

Gendered mediation and political/electoral preferences in opinion journalism covering the presidential debates in Mexico¹

Mediación de género y preferencias

Mediação de gênero e preferências

político-electorales en la prensa de

político-eleitorais na imprensa de opinião

opinión sobre los debates presidenciales

sobre os debates presidenciais

en México

no México

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To understand the effect of gendered mediation on the expression of political and electoral preferences, 170 opinion pieces were analyzed. These articles had been published in the newspapers *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and *Reforma* after the debates organized during Mexico's 2024 presidential campaign, in which a woman emerged victorious for the first time in the nation's history. The analysis of discursive actions –self-construction of the speaker, construction of interlocutors, and construction of adversaries– made it possible to determine how gendered mediation shaped five dominant frames: the emphasis on the figure of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as the strategist behind Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo's candidacy; the construction of the debates by means of war metaphors; the insistence on the female candidates' emotionality; the allusion to their physical appearance as a recurring theme; and the symbolic violence expressed in the various ways in which they were named. These frames evidence the persistence of sexist and misogynistic characteristics reinforcing partisan political journalism in the hegemonically male media sphere.

KEYWORDS: Gendered mediation, political discourse, press, opinion journalism, debates.

Con el objetivo de comprender el efecto de la mediación de género en la expresión de preferencias político-electorales, se analizaron 170 textos de opinión publicados en los diarios El Universal, La Jornada y Reforma tras los debates organizados durante la campaña presidencial de México en 2024, en la que, por primera vez, una mujer obtuvo el triunfo. El análisis de las acciones discursivas –autoconstrucción de hablante, construcción de interlocutores y construcción de adversarios– permitió identificar cómo intervino la mediación de género en cinco marcos dominantes: el énfasis en la figura de Andrés Manuel López Obrador como estrategia detrás de la candidatura de Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, la construcción del debate mediante metáforas bélicas, la insistencia en la emocionalidad de las candidatas, la alusión a su apariencia física como tema recurrente y la violencia simbólica expresada en las distintas formas de nombrarlas. Estos marcos evidencian la persistencia de rasgos sexistas y misóginos que refuerzan el periodismo político partidista en una esfera mediática hegemonicamente masculina.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Mediación de género, discurso político, prensa, géneros de opinión, debates.

Com o objetivo de compreender o efeito da mediação de gênero na expressão de preferências político-eleitorais, foram analisados 170 textos de opinião publicados nos jornais El Universal, La Jornada e Reforma após os debates organizados durante a campanha presidencial do México em 2024, na qual, pela primeira vez, uma mulher obteve a vitória. A análise das ações discursivas –autoconstrução do falante, construção dos interlocutores e construção dos adversários– permitiu identificar como a mediação de gênero interveio em cinco marcos dominantes: a ênfase na figura de Andrés Manuel López Obrador como estrategista por trás da candidatura de Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, a construção do debate por meio de metáforas bélicas, a insistência na emocionalidade das candidatas, a alusão à sua aparência física como tema recorrente e a violência simbólica expressa nas diferentes formas de nomeá-las. Esses contextos evidenciam a persistência de traços sexistas e misóginos que reforçam o jornalismo político partidário em uma esfera midiática hegemonicamente masculina.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Mediação de gênero, discurso político, imprensa, géneros de opinião, debates.

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INTRODUCTION

The present work aims to examine how gendered mediation influenced the expression of political and electoral preferences communicated in 170 opinion pieces (articles, columns, editorials, and letters to the editor) published in *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and *Reforma*. These three newspapers were selected for their prominence in the national media ecosystem and the diversity of their editorial stances. According to the Digital News Report 2024 (Newman et al., 2024), they are among the most widely consulted newspapers in Mexico in both print and digital formats, with *El Universal* exhibiting particular centrality and *Reforma* and *La Jornada* a constant presence. They also reflect distinct editorial stances. *Reforma* is often linked to conservative positions, *La Jornada* to a progressive stance, and *El Universal* to a pluralistic tradition that, in pursuit of a wide readership, has brought together voices from different points of view. This combination enriches the comparative analysis and offers an ideal framework for the study of how gendered mediation shaped the expression of political and electoral preferences.

The 2023-2024 presidential election had a very particular characteristic: it was the first time that the major party platforms nominated female candidates. On the one hand, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo was selected by the *Sigamos Haciendo Historia* (Let's Keep Making History) coalition, constituted by Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional or "Morena" (the National Regeneration Movement), Partido de Trabajo (PT) (the Labor Party), and Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) (the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico). In several of her public appearances, this candidate stated that the two main pillars of her campaign were the construction of the "second floor of the Fourth Transformation or 4T"⁴ and "It's time for women". Throughout the electoral process, most of the polls showed her as the clear favorite, and this was ultimately confirmed by the results.⁵

⁴ A political project launched by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), President of Mexico from 2018 to 2024.

⁵ In the elections, which took place on June 2, 2024, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo won with 35 924 519 votes (59.75%); Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz garnered

Representing the main opposition and focusing a significant part of her campaign on the fight against public insecurity, Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz ran on the shared candidacy of “Fuerza y Corazón por México” (Strength and Heart for Mexico), an alliance made up of Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) (the National Action Party), Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) (the Institutional Revolutionary Party), and Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) (the Democratic Revolution Party), in a political coalition that seemed to stand united only in its attempt to defeat the movement initiated by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), a difficult task given this president’s broad approval rating throughout his term, indicated by various polls (Enkoll, 2024; Moreno, 2024).

Finally, backed by Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) (the Citizen Movement party), Jorge Álvarez Máynez was the only male candidate. He was a federal congressman for MC representing Zacatecas at the time of his nomination as that party’s presidential candidate. His campaign consisted primarily of a tour of several universities throughout the country to engage in dialogue with young people and promote a progressive social democratic agenda that sought to advance environmental protection and sustainability while recognizing the rights of children and minorities.

The Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) (National Electoral Institute) organized three presidential debates in order to present these candidates’ proposals to the public. The first debate, held April 7 on the subject “The society we want”, drew 11.8 million viewers. The second, held on April 28, reached 13.7 million viewers and focused on “Mexico’s road to development”. The third, which took place on May 19 with an audience of 13.9 million, was entitled “Democracy and government: Constructive dialogues” and it coincided with the Pink Tide march, originally a non-partisan citizen initiative that shifted to showing open support for Xóchitl Gálvez.

The opinion pieces that accompanied this coverage reflected a wide range of voices: regular columnists, guest writers, politicians, academics,

16 502 697 (27.45 %), and Jorge Álvarez Máynez 6 204 710 (10.32 %) (INE, 2024).

civil society activists, and hybrid figures. On occasion, letters to the editor provided opinions aligned with the editorial stance. As will become apparent, the possibility of free expression of political and electoral preferences made the columns and opinion articles an interesting discourse laboratory for the examination of gendered mediation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the epistemological assumptions of paradigms such as social semiotics and semiotic anthropology. Firstly, social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1995) emphasizes the complex interrelationships among semiotic systems in social practice as well as the factors that drive, generate, and guide these systems. In this sense, it offers a broad framework for the understanding of opinion journalism in the electoral context and the role of gendered mediation therein.

By contrast, semiotic anthropology proposes that, for the study of any social phenomenon, one must take into account the necessary interaction between three major systems: society, language, and meaning (Salgado Andrade & Villavicencio, 2024). Society, the first element, refers to a political and social context dominated by patriarchal and misogynistic views. Since the beginning of López Obrador's six-year term in 2018, an ongoing conflict has existed between those who support the advancement of Morena and the Fourth Transformation project, and those who oppose it. This has generated a polarized political atmosphere amplified by the increasing use of social media platforms, which enable diverse political actors, journalists, and commentators to interact with each other and with their audiences.

Language, the second element, alludes to the opinions published in the selected newspapers, which throughout this process showed political affinities toward one or another candidate, party, movement, or political camp, supporting or attempting to reverse the preferences of the electorate. Finally, the central element in this analysis lies in the meanings or semiotic processes that the opinion pieces comprising the corpus sought to construct.

In this electoral process, women played a prominent role in a traditionally male-dominated environment; thus, gendered mediation, the

expression of political and electoral preferences, the discursive actions employed in these texts, and the role of the foregoing in journalistic framing proved quite useful in the interpretation of these meanings. We will proceed to outline these concepts below.

The theory of gendered mediation proposes that the coverage, presentation, and treatment of information differ depending on whether the people involved in politics are men or women. Several recent studies on gendered mediation in the journalistic field have shown how media coverage tends to reinforce sexist stereotypes, render female candidates invisible, or frame their political participation in terms of traditionally masculine categories (Campbell, 2014; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Wagner & Everitt, 2019; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). These findings offer a valuable framework through which the persistence of inequalities in the media sphere may be understood. Nevertheless, the present study distinguishes itself by its focus on opinion journalism, a relatively underexplored but highly influential discursive arena in the public construction of political meaning. Unlike informative journalism, where bias can operate implicitly, in the columns and collaborations analyzed here, misogyny is openly articulated as a rhetorical strategy in an attempt to construct oppositional discourses.

The present study provides an original perspective that complements existing research: while the persistence of sexist frames has been documented in informative journalism, this work demonstrates that in opinion journalism these frames can be intensified and become explicit strategies for political delegitimization, which confirms that the arena of opinion journalism is exceptionally well-suited for the critical analysis of gendered mediation in electoral contexts.

Recent studies regarding the link between gender and political communication in Latin America have generated findings consistent with those obtained in other countries, allowing for the assertion that there does exist an inequality in the framing of men and women in the media coverage of politics, an inequality that undermines the political legitimacy of women as decision-makers (Álvarez-Monsiváis, 2019). Other studies have shown that, even when there are multiple communication approaches that seek to reverse negative stereotypes regarding women in

politics, the parties continue to prioritize the dissemination of campaign ads that present negative stereotypes of women, casting them as fragile and dependent (Marañón et al., 2021). Similarly, some of the most commonly identified and documented stereotypes include an emphasis on the female candidates' private and domestic life, their role as mothers; an insistence on explaining the women's achievements, merits, and political careers through their relationships with powerful and influential men; the belief that women lack control, rationality, and emotional intelligence; and the importance placed by the media on the female candidates' physical appearance and manner of dress (García Beaudoux et al., 2018).

By political and electoral preferences, we mean favorable or unfavorable assessments and treatments intended to benefit some actors, parties, or policy positions to the detriment of others. Since this study analyzes opinion journalism, the term "political and electoral preferences" is more appropriate than other similar concepts such as "partisan bias", "inequitable access to information sources", or "unbalanced treatment" (Echeverría, 2017; Fico et al., 2006). This is because opinion journalism, by its very nature and function, is not required to adhere to the criteria of objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality with the same rigor as informative journalism.

In order to examine the relationship between gendered mediation and political/electoral preferences, it is useful to consider the phenomenon of framing in journalistic texts. Gitlin (1980) notes the centrality of this concept to discourse analysis: "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 6). When these "tacit theories" make assumptions about gender, we can say that this frame is *gendered* (mediated by gender).

In a seminal article, Entman (1993) conceptualized frames essentially as acts of selection and salience:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 52).⁶

⁶ Original italics.

Entman's definition is useful as a theoretical and methodological tool for discourse analysis, as frames allow us to define a problem, diagnose its causes, make judgments, and suggest treatments or remedies. In the case of complex processes such as presidential elections, framing is identified by observing how different actors respond to these questions. When these responses vary according to the gender of the participants, we can speak of a gendered mediation process.

This mediation, moreover, is not politically neutral because the topics, words, images, and other elements used by journalistic discourse are selected and constructed from a particular point of view (Kress, 1983), and these points of view, especially when expressed by the media, are often shaped by the preferences, interests, and positions of the actors.

In electoral contexts, the media select, reference, or circulate opinions and discourses of other actors such as political parties or the candidates' campaign teams, framing them in a positive or negative way (Salgado Andrade, 2001, p. 151).

In such situations, the press itself becomes a strategic political actor by representing certain of the competing parties' interests. Thus, the opinions they publish can be categorized as political discourses and perform one of the following four discursive actions of journalism as a political actor (Salgado Andrade, 2009, pp. 86-89): 1) *Self-construction of the speaker*: highlights the feelings, assessments, or emotions of the person writing or of the groups she or he represents; 2) *Construction of interlocutors*: presents opinions expressly addressed to the reader or to other social actors whose points of view align with the newspaper or its contributors; 3) *Construction of adversaries*: conveys opinions that identify political figures or processes acting against the current of a desired social order; 4) *Construction of the referent*: articulates opinions aimed at analyzing reality, without taking sides; in theory, if an opinion article is guided by the goal of constructing a referent, its author deliberately refrains from expressing a point of view for or against anything or anyone, adopting a neutral analytical stance instead.

In short, considering the press as a political actor involves reading publications as political discourses, with the discursive actions that characterize them and contribute to framing a certain situation, defining

the problem, identifying its possible causes and solutions, and making judgments in that regard.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the role of gendered mediation in the expression of electoral preferences, the following procedure was carried out:

1. Accessing newspaper sites: The search tools of the official portals of *El Universal*, *Reforma*, and *La Jornada* were used. The first two require a paid subscription, while *La Jornada* is open access.
2. Definition of the analysis window: A one-week consultation period was established following each 2024 presidential debate based on the criterion that this timeframe should be sufficient for contributors wishing to publish their opinions and conclusions.
3. Selection by keywords: For each debate, a search was performed with terms such as “debate”, “Sheinbaum”, “Claudia”, “Xóchitl”, “Gálvez”, and “Máynez”.
4. Filtering for all three newspapers: After entering the keywords (e.g. “Sheinbaum”), the results were filtered to include only the Opinion section (*El Universal* and *La Jornada*) and the Opinion/Articles section (*Reforma*), as well as the corresponding date range (e.g. April 7-14, 2024 for the first debate). Recurring columns, the names of which are not always specific (e.g. “Astillero”, “México S.A.”, “Dinero”, or “Templo Mayor (“Shipyard”, “Mexico, Inc.”., “Money”, and “Great Temple”), respectively), were manually searched within the selected date ranges to identify articles that offered opinions on the debates.
5. Corpus construction and coding: The final corpus comprised 170 texts (67 from *El Universal*, 36 from *La Jornada*, and 67 from *Reforma*), which were integrated into a database on Atlas.ti, allowing searches by author, event, and actor.
6. The texts were coded based on electoral preference, whether they positively highlighted the personal, political, or discursive qualities of a candidate, or by negatively evaluating her/his opponents using derogatory metaphors or by questioning their legitimacy. The

texts were considered neutral when they merely described, narrated, or contextualized the debates without exhibiting clear biases toward any candidate, male or female. Of the 170 texts, 84 supported Gálvez (49.41 %), 45 favored Sheinbaum (26.47 %), five endorsed Máñez (2.94 %), and 36 were neutral (21.18 %) (see Table 1).

7. Identification of discursive actions and their role in the construction of frames.
8. Consolidation of the results into dominant discursive frames.

RESULTS

The first identified frame, present in all three studied events, was that Claudia Sheinbaum's nomination did not result from her own political career or her professional, academic, or personal merits, nor from her victory in her movement's internal survey for the selection of candidates. Rather, her nomination was portrayed as a strategy devised by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to extend his hold on power, explaining why "they put her there": "López Obrador is a statist but not a statesman. And Claudia must follow in his footsteps. That's what they put her there for. That's why she said she is no longer her own" (Lozano, 2024).

Also prevalent was the discursive frame that insisted on assigning a leading role to the then president at the expense of the Morena candidate: "Claudia seemed to focus only on cultivating and reinforcing the current president's trust in his pupil, which, to make matters worse, she apparently did not achieve" (Carreño Carlón, 2024).

Notable here is the discursive action of constructing the adversary; Claudia Sheinbaum is represented negatively, as the pupil of a mentor (President AMLO), who is also seen as an adversary. This also emphasizes the agency of the outgoing president (a man) over that of the female candidate.

Another dominant frame constructed the referent (the presidential debates) using war metaphors, one in particular framed the debates as boxing matches. This metaphorical construction was consistent in *El Universal* and *Reforma*, the main opposition newspapers (opposing Sheinbaum), and was also echoed in *La Jornada*. Female and male

TABLE 1
OPINION TEXTS THAT FORMED THE CORPUS

Event	Date range	Newspaper	Texts	Supported Claudia Sheinbaum	Supported Xóchitl Gálvez	Supported Jorge Álvarez Máynez	Neutral
First presidential debate (84 articles)	April 7-14, 2024	<i>El Universal</i>	49	10	23	1	15
		<i>La Jornada</i>	10	7	0	0	3
		<i>Reforma</i>	25	3	15	0	7
Second presidential debate (43 articles)	April 28-May 5, 2024	<i>El Universal</i>	13	0	9	1	3
		<i>La Jornada</i>	6	5	0	0	1
		<i>Reforma</i>	24	0	17	2	5
Third presidential debate (43 articles)	May 19-26, 2024	<i>El Universal</i>	5	2	3	0	0
		<i>La Jornada</i>	20	18	1	0	1
		<i>Reforma</i>	18	0	16	1	1
Total			170	45	84	5	36

Source: The authors.

commentators alike emphasized the expected confrontational nature of a political debate, leading to the perception of the candidates as boxers rather than political adversaries.

Yes, Claudia Sheinbaum's followers feel confident that she was able to defend herself against the heavy blows delivered by Xóchitl Gálvez, mainly, and the latter's followers saw her come out swinging like "Canelo", with jabs and hooks to knock her opponent out (Jáuregui, 2024).

Xóchitl had to pull off a knockout, and she didn't even win the fight. She had Claudia on the ropes and shook her up, but let her slip away (Loret de Mola, 2024).

In the second debate, the allusion to a boxing match was intensified with explicit mentions of punches, sparring, and the ropes, particularly because several opposition pundits declared Xóchitl Gálvez the winner.

In boxing terms, "pressure fighters" are pugilists who are always on the attack, pursuing victory based on the punches they unleash on their opponents. This is how Xóchitl Gálvez appeared on this occasion: as a "pressure fighter" who threw everything she had at her adversary, driving her to the ropes and repeatedly putting her in trouble, but her opponent's impassive expression didn't let it show (Catón, 2024b).

In the third debate, according to public opinion, Claudia Sheinbaum performed better against Gálvez; perhaps this explains why the boxing metaphor was no longer so prevalent in the articles written by the opposition, supporters of the female candidate backed by *Fuerza y Corazón por México*.

A third dominant frame was the evaluation of the female candidates based on their emotionality (or lack thereof). Depending on the political and electoral preferences of each commentator, the same emotion could be perceived as negative or positive (confidence or arrogance; nonchalance or weakness); these emotions were used to evaluate the political capacity of both Claudia Sheinbaum and Xóchitl Gálvez.

This was accentuated by her severe, stiff, unsmiling expression, in contrast to the relaxed and confident attitude of her opponent ... Xóchitl Gálvez, unlike in the previous debate, was calm, confident, forceful, while Claudia Sheinbaum seemed hesitant, nervous, weak, and, worst of all, dishonest (Catón, 2024b).

While most of the biases highlighting the emotional aspect of the female candidates were exhibited by men, there were some female authors such as Guadalupe Loaeza, who, in adopting the sexist political discourse of the female challenger (Gálvez), did not hesitate to allude –with virulence– to the emotional dimension:

And the more Xóchitl cornered Claudia with uncomfortable questions, the stiffer the doctor of environmental engineering became. From time to time, she would give a little smile that looked more like a grimace. The woman from Hidalgo was right when she called her the “Ice Queen” and “a cold and heartless woman” (Loaeza, 2024b).

The epithets “Ice Queen”, “a cold and heartless woman”, “insensitive”, among other sexist linguistic constructions, which were very frequent even in the discourse of candidate Xóchitl Gálvez herself in reference to Claudia Sheinbaum, reflect one of the most deeply rooted biases in the field of politics: the greater emotionality of women to the detriment of their rationality or scientific qualifications, even going so far as to represent the academic degree (Sheinbaum has a PhD in environmental engineering) as a mere discursive construction of identity (“Sheinbaum *may call herself* a scientist”) as can be read in the statements of the former president of the INE: “Sheinbaum may call herself a scientist, but her displays of arrogance and self-importance make it clear that she is more accustomed to imposing her will than to debating” (Córdova Vianello, 2024).

Gendered mediation regarding expected emotions in men and women also influenced the commentary directed at candidate Jorge Álvarez Máynez, whose characteristic smile drew criticism and ridicule.

...with a permanent smile –whether from nerves or intent is unclear– he became the king of memes and social media commentary for flashing his full set of teeth most of the time and transmitting a relaxed yet calculated image, in contrast to the studied and very well-trained image of Claudia and the nervousness of Xóchitl (García Soto, 2024a).

This confirms the effect of gendered mediation, which, in the context of an electoral contest, can notably exacerbate or reveal sexist narratives and stereotypes. As Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) point out, counter-stereotypical behaviors (such as leadership or seriousness in women or smiling in men) are often exaggerated or emphasized. Hence the criticism of Álvarez Máynez’s “permanent smile” in stark contrast to the accusation of Claudia Sheinbaum for her “severe, stiff, unsmiling expression”. The fact that these candidates were those who were most heavily criticized in the newspapers *El Universal* and *Reforma*, based on their emotionality, reveals how this trait is used as a tool of persuasion to present the writer’s political/electoral preferences as the most acceptable and legitimate. Through these assessments, the newspapers signaled their alignment with candidate Gálvez while constructing Sheinbaum and Máynez as adversaries.

A fourth discursive frame focused on the female candidates’ physical appearance; the debate coverage abounded with comments on their attire, physiques, hairstyles, and makeup. References to clothing were highly prevalent after the second debate, particularly when journalists sympathetic to Xóchitl Gálvez expressed their satisfaction with the huipil⁷ worn by the female challenger (possibly because it better aligned with the indigenous origins that her campaign consistently sought to construct for her). In fact, they credited this choice with her stronger performance relative to the first debate: “In the case of Xóchitl (sic) there was also a notable improvement. Wearing a blue huipil with silver embroidery and tasteful makeup, the female challenger looked much

⁷ Translator’s note: a type of tunic considered everyday clothing in many indigenous communities and a marker of heritage and identity when worn in public or political settings.

more relaxed and less nervous than in the first debate” (García Soto, 2024b).

While male commentators focused most sexist references on physical appearance and clothing, Guadalupe Loaeza, a contributor to *Reforma*, sparked widespread public outrage with an article published two days after the first debate, which went viral on social media. Loaeza made derogatory and sexist comments about the female candidates’ physical characteristics as well as their clothing, makeup, and even hair. She also expressed negative opinions about Claudia Sheinbaum’s academic qualifications, almost as if she were condemning the audacity of the candidate’s participation not only in politics but also in science:

She may be very academic, scientific, competent, political, serious, and extremely well-organized, but I don’t believe a word Claudia says, nothing at all. She’s faker than a three-dollar bill. Xóchitl was right to call her “the heartless ice queen” in the debate. Claudia is unmoved by anything, zero empathy and zero humanity. I imagine she’s been like that since she was a child, very competitive and a jealous type, especially with the girls at school who had straight hair (Loaeza, 2024a).

After the subsequent debates, this contributor continued to include sexist remarks about the female candidates’ figures and clothing in her arguments, and her deeply misogynistic discourse intensified as the campaign progressed. This can be seen in the following excerpt, where it would seem that referring to a woman as “unsexy” is a way to diminish her value, both as a woman in general and as a politician specifically:

Claudia: always with that superior little smile. She doesn’t change one bit; deep down she must be very boring, with no sense of humor. She’s the most unsexy woman I know. I don’t like her burgundy jacket. I don’t like it at all (Loaeza, 2024c).

The presentation of candidate Claudia Sheinbaum as “unsexy”, “boring”, and having “no sense of humor” reveals the operation of the discursive action of constructing the adversary once again, with

the significant mediation of gender. It is unlikely that a male politician would be negatively evaluated for being boring or humorless, for smirking, or for his attire.

The fifth identified discursive frame arises directly from the symbolic violence in naming. Such is the case of the term *la señora* (roughly “the missus” or “the married woman”) used in reference to Claudia Sheinbaum, reducing her identity and title to a traditional gender role and ignoring her academic and professional accomplishments. This manner of reference can also be interpreted as a condescending attitude implying that she ought to be treated differently because she is a woman: “I also think that *la señora* is a threat to the institutions on which the exercise of democracy, freedom, and justice in Mexico is based” (Catón, 2024a).

Particularly notable in this analysis of labels rife with symbolic violence is politician Jesús Zambrano. He repeatedly referred to the candidate nominated by the *Sigamos Haciendo Historia* coalition solely by her first name, or as “la Sheinbaum”⁸ while expressing serious doubt as to her possible victory and her performance in the debate.

Claudia showed no empathy for the Rébsamen School victims or those of Metro Line 12 –52 deaths in total. And she focused on falsely accusing her opponent of being “corrupt”... That is why la Sheinbaum lost the debate (Zambrano, 2024).

Another discursive element that reflects a rather peculiar exercise of symbolic violence was the prevalence of first names in reference to female candidates (“Claudia”, “Xóchitl”), as compared to the only male candidate, who was usually referred to as “Máynez” and not “Jorge”. While this could be interpreted as a sign of cordiality, the fact that their first names were used instead of their surnames (which, in regions such

⁸ Translator’s note: Referring to Claudia Sheinbaum as “la Sheinbaum” is more derogatory than using her surname alone because, in this context, the familiar or jocular article “la” is delegitimizing, depersonalizing, and disdainful. It also serves to underscore the existence of her gender in a traditionally masculine sphere.

as the Spanish-speaking world, do not reveal gender) emphasizes the fact that the female candidates are women entering arenas that have traditionally been closed to them. Incidentally, the newspapers and their contributors were not alone in their repeated use of this manner of reference to the contenders; the parties and campaign teams themselves also opted to emphasize the female candidates' first names through campaign slogans such as "It's Claudia" or "Go, Xóchitl".

At this point it is fitting to develop a comprehensive reflection on how the presented frames operated in terms of the points raised by Entman (1993) in his definition of framing, which will allow us to understand the general meaning of most of the opinions expressed, especially those of the opposition.

- a) *Definition of a problem*: Claudia Sheinbaum is not a suitable candidate; she is "boring", has "no sense of humor", and is "insolent", "severe", "cold", and "heartless" (traits that run counter to traditional notions of what it means to be a woman).
- b) *Diagnosis of causes*: Despite not being a "suitable candidate", Sheinbaum is in the running because "they put her there", where she must "follow the footsteps" and "formulas" of her "mentor" (traits that run counter to the stereotype of a good politician's leadership).
- c) *Moral judgment*: distrust, disapproval, and rejection due to the supposed absence of political merits of her own and what is portrayed as a lack of qualifying attributes (but what is, in fact, a series of sexist biases and prejudices).
- d) *Suggestion of a treatment or remedy*: vote for Xóchitl Gálvez, who is presented as a "confident", "forceful", "simple", and "elegant" candidate, and whose political agenda does not represent "a threat to institutions".

Taken together, the aforementioned frames converge broadly around the positioning of opinions for or against the 4T, portraying this agenda as anti-democratic, a portrayal for which the discursive actions of the press as a political actor were instrumental. Thus, self-construction of the speaker allowed those expressing their opinion to base them on their own points of view, convictions, political preferences, or even life

experiences: for example, in the following excerpt, political scientist Denise Dresser, constructing herself as a champion of democracy, openly opposes the candidate nominated by the *Sigamos Haciendo Historia* coalition.

In 2000, I was one of the “strategic votes” (in favor of Vicente Fox, the PAN candidate) mobilized by the left to remove the PRI from Los Pinos. In 2024, I will be one of the strategic votes cast to ensure that López Obrador, Claudia Sheinbaum, and Morena cannot continue governing as Salinas, De la Madrid, López Portillo, Echeverría, Díaz Ordaz, and all the patrimonialist presidents did before the transition era (Dresser, 2024).

Similarly, José Antonio Crespo of *El Universal* reinforces the opposition to the 4T, framing the project as anti-democratic. In his discourse, a clear construction of interlocutors, specifically the supporters of *Movimiento Ciudadano*, were identified as traitors to democracy if they failed to opt for the strategic vote in the presidential election.

*Do you like MC?*⁹ OK. Are *you* fed up with the PRIAN and Morena? So *vote* for Orange for deputy and senator, but *don't waste your presidential vote*, because casting it for MC is like throwing it in the trash. If *you happen to like* Morena more and *you don't care* about democracy, then *vote* for Claudia. If, on the other hand, *you support democracy* and *want to defend and strengthen* it, *vote* for Xóchitl, regardless of whether her coalition *appeals to you* (It doesn't appeal to me, either, but democracy is the priority here) (Crespo, 2024).

In order to frame the 4T as an anti-democratic movement, the explicit construction of adversaries was also employed, as can be clearly seen in the following excerpt:

⁹ Translator's note: The author set some words in italics to show the strategic use of (tú), the familiar form of “you” in Spanish, as opposed to “usted”, the other, more formal, more respectful, but also distant form of “you”. This distinction is not apparent in translation, but the italics have been maintained.

It's no secret that López Obrador captured the presidency through deception, making promises that were impossible to deliver, and, moreover, failed to do so because of his ineptitude, lies, and hypocrisy. Thus, the official candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum, offered to build the "second floor of the transformation". Even at that they are clumsy (Lozano, 2024).

On the other hand, in the media coverage sympathetic to –or at least not combative toward– the continuation of the 4T, there were discourses that constructed Xóchitl Gálvez as an adversary as well, though they did not seem to construct a frame to intentionally tarnish her image, unlike the press that was critical of Claudia Sheinbaum. This may have had to do with the fact that Gálvez was not perceived as a serious threat, given the numerous failed strategies or poor public performances during her campaign –which frequently went viral on social media– and the fairly consistent¹⁰ polling throughout the electoral process showing Claudia Sheinbaum as the favorite, a result corroborated in the June 2 election, in which she won by a wide margin.

In fact, from the beginning of the electoral process, the discursive frames constructed around Xóchitl Gálvez by her campaign team seemed intended to position her as a woman of indigenous origin, dressed in a huipil, an entrepreneur from a very young age (with a business selling Jello cups), willing to tackle insecurity, courageous in defending her rights –for example, when she sought legal protection to prevent the president from mentioning her in his morning press conference– not formally affiliated with any party, not even those that nominated her, along with many other strategies that had little real impact on electoral preferences. However, gendered mediation was evident in articles critical of Xóchitl Gálvez, as in the following example, which

¹⁰ The only exception was in the results released six days before the election by the telephone polling firm Massive Caller, which recorded 45.1% support for Gálvez and 44.8% for Sheinbaum. These figures were widely boasted about by the *Fuerza y Corazón* candidate and her supporters, despite the controversy surrounding the methodology used and Massive Caller's previous episodes of bias favoring certain parties.

emphasizes the emotional side of the opposition candidate and charges her with a lack of self-criticism:

Being the cynic that she is, Xóchitl Gálvez wept bitterly and insisted that the collapse of her candidacy is not the result of her notorious shortcomings, excesses, and constant blunders, but rather the work of “others”, especially those who work in the National Palace and use a “malevolent tool” known as “the morning press conference” to destroy her. Without an ounce of self-criticism, the former Jello-cup vendor washed her hands of the matter, declaring: “It’s not me, it’s the people across the street” (Fernández-Vega, 2024).

In short, the discursive actions identified, far from merely being the product of sexist, macho, and androcentric discourses, reveal how these systems of symbolic domination are exacerbated or intensified in electoral contests, where the positive or negative portrayal of an adversary is used to convince audiences of the writer’s own political and electoral preferences.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the relationships between the press, politics, and gender. Revisiting the idea of the interaction between society, language, and meaning proposed by social semiotics and semiotic anthropology for the study and understanding of social phenomena, the analysis of opinion articles showed that, in the context of the 2024 electoral process, several of the texts were directed toward the following meanings: reinforcement of the idea that politics is a predominantly masculine arena into which women enter as disciples or apprentices; the assumption that the presence of women is atypical, and the use of pugilistic metaphors to represent their political struggle; the bias regarding what qualities are considered important in a woman (emotionality, physique, appearance, etc.); and, finally, it was observed that both the political and media fields reveal their discursive effects in the symbolic violence of nicknames and the predominance of first names.

These findings coincide with some of the frames identified by previous studies conducted in other countries, where it has been pointed out that journalistic coverage tends to reproduce sexist stereotypes such as the emphasis on physical appearance, clothing, irrationality and lack of control, or the tendency to explain women's political successes and achievements based on their relationship with influential men (Álvarez-Monsiváis, 2019; García Beaudoux et al., 2018; Marañón et al., 2021).

Upon examination of gendered mediation as it appeared in journalistic discourse during the electoral contest in question (a struggle for power), it became evident that this mediation operates ideologically, particularly to discredit, humiliate, and delegitimize the leading candidate in opposition newspapers. Therefore, this study shows that gendered mediation can intensify the violent biases it carries when deployed in contexts of struggle and competition for a certain good or resource, whether material or symbolic, such as votes from the electorate and the approval or validation of public opinion. While it is true that gendered mediation continues to represent a considerable disadvantage for women in politics, its impact was also observed in the case of the male candidate.

Given the complexity of the corpus and its relevance to understanding the mechanisms through which public opinion is constructed in attempts to influence electoral outcomes— as has happened in other years in our country and elsewhere —it proved useful to categorize the discursive actions of the press as a political actor. Thus, after identifying forms of speaker self-construction, construction of interlocutors, and construction of adversaries, it became clear that certain strategies were being employed, such as grounding judgments and evaluations in the writer's own experience and militancy; exaggerating positive traits to build a favorable image of a candidate; or, conversely, repeated attempts to cast a candidate as unfit for office and even a threat.

While the materials analyzed paint a largely discouraging picture of the impact of gendered mediation as political discourse in the press, it is heartening that these opinions —despite differing from other forms of political participation in social media and alternative media— did not discourage a remarkable level of civic engagement. As a result, Mexico celebrated the election of its first female president in 2024. These

constantly evolving realities encourage us to continue analyzing the complex web woven by society, language, and meaning as a way to understand relationships such as those established among gender, politics, and the press.

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