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## Media Coverage of Campaigns: A multilevel study of Mexican women running for office

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### Abstract

Previous studies on the United States and Latin America have demonstrated unequal media coverage of men and women during electoral campaigns. However, in Mexico, a country where women increasingly participate in politics, this has seldom been studied. This is worrisome when considering that, with gender stereotyping, the media can create new barriers for female candidates, affecting voters' perceptions of women's expertise and policy proposals. Through a comparative analysis, this research explores the role of the media when covering women running for office. It specifically studies coverage of executive-branch campaigns at the three levels of government. This is an important contribution to the literature as there are few studies of the Mexican context; specifically, this research examines the visibility, focus, traits, and issues covered in written media in order to explore, as well expand knowledge of, media biases and Mexican politics. Findings suggest that women running for positions with more power received different appraisal in printed media.

Furthermore, male candidates received more coverage with the number of stories and headlines explicitly covering them higher than female candidates. This was most evident in municipal elections. At the same time, coverage of both female and male candidates shied away from personal traits or family matters. The media's attention was on 'male' issues, where women were less competitive than men. Albeit with marginal differences, coverage of municipal elections was positive for women (where they won), compared with that of the across-the-board losses for female candidates running for governor.

### Keywords

**Women, politics, campaigns, media coverage, Mexico, multilevel study.**

## 1. Introduction

The media is considered a fundamental element of democracy because they provide a channel through which citizens can access information deemed necessary for choosing representatives (Dahl, 1989; Przeworski, 1991). Although extremely important for democracy, their functioning, and the information they present does not always generate positive results and does not necessarily transmit truthful and reliable data. Thus, a combination of biased information with the power to set agendas (Habermas, 1996: 377) and frame debates (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177) allows media to portray a situation, group, or certain political actor negatively.

By setting the agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and by reducing and simplifying information (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974), journalists' coverage of both men and women in politics can broadly express expectations about the role of women in public life (Winfield, 1997, p. 166). Previous research has shown that media, even if only indirectly, can contribute to women's low levels of representation (Bystrom *et al.*, 2001; Devitt, 2002; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008). These studies have found that, through gender stereotyping, media create new barriers for female candidates. This could have a significant impact because media coverage affects voters' perceptions of candidates' traits, expertise, and policy proposals (Herrnson *et al.*, 2003; Mendelsohn, 1996; Wattenberg & Briens, 1999).

Regarding the role of the media and the possible consequences for women's electability, findings have been diverse and have changed over time. Earlier studies demonstrated a clear difference in the number of stories on male and female candidates (Kahn, 1994a, 1994b, 1996). Later, studies revealed key differences, especially a lack of neutrality in how the media portray female candidates (Norris, 1997) and how they continue to differentiate coverage between male and female nominees, for example, in terms of content (such as issues covered) or the general focus of stories (Everitt, 2003; Falk, 2008; Fridkin & Kenney, 2014; Heldman *et al.*, 2005). However, recent findings note that, 'Partisanship, ideology, incumbency, and stories coverage –long identified as important forces in congressional elections– shaped voters' evaluations' (Hayes & Lawless, 2016, p. 107). Moreover, even if sometimes present, gender stereotypes do not impair women's prospects (Dolan, 2014; Hayes *et al.*, 2014; Hayes & Lawless 2016).

In the Mexican case, significant differences have been found regarding access to media coverage (Rodelo, 2016) and differentiated coverage based on gender traits (García Beaudoux *et al.*, 2018; Hernández-Telléz, 2014; Ojeda *et al.*, 2017). The effects thereof are questionable in the face of a political scenario like the Mexican one; therein, and at least at the federal level, the number of women in positions of representation continues to rise. In the last federal election (2018), and mostly based on a recently enforced parity law, women obtained more than 50% of the seats in the Senate and 48% in the Chamber of Deputies; the same was observed in some state congresses. However, on the municipal level and in gubernatorial elections, the political presence of women continues to shrink. December 2019 figures reveal that only two out of 32 governors, and only 560 out of 2461 municipal presidents, were women (Sistema de Indicadores de Género, 2019).

The role of the media in Mexico requires urgent analysis because available research presents conflicting data, because women's political situation in Mexico is dire, and because recent studies on the Mexican case are absent, specifically, exploratory studies comparing elections at different levels of government. More precisely, we must ask how the written media in Mexico has covered women running for office. Are there any gender-based differences in terms of how the media portrayed male and female candidates?

To answer these questions, this article analyses media coverage of both male and female candidates running in Mexico. Based on Atkeson and Krebb (2008), this study specifically focuses on the visibility, focus, traits, and issues covered. First, it questions whether women running for office are given the same exposure as men in the media, and how said exposure may vary according to the position to which they aspire (visibility). Second, it analyses whether women are depicted as equally successful and competitive as men, or if their coverage rather emphasises their chances of being elected (focus). Third, the tone with which stories are written is assessed, thus exploring whether coverage of women portrays them more negatively than their male counterparts (focus). Fourth, this paper explores whether media coverage of women in Mexico focuses on their traits over their policies in comparison to men (traits). That is, if coverage focuses more on women's looks than their political positions or proposals. Fifth, and in light of the fact that some issues are more covered for a female nominee, the related notes were classified as male or female-oriented in order to

assess the overall focus of the stories studied. That is, they were categorised into focusing on security issues, job creation and the economy or on youth, women's rights, health and education.

## 2. Previous research

Much has been written about differentiated coverage of men and women and findings have varied. For example, Kahn's seminal study (1994) concluded that the press paid more attention to personality traits when covering women candidates (Devitt, 1999; Kahn, 1994a, 1994b; Winfield, 1997). More recently, evidence suggests that women in politics are represented as homemakers and that their value is measured through their physical appearance (Fridkin & Kittilson, 2008; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). For example, media coverage of both Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin described them as less suitable for office because of their duties as mothers or because of a perceived 'iron maiden' attitude (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009: 339). Conversely, others have found that gender is only one more issue to consider when studying political outcomes since other issues have been shown to have more significant impact, including partisanship, ideological positions, and even the ability to compete (Bystrom, *et al.*, 2001; Devitt, 2002; Dolan, 2018; Lawless & Hayes, 2016).

In studies that cover contexts more akin to the Mexican case, evidence has shown that media coverage of women on the campaign trail chooses gender stereotypes for framing. Beaudoux *et al.* (2018) found that, in Argentina, coverage of the candidate for the regional government of Buenos Aires, Maria Eugenia Vidal, heavily relied on gender stereotypes. The study contends that coverage focused on her children, her role as a mother and her daily life, with frequent comments about her physical appearance and fashion choices. In a study of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Dilma Rousseff, Ríos Serra (2017) showed that local media's construction of their images prioritised aspects of their private lives, seeking to understand their political positions in terms of male dependency and a metaphorical-reproductive discourse. In a study of television advertisement during the presidential campaigns of Dilma Rousseff, Michelle Bachelet and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Panke, Iasulaitis and Nebot (2015) showed that the candidates themselves reproduced gender stereotypes, and that their agendas were largely focused on maternity programs and job creation. This is similar to Herrnson, Lay and Stokes' findings (2003) among the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislative candidates, revealing that women gain a strategic advantage running 'as women.'

The few existing studies on the Mexican context analyse the number of stories covering women running for election compared to their male counterparts (INE, 2016; Rodelo, 2016). One of the most recent from the National Electoral Institute's media monitoring initiative shows that, in the 2014-2015 deputies' election, 70% of the 66,000 published texts were not sensitive to gender equality (INE, 2016). In other words, these stories did not explicitly employ gender stereotypes, but failed to provide women's points of view and to include implications for gender equality as part of their analysis. Moreover, 19.3% of total candidate mentions pertained to female candidates, while the rest referred to male ones (INE, 2016). As for media coverage on the radio, in her study of Jalisco's elections, Rodelo included data from 211 candidates in 24 elections (173 legislative and 38 municipal candidates). She found that the 94 female candidates were covered in 390 stories (17%), while the 117 male candidates were covered in 1871 stories (83%). Rodelo found that the greatest bias appeared when comparing media coverage in districts or municipalities previously won by incumbent parties. On average, men received more than double the media coverage of their female counterparts. Ojeda, Pérez and Valdez (2017) focused on gubernatorial elections in Sonora and Nuevo León (2015). They found that women's physical appearance and 'feminine' traits –such as compassion and honesty– were among the rhetoric used to describe female nominees.

Studying and approaching gender-based media biases in Mexican politics more comprehensively is increasingly relevant in light of the electoral political landscape. Mexico is among the countries with a significant number of women elected to congress (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). Moreover, it is one of the few countries that legally guarantees gender parity in the composition of its legislative bodies. In fact, since women gained the right to vote in 1954, they have struggled to generate conditions of equal access and participation in all government positions. Mexico is among the few countries that adopted a gender quota early on (in 2002) for its democratic process (Baldez, 2004) and it later began enforcing restrictions and sanctions for non-compliance (2008). By 2015, this resulted in the adoption of gender parity in the nomination of candidates for local and federal congresses. It is indicative of widespread (or at least effective on the part of certain politicians) concern for eliminating or diminishing the barriers that limit women's political participation. However, despite changes to certain provisions, the consequences of media coverage, including possible gender bias, have been left out of the debate. This study thus aims to provide a broader picture of possible gender-biased media coverage within Mexico's three levels of government and, in so doing, contribute to the literature on this particular matter.

### 3. Media coverage of women: A note on methodology

This analysis uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. It first studies the presence of women politicians in the media and the kind of content that receives greater coverage in order to highlight aspects related to coverage of female candidates, and then use that evidence to compare with male candidates. Accordingly, this study explores similarities and differences in coverage of female candidates compared to their male colleagues and with females running for other positions at different levels of government.

Content analysis and media monitoring (Gallagher, 2014) was conducted for the following elections:

- a. The 2012 presidential election
- b. Gubernatorial elections in the State of Mexico (2017), Aguascalientes (2016) and Mexico City (2012)
- c. Municipal elections in Pachuca, Aguascalientes and Hermosillo, all in 2016 (for information on geographical location see Annex 1)

In total, 3352 stories were studied:

- a. 1,842 covered the 2012 presidential election
- b. 613 covered the aforementioned gubernatorial elections and
- c. 897 covered the aforesaid municipal elections

#### 3.1. Selection of newspapers

Newspapers covering national politics were selected for the presidential election, including the three with the highest circulation rates according to the 2012 National Catalogue of Printed Media and Internet. The newspapers selected were:

- a. *El Universal* with a print run of 180,000 copies
- b. *La Jornada* with a print run of 107,666 copies
- c. *El Reforma* with a print run of 146,309 copies

For the gubernatorial elections, newspapers were selected from among local editions that specifically cover local elections in order to include newspapers that report on local stories since national newspapers do not necessarily report on local events. Likewise, readers who seek information on local stories do not necessarily go to national media since they cover local events less. The newspapers selected include:

- a. *Milenio* local edition (with a print run of 36,945 copies)
- b. *La Jornada* local edition (with a print run of 6,380 copies)
- c. *Excelsior* (with a print run of 90,000 copies)

For coverage of municipal elections, local editions were also selected for the same reasons, including:

- a. *Milenio* local edition (with a print run of 10,260 copies)
- b. *La Jornada* local edition (with a print run of 6,380 copies)
- c. *El Imparcial* newspaper edition (with a print run of 40,287 copies)

These newspapers were included because of their print numbers, their focus on political events, and the availability of their digital libraries. For the study of gubernatorial and municipal elections, inclusion criterion was based on whether the outlet consistently stories on local events. Additionally, these newspapers include the entire political spectrum. The left wing is more closely associated with *La Jornada*, the centre with *El Universal and Milenio*, and the right wing with *El Reforma, Imparcial and Excelsior*.

### 3.2. Time frame

All the elections and their coverage are studied during the last month of the campaign. This time frame was used for all the elections studied because the last month of a campaign is associated with heightened media and public opinion attention due to the proximity of Election Day. In the case of the 2012 presidential election, the last month of the campaign corresponds to May 31 to June 28, 2012.

The state gubernatorial elections studied herein took place at different times. In the State of Mexico, the last month of the campaign was from May 3 to June 4, 2017. In Aguascalientes, it took place from May 1 to June 1, 2016, and in Mexico City, it ran from May 27 to June 27, 2012. It is important to note that gubernatorial elections were included from the states highlighted above because women were competing. Since female participation was an essential selection criterion, elections from different years were included to fulfil it. This decision also allowed for comparison of two cases that are highly relevant due to the number of voters in Mexico City and the State of Mexico.

In the case of the municipal elections examined, the last month of the campaigns in both Pachuca and Aguascalientes was from May 1 to June 1, 2016. In the case of Hermosillo, the period studied was from May 3 to June 3, 2015.

### 3.3. Content coding

Under the supervision of a senior researcher, two research assistants coded the 3,352 stories over a period of six months. Before performing the work, raters went through three training sessions to familiarise themselves with the units and categories of analysis. During these sessions, general questions about the coding protocol were addressed.

Subsequently, in order to measure inter-rater reliability, both raters independently analysed a random, 345-item practice sample of stories. The differences that arose in the sample process were discussed and resolved in a fourth session with each rater. Afterwards, both raters began to process the study's sample. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  was used to calculate reliability (see variable descriptions below).

### 3.4. Variables descriptions

#### 3.4.1. Visibility

To study visibility, proxies were employed, including the number of stories published for each female and male candidate (Krippendorff's  $\alpha = .92$ ), and the number of headlines explicitly mentioning them ( $\alpha = .96$ ) were analysed. Stories were classified as follows:

- a. No mention of the candidate in question
- b. Some mention of the candidate (when the story mentioned a candidate, but the narrative focused on other events or candidates rather than the candidate in question)
- c. Stories explicitly focusing on or about the candidate in question

Stories explicitly covering a candidate (C) were coded as such if they only reported on one candidate. Stories classified as 'some mention of the candidate' (B) contained information on two or more candidates and were not necessarily focused on the candidate's campaign given that the content usually compared candidates or covered events with more than one candidate. Headlines were counted for each of the candidates if they included an explicit reference to a single candidate, either with mention of a name, surname, acronym, or nickname. Thus, these were coded as either present or not, meaning one candidate was mentioned in the headline or not.

### 3.4.2. Focus

To assess the general focus of each story ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and how stories framed coverage of male and female candidates (Heldman *et al.*, 2005, p. 322), they were categorised as follows:

- a. **Negative campaign:** These stories contain information questioning candidates' reliability and honesty with information about alleged acts of corruption, diversion of public money, extortion, and political actors' reactions to these accusations (such as those from the electoral authority and its investigations). They may also include negative information about opposing nominees.
- b. **Issues and proposals:** Stories that provided specific information on the proposals that candidates and their teams put forward. Stories coded in this category were only included if they contained proposals. This did not include mention of a problem that needed to be tackled.
- c. **Acts of campaign:** These stories included information on party rallies, campaign rallies, and candidates' meeting with different groups (without actually providing proposals that attend to the needs of those groups). In addition, they included stories with information about things like visits to hospitals, schools, and asylums, and meetings with groups such as low-income farmers, entrepreneurs, homemakers, and indigenous people.
- d. **Horse race:** These stories included information that questioned a given candidate's chances or possibilities of winning the election. This included stories about polls, performance during debates, comparisons among the leading candidate and runners-up, and general information about their relative standing in the race (Heldman *et al.*, 2005; Kahn, 1996). In this particular case, some stories included in this category could have been classified either as issues or as negative campaigns. However, they were categorised as horse race if they contained information, no matter how small, that referred to surveys, polling numbers, positions, or any other insinuation that treated the campaign as a competition or a race.

### 3.4.3 Tone and traits

To understand the view through which the media present male and female candidates and how media depict images of people running for office, the tone of the coverage was studied ( $\alpha = .82$ ). All stories were further categorised according to the following classification:

- a. **Positive:** When an article clearly contained words portraying the candidate favourably
- b. **Negative:** When an article clearly contained words that expressed disapproval towards the candidate
- c. **Neutral:** When an article was balanced or did not contain positive or negative criticism

Coding tone followed previous research and use of the concepts. This includes Scharrer's work (2002) on Hillary Clinton's newspaper coverage and Kittilson & Fridkin (2008) analysis of American, Australian, and Canadian elections. Specifically, coders received instructions that stories with a negative tone uses clear and blatant words to connote a sense of

disapproval, disregard, accusations, or unflattering comments. On the contrary, stories coded as positive used words that connote praise, approval, flattery, or any angle that portrayed the subject in an overall good light. Coders received instructions that the tone had to be evaluated based on the author's words and use of language without taking into consideration any paraphrasing or reporting of third-party speech. The coders received a list of words that connote a negative or positive tone (Annex 4).

Traits and appearance ( $\alpha = .87$ ) were coded either as present or not, meaning that any mention of candidates' dress, family or physical features was coded as present.

#### 3.4.4. Stories' content

Stories were categorised using a binary selective process ( $\alpha = .91$ ), either as male or female. Linguistic content analysis of all stories was performed. Words attributed to each category were searched based on a list given to the raters (Annex 3).

- a. **'Male' content:** Report reported on themes such as the economy, business, taxes, trade, employment/jobs, and security
- b. **'Female' content:** Stories conveying information on women's rights, health policies, violence against women, gay rights, education, welfare, environment, care for the elderly, and childcare

### 4. Visibility

Visibility is a key asset because presence can reinforce partisan voting intentions or convince undecided voters (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Hillygus & Jackman, 2003). Being newsworthy, which is directly related to media assessment of a candidate, can play an important role in a candidate's campaign as it might directly influence the electorate. Moreover, if one particular group (such as male candidates) is always considered newsworthy because of their polling position (or because they were nominated by the incumbent party), the disproportionate exposure they receive likely sends a message to the electorate.

What the media chooses to cover can be identified as 'endogenous' content within the political arena. Thus, a white male candidate may be perceived as an endogenous political actor, while a Muslim, female or indigenous representative may not benefit from the same perception. In the case of women, previous research has found that visibility increases the likelihood that the media will cover them (Trimble, 2007), and it affects how they are perceived. Thanks to visibility, women can be seen as an endogenous element of the political process (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2005). Because of this, understanding how women are exposed (the amount of coverage they have received) is extremely important.

When comparing the data, some general differences emerge. First, in the gubernatorial elections, women received more explicit coverage than in the presidential and municipal elections. This is extremely relevant if one takes into consideration that none of the eight women running (three in Mexico City, two in Aguascalientes, and three in the State of Mexico) were elected. Male nominees received less explicit coverage than female ones, but they still won the election in all three states (see Table 1). Second, even though the incumbent party nominated the only woman running for office in the presidential election, she received less visible coverage than the two male nominees. Third, the explicit coverage that male candidates received at the municipal level was double what female candidates received. Women aspiring to low-level executive positions received less explicit coverage (see Table 1). This difference could negatively impact the electorate's perception if one considers that these positions often have a greater impact on the life of citizens since local public servants are closer to their voters (Vidal, 2019).

Candidates' competitiveness might explain the differences in the coverage women received in the presidential and gubernatorial elections. However, this was not the case at the municipal level, where, in two of the three cases studied, women won the elections

(Aguascalientes and Pachuca), a sure indication of women’s competitiveness. Nevertheless, the number of explicit stories reveals important differences (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Visibility and coverage by candidate and type of election.

<i>News reports with coverage for the running candidates</i>			
Female Candidates (n= 2643)	Municipal Elections (n= 368)	Gubernatorial Elections (n= 614)	Presidential Elections (n= 1842)
No mention of the candidate	55.4	32.2	60
Some mention of the candidate	22.3	30.3	25
News story explicitly about the candidate	22.3	37.5	15
<b>Male Candidates (n= 2643)</b>			
No mention of the candidate	22.3	38.3	45
Some mention of the candidate	22.3	30.3	33
News story explicitly about the candidate	55.4	31.4	22

Entries are percentages of male and female news reports linked to a given candidate, based on the total number of male candidate and female candidate news reports.

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 2:** Visibility and headlines by candidate and type of election.

*Table 2.*  
*Appearance in the number of headlines*

	Municipal elections	Gubernatorial Elections	Presidential Elections
Female candidates	21.7	57.7	25.3
Male Candidates	78.3	42.3	74.7

Entries are percentages of male and female news reports linked to a given candidate, based on the total number of male candidate and female candidate news reports. In some headlines, two candidates are mentioned.

Source: Own elaboration.

In the gubernatorial elections analysed, 50% of candidates were female. They were included in almost 40% of the explicit mentions and in 57% of the headlines, and yet none won their elections. This seems to demonstrate an important difference between the coverage of women who are nominated at the gubernatorial level and those who run for positions of lesser responsibility (meaning municipal presidents).

As for the presidential election, male and female candidates were mentioned in the newspapers studied at a ratio of 3:1. However, it is important to mention that, in the last month of this presidential election cycle (the period of analysis for this study), the female candidate had little chance of being elected since by then she was finishing third in the polls. This could explain why her candidacy received little attention from the media, despite having been nominated by the incumbent party.

## 5. Focus of the story

Research has found that gender-based differences among candidates can be created either through negative coverage (the tone with which stories are written), or through a lack of visibility. The primary focus of a story can portray women as being capable of fulfilling the position, prepared, and sufficiently experienced, or they can be described as less able, less competent, or even altogether out of place in the race (Heldman *et al.* 2005; Kahn, 1996; Smith, 1997).

With regard to the focus that stories receive, the evidence for both municipal and gubernatorial elections shows that differences were not necessarily present when comparing male and female candidates' coverage. However, differences were present when comparing the data by type of election.

First, coverage of municipal elections focused on candidates' proposals, regardless of their gender. In these elections, coverage of proposals made up almost 50% of all reported content. The remaining coverage mainly focused on general campaigning activities, such as campaign events and rallies. Little attention was paid to negative campaigns or horseracing, whether for male or female candidates.

**Table 3:** Focus of the story by candidate and type of election.

	<i>General topic of the story</i>					
	Municipal elections		Gubernatorial Elections		Presidential Elections	
	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female Candidates	Male Candidates
	n= 83	n= 204	n=230	n=193	n= 272	n= 726
Horse Race	7.2	9.3	9.6	11.9	36	22.7
Issues & Proposals	44.6	46.1	37.8	38.3	6.3	4.7
Negative Campaigns	9.6	4.9	16.1	9.8	11.8	28.2
General Proselitism	38.6	39.7	36.5	39.9	46	44.4

Entries are percentages of male and female news reports explicitly linked to a given candidate, based on the total number of news reports covering either female or male nominees. Thus, the number of reports analysed is smaller because only explicit news reports were studied. This was done with the purpose of linking specifically the focus of a story to one specific nominee.

Source: Own elaboration.

Conversely, coverage of the presidential election was quite different in some areas. Moreover, important differences arise in the focus of the coverage that male and female candidates received.

First, for both female and male candidates (unlike coverage in the gubernatorial and municipal elections), the focus on issues and proposals was marginal. Second, both the focus on negative campaigns and portrayal of the election as a horse race were higher. As for gendered differences, much of the coverage received by the female candidate highlighted her limited election chances. Moreover, the media presented this election as a battle between the two male candidates; coverage focused on competition or horseracing, underlining the female candidate's third-place position in the polls. Gender differences were observed in coverage of both runners-up. Thus, the second-place male candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), was portrayed as fighting the male leading candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN), while the female candidate, Josefina Vazquez Mota (JVM), was portrayed as struggling not to drown in the polls, even though both AMLO and JVM clearly trailed EPN by more than 10 points. Particular focus on the negative campaign between the two male candidates sustains this claim (see Table 3).

## 6. Tone and traits of coverage

In 2016, the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy analysed the news coverage of the 2016 presidential primaries (Patterson, 2016), showing that Donald Trump received far more 'good press' with positive tones than his counterpart in the Democratic Party. The report found that Hillary Clinton's coverage had by far the most negative tone, even when compared with fellow Democrat Bernie Sanders. For Clinton, the tone major news outlets employed during the primaries was, on balance, more negative than positive. Moreover, her work as Secretary of State and her tenure as Senator were randomly

highlighted (Patterson, 2016). These findings replicate previous research, highlighting that men receive more neutral coverage than women (see Kahn, 1992, 1994b; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). In fact, when covering campaigns, media outlets have been known to question women's possession of characteristics and competencies necessary for leadership. For example, Carlin and Winfrey (2009) found that coverage of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton was quite negative. However, findings are inconclusive, and results have varied. For example, Smith (1997) concluded that the overall tone of coverage could present an advantage for women since outlets tend to portray them positively, which suggests that they can be more honest, while men are often portrayed as corrupt. Women can even play the 'gender card' to their advantage (t al., 2003), moving the focus of public policy concerns, as Burrell suggests happened in the 1992 House of Representatives election, and changing perceptions of set stereotypes (Burrell, 1996).

In addition to analysing the tone of the selected stories, this section presents findings on the inclusion of traits and appearance in the coverage of women running for office, which can play a decisive role in voter perceptions, and even in the capacities voters associate with candidates (Bligh *et al.*, 2012; Kahn, 1994b). This can further lead to the belief that only certain types of candidates, with a certain appearance, family, and ideology, can be decisive actors in government. For example, previous research has suggested that, when providing coverage on women, looks, personality, and family are key aspects of the content (Guan & del Rey, 2015; Ojeda *et al.*, 2017; Panke, 2015). It is through these different lenses—as mother, wife, or having a certain look—that media present women running for office.

Moreover, the media can employ certain gender-related 'shortcuts' (such as feminine traits) as elements that guide journalists' coverage of candidates. Mention of compassion and honesty are common shortcuts that inevitably result, in some cases, in the use of stereotypes. Furthermore, studies have found that masculine traits have been associated with the adequate exercise of political power (see Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn, 1992, Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008). When media employ gendered shortcuts to frame women's campaigns based on the idea of femininity, it is possible that voters will judge their leadership and capacity to conduct political affairs accordingly, even considering them unsuitable for conducting politics (Fowler & Lawless, 2009; Kahn & Goldenberg 1991; Kahn, 1994).

The use of these shortcuts as narrative mechanisms can have a negative impact on women's campaigns. Further, coverage that tends to focus more on family or appearance (in the case of women), while focusing more on agenda and proposals for men, can be problematic. For example, in terms of the U.S. elections, Bystrom (2006) and Dunaway *et al.* (2013) found that female candidates' traits received more coverage than those of their male counterparts. As already mentioned, Carlin and Winfrey's study (2009, p. 339) of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin found that the media portrayed them as less suitable for office—in the case of Palin because of her responsibilities as mother, and in the case of Clinton because she displayed masculine characteristics that are not considered suitable for women. As Fowler and Lawless (2009) suggest, media coverage is gendered when it covers a female candidate's marital status and other 'superficial' characteristics, rather than the issues and candidate's proposals.

Here, findings were expected to resemble those in previous studies, such as ones from the American, Argentine and Brazilian elections. However, the results of the present study indicate that neither appearance nor traits were employed as narrative elements in coverage of both male and female candidates.

**Table 4:** Tone, appearance and traits by candidate and type of election.

<i>Tone, gender and appearance in the coverage</i>						
	Municipal elections		Gubernatorial Elections		Presidential Elections	
	Female Candidates n= 83	Male Candidates n= 204	Female Candidates n=230	Male Candidates n=193	Female Candidates n= 272	Male Candidates n= 726
Tone (negative)	5	12	17	3	7	4
Tone (positive)	2	1	6	10	5	3
Tone (neutral)	76	191	207	180	260	719
Appearance & personality traits	1	0	0	1	8	7
Family	1	0	1	3	12	22

To understand the use of the tone and focus of the news reports, either on the family or the appearance of the candidates, only the notes that explicitly covered a particular candidate were used. In this way, it was possible to confirm what tone and coverage was given to a particular candidate, and subsequently, to group female and male candidates together and observed any effects linked to the gender of the nominees.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4 shows that, in all three types of elections (municipal, gubernatorial, and presidential), stories tended to be neutral for all candidates, regardless of their gender (above 89%). Nonetheless, a small difference does seem to correlate with the respective voting outcomes.

In the case of municipal elections, female and male candidates both received the same share of negative tone coverage, 6% and 5.88%, respectively. However, female candidates received approximately three times the positively-toned coverage that their male counterparts received. In this type of election, women won two out of three municipal presidencies. For the gubernatorial elections, female candidates received more negative and less positive tone coverage than their male counterparts, at 7.4% negative and 2.6% positive, and 1.5% negative and 5.2% positive, respectively. Receiving more negative and less positive tone coverage may have played a decisive role in the voting results given that none of the women who ran for governor won their election.

Additionally, female candidates talk more about their appearance, personality traits, and family than did their male counterparts. This is observed in all of the elections studied but is even more pronounced in the presidential election. Additionally, coverage of female candidates tended to discuss their appearance, personality traits, and family more than they did for male candidates: 7% of notes talked about family and appearance when covering JVM, while only 3.9% did so for the two male candidates (AMLO and EPN).

For the presidential election, the female candidate received more positive and more negative tone coverage than the male candidates. However, the sample is too small to determine any gender bias and no other election can be included for comparison yet.

Finally, it is important to note that, unlike other political contexts, tone coverage in the Mexican press was neutral for all candidates, regardless of gender and even political affiliation. This was an unexpected finding because much of the previous literature found evidence quite to the contrary.

## 7. Story content

Female candidates' agendas receive less coverage than those of men (Falk, 2008; Kahn, 1996; Powers *et al.*, 1996). However, gendered differences do not stop there. Other studies have found that, when covering women candidates, media outlets tend to focus on 'feminine' themes (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Kahn, 1992, 1996; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Powers *et al.*, 1996). When the media employ simplified versions of stereotypes –such as women being best suited to deal with social problems– they convey a message to voters (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Women are then perceived as better suited to deal with social issues and less suited for security problems or the economy, and perhaps as even less suitable for the job of Commander in Chief.

Previous research has classified 'feminine' issues as 'soft portfolios or communal issues,' which includes topics such as poverty, education, the environment, childcare, healthcare, culture, the elderly, and youth development. Conversely, 'competitive' or 'male' issues typically include foreign policy, security policies, corruption, defence, and economic policies (Fridkin & Kenney, 2014; Leeper 1991; Niven 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2003). If coverage is framed through these two broader classifications, then it is not surprising that women are seen to be best suited to deal with problems associated with education, the environment, childcare, healthcare, culture, and youth development and men being seen as best prepared to deal with problems related to foreign policy, security, corruption, defence, and economic policies.

This research employed the above binary classification in order to examine the coverage of political campaigns; specifically, it looks into whether issues received more media attention or revealed any gender bias when focused on women candidates. Thus, stories were categorised as: with mostly 'male' content when they reported on themes such as the economy, business, taxes, trade, employment/jobs, and security. Stories were categorised as 'female' when they conveyed information about women's rights, health policies, violence against women, gay rights, education, welfare, environment, care for the elderly, and childcare.

Accordingly, a linguistic content analysis of all stories was performed. Words attributed to one of the two categories were searched based on a list given to the raters (Annex 3). For example, words such as security or economy (economics) were employed as dummies for 'male' content, and youth and women's rights were used as dummies for 'female' content. Any differences or similarities between the issues covered were thus detectable; in addition, the study was able to detect evidence of whether women's coverage focused more on 'female' issues and whether men's coverage focused more on 'male' issues. Specific variations for the type of election were also studied. By definition, this data reveals differences in the stories studied. It is incapable of reflecting on or incorporating elements associated with candidates' campaign strategies, as well as of considering the media's reaction to them. The coverage of one topic or another can be explained by the messages that candidates sent, as well as by the internal editorial logic of the media itself.

Differences can be observed between the types of elections and in the coverage that female and male candidates received on certain issues. First, in the case of the presidential election (unlike the elections for governor and municipal president), most of the coverage of both male candidates and of the female candidate was focused on 'male' affairs. This was much more evident in the case of the male candidates whose coverage almost entirely corresponded to 'male' issues (88.6% of the content). Coverage of the female candidate concentrated a little more, albeit marginally, on 'female' issues (21.7% JVM compared with 11.4% AMLO and EPN).

Second, distribution of the covered content in both the gubernatorial and the municipal elections was a little more homogeneous (see Table 5). Thus, the content for both men and women running in local elections was distributed more evenly between 'female' and 'male' issues (almost 50/50 in municipal elections).

Third, in terms of the differences between male and female candidates, two aspects stand out. In both the gubernatorial and municipal elections, the content of the coverage that women candidates received (in contrast to male candidates) focused more heavily on 'hard' issues (65.7% and 57.8%, respectively). At the same time, in the municipal elections, coverage of male candidates focused more on 'soft' issues than on 'hard' issues (54.4% of the content).

**Table 5:** Type of issues covered by candidate and type of election.

		<i>"Hard" Issues</i>	<i>"Soft" Issues</i>
Presidential Elections	Male candidate n = 726	88.56	11.4
	Female candidate n = 272	78.3	21.7
Gubernatorial Elections	Male candidate n = 193	54.9	45.1
	Female candidate n = 230	65.7	34.3
Municipal Elections	Male candidate n = 204	47.5	54.4
	Female candidate n = 83	57.8	42.2

Male issues include the economy, business, taxes, trade, employment/jobs, security, while "female" issues comprise women's rights, health policies, violence against women, gay rights, education, welfare, environment, care for the elderly and child care.

Entries are percentages of male and female issues linked to a given candidate, based on the total number of male and female issues.

Source: Own elaboration.

## 8. Conclusions

Evidence presented portrays women in a different situation at each level of government. To establish more accurate conclusions, and to determine the importance of a candidate's gender in the coverage he or she receives, other elements of the coverage were studied, including the focus of stories, as well as their content and the tone they employed to describe the candidates.

Women were less visible than male candidates both in terms of the number of explicit notes and the number of headlines in which they were included. This is mainly the case when parties nominate women to positions of less responsibility (such as municipal presidents), regardless of how competitive they might be. For example, in all municipal elections studied, women received less explicit coverage at the municipal level, their names were less visible, and they were seldom mentioned in the headlines. If it is assumed that competitiveness grants candidates' greater newsworthiness, why did women receive less coverage than men in the municipal elections? The difference between male and female candidates is extremely important because, at this level, men outnumber women by 3:1 (see Table 2). One plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that gender stereotypes (and inequality between men and women) continue to be deeply rooted in the local media. Thus, changes at national and state levels in terms of parity have not managed to modify patriarchal patterns of social behaviour at the core of the political regime.

The data also suggests that the type of election does affect the focus of the story. The greater responsibility the position entails, the greater the use of 'fake news' and negative campaigning, as happened in the 2012 presidential election. Framing coverage as a horse race rises with the position's relative level of responsibility, which was again the case of the presidential election. This singularly affected the only female candidate running for president. She was treated differently than the other runner up, despite equal polling numbers (both were more than ten points behind the leading candidate). Although not the objective of this paper, this data does seem to suggest that the size of the region is important for planning and proposing public policy. In smaller regions, providing precise answers and planning specific projects, which give candidates clearer agendas, is likely easier than planning on the nation-wide stage. Further studies on this subject should consider whether geography plays a role in election coverage and media's preferred approach.

Surprisingly, the tone with which elections were covered was neutral for both male and female candidates. However, in the case of the gubernatorial elections, which all the participating female candidates lost, those same candidates received the highest number of negative stories and the lowest number of positive stories. At the same time, in the case of municipal elections, where women did win, female candidates received a large number of positive stories and a smaller number of negative stories compared to their male counterparts, although the differences were rather marginal. Thus far, the 2012 election has been the election in which one of the three most important parties nominated a woman. Perhaps future research should examine whether it is necessary to expand the number of categories to facilitate a broader spectrum of neutral notes to be assessed, qualitatively speaking. This would likely also require examination of more than one election and a much more accurate linguistic analysis software, such as neural networks.

As for the issues covered, data shows that when women are more competitive, coverage of male-led campaigns tends to focus more on 'soft' issues. The opposite is the case when women are less competitive, as their coverage tends to concentrate on 'hard' issues. It is as if, by using a 'hard' agenda, women attempt to compete with their male colleagues' perceived toughness. What can explain this heightened focus on 'hard' issues in coverage of female candidates? One plausible explanation is found in the observable competition between candidates. For example, in the case of the gubernatorial elections studied, the male candidates led the polls, while in municipal elections the female candidates led. Therefore, it is possible to infer that, when women are competitive and ultimately electable (as in the municipal elections studied), coverage of male candidates tends to focus on 'soft' issues. When men dominate the polls (as in the gubernatorial elections studied), the coverage that women receive tends to harden, concentrating on issues that are thought to be more masculine, such as security and corruption. It is clear that one candidate's dominance, whether male or female, can generally influence the topics on which campaign coverage focuses, whether soft or hard.

It is important to question the role of the media in their coverage of elections and the framing they select. For example, we might ask why media outlets treat women differently according to the position for which they are nominated. Is it a matter of the election's relevance for state and national policies? Or is it perhaps because of how outlets look at competitive and newsworthy candidates? In order to answer these and other questions, further research is needed, perhaps including a larger sample, and cases in which women are more competitive and ultimately triumphant in gubernatorial elections.

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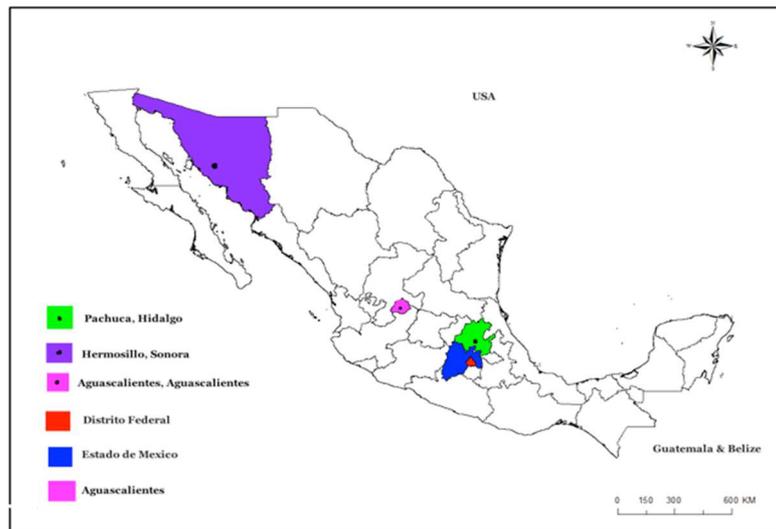
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## Annex 1. Map of the states and municipalities studied



## Annex 2. Code sheet for newspaper content analysis

Newspaper Code, Date (Month/Day/Year),

Sex of Author:

- Male = 1
- Female = 0

Sex of Candidate:

- Male = 1
- Female = 0

Visibility in stories mentioning the candidate:

- no mention of the candidate = 0
- some mention of the candidate = 1
- stories explicitly about the candidate = 2

Visibility in headlines explicitly mentioning the candidate:

- no mention of the candidate = 0
- headlines explicitly about the candidate (including name, surname, acronym, or a.k.a) = 1

Focus of the report for each candidate:

- Negative campaign = 1
- Issues and proposals = 2
- Acts of campaign = 3
- Horse race = 4
- None = 0

Tone of the report for each candidate:

- Negative = 1
- Positive = 2
- Neutral = 0

Traits for each candidate:

- Absent = 0
- Present = 1

Content of the stories:

- Male = 1
- Female = 0

**Annex 3. List of words given to raters to establish differences for issues covered (male and female)**

Male= Defence Issues, Arms Control, Foreign Affairs, International Organisations, Treaties, Economy, Taxes, Employment/ Jobs, Energy Assets, Drugs Politics, Crime, Drug Trafficking, Business, Government Spending

Female= Child Care, Welfare, Parental Leave, Education, Pensions, Environment/ environmental policies, Abortion, Health, Women's/Gay Rights, Violence Against Women

**Annex 4. List of words to connote negative or positive tones**

Positive= Honest, Trustworthy, Compassionate, Strong Leader, Gentle, Moral, Objective, Analytical, Effective, Knowledgeable, Hardworking, Tough, Strong, Intelligent, Independent

Negative = Weak, Passive, Non-competitive, Untrustworthy, Biased, Emotional, Dependent, Immoral, Uninformed, Erratic, Aggressive, Weak, Unintelligent, Ineffective, Insensitive, Inexpressive, Ambitious