

Abstract

The dissertation explores two cases of comedians who won political elections as a result of running primarily humorous election campaigns: Danish comedian, Jacob Haugaard, who became Member of Parliament from 1994 to 1998, and Icelandic comedian, Jón Gnarr, who became Mayor of Reykjavík from 2010 to 2014. The overall purpose of the dissertation is to uncover the comedians' election campaigns in depth so that we may come to a better understanding of how the comedians employed humor in their campaigns and how this use may have affected their wins.

The dissertation concludes that the comedians do not aim to accomplish the usual purpose of the election campaign genre, namely to be elected. Instead, the comedians primarily use humor for the purpose of laughter, entertainment, and criticism of established politicians or conventions in politics. That is, for purposes commonly associated with political humor. The analyses of a variety of campaign genres (e.g., election posters, election events or a political ad) reveal that the comedians principally do so by distorting the election promise and by appearing as political personas that are simple-minded, incompetent, and/or calculating.

Although the comedians deliberately sabotage their candidacies, voters nevertheless supported them. This suggests that the comedians succeeded at mirroring the opinions and values of voters, thereby releasing shared frustrations relative to political conduct and conventions. Thus, by accomplishing the social function of political humor, the comedians inadvertently accomplish the social function of an election campaign as well.