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'(A Long Way To) Building One's Own Citizenship: Housewives, Politics and TV news in Mexico'

Particip@tions Volume 3, Issue 2 **Special Edition** (November 2006)

(A Long Way To) Building One's Own Citizenship: Housewives, Politics and TV news in Mexico

Abstract

Beginning from a gender perspective, this article is focused on the role of Mexican media in relation to housewives with political sphere. The research asks: what role do TV news programmes play: a) in informing Mexican housewives about politics, b) in determining how they will vote and c) in their political participation? What this research is testing, is the idea that the media might directly cause this social problem, by exploring their role in informing these women and helping them to learn about politics.

Key words: housewives; political participation; TV news programmes

Introduction

In Mexico, recent research has suggested that television news shares or even replaces political institutions in their role as representatives and promoters of political participation among citizens. This is evident in two ways. According to several studies, during electoral processes TV news become the main way for the audiences to be informed. On the other hand, TV news programmes have played a central role in the democratic transition in Mexico. In consequence, television news is seen as a condition for the healthy democracy of the country. There is the belief that TV news programmes are responsible for producing informed citizens, and that the only way for most Mexicans to participate in the public sphere of political debate is through television news. This phenomenon takes on particular relevance in the case of groups historically excluded from the public sphere, such as housewives.

All the above beliefs make it difficult to account for certain central factors which structure the political participation of many people, and in particular women – factors such as gender, age, socio-economic position, educational level and their spheres of socialization (including the domestic and the public). And it is factors such as these which, at the same time, set the parameters for the ways such people watch and to interpret television news about politics.

This article is focused within this debate. Beginning from a gender perspective, it focuses on the role of Mexican media in relation to housewives with political sphere. The research on which it is based^[1] asks: what role do TV news programmes play: a) in informing Mexican housewives about politics, b) in determining how they will vote and c) in their political participation? My findings offer empirical evidence on Mexican housewives' relationship with the public sphere and the role of television news in their political participation. What this research is testing, is the idea that the media might directly cause this social problem. It also gives grounds to support the conclusion that the gender-identity of this audience group – who are marked by their exclusion from the public sphere – provides the main mediation influencing their relationship with TV news and, in a structural dimension, with the wider world.

Women and Politics: a citizenship of “low” category

The formal definition of political sphere proposes that this is the space within which everybody has the right to be informed, to discuss, and to take decisions relating with political power. That this relationship of citizens to the political sphere involves political culture, political participation and political socialization. In this sense, organization, strategy and collective action are necessary to transform it (Fernández Poncela, 1994).

This definition implies that, in a democracy, every citizen has these rights. However, it is not possible to make this generalization, because of a distinction between women's and men's relationship with politics. Men's relationship involves the recognition of the legitimacy for their exercise of power. But women's relationship does not. The public-private dichotomy has largely excluded women from citizenship. Women in many countries and cultures have been kept outside the public domain of politics, and considered fit only for roles in the domestic sphere, rather than public roles, because of their 'suitability' for caring roles as mothers and wives.

So, the historical exclusion from the formal and hegemonic arena of politics has complicated this relationship, and made it difficult for women to access the public structures of power. This is why it is common to hear that women are conservative and passive about politics; that they do not have enough or the correct knowledge about politics; that they are ingenuous, emotional and idealistic when they take decisions, such as to vote. That is in the case when women participate. When they don't, then hegemonic discourse says that women are, by nature, apathetic or “apolitical”.

This instrumentalist argument defines a political “normality” from the attitudes of conventional politics. It is based on the essentialist grounds that men and women are different, and that the different response of women to politics is the result of their gender condition as mothers. Therefore, it assumes that women in politics will bring a special caring focus. That the female values are not convenient for the structures of power. That they are not capable of developing themselves in this arena.

It is hardly surprising that all these prejudices about female political participation are particularly evident in the case of housewives. These women have been historically associated with three social factors that have boosted the stereotypes of gender related to them:

- 1) the reproduction, that is, the potential role of housewives as mothers, as women for the others - to nourish and to take care of them-, is an assignment apparently impossible to be rejected by them
- 2) the domestic sphere is seen as the natural space of housewives; this is the place where they have to carry out the social mandates and, in consequence, the place of the ideological reproduction of the gendered division of labor
- 3) the domestic work developed by housewives is defined as an inactivity, because it embraces all the private, individual and concrete activities, dedicated to satisfy the necessities of every member of the family.

These factors, that are used as arguments to define the role of housewives in society, make the activities, the places and, in one word, the identity of these women, invisible. At the same time, these stereotypes can influence the social perception and the auto-perception that most of housewives develop about their own citizenship. To think that they do not have the competence to participate in the formal politics, becomes in ideas such as housewives' political participation is a citizenship of a low status, because it is based on traditional values. That politics is a thing for men, but not for women (Astelarra, 1991).

But what this conventional perspective does not consider, is that women's, and specifically housewife's relationship with politics may be distinct, and display a particular way to relate to this sphere. We must remember that there were housewives that organized society across Argentina and the international community to defend the human rights against the terrifying regime. That the movements organized by housewives to develop cooperative activities, have made possible to feed their families safe food – that is the case in the Mexican towns of male emigrants, an example of the way that domestic responsibilities translate into a public role of women in the economy and politics. That housewives have fought for rights such as education, security and health services, conquering improvements for the development of the community and the family. These examples evidence the public and potentially political role of housewives and thus offer an opportunity to explore alternative conceptualizations of women's citizenship, to discuss about the public/private divide, and the formal/informal politics.

In the particular case of Mexico, women constitute more than half of the population (51.8 percent). Their contribution to the development of the country is also more than half compared to men, because of their double, or even triple, working lives – in both public and domestic spheres. But their participation, even their representation, in formal political structures and processes, nowhere near matches their proportion. Women's

representation in the legislature is around 20 percent. Only 3.5 percent of local governments are represented by women. No woman has yet been president of Mexico.

As in other countries, Mexican women's historic exclusion from political structures has been the result of multiple structural and individual factors. At the same time, whilst excluded, it must be recognized that women have built their own citizenship, by participating in formal politics (in parties and electoral institutions) but also in informal politics (in cooperative communities, voluntary organisations, popular movements, demonstrations, etc). Through these actions and in these spaces, Mexican women, but particularly housewives, have created their own identity as citizens, a particular way of living their citizenship. And if women constitute half of the population, they should have equal participation and representation in democracy.

Theoretical keys for reception analysis

In the last decades, research on the reception of television, and its role in the relationship between citizens and politics, has offered new theoretical tools to understand the participation of individuals in this process. In this way, the classical question of the Effects perspective has been rearticulated to address broader issues concerning the role played by mass media messages in the production of meaning in society and, at the same time, the role of audiences in this process.

These theoretical views, developed by the Cultural Studies tradition (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980, 1986; Lull, 1990; Buckingham, 2000) and by the Critical Audience tradition (Jensen, 1992; Orozco, 1993), define reception as a process of making sense that takes part in social complexity, in the context of the everyday cultural practices.

In Klaus B. Jensen's (1998) words, what research has to consider is that people are addressed simultaneously as citizens in the public sphere, but also as individuals in the privacy of their own homes. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that this process works at two levels: the micro and the macro (Lull, 1992). This combination of ideas opens up the possibility of looking at the macro-structure where it takes places, at the cultural and social implications of television, as well as the concrete activity of individuals.

Conceived in this way, this results in a complex process defined by a group of mediations (Martín-Barbero, 1987; Orozco, 1997) related to the socio-historical situation of people: including gender, socio-economic strata, educational level, race, place of residence and age. In the same way, other elements are also part of this communicative process: the cognition and interest of audiences about particular items such as politics (Orozco, 1996; Morley, 1986); the strategies and routines practised by audiences during the reception process, which arise from their interests and preferences, and the way they use the information they gather. According to Martín Barbero (1990) and Orozco (1996), these routines include different kinds of decisions: aesthetic, affective and cognitive.

Finally, one other mediation is considered central to understanding this communicative process: the interpretative communities to which people belong (Jensen, 1987; Morley, 1980; Orozco, 1997). These are the different social spaces where individuals reinterpret the media messages (such as family, school and place of work). These communities are diverse and they are not necessarily determined by geographical borders.

An integrative perspective for the reception analysis

Based on those theoretical approaches, I understand the relationship between media and political participation as a complex, social and active process which is manifested at both micro and macro levels. At the same time, it is a process that involves the direct participation of two actors: individuals and the mass media. As a result, this communicative process demands an integrative perspective to understand the diverse mediations which affect it.

As a proposal for conducting empirical research, I have developed a methodological model which can grasp the diverse dimensions of this reception process (Vega, 2004). This integrative perspective proposes that there are three basic dimensions:

- The **Individual**. This dimension captures those elements which are particular to members of the audience. It is manifested in two scales:
 - o The **Structural**, which implies categories such as: gender, age, socio-economic and educational level.
 - o The **Perceptual**, which includes the knowledge, interests, opinions, expectations and wishes of the members of the audiences, in relation to what they watch on TV.
- The **Televisual**, which addresses the role of television in the construction of meaning (**formal scale**), and the role of the members of the audience in making sense of the messages (**interpretative scale**).
- The **Socio-Institutional**, which considers the role of audience members as active participants in diverse social institutions at the same time –their **interpretative communities** –within which they discuss and reflect, or where they make sense of what they watch on TV.

Model 1. Integrative perspective for the reception analysis

DIMENSIÓN	SCALE	CATEGORIES
	Structural	Gender/Age/Socio-economical scale/Educational level

INDIVIDUAL	Perceptual	Cognitions/Interests/Wishes/Expectations
TELEVISUAL	Formal	Construction of meaning
	Interpretative	Election - Consume Practices and habits of reception Construction of meaning
SOCIO- INSTITUTIONAL	Social	Interpretative communities

Source: Vega, 2004.

Method

The present study was exploratory, deploying qualitative methods for its audience research, using discussion groups and in-depth interviews, to explore housewives' reception of TV news about politics. My criteria for inclusion were to work with women with following characteristics:

- n Mexicans, living in Mexico City, aged between 25 and 60 years old
- n Socio-economic strata and educational levels: being lower, middle and high class, with basic education, middle and professional studies
- n In order to reach the objective of this research, the main topics explored with them have been :
 - n Their interest in politics
 - n Their opinions on the four main Mexican TV news programmes
 - n The importance of the political information presented by TV news in participants' political participation.

The socio-historical context of this research was the 2000 Presidential election in Mexico.

Focus groups and in-depth interviews were structured as follows:

n Two focus groups of six women in each. The first one, one month before the date of the Presidential election (at the beginning of June 2000), and the second one, with the other group of women, the day after the end of the presidential campaigns (four days before the Elections). I decided to work with different women in the first and in the second sessions in order that the opinions voiced in the second session would not be conditioned by what had been said in the first session.

n 11 in-depth interviews with housewives, between May and June 2000.

In developing this research, my ultimate purpose was to explore audience discourses with reference to TV news discourse and with reference to television use.

Findings

1. Exploring the Individual Dimension: knowledge, feelings, interests and expectations of housewives about politics.

All the women expressed their interest in politics and, particularly, in the Presidential election of 2000, because of the urgency to change the government. In this way, all participants agreed about the importance of voting to effect this change. However, they showed scepticism about Mexican politics and politicians, for three main reasons:

- 1) Corruption. Everybody expressed the idea that this is one of the main problems with political institutions in Mexico.
- 2) Politicians are too separated from citizens. Participants claimed politicians ignore the needs of the people, that they only want to obtain power, without improving conditions in society.

“I don’t keep up with what is going on in politics because I don’t believe in politics an because I find it hard to understand it, particularly when the people involved do not want you to understand it so you cannot make demands on them”

- 3) The politicians’ discourses. The housewives said that they were disappointed about candidates’ discourses because they concentrated on criticizing their opponents, and spending a lot of money on that, rather than proposing their own ideas. For example:

“... I have not heard any proposals in the campaigns... I only have heard scandals”

Despite this criticism, women manifested the importance of voting and expressed their expectation that things would be better with a new government, solving the main social problems in Mexico: delinquency and economy. This hope is mainly motivated by the role of these women as mothers and wives:

“... I’m going to vote because I want a change in the government, that things become better for my children... When I was younger, my family survived the economic crisis, but I don’t want my children have to suffer a new one”

“... My interest in politics is derived of my interest to have a safe country, where my family could live”

In this sense, housewives pleased that politics was opening up as a result of the process of democratic transition that has made the progress of the opposition parties, and the triumph of PAN -the right party- in 2000, possible. They saw competition between parties as a first step towards a new alternative.

On the other hand, housewives showed a low belief in their own cognitions, rights and actions about politics. Most of them -excepting the youngest and high class’ women- expressed a feeling of exclusion from the formal political sphere. As part of this, women who are married say that their husband’s opinions are better and, for them, the key to knowing and to deciding:

“When I want to know something about politics, I prefer to ask my husband because he knows more about it”

“My husband’s opinion matters to me in terms of learning more, because the truth is I don’t know much about politics and also I don’t know how to express myself”

However, the housewives interviewed showed to have a whole knowledge about the election: they knew the candidates - they mainly referred to those who had the most possibilities of winning the election, Vicente Fox (PAN), Francisco Labastida (PRI) and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD)-, their programs and the main events during the presidential campaigns. In this sense, high and middle class’ housewives had a critical perspective about this electoral process. Some of them, by going to the local committees of the parties, were informed about the specific proposals of the candidates:

“... I like Fox’s program of government. His proposal about education is interesting. I like what he’ll do against corruption. I like his program specifies how it will help to the micro industry”

On the other hand, what the lowest class’ women knew and discussed about the campaigns, it was based on what they listened at home, at neighborhood and at television:

“... I only identify candidates that have been showed by television... I think this is the main platform to know them”

For that election, the voting decision of most of these women, oscillated between the right (PAN) and the center (PRI) parties. In this sense, the preference of these housewives it

was motivated by their presence in the domestic sphere, which in general translated into the constant search for the well-being of the others.

At the same time, these women also construct particular ways of political participation, in addition to voting. A number of the women in this study participate in local committees, voluntary organizations and political associations, with the objective of improving conditions of life for the domestic sphere: their family, their neighborhood, and their city. A women of the middle class participated in a neighbours' organization, with the objective to improve better conditions for the life of the community. She expressed that, by this activity, she was more conscious about the importance that society involves in informal political actions. In the same way, an older woman of the low class, by going frequently with her son to the meetings of the party where he was activist, she started to participate actively in that party. Finally, a young housewife of the high class takes part of a NGO, dedicated to fight for the human rights of women in Mexico.

Even most of the housewives interviewed were not political activists, is important to say that, by these forums, women have found the possibility of exercising a more active and ongoing political participation. In that regard, it was their social role, as the administrators of the daily life, which mainly stimulated their political activism.

We can detect here a contradiction between the auto-perception of these women about their own citizenship - as, we have seen, is expressed by a low belief in their own cognitions, rights and actions- and what they really do, by being involved in different formal and informal politics. This is a good example of what we annotated on the first part of this article: the public and potentially political role of housewives, demands that we explore alternative conceptualizations of women's citizenship, of public/private divide, and of formal/informal politics, to make visible the active participation of housewives as citizens.

2. Exploring the Televisual Dimension: the role of TV in housewives' political participation

In this research, everybody agreed about the importance of being informed. The housewives expressed a kind of commitment to this:

“Because everywhere, everybody talks about the election and I have to know about this issue to give my opinion”.

Most of the women prefer radio news. For instance, they express a preference for listening to “Monitor”, presented by Jose Gutierrez Vivo. Their other preferred programme is “W Radio”, presented by a woman, Carmen Aristegui, who is recognized by the women as an opinion leader. Their preference for these broadcasters is because they are “honest and intelligent”.

Why do they prefer radio news programmes? Because this is an activity that does not demand exclusive attention. Women can listen to it at the same time they clean their houses, or while they drive to their children's school or to work:

"I prefer to listen to the radio because I do not have to interrupt housework... I can do both activities at the same time"

The press was another source of information. Although its consumption was very marginal among this group, women of upper-middle, middle and working class used the press as a source of electoral information. Among the younger women and those with more economic resources, Internet represented another way to be informed.

For most of the women, however, television is the prime source of information about politics. Among these women, some of the knowledge and arguments they have are supported by what they watch on TV. And of all television formats, TV news is the main source. Women watch these programmes regularly, even every day, and mainly in the evening. They consider that it is easier to be informed by TV news because these programmes give a general knowledge of events during the day, without having to invest a lot of time. Some of these women positively value the introductory summary of these programmes because it enables them to be informed of the most important news in a very few minutes.

The key programmes are: "Noticiero" (from *Televisa*, the most important media enterprise in Mexico), "Hechos" (TV *Azteca's*, the second most important) and "Noticias" (*Canal 11*, the public television). "Noticiero" and "Hechos" are the most commonly watched programmes. Although "Noticias" is watched by only a few participants, they like it because it mainly produces educative and cultural programmes. But while "Noticiero" is the most watched TV news in Mexico, women expressed distrust of it. Participants saw *Televisa* as connected with Mexican political power.

The style of the presenter for "Noticiero", Joaquín López Dóriga, contributes to the negative opinion about this programme because, as the women say, he is "boring and he sensationalises and distorts the political information".

Participants who usually watch "Noticiero", say that they do it because it is a kind of family tradition to sit down every night to watch it. Another reason given is because of power of this programme in establishing the political agenda in Mexico. The women recognize that this programme gives them a "guide-line" to search another sources of information, to go more deeply into.

"Hechos" is the other most watched news programme. Its main characteristics are, in their own words, that its items are: short and concise, and understandable, and they have immediacy. Even so, participants criticize the sensationalism used by its presenter. And, as in the case of "Noticiero", women identify "Hechos" as manipulating the news to the benefit of the government.

It is important to note that “Hechos” and “Noticiero” broadcast at the same time, around 10:30 p.m., thus participants can also switch between channels:

“... to compare and determine which one gives more complete and interesting information about the presidential candidates”.

Finally, even when these programmes constitute their main source of information, these women attach low credibility to them. The majority of my participants think that in Mexico it is not possible for these news programmes to fulfil their social function because they are influenced by the interests linking the owners of TV stations with the Mexican government and with some political parties.

One of the findings of this research relates to the motivation for housewives to watch these TV news programmes. They said, talking about “Hechos”, that they like Javier Alatorre, its presenter:

“Because he shows that he is sensitive to the every day problems of citizens. At the same time, he is intelligent and handsome”

According to Stam (1983) and Buckingham (2000), this aesthetic and affective gratification constitutes one of the main resources for TV news programmes to increase ratings^[2].

“TV News programmes have increased my hesitation about politics”

How is TV political news related to the political participation of Mexican housewives?

The majority of participants agreed on the idea that, by their way of presenting the electoral news, “Hechos” and “Noticiero” had increased their scepticism towards politicians:

“They only have showed rows between politicians... on TV news programmes I have seen too much circus and not enough electoral proposals”.

As a consequence, these women believe that TV news programmes have increased their hesitation about politics.

What housewives do at the same time as they watch TV news: contexts and habits of reception

As Roger Silverstone (1996) has suggested, home, as the center of the everyday life, is the first place where relationship with media is formed.

Home is the place where these housewives listen to radio news, and where they watch and discuss TV news. The living room is the main social space where all these women watch the news. According to Morley (1986), this is the most important family space. This is the place where family members meet, share and talk about their daily life. In this socialization, television plays a central role. In consequence, the presence of television in the living room assists in it being seen as “natural”.

On the other hand, for my participants, the activity of watching TV news programmes is essentially social, in that they like to talk about it at the same time as they are watching it. However, most of these women stay alone at home for the most part of the day. That is why for these women TV plays the role of companion as well. So, watching TV programmes compensates them affectively:

“I have the TV on from the morning – when everybody leaves home – until night. Even though I do not watch everything, because I have to do the housework, I do like to listen to TV programmes”

Connecting with the habits of reception, this research provides evidence that housewives’ uses of TV are determined by their gender-identity. The perception that these women have of home, as a place of continuous work and responsibilities, makes particular this communicative process. The practice of watching TV news is constantly interrupted by other activities, domestic activities such as ironing, cooking or doing homework with children. This finding includes all the women: those of low economic and medium strata, as well as the ones of the highest strata who commonly have a domestic employee:

“At night, when the TV news programmes starts, I use to watch it while I fix the dinner for my family”. (lower class)

“When we watch the TV news programmes, we used to do other things at the same time: my husband uses to read the newspaper while I do something related with my children”. (high class)

Finally, that power relationships are related to gender inequality, is evident from the reception process in this group. If in modern society public power belongs primarily to men, this same order is transferred into the domestic space.

Most of the women, without distinction by social class or by age, said that it is usually the men (husband, boyfriend, father, even young children) who choose the TV news that is watched at home. The reason is that, as several of the women put it, men have more knowledge about politics – I think because men are who historically have had the right to develop themselves on the public sphere. There is therefore an implicit recognition that the men are the ones who know and decide and, therefore, a low confidence among these women about their own knowledge.

This male domination is much more evident in the case of televisions with remote controls: few of the participants take control of it. Normally, this is “possessed” by the

men. The remote control leads to the possibility of “zapping”, an activity which these women do not like. It is a practice that they associate with men.

In this sense, as other works on television reception have shown (e.g., Lull, 1990; Morley, 1986), the operations of male power in the family in relation to viewing habits do not derive simply from the characteristics of “being a woman” or “being a man”. Rather, they are components within the ways that the relationship between women and men is defined in modern society.

3. Exploring the Socio-institutional Dimension: the interpretative communities for housewives

If television information was not a factor that by itself would determine the political participation of these housewives, what were decisive factors? The interpretative communities, as the spaces where individuals socialize and discuss what they watch on TV, were key elements. In the case of these housewives, those communities were diverse. However, their gender-identity of these women does mark out common spaces: for all the women, family constitutes the most important interpretative community. They believe that discussions about politics with other members of the family represent their most important source for making sense of political events.

But discussion with other people about politics is also valued by these women. In other places such as meetings with friends, or with other women at the school of children, or neighbours, these women reflect together about political issues and, ultimately, gain the resources to take decisions related with this sphere – including voting.

“Sometimes the approach from television to information is not the main thing. So you look somewhere else, for other sources and you discuss about it with people who know about the issue... That is how you complement your information to have a whole perspective of the election”.

Finally, it is in these spaces that women identify opinion leaders. Regardless of social class or educational level, the primary opinion leaders for all the housewives interviewed were their husbands:

“He (my husband) has a complete perception of politics because he reads newspaper and talks about them with other man”.

Other male figures they recognize are their father and brothers. In the case of the youngest housewives, the father-in-law also counts as an opinion leader. The broadcasters of TV news programmes too. But never another woman: it looks that there is a generalized scepticism about the knowledge and opinions that women, and one of the main reasons of that it is because they do not belong to the public sphere. This

underestimation about the women's political knowledge is much more evident when it is related with other housewives:

"... I'm not running down the opinions of housewives like myself, who might well have a good knowledge, but I think that people who understand these things, like my father, know more".

These communities and opinion leaders represent for housewives the main sources for interpreting what they know about politics from the TV news programmes. As we have seen, these actors are mainly men. What we can also say is that, in some cases, this recognition is based on a low self-esteem about their citizenship. Women recognize these communities and these leaders because they represent a source of information and ideas that can lead to decisions, but also because these women have a low self-esteem about their knowledge and judgments on politics.

We could therefore observe that ideological and cultural limitations went close with the beliefs, values and behaviour that these women have historically incorporated and reproduced. These have been built on the bases of the male chauvinism that dominates the *habitus* of the Mexican culture and which, as we can see, directly affect the political culture of the participants in this research.

At this point, we could say that their gender-identity is what defines the interpretative communities and the opinion leaders of these women, as spaces of political socialization, but also and in many cases, as barriers that difficult them to build an own citizenship.

Apparently, there is a contradiction inherent in here: it seems as if these women choose to talk to other women about politics, but let men determine the agendas and conclusions about politics. However, again, is necessary to pay attention to the knowledges and the perception what they have about the public political sphere, and to the ways by these housewives participated in politics, to consider that what these women do, by their actions and perspectives, are another and alternative ways to define what political participation is.

Conclusion

This analysis points up a small but important conclusion about these housewives' perceptions of Mexican politics: the role of scepticism. Although they recognized the importance of citizens participating in the political sphere, their lack of trust is enhanced by political actors themselves. Their campaign method, which is filled with criticism and attacks, and the poverty of their proposals is what determines the opinion of women about politics.

We have seen that, for my participants, the main way to be informed about politics is via the mass media. In this sense, to listen to radio news programmes is a form of media reception associated with these women's identity: they select this medium because they

can at the same time pursue activities related to housework, such as cleaning, taking children to school, and etcetera. It is an activity that does not demand their full attention.

Of all the mass media, however, they prefer television. TV news programmes are their main sources of political information. In this, the women display two rather different beliefs: that to be informed is an important commitment for citizens; and yet at the same time Mexican television businesses are not to be trusted.

As for politics, these Mexican housewives express their scepticism in the veracity of the information broadcast by Mexican TV news programmes, because they are aware of the long tradition of the manipulation of TV news to favour or to disfavour parties and politicians. These women expressed the conviction that Mexican TV news programmes do not promote political participation by the audience. What those programmes do instead during political processes such as the presidential election is to emphasize negative criticism, instead of informing about or analyzing the really important thing in a presidential election: the government's proposals. In this sense, I believe that TV news programmes bring about an increase in these women's distrust not only in politicians but in their own political participation too.

However, despite the importance of TV news as the main source for citizens to be informed about relevant events like an election, the reception process involves other significant elements. As other researchers have shown (Orozco, 1997; Jensen, 1992; Morley, 1986), the reception of TV news does not start or finish when TV is turned on and turned off. Those researchers, and also our own study, have shown that individuals take the information provided by the news to other places, that is, to other communities of reception – such as the home, their children's school, their friends, and so on – in order to resignify it, and to take, in this specific case, the decision to vote for a particular candidate.

In addition to these notions, this research has given other information about the reception of television news by this group of Mexican women. Firstly, their habits of reception, that we have seen are related directly with domestic activities: they usually watch TV news at the same time they do housework activities.

More than anything else, what this research provides is a preliminary account of how these Mexican women are participating in the political sphere, and the role of mass media in this process. In this sense, we cannot affirm there is a direct influence of TV news programmes in political participation of women. Rather, it is mediated through their social situation and gender-identities. This generates the main policy outcome of this research: the need to continue opening spaces for the political participation of women since it is their identity, as produced and defined by their historical exclusion from the formal and hegemonic arena of politics, which has made this relationship complex, and made it difficult for them to access the structures of power. What it is needed, therefore, is a strategy for promoting the opening of such spaces so that all the forms and kinds of citizenship can be recognized.

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[1] This article is based on the Ph. D. Thesis of the author, published by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) in 2004, *The Voting Decision of Mexican Housewives and Television Electoral News*.

[2] Even Stam's and Buckingham's researches are focused on different objects and social groups, I consider both studies show that the criterion followed by these programs to attract audiences, are the same in different cultures and contexts.

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