Women's political firsts and symbolic representation

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ABSTRACT: Despite the political gains made by women in the last decade, the extent to which politics is still a "man's game" is made evident each time a top political office has a female holder for the first time. These incredibly revealing moments are expected to give a new social meaning to women *in* politics and women *and* politics. Yet, media representations of female firsts in politics might well depress the symbolic effects of women's political presence. This paper explores the types of gendered mediation deployed by the print media in the representation of first women to ever serve in high-ranked national and subnational political offices in Spain. It reveals that gender media frames are pervasive across news stories and that women tend to be constructed as deviant from the male norm. News stories thus reinscribe gender into women's milestones, which may lead to an effective annihilation of women's symbolic representation.

KEYWORDS: Women politicians; symbolic representation; media frames; gendered mediation.

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Introduction

Reaching top political offices is still a women's milestone rather than a regular event, although within the last decade there has been a surge of women in these positions, including top executive office (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010; Claveria, 2014).[1] The paucity of women's access to high-ranked political offices makes first-ever female politicians "space invaders" breaking the association between men and privilege positions (Puwar, 2004), which encroaches upon the symbolic domain of politics. The descriptive and symbolic dimensions of political representation are thus linked since "increased representation of people who 'look like' women will affect powerful symbolic changes in politics" (Sapiro 1981: 712). Engendering political institutions is then expected to engender politics at the mass level (cf. Barnes and Burchard, 2013: 785), especially by giving a new "social meaning" (Mansbridge, 1999) to women *in* politics and women *and* politics. In particular, "women in public office stand as symbols for other women" (Burrell, 1996: 151).

The inclusion of those previously excluded from top political offices is an extremely reveling moment (Puwar, 2004: 2), as is the case of female firsts in politics; a moment very likely to instill symbolic effects on the citizenry, especially on women citizens. According to Pitkin (1972: 97), a symbol has the "power to evoke feelings or attitudes" on people. Symbolic representation was thus depicted as a formalistic and passive dimension but Pikin also noted that symbols must be "actively evoked" to produce affective responses, that is, to make the represented feel represented, which may then require a certain amount of "ritual activity" (Ibid., p.103–4). As agents of representation, female firsts in politics may "stand for" women citizens in particular ways since they are trailblazers who break through spaces (political positions) where no other woman in their country had previously served.

Although women politicians are not simply passive recipients of media representations but can also participate in their construction (Ross, 2003), as pointed out by Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996: 114), "women still have a long way to go to represent themselves" due to the prevailing "masculinist norms of the news industry" and the "gendered structure of news production" as editors, reporters and sources (van Zoonen, 1994: 43). Indeed, symbols are politically contested and discursively constructed (Lombardo and Meier, 2014, ch 1) by different actors, including the media, which plays a

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[1] See CAWP (2014) for U.S. politics and Wikipedia (2014) for different world regions.

key role in sustaining existing social relations, including gender identity (García-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013: 428). Media are thus "symbol handlers" par excellence through the routine organization of verbal and visual discourses (Gitlin, 1980: 7). Mediated representations of female politicians is carried out by a male-dominated and gender-biased industry, which has been characterized as "malestream" media (Ross, 2003). In this vein, "mediated representations of female politicians can tell us important things about the relations between gender, power and politics" (Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013: 437).

This paper explores the types of gendered mediation deployed by the print media in the representation of first-ever female politicians in historically male-dominated high-ranked political offices. More specifically, we seek to assess how female politicians' capacity to suggest a new social meaning to women *in* politics and women *and* politics is hindered by the use of gender frames in which the male is treated as normative. In line with Gidengil and Everitt, (2003), we thus expand Tuchman's (1978) concept of "symbolic annihilation" by looking beyond lower media coverage of female politicians in comparison with men and exploring the gendered mediation as a crucial factor that may depress the symbolic effects of women's political presence. Our empirical analysis focuses on media representations of national and sub-national female political firsts in Spain. We concentrate on a single country given that context may shape meanings of political representation and overall levels of women's presence in the public arena might influence the evaluation of the very same women politicians (Murray, 2010a: 229).

In the following sections we first discuss the symbolic dimension of women's political representation and the role of gendered mediation. Next we present the cases under examination and the methods used in the examination of news media content. Subsequently, we present the empirical analysis of media representations of first-ever female politicians in Spain and discuss how women's symbolic representation is resignified through a myriad of gendered frames. Lastly, the final section concludes.

Women politicians as symbols
Gender politics scholarship refers to symbolic representation as the extent to which gendered embodied actors affect "the represented's feelings of being fairly and effectively

represented" (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005: 407). There is a wide expectation that women politicians will "stand for" women constituents, making the latter feel better represented by creating a "social meaning" about the ability to rule for the traditionally underrepresented group and by increasing the attachment of group members to the polity (Mansbridge, 1999). More specifically,

> "Representatives and voters who share some version of a set of common experiences and the outward signs of having lived through those experiences can often read one another's signals relatively easily and engage in relatively accurate forms of shorthand communication. Representatives and voters who share membership in a subordinate group can also forge bonds of trust based specifically on the shared experience of subordination" (Mansbrige, 1999: 641).

As members of an underrepresented group, women may internalize the idea that politics is a 'man's game' (Burrell, 1996: 151). The novelty brought in by the feminization of politics signals the openness of the political system, which may therefore be perceived as fairer and be more positively evaluated (High-Pippert and Comer, 1998: 62). This is coupled by a role model effect through which women citizens may feel more politically efficacious and be more willing to run themselves as candidates (Karp and Banducci, 2008). A greater presence of women contesting or occupying public office might thus suggest female citizens that political institutions will produce more women-friendly policies (Burns et al., 2001: 352) thereby positively influencing their satisfaction with the political system. Women are also expected to change the ways of doing politics, for example, their presence is associated to a lower prevalence of corruption (Stensöta, Wängnerud and Svensson, 2014).

Politicians' will and ability to identify with constituents as "one of [them]" are thus critical (Fenno, 1978: 73). Given that self-presentation "is entangled with the cultural representation of the group one belongs to" (Markstedt, 2007: 7), if politicians are able to identify and empathize with constituencies sharing their descriptive characteristics and communicate how they work on their behalf, these messages may therefore enhance trust and support (Brown and Gershon, 2015: 28). Extant research has found that office holders

vary a great deal in the ways politicians present themselves to the public and how appeals to constituencies are made, which may be shaped by their gender identity (Carroll, 2001; Brown and Gershon, 2015).

This notwithstanding, the symbolic effects of women's representation on citizens' attitudinal, cultural or behavioral shifts may largely depend on how citizens observe and react to elected women (Franceschet et al. 2012: 239-42). For example, women candidates' visibility and the public saliency of women's descriptive representation have been found to shape symbolic effects (Atkeson, 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006; Koch, 1997). The role of the media thus has a paramount importance in the representation of women politicians. On the one hand, women politicians tend to receive lower media coverage than their male peers (Tuchman, 1978; Fountaine and McGregor, 2002). On the other hand, gendered mediation entails a "more subtle, but arguably more insidious, form of bias that arises when conventional political frames are applied to female politicians" (Gidengil and Everitt, 1999: 49; see also Norris, 1997: 161; Bystrom et al., 2004). The use of traditional frames by media, built around male dominance, still portray women as political outsiders (Fountaine and McGregor, 2002). Women's political presence is often rendered by the media as "suspect" and "other", as if they were political "pretenders" (Childs, 2008: 142).

Also, the systematic gendering of women in politics by the media translates into several "instances of omission, trivialization and condemnation" (Fountaine and McGregor, 2002: 5). Whereas self-presentations (i.e., women candidates' websites) and media presentations (newspaper articles) tend to be rather alike as regards focus on policy areas traditionally associated with women, their presentation as individuals by the media is often negative and patronizing (Markstedt, 2007: 31). Gendered media representations, which emphasize less what women politicians do and more what they look like, might "re-present and reinforce, rather than challenge, widely accepted assumptions about the suitability of women and politics" (Childs, 2008: 141). Likewise, negative stereotypes surrounding women's capabilities and sexism in describing women's character traits or appearance still are common practices by the media thereby hindering female politicians' credibility and authority (Norris, 1997; Everitt and Gidengil, 2003). In addition, as noted by Trimble et al. (2013: 476), "by highlighting politicians' bodies or family lives, news reports perform gender work".

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Gendered mediation may then turn women politicians into void symbols. As has been elaborated for "quota women", if women elected under quota schemes are perceived as undeserving of their seats (Clayton, 2015: 356) or if they are seen as unrepresentative of ordinary women, citizens may remain skeptical about both the suitability of women in leadership positions and about claims of their producing new ways of doing politics (Franceschet et al., 2012: 240). More generally, as found in a recent experimental study, citizens' attitudinal changes have been found to be shaped by the framing of greater women's representation and its concomitant effects on the political system, such as perceptions of a more open and fairer political system and of more diverse representatives' profiles and legislative agendas (Verge et al., 2015: 15–16). Similarly, the negative stereotyping of women politicians can make some of them hesitant about focusing too much on women's policy interests, thus leading women politicians to undermine the link between substantive and symbolic representation (Franceschet et al., 2012: 241).

Data and methods

The empirical analysis of media representations of first-ever female politicians centers on Spain. In both national and regional parliaments, women's representation is significantly high, with percentages around 40%. Spain is also one of the few countries where parity cabinets have existed at both the national and regional levels. Given that time may affect how women's presence is valued, we restrict our survey to female firsts having assumed political office in the last decade or so, covering the period 2000–2015. At the international level, gender-balanced representation was only established as a goal in the 1990s, especially after the Beijing's Platform of Action (1995) recommended the adoption of positive action (Krook, 2006). Following the global diffusion of gender quotas, the issue of women's presence in politics reached the national political agenda in Spain in the late 1990s with several bill proposals submitted to the national parliament. In 2007 a legislative electoral quota was enacted (Verge, 2012).

As shown in Table 1, our empirical analysis examines eleven cases, despite including just eight female politicians since a few of them broke through more than one top political office. They include presidents of the national and subnational parliaments, presidents of regional governments, leadership positions in statewide political parties and

ministers of traditionally masculinized portfolios in the national government. Five of the selected female politicians belong to the social-democratic PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*/Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and the other three to the conservative PP (*Partido Popular*/People's Party). In fact, these parties have traditionally sustained radically different stances toward equal gender representation. Whereas the PSOE has long applied party quotas (since 1988), the PP maintains a vocal opposition against positive action based on its liberal defense of meritocracy (Verge, 2012). Nonetheless, the latter took the lead in placing women in very visible top national and sub-national political office.

Table 1. Female firsts in Spanish politics (2000-2015)

Name	Position(s)	Period(s) in office as 'firsts'
Luisa Fernanda Rudi (PP)	President of the lower house President of Aragon	05/04/2000-08/04/2004 13/07/2011- July 2015
Esperanza Aguirre (PP)	President of the Senate President of Madrid	09/02/1999-16/10/2002 21/11/2003-26/09/2012
M. Teresa Fernández de la Vega (PSOE)	Vice-president of the government and Minister of Presidency	18/04/2004-21/10/2010
Carme Chacón (PSOE)	Minister of Defense	14/04/2008-22/12/2011
M. Dolores de Cospedal (PP)	Deputy secretary-general President of Castile La Mancha	Since 21/06/2008 22/06/2011-July 2015
Elena Salgado (PSOE)	Minister of Economy and Vice-president of the government	07/04/2009-22/12/2011
Elena Valenciano (PSOE)	Deputy secretary-general	05/02/2012-27/07/2014
Susana Díaz (PSOE)	President of Andalusia	Since 07/09/2013

The first female presidents of the Congress of Deputies (Luisa Fernanda Rudi) and the Senate (Esperanza Aguirre) were PP female politicians. Likewise, whereas PSOE's first female regional prime minister did not take office until 2013 (Susana Díaz), the PP had already elected several women to this position (Esperanza Aguirre in 2003, Luisa Fernanda Rudi and M. Dolores de Cospedal in 2011).[2] Alternatively, with regards to the central government, PSOE cabinets have not only included a higher proportion of women but also more women have occupied prominent positions like the Vice-presidency (M. Teresa Fernández de la Vega, Elena Salgado) and traditionally masculinized portfolios such as

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[2] Strictly speaking, the first female regional president (M. Antonia Martínez) belonged to the PSOE. She served as interim president on two occasions (in March 1984, when the incumbent resigned, and between 1993 and 1995, when another incumbent was facing corruption charges). We exclude her from the empirical analysis since she does not fall into the selected time span of our study. Similarly, the resignation of the Andalusian incumbent president led Susana Díaz to assume this office in 2013.

Economy (Elena Salgado) and Defense (Carme Chacón).[3] Quite recently, both parties have propelled women to the higher ranks of their organizations as the 'number two' on the party hierarchy (Elena Valenciano in the PSOE and M. Dolores de Cospedal in the PP).

For the analysis of media representation of these female historical firsts we center on the three leading Spanish newspapers, which present different political orientations. From center-left to right, these are *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, and *El Mundo*.[4] Regional media coverage was discarded because national newspapers have a predominant role in molding the image of politicians across the country and because all sampled female firsts in regional positions already had a national projection before their election. The type of information examined includes news on the investiture, the electoral campaign, opinion articles as well as editorials. Our coverage was restricted to about two months either side of women politicians' election or appointment to office.[5] This information was cross-checked with female politicians' investiture speeches (when available) in order to identify whether news merely reported or introduced other evaluative aspects. We selected 191 news stories and 5 investiture speeches, which were subject to in-depth analysis. This selection provides us with an adequate sample for identifying the type of discourses about first-ever female politicians in Spain and to examine how they are constructed through the news.

Our analysis uses framing theory, in particular the one adapted by gender scholars in their examination of gendered media representations (Norris, 1997; Gidengil and Everitt, 1999; Fountaine and McGregor, 2002; Childs, 2008; Murray, 2010b). News stories are "framed" in that they construct meanings about political and social issues (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992: 374). As has been already discussed, "far from being gender-neutral, conventional news frames treat the male as normative" (Gidengil and Everitt 2003: 210). Previous scholarship has also identified several sex stereotypes and

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[3] The PP government (2011–2015) also had a woman Vice-president (Soraya Sáez de Santamaría) but she is not included in the empirical analysis since she was not the first woman to occupy this position.

[4] Newspaper circulation (daily readers): *El País*, 1,533,000; *El Mundo*, 960,000; and *La Vanguardia*, 718.000 (Estudio General de Medios, April 2014–March 2015, http://www.aimc.es/Entrega-de-resultados-EGM-1%C2%AA-ola,1588.html).

[5] After a certain amount of time in office newspaper articles report on the activity of these women in their respective positions, which falls beyond the scope of this paper. For those women having been reelected, only the first tenure is examined as in the second one they are no longer the 'firsts' in that position.

gender frames (Norris, 1997, Childs, 2008; Murray, 2010a), such as age routinely cited; first name used frequently; motherhood status and reconciliation issues often highlighted; gendered traits as filters of women's capabilities; focus on women's looks and fashion; and overemphasis on the first-woman breakthrough in a given political office.

In this study we do not seek to quantify the occurrence of sex stereotypes and gender frames but rather we are interested in the processes of signification of women's presence in top political office that underlie the broader narratives. Through a qualitative discourse analysis we delve into how the male-centered media coverage is encapsulated in discourses that perpetuate the gendering of female politicians. Firstly, departing from previous theoretical and empirical scholarship on women's symbolic representation, we focused on four thematic areas that build on the links between symbolic representation and the other two dimensions of political representation, namely descriptive and substantive representation. Secondly, we examined the perspectives which underpinned the descriptions of female firsts in politics, that is, we investigated the gender relations underlying the generation of these descriptions. Ultimately, this implies locating gender frames within the defined thematic areas and analyzing whether and how they are encapsulated in gendered narratives. The results of the qualitative data analysis were manually coded in spreadsheet format and the researchers' observations and notes were separately recorded. The spreadsheets were revised by the two researchers with a view to ensuring inter-coder reliability.

Empirical analysis: Women's symbolic representation under gendered frames

How do male-centered reports of politics affect first female holders of top political office? Which meanings are given to their presence by the print media? In which ways do gender stereotyping and gendered frames resignify women's milestones?. The empirical analysis is organized into two sub-sections, one focusing on the established links between descriptive and symbolic representation and another one looking into the connections between substantive and symbolic representation.

Descriptive and symbolic representation: Novelty and role model

The unique experiences of female political firsts bring "novelty" into the political system as trailblazers who entered into spaces where no other woman had previously served thereby signaling that politics is no longer (an exclusively) "man's game". We could argue that their presence has an emancipatory value for women. Their presence also instills a "role model" effect that provides women citizens with behavior, example, or success that can be emulated by other women, which may stimulate attitudinal and behavioral change among female citizens. In what follows we examine whether and how the "novelty" and "role model" themes are combined with gender frames and sex stereotypes.

"Novelty" is clearly the predominant theme for first-ever female politicians in Spanish national and subnational politics. Their presence is framed as a historical event that says something about women's place in society. Top public offices receive more attention than top party office when women break through these male-dominated spaces. As found elsewhere (Murray, 2010a), women's political milestones are underpinned by a pervasive "first woman" frame, which becomes a reminder of the exceptionality of the appointment or selection of women in such top political offices. This frame made it to the headlines of the three newspapers we surveyed: "The time of women presidents" (2011/06/20_RUD_ EM),[6] "The first president" (2004/04/24_DLV_EP; 2003_10_27_AGU_EP), "Women presidents" (2000/04/06_RUD_ LV1; 2000_03_30_ AGU_EM) or "Mrs. President" (2000/ 03/30_RUD_EP2; 2003/10/27_AGU_LV). References are also made to early suffragists who could have "never dreamt of" such milestones (2012/02/11_VAL_EP).

Murray (2010a: 230) considers this frame to be "both a blessing and a curse" for female politicians since emphasis on their novelty may put into question their viability. However, we find that female firsts in politics tend to be depicted as strongly qualified for the office they have been elected or appointed to. They are represented by the media as "veteran" (2000/03/30_RUD_LV1), "rigorous" (2000/03/30_RUD_LV2; 2004/05/16_ DLV_LV); "solid discourse" (2000/04/06_ RUD_LV4); "judicious prior performance" (2000/03/30_RUD_EP2), "not a rookie" (2011/07/11_VAL_EP2), "efficacious politician"

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[6] All news stories are identified by publication date (year/month/day), the first three letters of the politician's last name, and the initials of the newspaper. A number is also added at the end if more than one news story appeared on the same day.

(2012/02/05_VAL_EP; 2009/04/08_ SAL_EP1), "solidly experienced" (2004/04/01_DLV_ EP), or "a heavy weight" (2009/04/08_SAL_EP5). Accusations of tokenism have not been found for any of the eight female firsts under examination. Thus newness was not generally harmful for women. Women's competency was challenged, though, in two cases where women broke through in times of economic and political crisis after ministerial reshuffles or resignation of the incumbent regional prime minister (2009/05/07_SAL_EM; 2009/04/08_SAL_LV; 2013/09/07_DIA_EM; 2013/11/24_DIA_EM). It should be noted that the ideological leaning of the newspaper largely explains this criticism.

Women's age goes unnoticed in media representations of most the female firsts. Generally, age is mentioned highly aseptically in passing, with information provided on the year and place of birth of women politicians. Their maturity is celebrated as the power of a generation of "senior women" who have broken molds all their lives (2009/05/31_SAL_EP). Age is, nonetheless, highlighted for the youngest female politicians, the premier of the Andalusian regional government (Díaz, 39 years) and the Minister of Defense (Chacón, 37 years) (2008/04/13_CHA_EP; 2013/08/31_DIA_EP), despite men having previously accessed political positions in their late 30s. The age frame thus becomes gendered.

When news stories use female politicians' name and last name, this may suggest unfamiliarity and the need for introduction to the public (Murray, 2010b: 13). The "first name" frame has more emphasis when these women accessed a top position for the first time in comparison to her second time. Their first name is never used alone. In their second tenure, the use of just the last name is predominant. As said, three of the female politicians under examination subsequently occupied other offices and were also the first women to so. The very same female politicians also distance themselves in their investiture speeches from the "first woman" self-presentation in their second breakthrough.

First female holders of top political office are portrayed as gendered actors in gendered institutional spaces, as illustrated by several headlines: "Women take the lead" (2004/02/19_VAL_LV; 2011/07/11_VAL_EP2), "Women take over the Joint Chiefs of Staff" (2008/07/08_COS_LV), or "Troops stand for the first time at attention of a female minister" (2008/04/14_CHA_EM). The extent to which they are represented as gendered actors is also visible through emphasis on their bodies, be it their fragility ("Her thin, slight

figures gives her a fragile aspect", 2004/03/26_DLV_EM), ("tenacity and energy for public service under a fragile appearance", 2009/04/06_SAL_EP3), non standard height ("her height is outstanding – almost 1.80 cm in heels", 2011/05/20_RUD_EM), or pregnancy ("she is received with the same respect and with more sensitivity", 2008/04/13_ CHA_EP).

In addition, a sort of underlying message emerges through which the merit of the historical event is attributed to the political party, which may eventually underscore the social meaning of such novelty. Women politicians are rendered the passive actor and political parties or specific male selectors become the active actor, which yields a broader gendered frame that still depicts politics as male despite women's invasion and that denies agency to women politicians. As found elsewhere, gendered mediation contributes to turning women's political milestones into men's achievement (cf. García-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013: 436). The president of the government José María Aznar (1996-2004) is seen as the enabler of the historical event that put two women as presidents of the two houses in parliament (for example, "Aznar's choice is spot on", 2000/03/30_RUD_LV2) or as regional prime minister (2003/10/11_AGU_EM). The president of the government José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-2011) is presented as the enabler of the feminization of cabinet office more broadly (2004/04/01_DLV_LV; 2004/03/26_DLV_EP2; 2008/04/13_ CHA_LV3; 2008_04_11_CHA_EM). The president Mariano Rajoy (2011-2015) is similarly presented as enabling women's political careers – "He has given her the chance to become a prophet in her own land" (2011/07/15_RUD_EM).

With regards to the "role model" theme, female firsts in politics are presented by print media as 'symbols' of women's increasing social and political power (2000/04/09_RUD_LV; 2004/04/24_DLV_EP). It should also be noted that the very same women tend to self-present their space invasion as symbolic for society in their investiture speeches or interviews, so media may be purely reporting their words rather than attributing them the role model effect for other women. Only a few news stories (2000/04/09_RUD_ LV; 2000/04/02_RUD_EP), though, mainly written by female journalists, put these 'invasions' into a more critical examination by highlighting the still pervasive gender inequalities, including disregard of women's merits, the sexual division of labor and gender-based violence (2000/04/09_RUD_LV; 2000/04/02_RUD_EP; 2004/02/19_VAL_ LV).

The "role model" theme is, nonetheless, grounded on notions of shared gender identity, especially that of motherhood and reconciliation issues. Several newspaper articles emphasize how difficult it is for women to combine their activities in top political office with their family responsibilities and how they often fail to make reconciliation possible. "She has to combine her passion for politics and her party with her top priority, family, from which she lives away most of the week" (2012/02/05_VAL_EM), a news story reports. Stories often highlight the complex lives female politicians have: "[Reconciliation] is difficult but feasible. Otherwise, I would have not been so insensate" (2008/06/29_COS_LV); "My daughter once told me: you cannot pretend to raise your children only during weekends (2012/02/11_VAL_EP). This implies that questions on reconciliation are put to women politicians in interviews, while this is not usually the case to male politicians with young children. If female politicians are single or childless, this is also emphasized, sometimes in conjunction with their feminist activism, as if the latter explained the former (2004/04/24_DLV_EP; 2004/04/18_DLV_EM).

Therefore, the "role model" frame is mediated by gendered conceptions of femininity that convey a double bind – to be a good mother or to be a top politician – whereby the demands of top political office are implicitly presented as incompatible with social expectations about women's responsibilities. The message conveyed is that of female top politicians' "odd choices as women and their odd position in politics" (van Zoonen, 2005: 95). The maternal frame even delves into non traditional ways of conceiving a child, such as in vitro fertilization (2008/06/20_COS_EP3; 2008/06/19_ COS_EM3). A case worth mentioning is that of the Minister of Defense, seven-month pregnant when she took office. Some opinion articles and editorials questioned the suitability for the job of a woman on maternity who would thus miss NATO summits or could not visit the military troops stationed abroad (15/04/2008_CHA_EM).

Substantive and symbolic representation: Equality advocates and agents of change
Women politicians are expected to act as "equality advocates" and "agents of change" thereby providing cues to citizens on increased social responsiveness of institutions and new (or different) ways of doing politics, respectively. In regards to "equality advocates", women politicians are considered to work for advancing gender equality, act for

marginalized or disadvantaged groups, or bring in women's global issues more broadly. As to "agents of change", women politicians are expected to instill changes in the way politics works through different communication or action repertoires thereby challenging politics 'as usual'.

The "equality advocates" theme is poorly present in media representations of female firsts in politics, and they are basically found in coverage of left-wing women politicians. Mentions of advocacy for women's issues are reported in passing from the very same politicians' speeches during their investiture, for example, De la Vega's announcement upon inauguration of her tenure as Vice-President of the adoption of legislative gender quotas (2004/05/16_DLV_LV; 2004/04/24_DLV_EP), Chacón's goal of advancing women's presence in the armed forces (2008/04/14_CHA_EM), or Díaz addressing her first words in the investiture speech before the Andalusian parliament to the victims of gender-based violence and self-identification as an "inheritor of the fight for gender equality". When media present right-wing first female office holders of top political office, their positioning as opponents to gender electoral quotas tends to be recalled (2000/04/01_ RUD_LV; 2008/06/29_COS_LV). However, almost all women political firsts make explicit references to gender inequalities, women's rights and pressing policy concerns. For example, Aguirre (Madrid regional government) claimed: "My condition as a woman gives me a plus of credibility when it comes to express my firm decision to fight the real, psychological and cultural barriers still faced by women". Her investiture speech also put emphasis on promoting women's employment, furthering reconciliation policies, and increasing resources to fight against gender-based violence. Similarly, Cospedal (Castile La Mancha regional government) denounced in her investiture speech the fact that women lack proper recognition in society and especially in the labor market and announced that gender equality policies would be placed under the regional ministry of presidency.

This shows that gendered mediation distorts women's substantive representation. On the one hand, right-wing women politicians' claims to 'act for' women are rendered largely invisible. These claims are exclusively emphasized by the media for left-wing first-ever female politicians and their representation is often reduced to female politicians' feminist social or professional activism or their participation in the women's movement (2011/07/11_VAL_EP1; 2004/04/18_DLV_EM; 2004/04/01_DLV_EP; 2009/04/08_SAL

_EP1). With regards to other policy initiatives launched by female firsts in their opening speeches when assuming office media reports are some times riddled with sexism. For example, the announcements made by Rudi (Aragon regional government) and Cospedal (Castile La Mancha regional government) of austerity policy packages within their respective regional administrations were presented as "Operation bikini" (2011/07/08_RUD_EP).

For its part, the "agents of change" theme is conspicuous by its absence and when it is present the potential engendering of how politics and institutions work is affected as well by gendered mediation. Firstly, most female political firsts are represented as being closely connected to the inner circles of power within their respective political parties (2011/05/23_COS_EP2; 2009/04/06_SAL_EM; 2008/04/11_CHA_EM; 2013/07/21_DIA_EP2) or to former ministers (2012/02/05_VAL_EM; 2004/03/26_DLV_EP3; 2008/06/19_COS_EM7). Often times, these connections are presented as being strongly personal. For example, in the case of Rudi, it is highlighted that Aznar was the best man at her wedding (2000/03/30_RUD_LV1), and, in the case of Díaz (Andalusia regional government), her predecessor in the regional government is presented as her "political father" (2013/09/06_DIA_EM). Men are again brought in as protagonists and the outsider status of women's politicians is resignified to fit into the existing order.

Secondly, the feminization of top political offices is fundamentally trivialized by the gender stereotyping of the feminine attributes or behavior of these politicians, like not being able to contain their tears when taking office (2008/06/20_COS_LV; 2003/11/22_AGU_LV). The following quote is also very illustrative: "with clear ideas; discreet person; sun, reading and sports lover; those who know her affirm she is a kind-hearted person" (2004/04/18_DLV_EM). On some occasions, male political peers are asked about these women politicians and their answers show a patronizing attitude: "In harsh times, when tension is high, she is able to relax the atmosphere, to recover control of the situation with a smile, a gesture or a look (…). Her presence gives good vibes, instills confidence. (…) She never loses her ability to empathize, to be affectionate" (2004/02/06_VAL_LV). News stories seek to make all female firsts fit into the 'being nicer' expectation, like "she has a kind iron smile" (2011/07/15_RUD_EM) or "her distant character has been sweetened" (2000/03/30_RUD_EP).

This notwithstanding, some representations fail into the "dominatrix" frame through which some of the female politicians are depicted as powerful women emasculating men (Murray, 2010b: 243). Salgado (Minister of Economy and Vice-President) is presented as someone who "scared smokers when she was the Minister of Health" (2009/04/16_SAL_EP); Fernández de la Vega (Vice-President) is reported to have been presented as "men's inquisitor" by the Federation of Divorced Fathers for having defended sanctioning husbands who fail to pay children's' alimony (2004/04/18_DLV_EM); and Díaz (Andalusia regional prime minister) is represented as "bossy" and "having a black legend as a hard woman (…) who can efficaciously play as a killer or as central defense" (2013/10/27_DIA_EP).

Thirdly, other changes brought in formal political spaces by female top politicians are strongly trivialized in media discourses. Politics is presented to have become more "colorful". This frame is mainly built upon female politicians' looks and fashion: "The historical memories of the Board of Congress are a universe of blue and grey colors, the color shade of male suits. But yesterday in these stage of wood and fine tapestry, a new rainbow of light colors burst out, that of female suits" (2000/04/06_RUD_LV2). Sartorial issues accompany several of the descriptions of female politicians: "the bright colors of her clothing, especially all color ranges of purple" (2004/05/16_DLV_LV), "eight-centimeter heels and a flowery blouse" (2008/04/15_CHA_LV), or "short skirt and light grey tights with black dots (…), painted fingernails" (2013/09/06_DIA_EP). Gender stereotyping and the trivialization of the changes instilled by women's political presence turns feminization into a superfluous add-on to male politics.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the first women ever to reach top political office in Spain in the last decade confirms that gendered media framing is pervasive across in the print media. Significant differences between men and women journalists were not observed. While the irruption of female firsts in politics is generally celebrated, media stories rest on women's physical appearance and traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which leads to a representation and, as such, a construction of women politicians as deviant from the male norm. Although references to women politicians' age or the use of double binds are less recurrent than

found by previous scholarship, these references are still identified in the three newspapers under examination. By reproducing politics as male gendered mediation voids women's political firsts of symbolic power.

Concerning the link between descriptive and symbolic representation, "novelty" shifts into a gender frame whereby male selectors usurp women's agency. For its part, the "role model" effect adopts a gendered form through the performative dynamics of motherhood and reconciliation. With regards to the connection between substantive and symbolic representation, "equality advocacy" is largely diluted. It is largely absent for right-wing female politicians, despite the explicit claims made in their investiture speeches, and it is mainly conflated with feminist activism in the case of left-wing women politicians. Lastly, news stories of female firsts as "agents of change" are riddled with gender stereotyping. The ways in which politics may be transformed with women's presence are trivialized and women politicians are constructed as complementing male politics with a touch of sensitivity and color.

The fact that the substantive dimension is either hidden and often devoid of substance is highly problematic for symbolic representation since citizens' attitudinal change on women's representations is not only dependent on the presence of women but rather on which effects this presence is expected to bring about in terms of how both politics and policy work. Media representations of the first women to ever serve in top political office dramatically fail to expand the social meanings of women and politics and women in politics. The prevailing gendered mediation prevents audiences from relating greater women's numerical representation with the engendering of politics. On the contrary, media representations reinscribe gender into women's milestones by highlighting how different from the male norm the 'chosen' outsiders are. Therefore, the malestream media re-genders the symbolic construction of women's political presence, which may lead to an effective annihilation of women's symbolic representation.

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