observe that these models are not mutually exclusive and may be used complementarily to describe the operation of a variety of forces in any given joking situation.

Sources

The following anthologies were used for this study based on availability and quality.

³¹ Tannen (1985), p.69; cited by Johnston (2005), p.12

Totalitarian: The Third Reich

- Steve Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991)

Post-totalitarian: Post-Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe

- *Forbidden Laughter: Soviet Underground Jokes*, compiled and ed. Emil Draitser, trans. Jon Pariser (Los Angeles, The Almanac Publishing House, 1978)
- David A. Harris and Izrail Rabinovich, *The Jokes of Oppression: The Humor of Soviet Jews* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1988)
- C. Banc and Alan Dundes, *You Call This Living? A Collection of Eastern European Political Jokes* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1990)

Authoritarian: Franco's Spain

- Oriol Pi-Sunyer, 'Political Humor in a Dictatorial State: The Case of Spain', *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 24, No.2 (Spring, 1977), pp.179-190
- Stanley H. Brandes, 'Peaceful Protest: Spanish Political Humor in a Time of Crisis', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 1977), pp.331-346
- Uxio Valentin, 'Franco Jokes: The Spaniards are Still Getting Even with the Generalissimo', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20: 4 (1987: Spring), pp.83-92

Whereas in the case of post-totalitarian and authoritarian regime types there are respectively three sources for each regime type, the 304 jokes examined as instances of totalitarian humour all come from one source and thus – despite the reasonable sample size – are in no way insulated against biases in the selection process carried out consciously or unconsciously by the compiler. This is a problematic uncontrolled variable in this study –

and one which little can be done to guard against except by including a greater number of sources. It ought also to be noted that whilst there are three sources for political jokes under the authoritarian regime type, the actual total number of jokes examined (36) is very low. Here the risk is therefore that the picture created by such a small selection of jokes is unrepresentative or severely distorted.

It is noted here that although Uxio Valentin's study was written 12 years after Franco's death, as with the other two sources for the Franco government, unless there is a clear reason to think otherwise, I have proceeded on the assumption that the jokes presented were in circulation under Franco qua authoritarian regime.

Methodology

Having identified the sources above, it was necessary to produce an analytical frame by which comparative work could be undertaken on sets of jokes. In order to categorise the jokes found under each regime type I asked the question: "Does this instance of humour seem primarily to speak to the state, the regime or the ideology of the regime (or

none of the above)?" It must be noted that not only are these topics prone to overlap, but also many jokes are inherently ambiguous as to their object. While this is true generally of jokes, it could be said to be particularly true of political jokes under repressive regime types. Therefore a degree of subjective judgement necessarily enters the process of categorisation at this stage.

The state/regime distinction used follows as closely as possible that elaborated by Robert M. Fishman in 'Rethinking State and Regime'³²:

Regimes are more permanent forms of political organization than specific governments, but they are typically less permanent than the state. The state, by contrast, is a (normally) more permanent structure of domination and coordination including a coercive apparatus and the means to administer a society and extract resources from it.³³

Following from this, jokes which seemed to address state apparatuses (including the secret police, bureaucracy, the military, official organs of state media, etc) and jokes which spoke to issues bearing upon the infrastructure of the state (including actual mechanisms of voting, supply-side issues with the economy and procedures of appointment to the civil service) were all categorised (where appropriate) as jokes relating to the state. Jokes whose proper object could reasonably be regarded as political figures, parties and the mechanisms of

³² Robert M. Fishman, 'Rethinking State and Regime: Southern Europe's Transition to Democracy', *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No.3 (April 1990), pp.422-440

³³ Fishman (1990), p.428

promotion and succession were conversely categorised as relating to the regime. Where the subject matter, tenor or impetus of a joke could reasonably be thought to speak directly to the core principles or legitimacy of the regime it was classified as relating to ideology. Where none of these categories were relevant to the humour of the joke, it was placed in the “other” category of “none of the above”. It was not enough for a joke merely to mention (for example) a political leader in a contextual capacity for it to be a regime joke. Within the limitations of the exercise the jokes have been categorised as far as possible with attention to what they are “about”. Where two or more categories could be said to be appropriate, the following hierarchy has been applied (in descending order): ideology, regime, state. To be explicit, a joke involving a political leader which seemed to speak to the pith of a regime’s ideological substance was categorised as an ideological joke.

The Jewish Question

The claim can plausibly be made that in the Third Reich and the soviet states, the experience of Jewish citizens was radically different from that of the non-Jewish citizen. The question then asked is, “Should Jewish humour under each regime type be assessed separately from non-Jewish humour?” The anthologies consulted for Nazi Europe and for

the USSR (and soviet Europe) make this distinction in organising and presenting their material (except *Forbidden Laughter* (1978)). Both aggregated and segregated results have been provided for examination and potential problems with this approach are discussed in the conclusion. Where a source has been treated in this manner, results for the Jewish segment have been indicated with the designation (J).

Examples of jokes by regime type as categorised by their primary relevance are shown below:

Table 1.1: Examples of political jokes under each regime type categorised according to state/regime/ideology/other distinctions

Regime type <i>government</i>	State	Regime	Ideology	other
Totalitarian				
<i>Third Reich</i>	●			
	Hitler visits a woman on her 100 th birthday and asks her to make a wish. "I don't have any more earthly interests," she says. My highest wish is to have my death announced in a great newspaper." Hitler immediately promises her a half-page notice in the <i>Volkischer Beobachter</i> . "No," she says, "not in the <i>Volkischer Beobachter</i> . Then no one will believe I died." ³⁴			

³⁴ Lipman (1991), p.78

		●		
	<p>While out walking one morning, Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels get lost. Finally they meet a farmer driving down the road in a cart. The farmer gives them a lift.</p> <p>As they get in and drive off, Hitler can not resist a little bragging. "My man," he says, "imagine the great honor that has come to you. In your humble cart sits Adolf Hitler."</p> <p>"You are Adolf Hitler?" asks the farmer doubtfully.</p> <p>"Der Führer!" cries Hitler impatiently. "Don't you know me?"</p> <p>The farmer glances at the man with the little moustache, shakes his head, and coldly replies, "I never saw you before."</p> <p>Then Goering speaks up. "Then, farmer, look at me closely and tell me who am I?"</p> <p>The farmer glances around again, shakes his head, and says in an unfriendly tone, "No, I don't know you either."</p> <p>"I am Marshal Goering."</p> <p>Now the farmer feels sure he is being made a fool of. He says angrily, "Goering? You? Next thing you'll be telling me is that the Jew back there with you is Goebbels."³⁵</p>			
			●	
	<p>A propaganda poster displayed in a Berlin street bore the legend: "Under National Socialism People Live Longer."</p> <p>One night someone wrote underneath this: "Perhaps it only <i>seems</i> longer."³⁶</p>			
				●
	<p>Fietje and Tetje are standing on the street, holding out their collection cups. Fietje keeps coming back with a full cup, in order to get a new, empty cup. Tetje gets almost no coins. "What's your secret, that you're collecting so much?" Tetje asks. "That's simple," Fietje grins, "I always whisper: 'This is a collection for the new government.'"³⁷</p>			
<i>Third Reich</i> (J)		●		
	<p>An elderly Jew was released from a concentration camp.</p> <p>"What happened to you?" asked a friend. "Your teeth are missing, your arm is twisted, you walk with a limp, your face looks as if it went through a meat grinder, and you weigh less than 70 pounds."</p> <p>"Nothing happened," the Jew responded. "I am just another atrocity lie."³⁸</p>			

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.54. Goebbels was rumoured to have Jewish ancestry because of his appearance.

³⁶ *ib.*, p.83

³⁷ *ib.*, p.66. Tales from the port city of Hamburg often feature the characters Fietje and Tetje.

³⁸ *ib.*, pp.171-2

		●	
	<p><i>Please note: The following joke contains an episode that readers may find offensive. In this respect it is not representative of the sample.</i></p> <p>Freudenheim was walking down the street in Nazi Germany in 1934, when suddenly a large black limousine pulled up beside him. Freudenheim looked up in astonishment and terror as Hitler himself climbed out of the car. Holding a gun to Freudenheim, Hitler ordered him to get down on his hands and knees. And pointing to a pile of excrement on the curb, Hitler ordered the Jew to eat it.</p> <p>Freudenheim, putting discretion before valor, complied. Hitler began laughing so hard that he dropped the gun. Freudenheim picked it up, and ordered Hitler to undergo the same humiliation. As Hitler got down on the sidewalk, Freudenheim ran from the scene as fast as he could.</p> <p>Later that day, when Freudenheim returned home, his wife asked him, "How was your day?"</p> <p>"Oh, fine dear," he answered. "By the way, you'll never guess who I had lunch with today."³⁹</p>		
		●	
	<p>During the onset of Nazi terror, an elderly Jew was walking down the street in Berlin when he was stopped by two storm troopers.</p> <p>"Halt Jew!" they cried, and proceeded to interrogate him.</p> <p>"Who is responsible for all of Germany's troubles?" they demanded.</p> <p>The Jew looked at them and said, "Why, the bicycle riders and the Jews."</p> <p>"Bicycle riders" they snorted. "What foolishness. Why the bicycle riders?"</p> <p>"Why the Jews?" replied the old man.⁴⁰</p>		
			●
	<p>Two Jews had a plan to assassinate Hitler. They learned that he drove by a certain corner at noon each day, and they waited for him there with their guns well hidden.</p> <p>At exactly noon they were ready to shoot, but there was no sign of Hitler. Five minutes later, nothing. Another five minutes went by, but no sign of Hitler. By 12:15 they had started to give up hope.</p> <p>"My goodness," said one of the men. "I hope nothing's happened to him."⁴¹</p>		

³⁹ ib., p.194

⁴⁰ ib., p.206

⁴¹ ib., p.16

Post-totalitarian	●			
USSR '78	<p>In a quiet corner of Moscow, a man goes into the public toilet and sees a cleaning woman. Her face looks familiar to him.</p> <p>“Hold it, hold it, I remember you,” says the man. “Three months ago you were working in the bathroom on Red Square. How come you find yourself in this place?”</p> <p>“Well, sonny, don’t ask!” sighed the old woman. “Intrigues, I’m surrounded by intrigues!”⁴²</p>			
		●		
	<p>Brezhnev is talking to Kosygin:</p> <p>“The devil only knows what’s going on. Everyone’s running away! If you were to declare free emigration, perhaps only the two of us would remain here.”</p> <p>Kosygin, avoiding Brezhnev’s eyes, muttered:</p> <p>“Leonid, please – speak only for yourself!”⁴³</p>			
			●	
	<p>At a conference in Moscow, Brezhnev called Nixon aside and said:</p> <p>“Listen, Dick, could you help us with our footwear problem?”</p> <p>“With pleasure,” replied Nixon. “We can sign a contract immediately.”</p> <p>“Well, thanks a lot! And what about wheat?”</p> <p>“We can sign an agreement right away,” answered Nixon.</p> <p>“Dick, I could kiss you! What about the technological aspect? Can you give us a hand?”</p> <p>“We have everything in order.”</p> <p>“Thank you, my friend,” Brezhnev rejoiced. “But you know, Dick, these are all sort of partial agreements. It would be fine for us if we could somehow unify everything into one large pact.”</p> <p>“Agreed,” said Nixon. “Let’s sign a general contract: The United States will help build Communism in <i>your</i> country.”⁴⁴</p>			
				●
	<p>Question to Radio Armenia:</p> <p>“What will it be like in the Soviet Union in the year 1984?”</p> <p>Answer:</p> <p>“That we don’t know, but we do know that all will be quiet on the Chinese-Finnish front”⁴⁵</p>			

⁴² *Forbidden Laughter: Soviet Underground Jokes*, compiled and ed. Emil Draitser, trans. Jon Pariser (Los Angeles, The Almanac Publishing House, 1978), p.45

⁴³ *ib.*, p.79

⁴⁴ *ib.*, p.71

USSR '88	●			
	<p>In the Soviet Union, no one does anything without written instructions. Thus, when there was a knock at Brezhnev's bedroom door late one night, the Soviet leader got up, put on his robe and slippers, and walked over to a file box of instructions.</p> <p>Looking under the letter "k," he found the appropriate instruction card for "Knock on the Door" and pulled it out. Reaching the door, he slowly read out in a loud voice: "Who... is... it?"⁴⁶</p>			
		●		
	<p>Each time the Moscow-based foreign press corps saw Gorbachev's chauffeur, Petya, they would try to pump him for information about the war in Afghanistan.</p> <p>"Come on, tell us," they would say, "maybe you've overheard a conversation suggesting when the war in Afghanistan would end."</p> <p>"No, I simply don't know. Gorbachev has said nothing about that," was the standard reply.</p> <p>One day, though, a reporter had some better luck. "Is it really possible that Gorbachev never says anything at all about the war?" he asked the chauffeur.</p> <p>"No, as a matter of fact just this morning he raised the issue with me," Petya admitted.</p> <p>"Well, what did he say?" demanded the reporter.</p> <p>"As we were driving from his house to the Kremlin," the chauffeur began, "he turned to me and said: 'Petya, do you have any idea when this damned war in Afghanistan is going to end?'"⁴⁷</p>			
			●	
	<p>Brezhnev's deceased mother returned to earth to see how her son, Leonid, was doing. Anxious to make a good impression, he took her to see his well-appointed apartment, his spacious office in the Kremlin, and the several country homes at his personal disposal. He also showed her the cars, yachts, jets, and helicopters that were for his use only.</p> <p>"Well, Mama, what do you think of all this?" he asked her.</p> <p>"Son, I think it's absolutely wonderful that you've done so well," said his mother proudly, "but I've got one piece of advice for you. If I were you, I'd grab the transportable goods, sell the rest, and run before the Communists come to power and confiscate it all."⁴⁸</p>			

⁴⁵ ib.

⁴⁶ David A. Harris and Izrail Rabinovich, *The Jokes of Oppression: The Humor of Soviet Jews* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1988), p.166

⁴⁷ ibid., pp.199-200

⁴⁸ ib., pp.171-2

				●
	<p>The problem of service continues to plague Soviet consumer life, as two American tourists discovered in the dining room of a Moscow hotel when they ordered coffee.</p> <p>“Waiter, this is filthy,” said one of the Americans on seeing the coffee placed before them. “Please bring clean cups.”</p> <p>A few minutes later, the waiter returned with two cups of coffee.</p> <p>“Now which of you ordered the clean cup?” he asked.⁴⁹</p>			
<i>USSR '88 (J)</i>	●			
	<p>It was a bitterly cold day, but still the line in front of the butcher shop continued to grow. After a few hours, the shop manager emerged from the store to make an announcement. “All the Jews in line must leave,” he shouted.</p> <p>A number of dejected people stepped out and, muttering to themselves, walked away. Several more hours passed with no movement in the line. The shop manager re-emerged. “Citizens, I am sorry to report, but there will be no meat available today,” he announced.</p> <p>One shivering person, still standing in line, turned to another and remarked, “Those damned Jews, lucky again.”⁵⁰</p>			
		●		
	<p>The good fairy came to old Khaimovich in his sleep.</p> <p>“Ask for anything and it shall be yours,” said the fairy. “Your wish is my command.”</p> <p>I’d like to live out my last years in the finest old age home in the country,” sighed Khaimovich longingly.</p> <p>His wish was granted, and suddenly, Khaimovich found himself in the Kremlin in the company of Brezhnev Kosygin, Gromyko, Suslov, and the other Politburo golden-agers.</p>			
			●	
	<p>Returning to New York from a trip to the Soviet Union, Goldberg, a member of the U.S. Communist Party, was summoned to the local headquarters.</p> <p>“Comrade Goldberg, did you have the chance to meet any real, unshakable Marxists during your three-month official tour of the Soviet Union?” a party boss inquired.</p> <p>“Only one,” came the terse reply.</p> <p>“And who was that?” the official queried.</p> <p>“Kogan, another tourist from New York,” said Goldberg.⁵¹</p>			

⁴⁹ ib., p.201

⁵⁰ ib., p.55-56. Source text reads: “All the Jews on line must leave” [sic] p.55

⁵¹ ib., pp.14-15

				●
	<p><i>Question:</i> Why isn't there a Communist government in Israel? <i>Answer:</i> And why should a small country have such a big joy?</p>			
<i>Eastern Europe</i>	●			
<p>At school, a teacher discusses Homer's account of the Trojan war. He asks a student: –Isaac, who took Troy? –Comrade professor, it wasn't me. The teacher is furious. He sends a note asking Isaac's father to come to school to see him. When the father arrives, the teacher tells him about his son's inept answer. –Well, comrade teacher, says Mr. Rabinowitch, my son may not be a bright student, but he is not a liar, If he says he didn't take it, you may believe he really didn't. The exasperated teacher complains to the principal. –Well, says the principal, I know the family – honest working-class people. Maybe the kid really didn't take it. Even more irritable, the teacher leaves for home, and on the way he runs into a friend who happens to be a K.G.B. officer. He tells him his annoyance over the answers of the Rabinowitches and the principal. –You know, says the K.G.B. man, sometimes they do tell the truth. The teacher goes home fuming at such ignorance and tries to forget the incident. A week later he again runs into his friend. –By the way, says the K.G.B officer, the Rabinowitches have confessed everything. <i>They</i> took Troy.⁵²</p>				
		●		
<p>The following discussion takes place between Brezhnev and Kosygin after a Warsaw Pact meeting: –Did you see the beautiful watch Nixon gave Ceausescu? –No. Show it to me.⁵³</p>				
			●	
<p>What's the difference between capitalism and communism? In capitalism, man exploits man. In communism, it's the other way round.⁵⁴</p>				
				●
<p>–What does a cautious man do? –He learns how to eat matzos with chopsticks.⁵⁵</p>				

⁵² Banc and Dundes (1990), p.37

⁵³ ib., p.111

⁵⁴ ib., p.69

⁵⁵ ib., p143

<p>Authoritarian</p>	<p>●</p>			
<p><i>Franco</i></p>	<p>It seems that right after the Civil War had ended in 1939, a fisherman from Galicia loaded up his small boat with provisions, pushed it confidently into the sea, and began to row toward America. Somewhere out in the middle of the Atlantic, the captain of a large sea liner noticed the fellow and signalled the engine room to slow the ship.</p> <p>When he finally got close enough to talk to the Gallegan, the captain looked over the edge of his ship and shouted, Ahoy down there! What in the hell are you doing?"</p> <p>"Me? I'm going to America," replied the man.</p> <p>"You're going to America by crossing the Atlantic in a rowboat?"</p> <p>"Yes, it's all I have."</p> <p>"Well, then," replied the captain, "why are you going?"</p> <p>"Because I have toothache and I'm going to America to get it fixed."</p> <p>The captain was totally bewildered. "You mean to tell me" he said, "that there are no dentists where you come from?"</p> <p>"Oh, yes," the fisherman assured him, "In Spain we have a lot of dentists, but nobody dares to open his mouth!"⁵⁶</p>			
	<p>●</p>			
	<p>They say that General Franco, in one of his famous speeches from the Plaza de Oriente in Madrid, actually declared: "Spaniards! In 1939, our country was at the brink of an abyss. But now, thanks to my courageous leadership, we have taken a giant step forward!"⁵⁷</p>			

⁵⁶ Uxio Valentin, 'Franco Jokes: The Spaniards are Still Getting Even with the Generalissimo', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20: 4 (1987: Spring), p.91

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.84

			●	
	<p>Franco was going to a party one evening, and so that the people at the party would be entertained he called for Ramples [the famous comic, again]. When Ramples came to the Pardo he said, “But, Your Excellency, what an honor it is to be here. Why would you want the likes of a humble man like me to be with you?” “Well,” answered Franco, “we’re going to a party, and to entertain us I want you to tell us a few jokes.” “What an honor, sir. Just let me change clothes, and I’ll come along with you.” So Ramples went out and changed his clothes. When he returned, Franco escorted him to the limousine which would bring them to the ballroom. Said Ramples, “Your Excellency, what a magnificent car you have!” “Would you like one like it?” asked Franco. And then Franco continued, “You know, I won’t be satisfied until every worker in Spain has a car like this one.” “Wait a minute!” Ramples cried out. “Who’s telling the jokes here, you or me? Because if it’s you, I’m getting away from here right now!”⁵⁸</p>			
			●	
	<p>Uncle Paco’s daughter married an incredibly bad doctor who practiced in a Madrid hospital called <i>La Paz</i> – The Peace. One day Uncle Paco’s grandson came to visit him. At one point when they were together, they boy blurted out, “Grandfather, some of the kids at school say that you killed a lot of people in the war.” “Ah, yes, that could well be true,” replied Uncle Paco, “but it isn’t as many as your daddy kills in The Peace”⁵⁹</p>			

⁵⁸ Stanley H. Brandes, ‘Peaceful Protest: Spanish Political Humor in a Time of Crisis’, *Western Folklore*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 1977), pp.337-8

⁵⁹ Valentin (1987), p.86. Uncle Paco is a nickname for Francisco Franco.

Results

The following table displays results of categorising a total of 967 jokes from the sources cited.

Table 2.1: The number of jokes classified under each regime type according to the categories of state/regime/ideology/other

Regime type <i>government</i>	State	Regime	Ideology	other
Totalitarian				
<i>Third Reich</i>	28	59	31	71
<i>Third Reich (J)</i>	30	9	15	61
	58	68	46	132
Post-totalitarian				
<i>USSR '78</i>	11	13	16	33
<i>USSR '88</i>	31	19	23	29
<i>USSR '88 (J)</i>	54	9	27	49
<i>Eastern Europe</i>	150	54	57	52
	246	95	123	163
Authoritarian				
<i>Franco</i>	2	25	5	4
	2	25	5	4

The pie charts on the following pages display the results of table 2.1 in graphic form.

Fig. 3.1 Objects of political humour in Nazi Germany – non-Jewish (sample: 198)

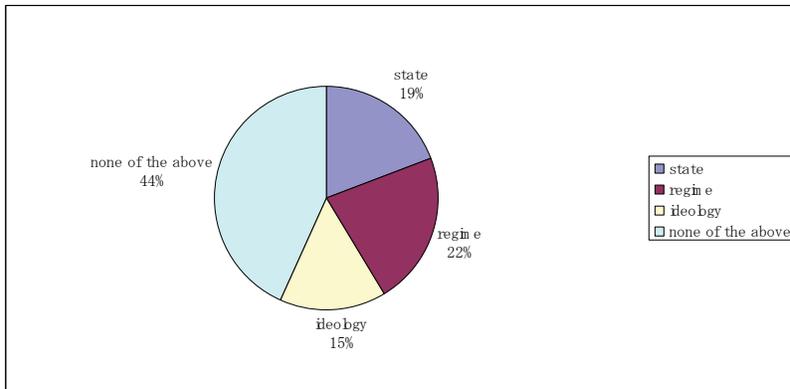


Fig. 3.2 Objects of political humour in Nazi Germany – Jewish humour (sample: 115)

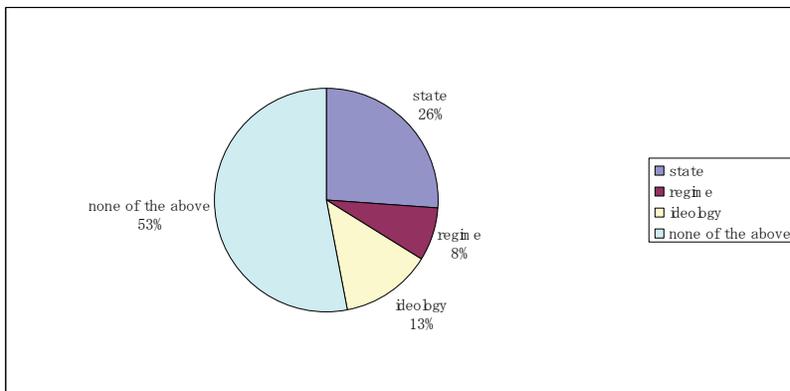


Fig. 4.1 Objects of political humour in Soviet Russia – 1978 (sample: 73)

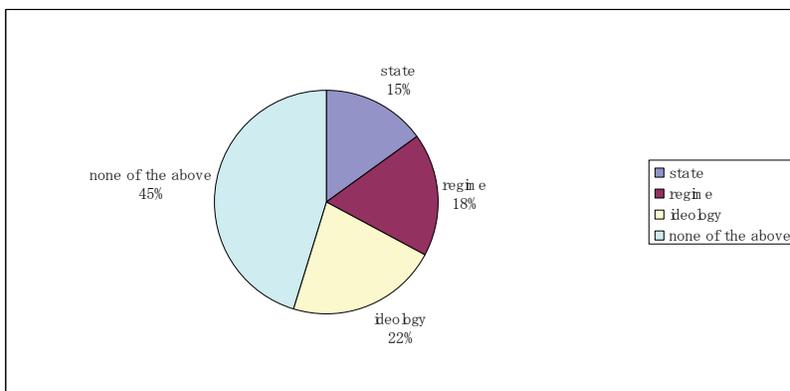


Fig. 5.1 Objects of political humour in Soviet Russia – Jewish humour – 1988 (sample: 139)

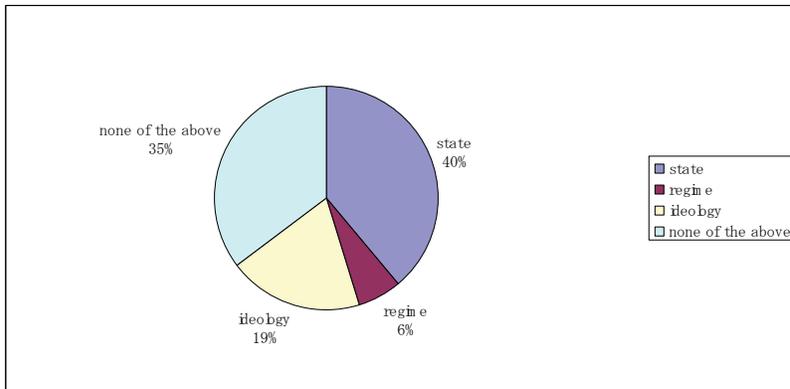


Fig. 5.2 Objects of political humour in Soviet Russia – 1988 (non-Jewish) (sample: 102)

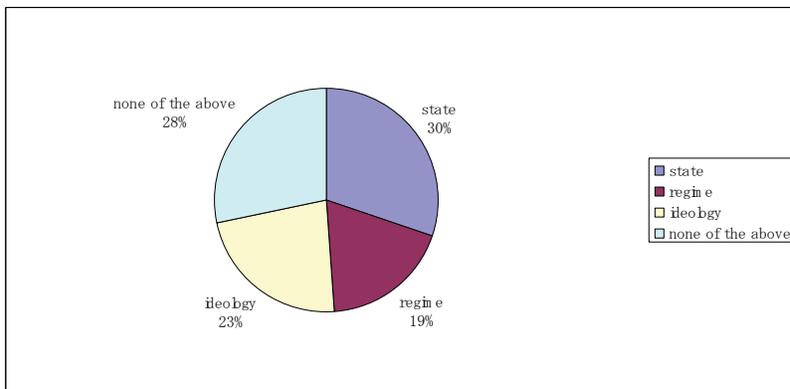


Fig. 6.1 Objects of political humour in Soviet Russia – aggregate non-Jewish
(sample: 175, 1978 and 1988 collections)

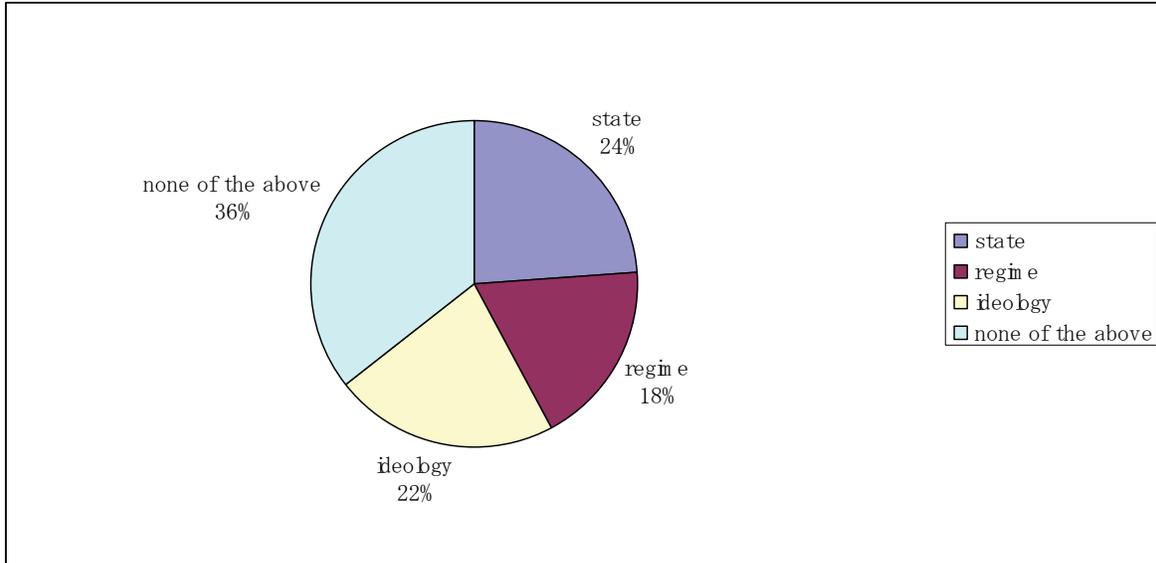


Fig. 7.1 Objects of political humour in Eastern Europe
(sample: 313 from 1990 collection)

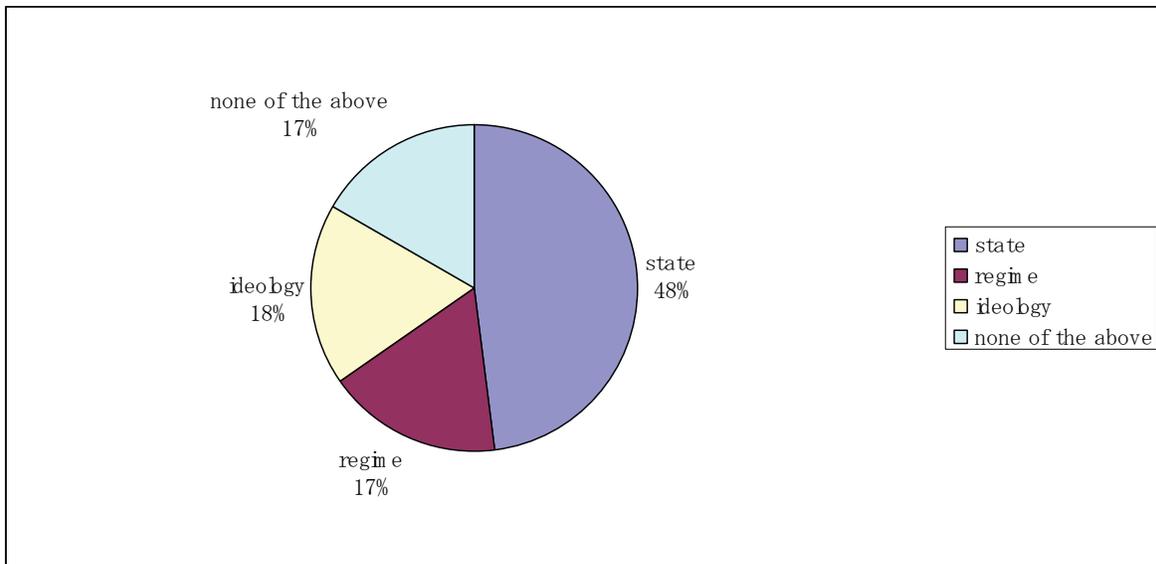


Fig. 8.1 Objects of political humour sampled in the **Totalitarian** regime type (sample: 304)

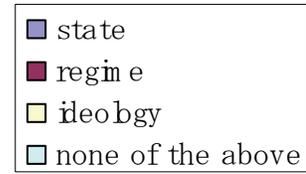
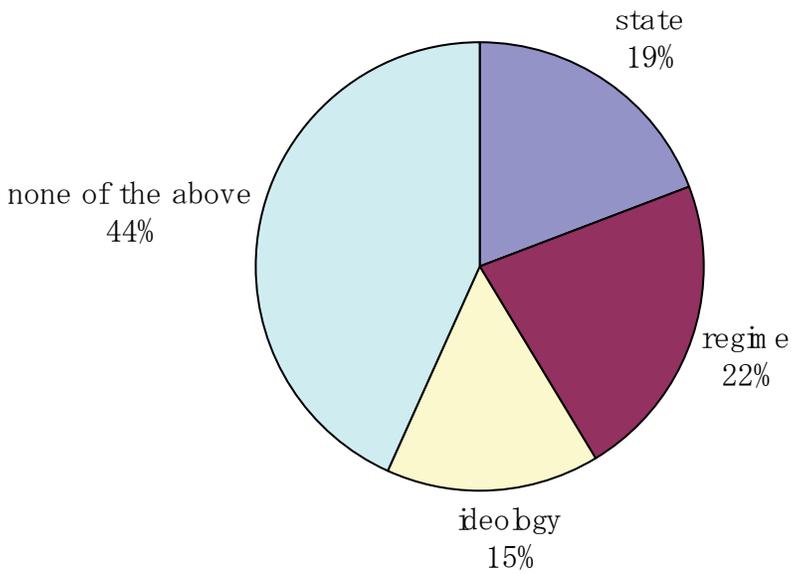


Fig. 9.1 Objects of political humour sampled in the **Post-totalitarian** regime type (sample: 627)

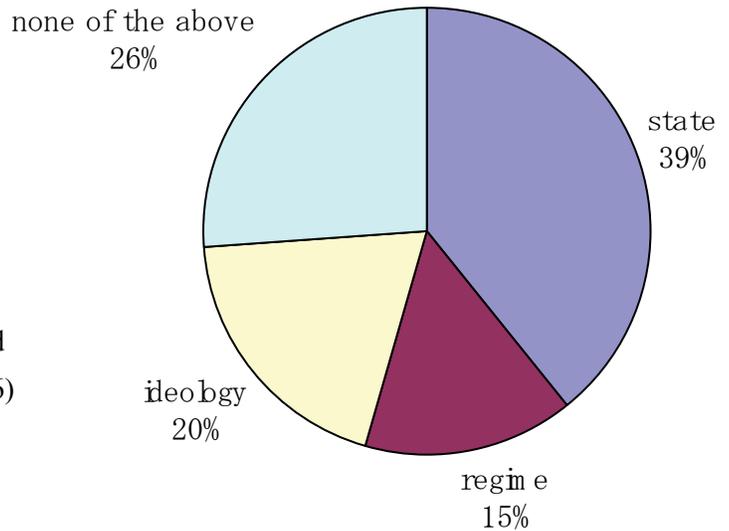
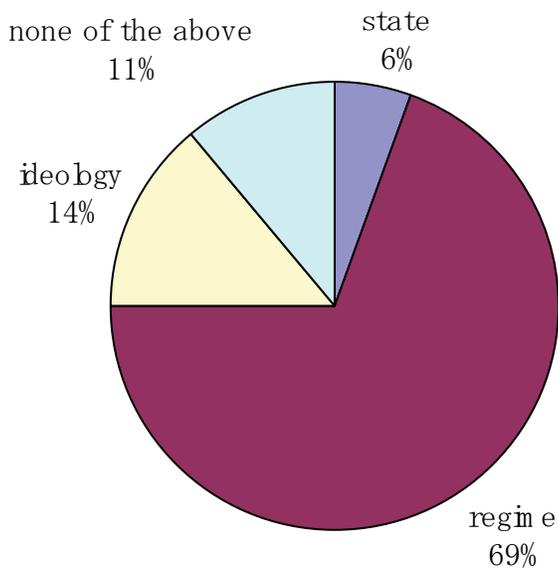


Fig. 10.1 Objects of political humour sampled in the **Authoritarian** regime type (sample: 36)



Conclusions

This discussion should be prefaced with the caveat that there is a considerable disparity between the number of jokes assessed in the totalitarian and post-totalitarian types and the number assessed for the authoritarian type. While there were three sources for jokes from the Franco government, this relative dearth of source material in actual numbers of jokes means that the editorial biases of the authors are likely to have a more significant impact on the final proportions of joke content represented than in the more comprehensive joke anthologies found for the other regime types. Thus, while fig. 10.1 is to be regarded with some circumspection, it does suggest that if the samples used were representative of jokes in circulation then the overwhelming majority of jokes under Franco relate to the regime – specifically, they are for the most part about the Caudillo.

The hypothesis posited that the proportion of political jokes which speak to the ideology of the regime would be highest in post-totalitarian regimes, next highest in totalitarian regimes, and that authoritarian regimes would circulate the smallest proportion of ideology-related political jokes of the three regime types. Ultimately, the findings are consistent with this hypothesis. Post-totalitarian type regimes manifest a 20% proportion of

ideology-related humour, the proportion of jokes that were ideology-related in totalitarian type regimes was 15% and for the authoritarian type the proportion was at 14%.

Despite reservations regarding the authoritarian sample as well as inherent methodological difficulties, it should suffice to say tentatively that these results would seem to confirm the following theoretical assumption. In what we regard, based on four dimensions of differentiation, as post-totalitarian regimes, there is a greater propensity for jokes to be circulated which relate to the ideology of the regime. If circulating political jokes which speak to the ideology of a regime is said to correlate inversely to levels of private commitment to the regime's official ideology – and many of the theoretical understandings of political humour discussed will admit of this – then the results found are consistent with what Linz and Stephan claim to be a defining difference in the relationship to ideology between totalitarian and post-totalitarian regime types. The disparity in proportions of ideology-related humour additionally holds for each of the cases of totalitarian versus non-totalitarian type regimes compared separately – regardless of the inclusion or exclusion of the 1978 Soviet source. Furthermore, consistent with the claim made by Linz that authoritarian regime types are structurally inclined to manifest less coherent or explicitly articulated ideology and are instead characterised by distinctive

mentalities, the results found do not directly contradict this theoretical claim, although the proportion of 14% is uncomfortably close to the percentage of ideology-related jokes under post-totalitarianism. I would have expected it to be substantially lower based on the Linzian conception of a regime that struggles to articulate a unified ideology.

Broadly it will be noted here that some of the humour which in Fig. 8.1 speaks neither to the state, regime nor the ideology did in fact relate to the performance of Germany during the war and could be thought to signal concerns about the progress of the war. This trope characterised the Third Reich sample in a manner not seen in the other sources. An example joke would be:

“Are we going to lose the war” one German asks another.

“Yes,” says his friend, “but when?”⁶⁰

It may also help to explain the large state sector of the pie charts shown in figures 9.1 and especially 7.1 to know that many of these jokes relate to problems with the economy which, given the infrastructural and administrative issues which could be said to underlie many of the supply-side difficulties, I have categorised as jokes that speak to the state. The following is an example from the 1988 Soviet collection which was particularly hard to categorise, but arguably speaks to the state:

⁶⁰ Lipman (1991), p.201

Ivanov was standing in a very long line for vodka.

“We have General Secretary Gorbachev to thank for such a long line,” one of Ivanov’s neighbours in line muttered. “He’s making the stuff very scarce.”

“I can’t endure this any more,” Ivanov said, walking away. “I’m going to get my rifle and kill Gorbachev.”

Two hours later Ivanov returned to the line. “What happened?” the others asked.

“I decided to get back in this line. It’s shorter than the line to kill Gorbachev”⁶¹

The following East European example, which also exists in Czech and Polish versions, is taken from the Banc and Dundes collection of 1990 and contributes towards the 48% of jokes in fig. 7.1 which were categorised as speaking to the state:

In a food store in Bucharest.

–Do you have any frankfurters?

–No.

–Do you have ham?

–No.

–Do you have bologna?

–No.

–Do you have dry salami?

–No.

–Do you have...

–No.

After the customer leaves the store the vendor exclaims in amazement:

–What a memory!⁶²

The weakness methodologically with treating the Jewish experience under repressive regime types as qualitatively different and therefore as giving rise to a different spectrum of jokes is not that this appears inherently false. On the contrary the results

⁶¹ Harris and Rabinovich (1988), pp.165-6

⁶² Banc and Dundes (1990), p.65

suggest that where separate groupings are available for the political humour of Jewish people under regime types, the kinds of political jokes circulated are markedly different as to their content from jokes which are not Jewish. In the Third Reich source and the soviet 1988 source, Jewish jokes more frequently speak neither to the state, the regime nor the ideology, compared to the non-Jewish jokes. The following joke involves a Schutzstaffel (SS) raid, but is not “about” the state apparatus – rather, it could be more fairly characterised as “Jewish humour”:

There is a raid on a Jewish home at breakfast time.
“Who are those men?” a frightened boy asks his grandmother.
“S.S., mein kind.”⁶³

Many of these “other” jokes are those whose primary reference is to constructions of “Jewishness” whether endorsed or parodied, rather than to the political context – what Christie Davies calls the “conventional scripts”⁶⁴ of a group that are given currency for the sake of humour. For example, the following joke is both set in Auschwitz and involves a gas chamber, but it a joke that is “about” a script for Jewishness and not “about” the holocaust:

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.180. This reads “Ess, ess mein kind,” and is hence the petition of the supposedly archetypical concerned Jewish grandmother.

⁶⁴ Christie Davies, *The Right to Joke*, Research Report 37 (London: 2004, The Social Affairs Unit), pp.1-15, available at: <<http://socialaffairsunit.org.uk/digipub/content/view/11/27/>>, retrieved: 1st Jan 2006, p.11

Two Jews are about to enter the gas chamber in Auschwitz. One of them turns to the S.S. guard to make a last request for a glass of water.
“Shah, Moshe,” says his friend. “Don’t make trouble.”⁶⁵

Both sources also show a bias in Jewish jokes (relative to non-Jewish jokes) towards jokes which relate to the state, rather than to the regime – a bias that is understandable considering the manner in which the daily life of a Jewish citizen in these political systems was intimately bound with the operation of state apparatuses.

The difficulty in drawing conclusions from comparing Jewish and non-Jewish humour within regime type, stems from being unable to ascertain whether jokes have been classified as Jewish because they were circulated disproportionately by the Jewish community in contradistinction to other, more mainstream political jokes; or whether in fact the compiler has instituted chapter divisions having collated all the material and seeing that some of it refers to Jewishness – and some does not. Where the latter is the case such a selection process will tend to reduce representation within the Jewish chapter or section, of jokes from Jewish sources that are directed purely towards the state, the regime or the ideology – since they will be categorised as “not-Jewish”.

⁶⁵ Lipman (1991), p.193

Even despite this methodological issue and cognisant of the relatively small size of the 1978 Soviet Russia source, it is nonetheless illuminating to note the similarity between the distribution of types of joke collected in 1978 in the USSR as compared with the jokes (non-Jewish) collected from the USSR in 1988, a decade later (figures 4.1 and 5.2). The proportions are very similar (with ideology and regime seeing only one percent increases), but the number of jokes relating to the state has doubled in the decade between 1978 and 1988. If such a trend could be found more generally to be corroborated, it could be interpreted as a reflection of growing impatience with the functioning of the state, the state getting worse at delivery, or rising expectations.

Further Research

The system of categorising jokes according to whether they speak primarily to the state, regime or ideology is a blunt instrument, but has proven to be broadly workable. Future research could instead categorise political jokes according to which dimension they properly relate to of Linz and Stepan's four dimensions of pluralism, ideology, mobilization

and leadership. In favour of using such a typology would be its more comprehensive reach and seeming robustness – although jokes about the economic situation and the police state would probably be grouped perhaps awkwardly within “pluralism”. It would also be informative – given the nature of the activity of joking which is less often about attacking, and more often about being ludic in the vicinity of⁶⁶ – to add an index for whether the political joke could be regarded as “overtly critical” or simply “ambiguous/benign”. This exercise was experimentally carried out for humour under the Third Reich and the surprising results are shown in Appendix A.

If a distinction is to be made about the jokes of a minority group within a regime type (e.g. Jewish humour), the sourcing of these jokes needs to be able to substantiate the claim that the sample set is representative of the range of jokes circulated within the minority community – and has not been expunged of its mainstream content.

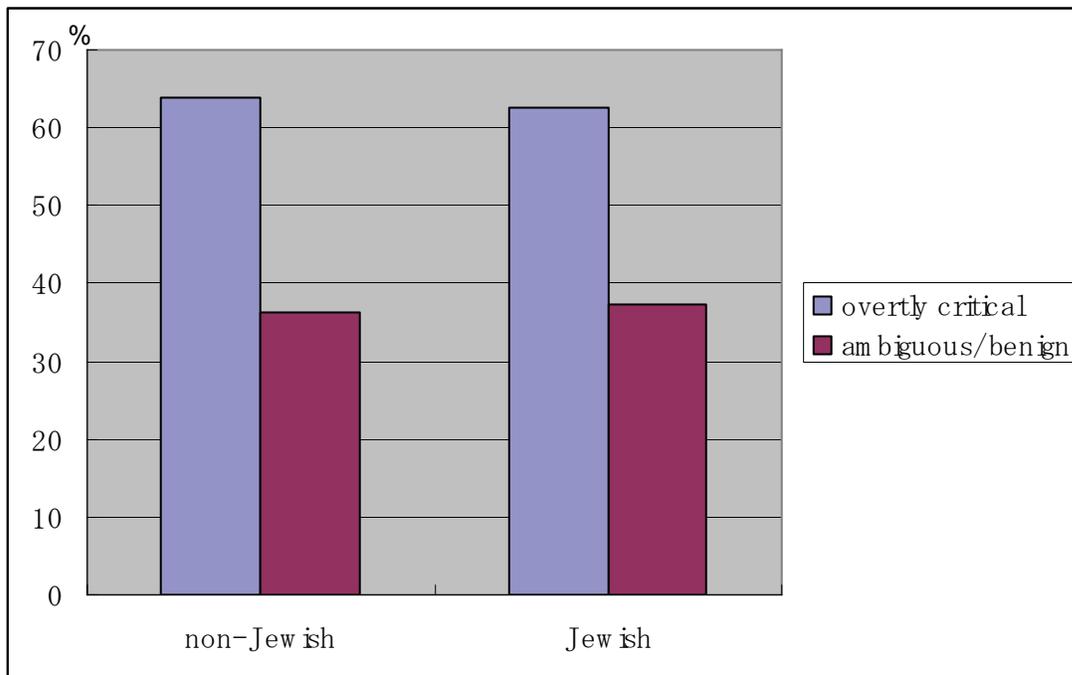
Keenly felt is not merely the desirability, but also the necessity for future studies of this nature to consult not just a broader range of sample sets for each individual regime, but also to use many more sources for each regime type. The directions which this research can take should be seen as having two distinct bearings. The comparativist asks whether

⁶⁶ see Davies (2004), p.9: “Jokes merely play with aggression just as they play with anything whose verbal discussion and expression is constrained by social custom or by the power of ‘them’ up there.”

different regime types can be shown necessarily to afford consistently distinct political landscapes for the cultivation of political jokes. A separate question asks how closely the range of jokes circulated within a political community can be shown to be responsive to and reflective of the lived experience of the political system.

Appendix A

Fig. 11.1 Bar chart showing percentages of political jokes that are overtly critical of state, regime or ideology from the Third Reich source and percentages of those that are either ambiguous or benign; for Jewish and non-Jewish jokes.



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