The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Media Engagement
Moody College of Communication

FROM COMEDY TO CONTROVERSY:

SATIRE IN POLITICAL MESSAGING

Nayeli Monreal, Ralph C. Anderson, & Scott R. Stroud

CASE STUDY

On February 14, 2025, following the beginning of Trump's second term in office and on a day traditionally associated with love and friendship, a post was shared by official White House accounts on Instagram, X, and Facebook. The post featured a satirical Valentine's card that offered a different take on the classic refrain "Roses are red, violets are blue." Instead, the White House used this Valentine's card to reinforce the administration's stance on illegal immigration: "Roses are red, violets are blue, come here illegally, and we'll deport you" (Schneid, 2025). The poem was accompanied by the faces of President Donald Trump and his border czar, Tom Homan, and the post caption read "Happy Valentine's Day," with a red heart emoji (Schneid, 2025). The Valentine's card, however, sparked immediate controversy, with some arguing that the use of satire in this context trivialized a profound and deeply personal issue, and others arguing that this kind of messaging is a natural part of democratic discourse and political communication. The debate surrounding this post raises ethical concerns about the use of humor in political messaging, specifically whether satire is a responsible or harmful tool when discussing sensitive topics.



Throughout history, satire has been a powerful tool for challenging authority and promoting change. Over time, political satire has evolved into a significant aspect of media culture, with television programs like "Saturday Night Live" and "The Daily Show" dissecting political issues through humor. While satire can expose contradictions and hold public figures

accountable, it also carries risks like reinforcing stereotypes, trivializing serious matters, and being dismissed as mere humor rather than a call for accountability (Politics Insider, 2023).

The ethical debate surrounding the use of satire by the Trump Administration echoes these concerns. Within hours of the post, critics began to share their thoughts about the Valentine's card, with organizations such as Voto Latino condemning it as an attempt to "provoke and sow division" at the expense of immigrant families (Voto Latino, 2025). "Using a lighthearted holiday to demean and target communities is not only irresponsible—it is beneath the dignity of the presidency," the organization stated (Voto Latino, 2025). Others found the message " insensitive, especially on a day meant to be about love" (NBC, 2025). The use of satire in political messaging may desensitize the public to serious issues. For instance, immigration policy affects millions of individuals, many of whom face dangerous and life-altering circumstances, and by turning a harsh immigration stance into a playful poem, the administration arguably minimized the gravity of deportation and the struggles of undocumented immigrants. Satire risks fostering a culture in which political leaders and the public fail to take these issues seriously, reducing accountability for policies with profound consequences. Some worry this type of messaging may be dehumanizing, reinforcing negative portrayals and bias towards undocumented individuals, rather than encouraging a nuanced discussion about immigration reform.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the Trump Administration's use of satire in this post was nothing more than an exercise of free speech that allows political messaging to be shared in a more digestible way to the public, and the responsibility for interpreting these messages falls on the audience. According to comments on the post, it appeared as if many viewers appreciated the approach the White House took towards a critical policy. Messages like "I can't love this enough," and "This is already my favorite Presidency of my life," were shared in this post (Morley, 2025). Satire is a longstanding tool in political discourse and can be seen as a legitimate exercise of free speech. Defenders of the Valentine’s card argue that satire allows political messaging to be shared in a way that makes complex topics more accessible to the general public. By using humor, political figures can engage audiences who might otherwise disengage from policy discussions. The post was also something pretty “normal” for the administration to post, as the Biden Administration had shared a similar Valentine's Day post with an overt political message. Last year, the Biden administration made a satirical post directed at House Speaker Mike Johnson (Weil, 2025). If individuals react strongly to a satirical post, some argue that it merely reflects the polarized nature of modern political discourse rather than an inherent flaw in the use of humor. From this perspective, the controversy surrounding the Valentine’s card exemplifies the power of satire to provoke discussion and bring attention to policy issues, even if the method is contentious.

The ethical debate surrounding the Trump Administration's use of satire in its anti-immigration Valentine's Day post extends beyond this single instance. This case raises broader questions about the balance between political messaging, ethical responsibility, and public perception. While satire can be a powerful tool for engagement, its use must be carefully considered in contexts where it risks trivializing serious human experiences. As political communication continues to evolve, this instance serves as a reminder of the ethical complexities that arise when humor intersects with governance and policy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does humor function differently when used by the government versus independent media or private citizens?
2. Should government officials be held to a different standard when using satire?
3. Do you think political affiliations shape our perception of "acceptable" uses of satire?
4. Does the benefit of using satire in political messaging outweigh possible negative effects?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Morley III, J. (2025, February 15). *WH trolls illegal migrants in Valentine's Day post*. Newsmax. Retrieved from https://www.newsmax.com/politics/valentines-day-illegal-immigration-white-house/2025/02/14/id/1199175/
- Insider, P. (2023, April 16). *When comedy meets politics: The art of satire in today's society*. Medium. Retrieved from https://politicsinsider.medium.com/when-comedy-meets-politics-the-art-of-satire-in-todays-society-93ed8ba02267
- Schneid, R. (2025, February 15). *White House, trump controversy: Social Media Post condemned*. Time. Retrieved from https://time.com/7225608/white-house-valentines-day-social-media-post-illegal-immigration-backlash/
- Staff, N. N. Y. (2025, February 14). *White House shares controversial deportation-centric Valentine's Day meme*. NBC. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/politics/white-house-controversial-valentines-day-meme-immigration-deportation/6151042/
- Voto Latino. (2025, February 14). Voto Latino condemns White House's offensive and divisive Valentine's Day Post. *Voto Latino*. Retrieved from https://votolatino.org/media/press-releases/voto-latino-condemns-white-houses-offensive-and-divisive-valentines-day-post/
- Weil, A. (2025, February 14). *Trump White House Valentine's Day card focuses on deportations*. Fox43. Retrieved from https://www.fox43.com/article/news/nation-world/white-house-valentines-day-message-deportation-trump/507-d2b2f6df-1b11-4234-b75a-8f6e2842bfc9

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cases produced by the Media Ethics Initiative remain the intellectual property of the Media Ethics Initiative and the Center for Media Engagement. They can be used in unmodified PDF form in classroom or educational settings. For use in publications such as textbooks, readers, and other works, please contact the Center for Media Engagement at mediaengagement@austin.utexas.edu.

This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

SUGGESTED CITATION

Monreal, N., Anderson, R. C., & Stroud, S. R. (October 2026). From Comedy to Controversy: Satire in Political Messaging. Media Ethics Initiative, Center for Media Engagement. https://mediaengagement.org/research/satire-in-political-messaging