Is There a Disdain of Comedy in César Awards?

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1. Introduction

In antiquity, tragedy was regarded as the paradigm of truth, morality, and seriousness, while comedy was often dismissed as frivolous or immoral. Since the Enlightenment, however, comedy has come to be seen as a philosophical paradigm in its own right, capable of transforming how truth and morality are conceived (Kieran, 2013; Street, 2018).

Throughout Western aesthetics, the distinction between the tragic and the comic long structured artistic and intellectual discourse. With modernity, these boundaries became increasingly permeable, leading to more fluid representations and shared narrative functions (Mosse and Street, 2016).

Plus, niche films tend to attract more attention and are often judged more severely than mainstream productions (Chen et al., 2021), which may also apply to comedies. Moreover, reputational motivations can influence expert reviews (Camara and Dupuis, 2014), meaning that critics' evaluations may diverge from public opinion.

Moreover, despite this historical hierarchy, comedy remains one of the most appreciated genres in popular cinema, particularly among general audiences (Georgakopoulou, 2000). However, this popularity does not necessarily extend to professional criticism, as it is critically underrated (Arell, 2012).

So we can ask ourselves:

Is there a bias against comedy in the selection process of the César Awards?

To answer this question, we formulated three hypothesis:

Predictions:

- **P1** - The winners of the French Academy Award for Best Picture tend to have a lower level of comedy than the nominated films.

- **P2** - The winners of the French Academy Award for Best Director tend to have a lower level of comedy than the nominated films.

2. Data

We constructed two datasets based on films nominated for the César Awards.

The first dataset includes all films nominated for the Best Picture category from 1976 to 2025 (N = 271), along with additional information such as the film's director, nomination status (nominated or winner), and the Wikipedia pages of both the film and its director. The second dataset contains the same information for the Best Director category (N = 265), covering the same time period (1976–2025).

Both datasets were compiled by extracting data from the HTML source code of the corresponding Wikipedia pages (César du meilleur film and César de la meilleure réalisation), accessed on October 3, 2025.

Next, for each film, we added its synopsis and genre tags by scraping data from its individual Wikipedia page via the Wikipedia API on November 6, 2025.

Finally, we concatenated the two datasets so that each film appearing in either category (or both) was included.

Each film therefore contained the two variables 'Best Picture' and 'Best Director', each with three possible values: Winner, Nominated, Not Nominated (if the film was nominated only in the other category).

However, we decided to remove the Not Nominated cases from our tests, as they contributed little to assessing the validity of our two hypotheses.

The final merged dataset included **N = 308 films**.

Finally, we created a new variable measuring the "level of comedy" of each film, based on the Wikipedia genre tags, using the following algorithm:

- **0 (No Comedy)** – The Comedy tag is absent from the list of genres.

- **1 (Mixed Comedy)** – The Comedy tag is present alongside at least one of the following genres: Drama, Action, Romance, or Horror.

- **2 (Pure Comedy)** – The Comedy tag is present, and none of the four genres above appear.

These four genres were chosen because, in classical and neoclassical theatre traditions, they were considered incompatible with Comedy. For example, a comedy could not include elements of horror. The case of Romance is more nuanced: romantic comedies existed in classical theatre, but from a contemporary perspective, romantic comedy and pure comedy slightly differ in both narrative and humorous structure.

We used three main variables of different types to test our predictions:

- Ordinal: the **level of Comedy** (see the scale above, **Figure 2a**);

- Binary: the film's status in the **Best Picture** category (Winner or Nominated, **Figure 2b**)

- Binary: the film's status in the **Best Director** category (Winner or Nominated, **Figure 2c**)
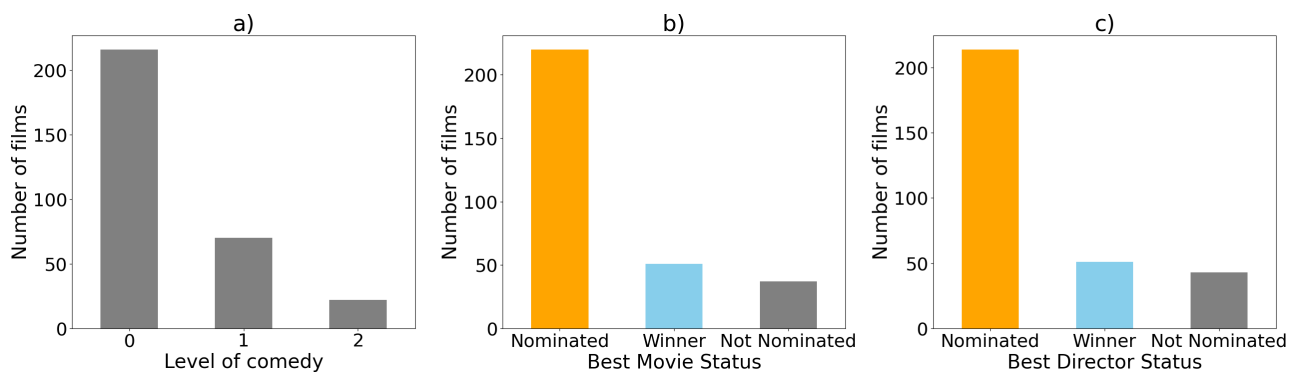

Figure 2 - Repartition according to a) the level of comedy (with 0: No Comedy, 1: Comedy mixed with another genre, 2 : Pure comedy), b) the movie status at the César Awards for the best Picture and c) the movie status at the César Awards for the best Director
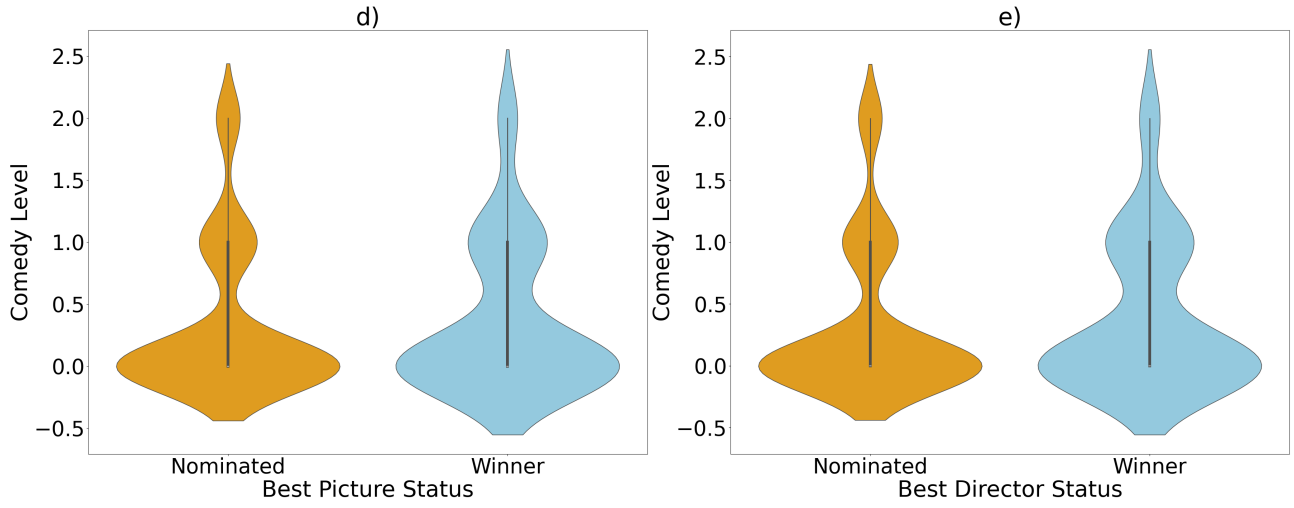
Figure 3 - Repartition of the level of comedy (with 0: No Comedy, 1: Comedy mixed with another genre, 2 : Pure comedy) according to d) the movie status at the César Awards for the best Picture and e) the movie status at the César Awards for the best Director

3. Methods

To test our two predictions, we compared the level of comedy in movies depending on whether they won the Best Picture award or not, and whether they won the Best Director award or not (**Figure 3.d** and **Figure 3.e**). We conducted two independent **t-tests**, assuming equal variance and an equivalent gap between categories 0 and 1, and between 1 and 2. The corresponding formula is:

$$t = \frac{\mu_1 - \mu_2}{\sqrt{s_p^2 \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right)}}$$

Where :

μ_1 and μ_2 : mean comedy levels of each group

s_p^2 : pooled variance

n_1 and n_2 : sample sizes of the two groups

Comedy movies are among the most liked genre in the movie industry (Georgakopoulou, 2000). As one the most watched film genre globally, comedies may reflect the social patterns previous studies have found in the movie industry.

Researches have shown that the media exposure of a movie male lead actor tend to positively impact the success of a movie, whereas a female lead actor tends to decrease box office revenue (Treme et al, 2013). Other studies found that over a certain age, women in the industry have a harder time being cast as main leads in movies (Gilbert et al, 2000).

So movies of any genre seems to be influenced in various ways by the gender and age of the actors playing the main characters, but comedies have yet to be studied. As gender distinctions have already been proven to exist in humor, (Kothoff, 2022), we could also find such patterns among comedy movies.

4. Results

The mean of the comedy level of movies among the winners of the best Picture is slightly higher than for the nominated (μ_1= 0.367, μ_2= 0.346, see **Figure 2.d**), but this difference is not significant (t = -0.215, p = 0.831). Plus, the mean of the comedy level of movies among the winners of the best Picture is slightly lower than for the nominated (μ_1= 0.388, μ_2 = 0.341, see **Figure 2.e**), but this difference is not significant neither (t = -0.478, p = 0.634)

5. Conclusion

See the MVP presentation

6. References

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