

‘Political cartoons’ y la re(presentación) simbólica de las mujeres políticas en los mass media

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Abstract. La representación simbólica es, de las distintas dimensiones de la representación política, sin duda, la ‘gran desconocida’. Sólo en los últimos años han comenzado a surgir vías teóricas, empíricas y metodológicas novedosas en el análisis de tal dimensión. De la mano de la literatura sobre representación política de género y medios de comunicación, este paper ofrece una aproximación discursiva al estudio de las mujeres como símbolos políticos, al objeto de conocer cómo son re(presentadas) simbólicamente a partir de su presencia/ausencia en un espacio concreto de los periódicos: las viñetas. En este sentido, se toma como material empírico las viñetas publicadas en los artículos de prensa aparecidos en los principales periódicos de tirada nacional. La atención se centra, de manera especial, en las viñetas presentes en los artículos de prensa publicados en los días inmediatamente anteriores y posteriores a la toma de posesión y ejercicio del cargo representativo por parte de las mujeres que lo ejercen por primera vez en España, – Presidentas del Parlamento Nacional y de Parlamentos Autonómicos, Presidentas de Gobiernos Regionales, mujeres en posiciones de liderazgo en partidos políticos y Ministras de ministerios considerados tradicionalmente masculinos como Economía y Defensa-. El componente gráfico y la naturaleza visual de las viñetas hacen de ellas un instrumento único para el análisis de la representación política simbólica, en la medida en la que pueden tanto producir y reproducir los sentimientos, valores, actitudes, normas y estilos de convivencia (des)igualitarios entre hombres y mujeres en una sociedad determinada, como contribuir a su (re)construcción como símbolos políticos. Su análisis comparado permite valorar, así, tanto la atención mediática que las mujeres políticas despiertan como su impacto a nivel simbólico en la sociedad a la que representan.

Palabras clave: Género, élites políticas, representación simbólica, mass media, ‘political cartoons’.

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Introduction

The media plays a critical role in the symbolic (re)presentation of women and the (re)production of gender identities, roles and stereotypes. This is especially the case of female politicians. Like many other social institutions, the media rests on a male power structure that fails to challenge and that sustains gender power relations (Ross, 2003). The media does not just reflect reality but rather through discursive work it represents reality (Macdonald, 2003: 14).

Hitherto, most extant research on the field has tended to focus on news in the print media whereas political cartoons and jokes have received much less scholarly attention. Political cartoons “re-contextualize events and evoke references” (Slyomovics, 2000: 72) and, due to their frame-breaking potential, they constitute tools that may either reconceptualize the news or reproduce traditional perceptions of women and gendered power relations (cf. Aliefendioglu and Arslan, 2011: 104). That is, political cartoons not only play an informative role but also a persuasive one (Greenberg, 2002: 185). While some authors argue that political cartoons represent the biased point of view of the cartoonist (Cahn 1984), others have claimed that these visual tools reflect the editorial position of the outlet (Benoit et al., 2001: 392), with cartoons being graphic editorials (cf. Walker, 2003: 19), and that such editorial cartoons can affect readers’ attitudes (Brinkman, 1968; Edwards and Ware, 2005) or at least resonate with the public (Benoit et al., 2001: 391).

Studies of political cartoons have focused on historical events, like wars (Connors, 1998; Gamson and Stuart, 1992), international conferences (Gilmartin and Brunn, 1998) or migrant crises (Greenberg, 2002); political scandals (Benoit et al., 2001); presidential candidates’ campaigns or candidates themselves, with some of them specifically focusing on female or black candidates (Connors, 2010; Gilmartin, 2001) or on First Ladies (Templin, 1999; Edwards and Chen, 2000; Edwards and McDonald, 2010; Heron, 2008). However, the portrayal of women’s political firsts has not been examined yet. This omission is critical since cartoons about the first female occupants of top political office, although a reduced sample as numerous as cartoons about female politicians, call attention on a specific aspect of politics, namely the pervasive male dominance of the public sphere.

In this paper we look at the presence or absence of women’s political firsts in such cartoons and we examine the content of the cartoons in which they are depicted. More specifically, we ask: To what extent do women’s breakthroughs in public office

merit attention by cartoonists? How are such events constructed symbolically in the cartoons, that is, which meanings do they seek to condense and evoke? In other words, which are the particular framing devices used by cartoonists in the (re)presentation of women's political firsts?

The election or appointment of female firsts to top political offices is an extremely revealing moment that challenges the association between men and prestigious positions (Puwar 2004, 2), which encroaches upon the symbolic domain of politics. To put it differently, being the first woman to hold a top political office is “a very recognizable symbolic change” (Thomas and Adams, 2010: 125). This historical event speaks to women's place in society (Verge and Pastor, 2017). Given that the visual communication conveyed by political cartoons reflects “the politics and the players of the time represented” (Walker, 2003: 17) – in other words, “cartoons are inscriptions of a moment in time” (Walker, 2003: 19) –, the examination of the ways in which female politicians who were the first women to hold top political offices are portrayed in political cartoons provides additional insights into women's symbolic representation by the media. Our empirical analysis focuses on political cartoons representing national and sub-national female political firsts in Spain.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The first section outlines the pervasiveness of gendered mediation in print media representations of female politicians, particularly in political cartoons, and discusses how this impacts on their symbolic representation. In doing so, we adopt an integrated approach to women's political representation looking at the links between symbolic representation and the two other main dimensions of such concept, namely descriptive and substantive representation. The second section presents the data and method used in the empirical analysis. Our preliminary results are presented in the third section, and the fourth section concludes.

Literature review

The common use in political cartoons of symbols and metaphors to ‘simplify ideas’ and evoke quick and easy interpretations (Connors, 1998), make this visual communication a useful tool to further our understanding how women are symbolically constructed by the media. As Edwards and Ware (2005: 467) pinpoint, “in a political environment dominated by the spectacle, political symbols that have a particularly visual orientation should be first-order objects of study”. Cartoons about first-ever female politicians in

historically male-dominated high-ranked political offices may inevitably “bring the unique issues of their demographics” to the electoral contest (see Connors, 2010: 309).

As visual communications, political cartoons allow catching at a glance the meaning of an issue or an event. Since they tend to be critical, the message conveyed by cartoons can “contribute to public dialogue on important political and social issues” (Benoit et al., 2001: 392). It should be highlighted as well that political cartoons, through the use of humor, can also include “politically incorrect” viewpoints that would be much harder to verbalize in editorial columns (Gilmartin and Brunn, 1998: 536). Still, as pinpointed by a woman cartoonist, male dominance of the media entails that a male sense of humor is also predominant, which oftentimes builds on the misogynist nature of much of the humor in contemporary societies (Swords, 1992, in Gilmartin, 2001: 64).

Political cartoons have been found to be “another means through which powerful interests reinforce their view about society” (Walker, 2003: 16) and “a venue for ‘othering’ at the hands of the dominant groups” (Walker, 2003: 20). In this vein, the cartoon rarely operates as a change agent but rather as “an invitation to remember cultural values and beliefs and, by implication, to participate in their maintenance” (De Sousa and Medhurst, 1982: 85). Indeed, the presence of blatantly sexist stereotypes in cartoons has been well documented (see Dines, 1995; Connors, 2010; Heron, 2008), dating back to the depiction of the suffragists (see, among others, Tickner, 1998).

Women’s political firsts implicitly provide a paradigm for the activation of gendered frames which allows us to shed light on the social and cultural assumptions concerning the roles of women and men in politics. In the symbolic construction of women’s political firsts what political cartoons highlight or overlook is equally important to (re)produce social meanings about women in politics and about gender and politics. Disentangling how gender power relations are played out in political cartoons requires investigating the role of gendered mediation through the lenses of a comprehensive approach to the various dimensions of women’s political representation.

The descriptive, substantive and symbolic dimensions of political representation are linked since increased representation of women is expected to “affect powerful symbolic changes in politics” (Sapiro, 1981; Mansbridge, 1999). The unique experiences of female political firsts bring novelty into the political system by signaling through their presence that politics is no longer a ‘man’s game’ (High-Pippert and Comer, 1998: 62). Their presence also instills a ‘role model’ effect by providing female

citizens with examples of success (Karp and Banducci, 2008). This may instill attitudinal, cultural or behavioral shifts on citizens, particularly on female citizens, like an increased political interest and political efficacy, whose perception of the legitimacy of and closeness to political institutions may also boost (for a review, see Espírito-Santo and Verge, 2017). When it comes to the link between substantive and symbolic representation, women politicians are considered to act for marginalized or disadvantaged groups and to voice women's interests and needs (Burns et al., 2001: 352). They are also expected to affect change in the way politics works through different communication or action repertoires thereby challenging politics 'as usual' (Carroll, 1994). For example, their presence is often associated to a lower prevalence of corruption (Stensöta, Wängnerud and Svensson, 2014) or to a higher commitment to a more inclusive and participatory democracy (Thomas and Adams, 2010).

The meanings that women's presence and action in public office may evoke are shaped by how female politicians are presented by the media (Verge and Pastor, 2017), thereby influencing the ways in which citizens may think or feel about women's breakthrough in politics. In the case of descriptive representation, several studies show that women politicians typically receive less media coverage than their male peers (Norris, 1996) and that their presence is often rendered by the media as "suspect" and "other" (Childs, 2008; Ross 2010). The symbolic annihilation suffered by female politicians in the media (Tuchman, 1978) is also found in the case of political cartoons, with women leaders' presence in this form of visual communication having been historically rare (Edwards and Chen, 2005; Morris, 1989; Gilmartin, 2001) for an exception see the analysis of the 2008 US presidential campaign in Edwards and McDonald, 2010) and events involving women being largely silenced, ignored and trivialized (Gilmartin and Brunn, 1998). As argued by Walker (2003: 17), "who is *not* satirized is almost as important as who is satirized", and from this point of view political cartoons remain "a source of the dominant" (Ibid, p.16).

As well, gendered media representations often emphasize sartorial aspects and negative stereotypes surrounding women's capabilities are pervasive (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009; Carroll, 2009; Norris, 1996; Murray, 2010). The "pioneer image" or novelty frame through which such women are depicted in political cartoons is riddled with gender (Edwards and McDonald, 2010: 321–322). Some of the patterns are also found in analyses of political cartoon representations of female politicians, with visual references to appearance, emotions and personality being the more prominent (Sena,

1985; Connors, 2010; Heron, 2008). This is not surprising since “cartoons, with their unusual mix of caricature, satire, humor and political commentary, are a particularly rich cultural source of material about commonly accepted stereotypes” (Dines, 1995: 245). Female politicians are also frequently sexualized and domesticated by depicting them in home settings (Gilmartin, 2001). They are also the target of virulent reactions, being depicted as radical feminists or emasculators of men (Timplin, 1999). This sanction, imposed by cartoonists to women politicians for having defied traditional gender norms, reflects the ‘dominatrix’ frame reported in studies of women’s representation in the media (Murray 2010; Verge and Pastor, 2017).

Concerning substantive representation, by emphasizing less what women politicians do and more what they look like (Aday and Devitt, 2001; Heldman et al., 2005), turn women politicians into void symbols. For example, as Verge and Pastor (2017) note, the “equality advocacy” theme is largely diluted and their capacity to act as “agents of change” is trivialized. In addition, the minute they make mistakes, women politicians are judged more harshly by the media than their male peers (van Acker, 2003). Likewise, some scholars have found that female politicians appear in the cartoons as characters having nothing to say about any political issue, and when depicted as having specific opportunities to address policy issues they are represented as being mute, unable to speak on the subject (cf. Gilmartin, 2001: 60), or as lacking competence in governance (Heron, 2008: 93). Other studies show that women’s leadership qualities come under much more scrutiny and attack than men’s, with the former being depicted as “incompetent”, “posturing and anxious to govern” (Heron, 2003: 84). In both media stories and cartoons motherhood and reconciliation issues are often brought to the fore (van Zoonen, 2005; Campus, 2013; Heron, 2008: 85).

Data and methods

The cartoons under examination in this paper represent a variety of cartoonists from the main newspapers in Spain. Worldwide, men are the vast majority of cartoonist, which poses the question of whether women’s political perspectives or perspectives on women politicians can be adequately represented (Gilmartin and Bruun, 1998: 547–548). This trend is also observed in Spain where the main media outlets include no women among their political cartoonists, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Cartoonists in Spanish newspapers

<i>Cartoonist</i>	<i>La Vanguardia</i>	<i>El País</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>ABC</i>
Toni Batllori	X			
Antonio Fraguas de Pablo (Forges)		X		
José María Pérez González (Peridis)		X		
Andrés Rabago García (“El Roto”)		X		
Agustín Sciammarella		X		
Álvaro Fernández Ros		X		
José María Gallego y Julio Rey (Gallego & Rey)			X	
Ricardo Martínez y José Ignacio Moreno Cuña (Ricardo & Nacho)			X	
Ulises Culebro (Ulises)			X	
Ángel y Francisco Javier Rodríguez Idígoras (Idígoras & Pachi)			X	
Ángel Monteil y Guillermo Torres (Ángel & Guillermo)			X	
Antonio Mingote				X
José Manuel Puebla				X
José María Nieto				X

In the Spanish case, there is no comprehensive cartoon website such as the US Daryl Cagle’s Political Cartoonists Index (www.cagle.com). For this reason, we undertook an exhaustive search of the main newspapers. Our sampling strategy was based on what Chilton (1987) calls “critical discourse moments”, that is, highly topical events that are likely to stimulate commentary by the media, as it is the case of the days preceding and following the election or appointment or the first days in office of first-ever female politicians in historically male-dominated high-ranked political offices.

Table 2. Female firsts in Spanish politics (2000–2015)

<i>Female politician (political party)</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Period in office (dd/mm/yyyy)</i>
Luisa Fernanda Rudi (PP)	(1) President of the lower house (2) President of Aragon (R)	05/04/2000-08/04/2004 13/07/2011- 05/07/2015
Esperanza Aguirre (PP)	(1) President of the upper house (2) President of Madrid (R)	09/02/1999-16/10/2002 21/11/2003-26/09/2012
María 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
María Dolores de Cospedal (PP)	(1) Deputy secretary-general of the PP (2) President of Castile-La Mancha (R)	Since 21/06/2008 22/06/2011-04/07/2015
Elena Salgado (PSOE)	Minister of Economy and Vice- president of the government	07/04/2009-22/12/2011
Elena Valenciano (PSOE)	Deputy secretary-general of the PSOE	05/02/2012-27/07/2014
Susana Díaz (PSOE)	President of Andalusia (R)	Since 07/09/2013

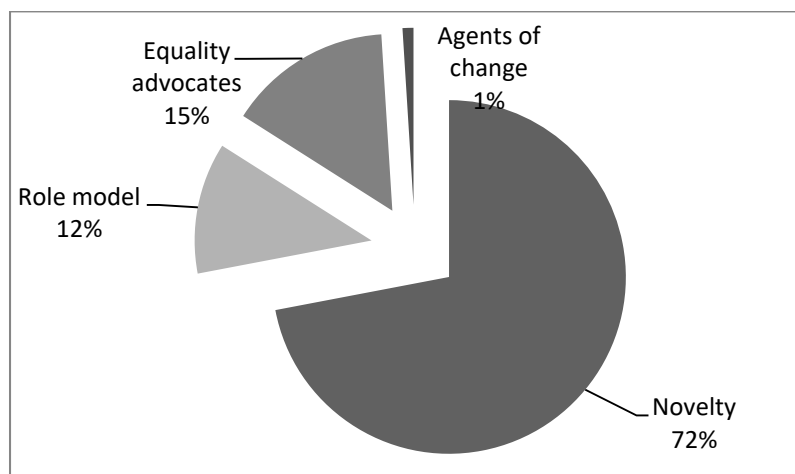
Notes: (R) – President of the regional government.

In this research, cartoons were primarily evaluated qualitatively to study the themes and patterns of representation that dealt with issues of gender. Our analysis of women’s symbolic representation in political cartoons pay attention to the presence of women politicians who became the first women serving in that position candidates, the representation of their persona the events surrounding their election or appointment as well as their immediate action in the political post. In doing so, we will explore the gender frames underpinning the political cartoons. We also look at whether women’s political firsts speak or are silent in the cartoons, as well as what they say when they are portrayed speaking. As Gilmartin (2001: 60) note, “the power to speak and be heard is a cogent indicator of authority and status among people”.

Empirical results (preliminary)

Our survey of newspaper cartoons shows that the main subject is men. The relative absence of women suggests that female politicians are not represented as key actors in the political sphere. Which theme is predominant in the (re)presentation of women’s political firsts in the printed media? Verge and Pastor (2017) found that 72% of news stories focus on “novelty”, 12% on “role model”, and 15% on “equality advocates”, as can be seen in Figure 1. The “agents of change” theme is conspicuously absent (1%).

Figure 1. Frequency of symbolic representation themes



Source: Verge and Pastor (2017).

Do political cartoons follow the same distribution? To what extent do media presentations use frameworks that may instill symbolic effects on citizens? At this point, we are still collecting the cartoons that fit into the time span defined in this

research (a few days preceding and following the election or appointment of women’s political first), so our sample is not fully representative yet. This notwithstanding, our preliminary analysis suggests that the ways in which women’s political firsts are portrayed in the media builds predominantly on the link between descriptive and symbolic representation. We have found no symbolic representation of women as equality advocates or agents of change, that is, the link between substantive and symbolic representation is conspicuous by its absence. As a consequence, the gendered mediation underpinning political cartoons contribute to suppressing a significant share of the symbolic effects women’s political presence in traditionally male-dominated public offices could potentially bring about

As Figure 2 illustrates, first-ever female officeholders do not go unnoticed by cartoonists. In April 2000, two women were for the first time elected as presidents of both the Spanish lower (Luisa Fernanda Rudi) and upper houses (Esperanza Aguirre). This political cartoon highlights the ‘role model’ effect instilled by women’s breakthroughs in the political field on female citizens. In particular, it suggests that women might be especially attentive to such historical milestones, pointing to an increased political interest by women, as shown by the female character live following the investiture of the female presidents of the legislative chambers – usually not a thrilling and rather ceremonial event – even at the expense of ‘neglecting’ traditional women’s roles such as cooking, as satirized by the cartoonist.

Figure 2. First-ever female presidents of the lower and the upper house in Spain



Source: *La Vanguardia* April 6, 2000. Author: Toni Batllori. Translation: (1) Men: Maria, aren’t we gonna have lunch today or what?!; (2) Men: Do you hear me?!; (3) Woman: Just wait, I’m watching the investiture of THE presidents [latin feminine form here] of the Congress and the Senate.

In the cartoon presented in Figure 3, we can see Carme Chacón, the first female holder of a traditionally masculinized portfolio such as the Ministry of Defense. It should also be noted that she was seven-month pregnant when she was appointed as minister. Her appointment was questioned by the conservative media, with various

opinion articles and editorials questioning her suitability for the job, considering that a woman soon to take maternity leave would be unable to visit her troops stationed abroad or to attend NATO summits. As shown in Figure 3, the novelty frame is predominant in the cartoon, highlighting the exceptionality of Chacón's appointment in an extremely male dominated field. Particularly, the cartoonist pinpoints the symbolic nature of a young, pregnant woman giving orders to the military and soldiers standing to her attention. This cartoon was included right before the headline of a news story which read "Chacón takes command of Defense with a proclamation of a diverse Spain", with the vignette reflecting the intersectionality of gender, age, ethnicity (through the territorial cleavage), along with her pregnancy. This leads to the representation of and, as such, the construction of this female politicians as deviant from the male norm.

Figure 3. *The first-ever female Minister of Defense (I)*



Source: *La Vanguardia*, April 15, 2008. Author: Toni Batllori. Translation: A woman!, Catalan!, Young!, Pregnant!, Attention!, Clac!

The cartoon shown in Figure 4 also builds on the novelty frame to present the first female Minister of Defense and it does so highlighting as well her imminent maternity, in this case through a picture where the pregnancy is clearly visible. This image is accompanied by a drawing symbolizing the values of hierarchy typically associated with the army and masculinity, and by extension to the public sphere, in sharp contrast with the private and domestic sphere the pregnancy of the minister symbolizes. As well, the text inserted in the cartoon is very revealing. Her name does not appear and her position is mocked when referred to as "mrs. Minister". Furthermore, it should be noted that attention is first drawn to her incoming motherhood than to her political office, as if her "space invasion" of a traditionally masculinized office was more forgivable because of the son she is going to give birth soon. The using of the "with all due respect" in the opening of the cartoon text, seems to satirize political correctness, which, in our opinion, is a crude manifestation of sexism.

Figure 4. The first-ever female Minister of Defense (II)



Source: ABC, April 11, 2017. Author: Mingote. Translation: With all due respect, hurray for the mother of the son who's gonna give birth Mrs. minister at the drop of a hat.

María Dolores de Cospedal was appointed as secretary-general of the conservative party (Partido Popular) in early 2008. The novelty theme in the cartoon shown in Figure 4 is coupled with an emphasis on private issues, namely the civil status of the female politician and her family type. The exceptionality of women's breakthrough is heightened here by the conversation between a man and a woman, with the former being depicted as a conservative and stereotypical male character – he is watching a soccer game on television. When the woman comments the new secretary-general is a woman, who is divorced and became a single mom through in-vitro insemination, the man despises the Social Democratic party (PSOE) for doing so and the woman answers back “The PP, buddy!”. The cartoonist is thus satirizing the contradiction between the public position of the conservatives on family matters and this decision.

Figure 4. The first secretary-general of the conservative party



Source: *La Vanguardia* June 20th, 2008. Author: Toni Batllori.

Lastly, as can be seen in the cartoon presented in Figure 5, female politicians are often (re)presented through the ‘dominatrix’ frame. The first woman president of the region of Andalusia, Susana Díaz, from the PSOE, is portrayed as a power-seeking and authoritarian person standing in a throne room, as also reflected in the text accompanying the cartoon: “All the power to the czarina”. This trivializes her accessing this high-ranked public office and at the same time evokes to readers her status as a “space invader”.

Figure 5. The first female president of Andalusia
Todo el poder para la zarina



Source: *El Mundo*, November 24, 2013. Author: Idígoras y Pachi.
Translation: All the power to the czarina.

Conclusions (preliminary)

In this article we have shown that political cartoons can carry relevant symbolic messages surrounding women’s political representation. While political cartoons are generally critical, in the case of women’s breakthroughs in public office they largely fail to do so. Although the irruption of female firsts in politics is generally captured by the cartoons, a significant amount of the satirical vignettes rests on women’s physical appearance and private decisions affecting their family life that very often do not comply with traditional gender expectations. While the satirization of such social gendered norms can be themselves positively evaluated, the symbolic construction of

politics may still perpetuate a public perception of this arena being constitutively male, with women's political gains entailing a transgression of gendered behavior.

With regards to the link between descriptive and symbolic representation, the novelty theme is predominant and the role model theme similarly adopts a gendered form through the performative dynamics of motherhood. While some of the cartoons seem to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, by highlighting pregnancy and motherhood, female politicians are still more represented as women than as politicians. As to the connection between substantive and symbolic representation, the equality advocacy theme and the agents of change theme are absent. The fact that the substantive dimension of women's political representation is hidden in political cartoons is highly problematic for symbolic representation since citizens' attitudinal change does not only rest on women's political presence but also on the effects this presence is expected to bring about in terms of how politics and policy work. We can thus conclude that media representations of the first women to ever serve in top political office dramatically fail to expand the social meaning of women in politics and of gender and politics.

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