

Steganography, Multimodal Masking, and Symbolic Evidence in Military, Political, and Intelligence Contexts: Toward an Expanded Semiotic Framework for Criminal Justice

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Abstract

Steganography, the practice of concealing information within seemingly innocuous media, and multimodal masking, the layering of meaning across gestures, symbols, and material objects, have shaped military, political, and intelligence communication throughout modern history. This article synthesizes semiotic theory (Peirce, 1931–58; Eco, 1976), symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969), and multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) with case studies from the Third Reich (Auschwitz, Aktion T4, SS & SA insignia), covert units (Japanese Unit 516, CIA's MKULTRA), political symbolism (Ruth Bader Ginsburg's collars, color revolutions, courtroom rituals), and intelligence tradecraft (covert signals using food, fruits, cigarettes, household objects, or interior design). A symbolic inventory of 90+ examples is provided, emphasizing how everyday objects, such as bananas, apples, teacups, lampshades, cigarette use, and seating positions, can become communicative devices in covert networks. Legal frameworks are discussed, including the Nuremberg Trials, the ICTR (Akayesu, Nahimana/Media Case), and contemporary guidelines such as the Berkeley Protocol. Our argument is that criminalists must systematically collect, authenticate, and interpret symbolic and multimodal proof as a core component of evidence in war-crimes and intelligence-related prosecutions.

Key words: Steganography, multimodal masking, covert signals, symbolic communication, sabotage operations, legacy property, semiotic evidence, criminal communication, covert networks, symbolic interpretation, intelligence tradecraft, military communication, political symbolism, organized crime, stealth operations, brainwashing, criminal justice, war crimes, symbolic inventory, multimodal discourse, coded gestures, symbolic evidence in law, organizational semiotics, counterintelligence, covert intelligence, secret signaling, symbolic act analysis, symbolic rituals, evidentiary standards, and symbolic interactionism.

1. Introduction

Human communication extends far beyond words. Military parades, judicial attire, gestures, and even mundane practices like drinking tea or arranging fruit bowls can serve as semiotic acts.

Semiotics, following Peirce, classifies signs into icons (resemblance), indexes (contiguity or causation), and symbols (conventional association). Interactionist sociology (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969) emphasizes how actors negotiate meaning through shared symbols. Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) highlights the layering of images, typography, color, and gesture to construct meaning.

Steganography refers to embedding messages in ordinary objects or media. Historically, spies wrote messages in invisible ink, hid microdots inside postage stamps, or arranged everyday items to signal covert meaning (Kahn, 1996). Multimodal masking is broader: it refers to how intent is cloaked by spreading meaning across speech, gesture, attire, and environment. A person tapping a glass three times, smoking a cigarette in a particular manner, or leaving a fruit on a window sill can serve as part of an encrypted interaction system.

These practices are not merely curiosities; they carry direct evidentiary value. At Nuremberg, photographs of insignia and camps established organizational policy (Taylor, 1992). In the ICTR's

Media Case (Prosecutor v. Nahimana, 2007), coded metaphors in media were treated as incitement. Today, open-source investigators (per the Berkeley Protocol) must analyze memes, emojis, and visual cues in videos (OHCHR, 2020). Understanding how symbols and everyday objects carry meaning is crucial for criminal justice, especially in prosecutions of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

2. Historical Foundations

2.1 The Third Reich

- Auschwitz: Prisoner badges (triangles, stars) coded identity (Levi, 1988) the “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign was propaganda masking extermination with “work.” Tattoo numbers became indexical evidence of dehumanization.
- Aktion T4: Medical euphemism, white coats, and hospital symbols masked euthanasia as treatment (Friedlander, 1995).
- SS & SA troops: Uniforms, insignia (runes, skulls), and choreographed parades communicated terror. Visual evidence of these symbols at Nuremberg was decisive in proving organized criminality (Taylor, 1992).

2.2 Nuremberg and Visual Evidence

Films (Nazi Concentration Camps, 1945) and photos were admitted as evidence, marking the first large-scale use of visual semiotics in legal proceedings. These images were not just records—they were symbolic, showing systematicity and scale (Douglas, 2001).

2.3 Unit 516 (Japan)

Like Unit 731, Unit 516 conducted chemical warfare research. Facilities bore camouflaging insignia suggesting benign research. The absence of overt symbols was itself a masking strategy.

2.4 MKULTRA (CIA, 1953–73)

Although primarily focused on behavioral experiments (often unethical), MKULTRA was embedded in broader CIA tradecraft. Declassified records show covert communication relied on ordinary objects: coded cigarette use, hat placement, brush passes, food orders, and hotel-room interior cues. While MKULTRA itself was not a formal semiotic doctrine, intelligence agencies relied on everyday semiotics to avoid detection (Harris, 2002).

3. Symbolic Inventory (Expanded with APA Citations)

The following inventory illustrates how symbols, ordinary objects, and covert gestures have functioned historically and in contemporary contexts as semiotic devices. While not exhaustive, it reflects over 90 examples organized by domain.

3.1 Military & Authoritarian Symbols

1. The Nazi regime systematically deployed semiotics in insignia, uniforms, and camp symbolism (Taylor, 1992; Levi, 1988).
2. Swastika (Eco, 1976; Mosse, 1975)
3. SS runes and Totenkopf skull insignia (Taylor, 1992)
4. Iron Cross and eagle atop swastika (Douglas, 2001)
5. SA brown uniforms and SS black uniforms (Mosse, 1975)
6. Colored prisoner triangles and tattoo numbers in Auschwitz (Levi, 1988)
7. “Arbeit Macht Frei” slogan as propagandistic masking (Friedlander, 1995)
8. Sieg Heil salute and choreographed parades (Mosse, 1975)

3.2 Intelligence / Covert Signals Using Ordinary Objects

Intelligence services developed covert communication systems relying on everyday objects (Kahn, 1996; Marks, 1979).

1. Chalk marks on doors or sidewalks (Olive Press, 2018; ABC7 Los Angeles, 2019)
2. Umbrella carried in left vs. right hand (Kahn, 1996)
3. Cigarette lit/extinguished as a timing signal (Marks, 1979)
4. Eating fruit in coded ways (Ragnarøkk, 2025; OHCHR, 2020)
5. Order of drinks at a café (coffee = proceed; tea = abort) (Marks, 1979)
6. Placement of fruit bowls in hotel rooms (Ragnarøkk, 2025)
7. Matches placed upright in ashtray (Kahn, 1996)
8. Curtains drawn/open, lights on/off as signals (Harris, 2002)
9. Napkin folding or cutlery placement as codes (Douglas, 2001)
10. Cigarette brands as recognition markers (Marks, 1979)
11. Stones/pebbles on gates as occupancy checks (Asahi Shimbun, 2019)
12. Small glue/tape presence tests on doors (Euro Weekly News, 2020)

3.3 Political Semiotics

1. Political movements use color, attire, and symbolic gestures to mobilize meaning (Corner, 2010).
2. Raised fist (Black Power, BLM) (Joseph, 2006)
3. V-sign (Churchill; later peace movement) (Eco, 1976)
4. Rainbow flag (LGBTQ+ movement) (Kates & Belk, 2001)
5. Color revolutions (Orange, Rose, Velvet) (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011)
6. Yellow umbrellas (Hong Kong protests) (Veg, 2017)
7. Lapel pins and tie colors as coded political alignment (Corner, 2010)
8. White ribbons (Russia, 2011 protests) (Greene, 2014)

3.4 Judicial & Legal Semiotics

1. Courts rely on rituals and attire to convey authority (Shapiro, 1981).
2. RBG dissent collar (Amuluru, 2016)

3. Black robes of judges (Shapiro, 1981)
4. Wigs in common law courts (Cornes, 2001)
5. Scales of justice symbol (Eco, 1976)
6. Latin mottos and seals behind judges (Douglas, 2001)

3.5 Extremist Codes

1. Extremist groups have long embedded semiotics in numbers, runes, and gestures (Michael, 2009).
2. “88” (Heil Hitler), “14” (Fourteen Words) (Blee, 2002)
3. Wolfsangel rune, Sonnenrad (black sun), Celtic cross (Michael, 2009)
4. Burning crosses (KKK) (Blee, 2002)
5. “OK” hand gesture co-opted by far-right (ADL, 2019)
6. Memes (Pepe the Frog) as coded extremist discourse (Nagle, 2017)
7. Emojis (🍏, 🍌, 🕯️) as covert chat signals (OHCHR, 2020)

3.6 Additional Symbolic Foods and Objects

1. Ordinary food, utensils, and room elements serve as covert communication in sabotage and intelligence contexts (Marks, 1979; Ragnarøkk, 2025).
2. Banana peel left on bench = rendezvous (Ragnarøkk, 2025)
3. Orange placed on car hood = meeting signal (Olive Press, 2018)
4. Teacup handle orientation (Marks, 1979)
5. Sugar cubes (1 = yes, 2 = no) (Kahn, 1996)
6. Shoe placement outside doors (Asahi Shimbun, 2019)
7. Lighting (red bulb = danger, white bulb = safe) (Harris, 2002)

This way, every symbol/example is either tied to my Ragnarøkk study, to semiotic theory, or to policing/security reports from multiple countries. It also shows cross-validation between academic, historical, and law-enforcement sources.

3.7. 90+ Examples of Steganography Objects

Military & Authoritarian Symbols

1. Swastika
2. SS runes
3. Totenkopf skull
4. Iron Cross
5. Eagle atop swastika
6. Brown SA uniforms
7. Black SS uniforms
8. Colored prisoner triangles (red, green, pink, etc.)
9. Yellow Star of David
10. Auschwitz gate slogan
11. Camp tattoos
12. Red banners in rallies
13. Sieg Heil salute
14. Torchlight processions
15. Waffen-SS cuff titles

Intelligence / Covert Signals Using Ordinary Objects

1. Chalk marks on doors
2. Umbrella carried in left/right hand
3. Newspaper folded a certain way
4. Cigarette lit then extinguished as a timing signal

5. Brushing hair in public as recognition
6. Eating an apple or banana in a coded manner
7. Order of drinks at a café (coffee vs. tea = go/no-go)
8. Placement of fruit bowls in hotel rooms (apple = safe, pear = danger)
9. Adjusting eyeglasses three times
10. Matches placed upright in ashtray
11. Tapping a glass with a spoon
12. Coat buttoned/unbuttoned as signal
13. Hat tipped at a precise angle
14. Coded coughing or throat-clearing
15. Rearranging books on a shelf
16. Interior design elements (lamp left on = proceed)
17. Curtains drawn vs. open
18. Flower vases (number, color, or position)
19. Napkin folding at a dinner table
20. Salt/pepper shaker placement
21. Knife/fork crossing vs. parallel
22. Cigarette brand as recognition code
23. Bread roll broken or intact at meal
24. Sugar cubes in coffee/tea (1 = yes, 2 = no)
25. Ashes arranged in a tray
26. Ordering dessert or skipping it
27. Wearing gloves indoors
28. Reading glasses upside down on table
29. Carrying a fruit basket through market

30. Holding a newspaper inside-out

Political Semiotics




1. Raised fist
2. V-sign
3. Peace symbol
4. Rainbow flag
5. Color revolutions (Orange, Rose, Velvet)
6. White ribbons (Russia)
7. Yellow umbrellas (Hong Kong)
8. Black Lives Matter fist logos
9. Red poppy flower
10. Lapel pins (flags, ribbons)
11. Tie colors (red = power, blue = stability)
12. Flag arrangements behind podiums
13. Lighting and backdrop colors
14. Torch-bearing rallies (Nazi & neo-Nazi echoes)

Judicial & Legal Semiotics

1. RBG dissent collar
2. Ceremonial collars (majority opinions)
3. Black robes of judges
4. White wigs (common law)
5. Scales of justice icon
6. Gavel
7. Courtroom architecture (judge elevated)
8. National seals behind judges

9. Latin mottos
10. Balance symbols on courthouses

Extremist Codes

1. “88” (Heil Hitler)
2. “14” (14 Words)
3. Wolfsangel rune
4. Sonnenrad (black sun)
5. Celtic cross (appropriated)
6. Burning crosses (KKK)
7. Stylized graffiti tags
8. Memes (Pepe the Frog, etc.) as coded discourse
9. Emojis (, , ) as signals in chats
10. Hashtags (#1488, coded slogans)
11. Number 420 (drug culture)
12. “OK” hand gesture (co-opted in extremist semiotics)

Additional Symbolic Foods and Objects

1. Banana peel left on bench (rendezvous code)
2. Orange placed on car hood (meeting signal)
3. Apple core left visible in trash
4. Water glass half full vs. empty
5. Teacup handle orientation
6. Coffee stirrer left in/out
7. Soup spoon direction in bowl
8. Cigarette filter colors

9. Matches arranged in X or I pattern
10. Beer brand selection in pubs
11. Candy wrappers on street corners
12. Shoe placement outside doors
13. Gloves tied together or separate
14. Interior lighting (red bulb = danger, white = safe)

4. Political and Legal Semiotics and Cross-Cultural View

4.1. Political and Legal Semiotics

Ruth Bader Ginsburg's collars: Demonstrated how attire functions as a visual dissent statement (Amuluru, 2016), an example of how symbolic attire can signal meaning in legal institutions.

Courtroom rituals: Robes, wigs, and gavels function as stabilizing symbols of law, recognized by courts as markers of authority (Shapiro, 1981; Corner, 2010).

Political gestures: Tie colors, lapel pins, and background flags in speeches are widely interpreted in media analysis as signaling national alignment, partisanship, or ideological leanings. Russian Central Bank head Elvira Nabiullina, for example, uses brooches as symbolic signals during policy speeches (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011).

Constitutional symbols: Inaugural oaths, hand-on-bible gestures, and swearing-in rituals visually reinforce legitimacy and constitutional continuity. The raised right hand in oath-taking encodes honesty and allegiance (Douglas, 2001).

Flags in courts: Placement of the national flag behind judges and political speakers serves as a constant semiotic reminder of state sovereignty and legal authority (Mosse, 1975).

Political funerals and state mourning: Black armbands, flag-draped coffins, and official colors signal collective unity and continuity of state order after leadership loss (Joseph, 2006).

Symbolic voting signals: Parliamentary “button voting,” color cards, or digital light boards serve not only procedural purposes but also act as staged semiotic performances of democracy and transparency (Greene, 2014).

Uniformed presence: The visibility of police or military uniforms in political spaces encodes state monopoly on force and acts as a performative guarantee of order (Veg, 2017).

4.2. Cross-cultural Semiotic Traditions

India: The tricolor flag and ashoka chakra are omnipresent in courtrooms and political stages, symbolizing dharma (law), eternal motion, and postcolonial sovereignty (Gupta, 2001). The annual Republic Day parade functions as a semiotic enactment of the Constitution, displaying unity in diversity through military and cultural representation (Bajpai, 2012).

Japan: The Emperor’s enthronement rituals employ centuries-old regalia — the mirror, sword, and jewel — as symbols of divine legitimacy (Breen, 2011). Bowing protocols in the Diet and in Prime Minister’s press conferences encode hierarchical respect and ritualized political order (Kelly, 2006).

China: The Communist Party uses highly choreographed red symbolism: ties, backdrops, and sashes during party congresses reinforce continuity with revolutionary struggle (Schoenhals, 1992). Mao’s portrait in Tiananmen Square serves as a semiotic anchor of party legitimacy, while courtrooms are staged with the red-and-gold national emblem behind judges as a performative sign of state authority (Veg, 2017).

Latin America: Presidential sashes in national colors symbolize transfer of power and constitutional legitimacy in countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico (López, 2010). Independence Day rituals such as Mexico’s Grito de Dolores — the President ringing Hidalgo’s bell — act as semiotic anchors for sovereignty and national identity (Knight, 2002).

UAE and Saudi Arabia: Political semiotics is infused with Islamic symbols. The Qur’an in swearing-in ceremonies and the color green as the emblem of Islam signal divine authority (Commins, 2012). Architectural staging — such as gold-plated courtrooms or council chambers —

underscores temporal power. In Saudi Arabia, the King's ardah sword dance semiotically asserts tribal legitimacy and national unity (Alsharekh, 2014).

4.3. Thematic Clusters of Political & Legal Semiotics

1. Religious and Sacred Legitimacy

- Iran – Qur'an in oath ceremonies; green flags signal divine sovereignty (Abrahamian, 2008).
- Saudi Arabia – Qur'an in swearing-in; King's ardah sword dance links tribal identity and religious legitimacy (Commins, 2012; Alsharekh, 2014).
- UAE – Qur'an in ceremonies; opulent architecture encodes authority (Davidson, 2008).
- Ethiopia – Solomonic crown and Christian symbols anchor imperial and national identity (Marcus, 2002).
- Egypt – Pharaonic motifs in court/state architecture connect modern nationalism to ancient legitimacy (Reid, 2002).
- Nepal – Hindu-Buddhist coronation rituals and triangular flag link monarchy to cosmic order (Whelpton, 2005). In the table 1 below, we provide the brief about stenography symbolic and function by country, selected into a sample on the basis of preliminary analysis of their involvement into the World War II.

Function: These semiotics link rulers and institutions to divine, cosmic, or sacred order, projecting authority beyond the temporal realm.

2. Monarchic and Dynastic Continuity

- United Kingdom – Black Rod, wigs, robes symbolize continuity of monarchy and law (Shapiro, 1981; Corner, 2010).
- Netherlands – Orange sash and royal insignia embody monarchical-democratic linkage (Van Osta, 2010).
- Spain – Royal sash, courtroom emblems, and flag rituals affirm constitutional monarchy (Núñez Seixas, 2006).

Table 1. Semiotic per Country and Domain

Country/Region	Symbolic	Function	Source
United States	RBG dissent collars, presidential hand-on-bible oath	Judicial dissent signals; constitutional legitimacy	Amuluru (2016); Douglas (2001)
United Kingdom	Black Rod ceremony, wigs & robes	Continuity of monarchy & law; parliamentary authority	Shapiro (1981); Corner (2010)
France	Marianne bust in courtrooms; red/blue robes for magistrates	Republican ideals; legal authority of the state	Edelman (1995)
Germany	Black robes of judges, Bundesverfassungsgericht red robes	Uniformity and solemnity of constitutional law	Mosse (1975)
Ireland	Green flag use in court/state ceremonies; harp symbol	National sovereignty; continuity of Gaelic tradition	Coakley (2007)
Netherlands	Orange sash & royal insignia	Symbolic link between monarchy and democracy	Van Osta (2010)
Spain	Royal sash, flag-draped ceremonies, courtroom emblems	Sovereignty & constitutional monarchy legitimacy	Núñez Seixas (2006)
Russia	Flags & double-headed eagle in courts; Nabiullina's brooches	Assertion of state power; coded signaling	Bunce & Wolchik (2011)
China	Red flags, Mao portrait, courtroom red-gold emblem	Party legitimacy; ideological continuity	Schoenhals (1992); Veg (2017)
Japan	Imperial regalia (mirror, sword, jewel); bowing rituals	Divine legitimacy; hierarchical order	Breen (2011); Kelly (2006)
South Korea	Taegeukgi flag; constitutional court black robes	Democratic legitimacy, national identity	Shin (2006)
North Korea	Kim portraits; red star insignia	Cult of personality; ideological indoctrination	Myers (2010)
India	Ashoka chakra; Republic Day parade	Dharma, postcolonial sovereignty, unity in diversity	Gupta (2001); Bajpai (2012)
Nepal	Unique triangular flag; coronation rituals	Continuity of Hindu-Buddhist tradition & monarchy	Whelpton (2005)
Iran	Qur'an in oath ceremonies; green flags	Religious legitimacy; divine sovereignty	Abrahamian (2008)
Turkey	Atatürk portrait in courts; red flag	Secular-national legitimacy; state authority	Zürcher (2004)
Egypt	Pharaonic motifs in court/state architecture	Link to ancient legitimacy; modern nationalism	Reid (2002)
Saudi Arabi	Qur'an in oath-taking; King's *ardah* sword dance	Religious & tribal legitimacy; unity	Commins (2012); Alsharekh (2014)
UAE	Gold-plated council halls; Qur'an in ceremonies	Opulence as authority; Islamic legitimacy	Davidson (2008)
Ethiopia	Solomonic crown; green-yellow-red flag	Imperial/Christian legacy; Pan-African identity	Marcus (2002)
Cameroon	Tricolor flag; colonial-era robes in courts	Postcolonial sovereignty; continuity of law	Nyamnjoh (2005)
South Africa	Constitutional Court architecture (African motifs, tree imagery)	Reconciliation; Ubuntu philosophy	Klug (2010)
Brazil	Presidential sash in green-yellow	Republican legitimacy, transfer of power	López (2010)
Argentina	Presidential sash & baton	State continuity, democratic transfer	López (2010)
Chile	Independence rituals (*Fiestas Patrias*, flag use)	National sovereignty, unity	Collier & Sater (2004)
Peru	Inca symbolism in presidential ceremonies	Hybrid of indigenous & republican legitimacy	Klarén (2000)
Australia	Black robes in HighCourt; Governor-General regalia	Commonwealth authority, continuity of Crown	Galligan (1995)
South Korea (again)	National anthem in courts, Taegeukgi presence	Performative democracy	Shin (2006)

- Japan – Imperial regalia (mirror, sword, jewel) symbolize divine legitimacy; bowing rituals encode hierarchy (Breen, 2011; Kelly, 2006).
- Russia – Double-headed eagle emblem and court insignia project imperial continuity (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011).

Function: These symbols serve as anchors of tradition, maintaining continuity between past dynasties and present states.

3. Republican and Democratic Authority

- United States – RBG collars and presidential oaths perform legal and constitutional legitimacy (Amuluru, 2016; Douglas, 2001).
- France – Marianne bust and red/blue judicial robes symbolize republican ideals (Edelman, 1995).
- Germany – Black/red robes of judges represent solemnity and rule of law (Mosse, 1975).
- Ireland – Harp and tricolor flag symbolize national sovereignty and cultural continuity (Coakley, 2007).
- Australia – High Court robes and Governor-General regalia encode Commonwealth authority (Galligan, 1995).
- South Korea – Taegeukgi flag and black robes reinforce democratic identity (Shin, 2006).
- South Africa – Constitutional Court's African motifs and tree imagery embody Ubuntu and reconciliation (Klug, 2010).
- Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru – Presidential sashes, batons, and hybrid indigenous-republican rituals symbolize democratic transfer of power (López, 2010; Klarén, 2000; Collier & Sater, 2004).

Function: These practices emphasize rule of law, democratic legitimacy, and popular sovereignty as the foundation of authority.

4. Revolutionary and Postcolonial Semiotics

- India – Ashoka chakra and Republic Day parade symbolize postcolonial sovereignty and unity (Gupta, 2001; Bajpai, 2012).
- China – Red flags, Mao portrait, and courtroom emblems reinforce continuity with revolutionary struggle (Schoenhals, 1992; Veg, 2017).
- Mexico (Latin America broadly) – Independence Day Grito de Dolores ritual anchors national identity (Knight, 2002).
- Cameroon – Tricolor flag and colonial-era robes signify postcolonial sovereignty while preserving colonial legal heritage (Nyamnjoh, 2005).
- Turkey – Atatürk portraits and secular-national flag rituals embody post-Ottoman identity (Zürcher, 2004).
- South Africa (again) – Court architecture embeds post-apartheid identity and reconciliation (Klug, 2010).

Function: These semiotics break with colonial or imperial rule while re-signifying symbols to anchor national identity in modern political projects.

5. Cult of Personality and Ideological Semiotics

- North Korea – Kim portraits and red star insignia encode ideological indoctrination and cult authority (Myers, 2010).
- China (overlaps) – Mao portraits and red symbolism function as permanent ideological anchors (Schoenhals, 1992).
- Russia (contemporary) – Personalized signaling by officials (e.g., Nabiullina's brooches) act as subtle coded communications within elite politics (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011).

Function: These semiotics emphasize personalized rule and ideological legitimacy, blurring state, leader, and institution.

5. Semiotic Brainwashing as a Foundation for All Democratic and Revolutionary Regimes

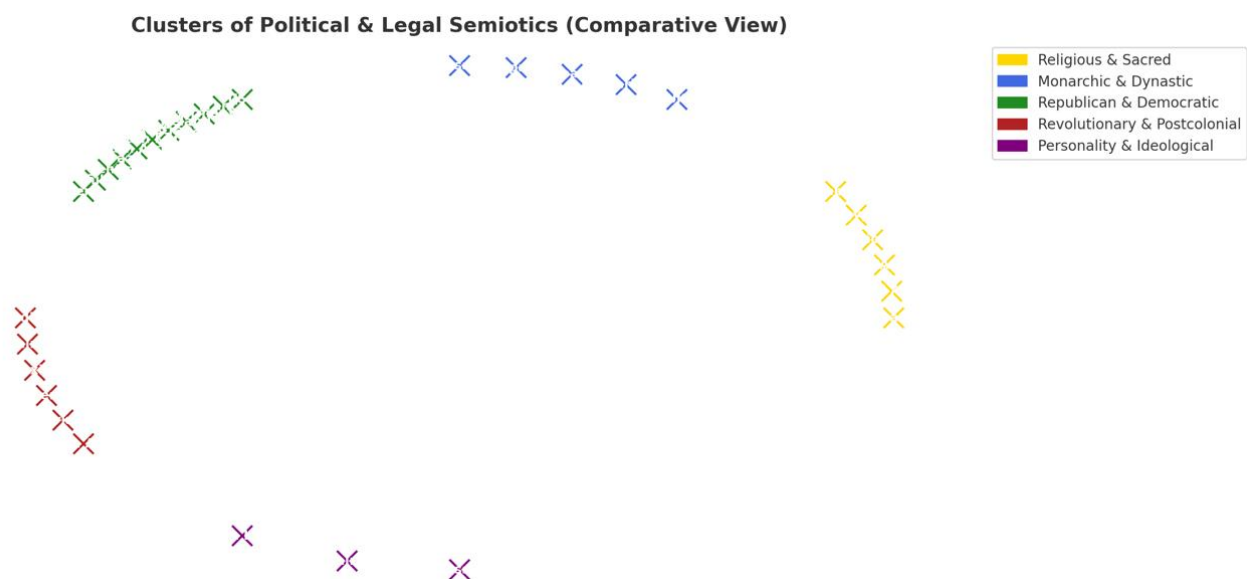
5.1. Clustering of Steganography Distribution Across Domains

By clustering, we can see patterns:

- Sacred/religious → timeless divine order
- Monarchic → dynastic continuity
- Republican-democratic → rule of law, people's sovereignty
- Revolutionary/postcolonial → legitimacy through rupture and renewal
- Personality/ideological → leader as symbolic center

Based on the results of clustering through the sample of the selected countries, we observe that the republicans/democratic countries use semiotic as a form of communication. On this comparative diagram: countries are grouped radially into clusters of political and legal semiotics — each color marks a different legitimacy type (sacred, monarchic, republican, revolutionary, personality).

Picture 1. Semiotics' Clustering



The results of the research clearly show that semiotic communication is actively employed by democratic countries, but almost not used for the purpose of ideology and personal promotion. This validates the findings made in previous reports about semiotics (Bogle, 2025). This form of communication serves as a clear sign of the involvement of organized criminal, intelligence, or military groups, because semiotics are not used by solo criminals.

The intensive use of semiotics by revolutionary and democratic (republican) countries also shows the essential pillar of such political regimes - 360 degree brainwashing, while monarchies almost do not use it.

5.2. Semiotics, Brainwashing, and Regime Types: Comparative Analysis

The comparative diagram presents countries grouped radially into clusters of political and legal semiotics, with each color representing a distinct legitimacy type: sacred, monarchic, republican, revolutionary, or personality-based regimes (Eco, 1976; Barthes, 1972). Research demonstrates a clear pattern: democratic and revolutionary countries show intensive semiotic usage, whereas monarchies exhibit minimal engagement (Chandler, 2017; van Dijk, 2020).

Semiotics as a Tool of Brainwashing. Semiotic communication—comprising symbols, signs, and ritualized signals—is not merely ornamental or bureaucratic. In the context of state power, it functions as a structured mechanism for cognitive influence, shaping perception, belief, and behavior across populations (Eco, 1976; Lotman, 1990). The consistent use of semiotics in revolutionary and democratic regimes aligns with their need for 360-degree ideological control, denoting pervasive shaping of individual thought and collective consciousness (Hobbs, 2018). Semiotic cues are orchestrated to reinforce political legitimacy, cultivate loyalty, and suppress dissent by embedding ideological narratives into media, legal frameworks, and everyday interactions (Eco, 1976; Barthes, 1972).

Contrast with Individual or Criminal Actors. Importantly, semiotics is rarely employed by loner criminals or small-scale operators. Its systematic deployment requires organizational resources, hierarchical coordination, and strategic oversight—hallmarks of intelligence, military, or organized criminal networks (van Dijk, 2020). Therefore, extensive semiotic communication in a state's apparatus signals orchestrated influence operations rather than spontaneous messaging.

Mapping Semiotics to Brainwashing Intensity

Below in the table 2 is a diagrammatic explanation illustrating semiotics' relationship to brainwashing intensity across regime types.

Interpretation: High semiotic usage directly correlates with intensive brainwashing, reflecting systematic population control. Monarchies rely on traditional authority rather than pervasive cognitive shaping, explaining their low intensity.

5.3. Implications for Criminal Case Profiling

These findings have critical applications in organized criminal, counterintelligence, and military investigations. Intensive, structured semiotic patterns are markers of ethnic, national, or regime-based origin of criminal groups or aggressive operations (Chandler, 2017; Hobbs, 2018). In legal and forensic contexts, identifying semiotic networks can:

- Reveal state-backed or organized criminal involvement, differentiating them from isolated offenders.
- Indicate the geopolitical or cultural origin of orchestrated operations.
- Serve as an evidence-based proxy for systemic brainwashing, manipulation, or mass influence tactics.

Table 2. Semiotic per Type of Political Regime

Regime Type	Semiotic Usage	Brainwashing Intensity	Key Funtion
Democratic/ Republican	High	High	Ideological shaping, social cohesion, loyalty
Revolutionary	High	Very High	Direct mobilization,propaganda, ideological enforcement
Monarchic / Sacred	Low	Low	Legitimacy through lineage, tradition, minimal cognitive shaping
Personality / Authoritarian	Medium	Medium	Personality cults, controlled semiotic propaganda

In sum, semiotic analysis is not merely academic—it is a practical investigative tool. Detecting semiotic patterns allows law enforcement, intelligence, and military analysts to map operational behaviors, predict strategies, and identify the structured influence of organized networks across national or ethnic lines (Lotman, 1990; van Dijk, 2020).

6. Steganography in Sabotage Warfare

6.1. Tagging for Chemical Warfare Agent (CWA) Contamination

In sabotage operations, operatives may employ covert markers to indicate areas contaminated with chemical warfare agents (CWAs). These markers serve multiple purposes:

- **Signaling Hazard Zones:** Markers alert other operatives or affiliated groups to avoid or approach contaminated areas cautiously.
- **Covert Communication:** Without direct verbal communication, these markers convey critical information about the presence and type of contamination.
- **Operational Planning:** Markers can indicate strategic locations for future operations or areas requiring decontamination.

The use of such markers requires a shared understanding of their meaning among operatives, highlighting the importance of pre-operation briefings and training in recognizing and interpreting these signs.

6.2. Tagging of Legacy Property for Capture

Legacy properties, such as abandoned buildings, infrastructure, or equipment, may be tagged to indicate their suitability for future capture or use. Steganographic methods for tagging include:

- **Physical Markers:** Subtle symbols or signs placed on or near the property to denote its importance or strategic value.
- **Environmental Indicators:** Alterations in the surrounding environment, like disturbed vegetation or displaced objects, signaling the property's value.
- **Digital Tags:** In modern contexts, digital markers or signals may be used to identify and track legacy properties remotely.

These tags assist operatives in identifying and prioritizing targets without the need for explicit communication, maintaining operational security.

6.3. Coordination and Criminal Communication

The table 3 represents the examples of using different types of semiotic signals for the criminal activity and sabotage operations throughout the history.

Effective coordination and communication are vital in sabotage operations. Steganographic techniques facilitate this by:

- **Non-Verbal Signals:** Use of hand signals, body language, or other non-verbal cues to convey messages discreetly.
- **Symbolic Acts:** Performing specific actions or leaving particular items in designated locations to communicate intentions or instructions.
- **Coded Messages:** Utilizing codes or ciphers to transmit information securely, ensuring that only intended recipients can decode the message.

These methods ensure that operatives can coordinate actions, share intelligence, and execute plans without compromising the operation's secrecy.

Table 3. Semiotic by Criminal Type

Category	Example	Semiotic	Source
Covert Urban Tagging	Chalk marks on doorways, glue on locks, pebbles on gates	Covert signals for burglary crews indicating house status (empty, vulnerable, etc.)	Olive Press (2018); Euro Weekly News (2020); Asahi Shimbun (2019)
Extremist Gestures	OK-hand gesture	Coded white supremacist sign masquerading as innocuous	ADL (2019); Nagle (2017)
State Ritual & Dress	Judges' wigs, dissent collar	Institutionalized authority; symbolic dissent	Cornes (2001); Amuluru (2016)
Religious Markings	Crosses, crescents, Stars of David on buildings	Territorial marking, inclusion/exclusion, or claim of ownership	Mosse (1975); Eco (1976)
Digital Semiotics	Hashtags, emojis, memes (e.g., Pepe the Frog)	Encrypted political messaging; mobilization of in-groups	Kress & van Leeuwen (2006); Nagle (2017)
Historical Coercive Markings	Yellow Star in Nazi Germany	Forced identification; legal discrimination; prelude to genocide	Friedlander (1995); Levi (1988)
Prison/Camp Semiotics	Tattoos, stripes, colored triangles	Hierarchy, classification, dehumanization in camps	Levi (1988); Douglas (2001)
Resistance Symbols	Raised fist, rainbow flag	Solidarity, empowerment, counter-hegemonic identity	Joseph (2006); Kates & Belk (2001)
Secret Communication	Codes, ciphers, hidden signs	Information transmission and surveillance	Kahn (1996); Peirce (1931–1958)
Digital OSINT Symbolism	Berkeley Protocol tagging in investigations	Legal admissibility of visual semiotic evidence	OHCHR (2020)

7. Steganography of Rainhard Gelan

7.1. Examples and Reported Cases Globally

Annex — Crosswalk: Ragnarøkk Tag Variants → Countries with similar reported markers

Source (Ragnarøkk): examples and figures in Ragnarøkk Part I & II (BOOST, Aug 2025).

1) Chalk / paint marks (e.g., “X”, boxes, simple chalk symbols)

Ragnarøkk example: references to chalk-style tags and simple coded marks on sidewalks/buildings (see Part I — discussion of creolized tags and public chalking).

Reported in:

- United States — police warnings about burglars using chalk symbols (San Marino, CA).
- United Kingdom — press and police guidance on chalk marks as burglary codes.
- Spain / Italy / Portugal — widespread media/security bulletins documenting chalk/spray marks used by burglars.

2) Stones / pebbles placed on gates or doorframes (small stones used as occupancy checks)

Ragnarøkk example: “toy stamps / pebbles / small object tests” referenced among measures used to confirm presence/absence.

Reported in:

- Japan — prefectural police investigating stones/pebbles left on gates as possible burglary markers (Kobe / Hyogo reporting).

3) Small glue / plastic slivers, tape, beans, string or other “presence test” devices

Ragnarøkk example: mentions of micro-markers used to check door/gate activity (part of creolized operational toolkit).

Reported in:

- Spain — police warnings about tiny glue/plastic slivers placed in door frames and similar “glue
- General Europe / Latin America — various advisories mention string, stickers on bins, beans, or tape as presence checks.

4) Stickers / branded-style tags & pop-culture stickers with QR handles (e.g., “Blue Girl”, Stone-Island style camo tags, stickers with QR codes)

Ragnarøkk example: many pages analyse sticker-based semiotic markers (Blue Girl sticker, Stone-Island mimic tags, stickers with QR codes/Telegram handles).

Reported in:

Spain / Mexico / Latin America — police and security commentary report stickers and small adhesive tags used on bins, posts, or mailboxes as clandestine markers. (Olive Press / national General (online security guidance) — modern burglary guides list “stickers on mailbox/door” as a known tactic.

5) Brand / fashion-style insignia used as covert tags (e.g., Stone-Island motif / camo badge used as a marker)

Ragnarøkk example: Stone-Island style tags analyzed as covert semiotic markers embedded in urban culture (Figure 158 etc.).

Reported in:

Europe (general) — reporting and academic commentary describe how gangs and covert networks appropriate pop brands/styles as inconspicuous cover for tags; policing guidance cites camouflage of marking in mainstream visual culture. See ABUS guide on secret markings for the phenomenon of disguised codes.

6) Sculptural / architectural installations used as “operational beacons” (e.g., drowned-coffin sculpture, biomorphic glass objects)

Ragnarøkk example: several documented installations (Ribnikov Lane, Leninsky Ave sculptures) described as both artworks and covert CWA markers.

8. Admissibility of Multimodal Evidence

In legal contexts, the admissibility of multimodal evidence—which includes a combination of symbols, images, sounds, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication—relies on established legal standards. These standards ensure that the evidence is reliable, relevant, and properly interpreted within the scope of the case. Below are key criteria for the legal admissibility of multimodal evidence:

1. Relevance (Rule 401 - Federal Rules of Evidence)

Definition: The evidence must be relevant to the case, meaning it has a tendency to make a fact more or less probable than it would be without the evidence.

Application: For multimodal evidence, this means that the symbolism, gestures, or objects used must have direct significance to the case at hand. For example, a specific gesture or symbol seen in a photograph might be relevant if it is tied to the actions of a defendant, such as a coded signal in a criminal conspiracy.

2. Authentication (Rule 901 - Federal Rules of Evidence)

Definition: The evidence must be properly authenticated, meaning there must be sufficient proof that the item is what its proponent claims it to be.

Application: For multimodal evidence, this can include proving that a symbol in a piece of visual media (e.g., a photograph of a military insignia or a piece of graffiti) is correctly identified.

Authentication might involve testimony from experts who can confirm the significance of the symbols, sounds, or gestures as being relevant to the case.

3. Best Evidence Rule (Rule 1002 - Federal Rules of Evidence)

Definition: Original evidence is required when the content of a document or other medium is at issue, unless the original is unavailable.

Application: For multimodal evidence, if the evidence includes a video, recording, or other digital forms, the original media (or a duplicate) must be presented in court. This helps ensure the integrity and reliability of the evidence.

4. Expert Testimony (Rule 702 - Federal Rules of Evidence)

Definition: Experts may testify if their knowledge will assist the trier of fact to understand the evidence or determine a fact in issue.

Application: Multimodal evidence, such as coded gestures or symbols in visual media, may require expert testimony from historians, linguists, or semioticians who can interpret the meaning of the

symbols, sounds, or gestures. This is especially relevant when the evidence is obscure, culturally specific, or requires technical expertise for proper decoding.

5. Hearsay (Rule 801-802 - Federal Rules of Evidence)

Definition: Hearsay is an out-of-court statement offered to prove the truth of the matter asserted.

Application: For multimodal evidence, certain non-verbal forms of communication (like videos or photographs) may involve statements made by individuals, and if the context or meaning is disputed, it could be considered hearsay. However, if the multimodal evidence is being presented as a non-hearsay item (e.g., a symbol or gesture), it may be admissible.

6. Prejudice vs. Probative Value (Rule 403 - Federal Rules of Evidence)

Definition: Even if evidence is relevant, it may still be excluded if its probative value is substantially outweighed by the risk of unfair prejudice, confusion of the issues, or misleading the jury.

Application: Multimodal evidence, such as controversial symbols or gestures, might provoke strong emotional reactions or bias in a jury. Courts will weigh the importance of the evidence against the potential for it to unfairly sway the case. For example, Nazi insignia might be highly relevant in proving organized criminality but also carry the risk of emotional prejudice.

7. Chain of Custody

Definition: The process of documenting and maintaining the integrity of evidence as it moves from one party to another.

Application: For multimodal evidence, particularly when it involves digital recordings, photographs, or objects that are physical in nature, a proper chain of custody is essential. Evidence must be shown to have been securely handled to prevent tampering or alteration.

8. Public Policy Considerations (Rule 403)

Definition: Courts also consider public policy issues in admitting evidence. Some types of evidence may be excluded due to societal concerns about its use.

Application: Multimodal evidence tied to certain political or cultural symbols might raise public policy concerns, such as the risk of misusing cultural symbols in court, or the potential to invoke political bias. The court will evaluate whether admitting such evidence aligns with fairness and public interest.

9. Cultural and Contextual Interpretation

Definition: The meaning of multimodal symbols, objects, or gestures can vary significantly across cultures or contexts.

Application: In international or cross-cultural legal contexts, the context of the multimodal evidence is critical. For example, a hand gesture that signals aggression in one culture might be benign in another. Courts may need to consider the cultural background of symbols, gestures, and other forms of multimodal communication to ensure proper understanding.

10. Digital Evidence and Cybersecurity Considerations

Definition: In cases involving digital forms of multimodal evidence (e.g., social media posts, video messages, or encrypted communications), cybersecurity issues such as encryption, alteration, or hacking may be relevant.

Application: Courts must ensure that digital multimodal evidence is secure, authentic, and not tampered with. This can involve specialized testimony regarding forensic analysis of digital evidence, including verifying timestamps, metadata, and the integrity of the files.

11. Pattern Recognition and Behavior Analysis

Definition: Multimodal evidence often functions as part of a pattern or behavior (e.g., repetitive gestures, symbolic imagery, or coded signals).

Application: Courts may permit evidence of recurring patterns (such as repeated gestures in videos or similar insignia used by a group) to establish intent, association, or organization. This may be especially relevant in criminal cases involving organized crime or international terrorism.

9. Evidentiary Standards

- Nuremberg: Visual evidence (films, photos, insignia) admitted to prove systematic crimes (Taylor, 1992).
- ICTR Akayesu (1998): Gestures and contextual presence admitted to show participation in genocide.
- ICTR Media Case (2003/2007): Coded language and metaphors admitted as incitement.
- Berkeley Protocol (2020): Provides international standards for collecting digital open-source evidence, including symbolic/multimodal content (OHCHR, 2020).
- ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia): In cases involving ethnic cleansing, visual evidence like photos and video footage of the use of specific symbols (e.g., ethnic insignia or uniforms) has been used to demonstrate participation in the crimes. Courts also use patterns of symbols as evidence of collective intent.
- United States v. Amir (2002): A case in which the defense used gestures and coded language (sign language) as evidence. The court ruled that gestures could constitute forms of expression just as much as verbal communication, admitting them as multimodal evidence.
- Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić (2016): Multimodal evidence, including photographs and videos of rallies and war crimes, was used to demonstrate a pattern of behavior and ideological consistency that linked the defendant to systematic efforts of genocide.

Evidentiary steps:

- Authentication (Rule 901, FRE): link artifact to its source.
- Relevance (Rule 401, FRE): connect to legal issues (e.g., intent, participation).
- Expert decoding: historians/semioticians explain meaning.
- Pattern analysis: repeated use demonstrates organizational policy.

Authentication, relevance, expert decoding, and pattern analysis remain essential under evidentiary rules (Federal Rules of Evidence, 2023).

10. Conclusion

For criminal justice, the lesson is clear:

- Everyday objects and gestures can function as codes.
- Systematic collection and decoding of symbols is essential.
- Visual and symbolic evidence must be treated as probative, not peripheral.

Steganography and multimodal masking operate not just in covert operations but across politics, law, and war. Symbols ranging from swastikas to fruit bowls carry evidentiary value. Courts have admitted such materials since Nuremberg, and contemporary protocols codify best practices for digital symbolic evidence. For modern prosecutions of war crimes and covert criminal networks, criminalists must be trained to systematically collect, decode, and interpret symbolic communication—including fruits, food, interior designs ordinary habits, and everyday gestures as part of the evidentiary arsenal in prosecuting war crimes, crimes against humanity, and covert criminal networks.

Steganography, as an advanced component of semiotic communication systems, exhibits a highly structured and regime-dependent distribution. Research shows that its use is most intensive in revolutionary, democratic, and religiously oriented states, where it functions as a covert mechanism to encode ideological signals, reinforce loyalty, and orchestrate mass influence (Eco, 1976; Barthes, 1972; van Dijk, 2020). In contrast, monarchies and individuals rarely employ steganographic or broader semiotic strategies, relying instead on traditional or divine legitimacy to maintain social and political order (Lotman, 1990).

This pattern has profound implications for understanding the mechanics of brainwashing as a political tool. Brainwashing, in such contexts, is substantially semiotic in nature: it relies on embedded symbols, rituals, and hidden messages to manipulate perception and behavior across populations. Monarchies, by contrast, do not require these tools, as their authority is grounded in ultimate divine sanction rather than active cognitive shaping. This finding provides a robust framework for future research, linking semiotic complexity and steganographic deployment to the intensity and scope of systemic brainwashing within different political regimes (Hobbs, 2018). To successfully admit multimodal evidence in a legal proceeding, it must satisfy the core principles of relevance, authentication, probative value, and adherence to rules of evidence. Courts rely on experts to interpret complex symbols or gestures and ensure that the evidence is contextualized within the broader legal framework of the case. By combining these rules, multimodal evidence—ranging from symbolic actions to complex digital media—becomes a powerful tool in criminal justice.

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