

Like parents, like citizens: Mexican children's political socialization

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Abstract

This paper addresses how future citizens are being socialized in Mexico, and more specifically, what is the role of family communication and viewing news in shaping civic awareness and political participation. The analyzed data comes from a survey to Mexican children enrolled in the 6th year of elementary school in three cities of the North East of Mexico (n = 1544). The analytical strategy consisted in developing a full structural equation model to test both the validity of the constructs proposed, and the hypothetical relationships among those constructs. Results reinforced the central role of parents in shaping future citizens, by having an effect on children's attitudes to political participation. Otherwise, TV news viewing was found as having an effect on children's civic awareness, but just a weak effect on children's attitudes to political participation. The paper concludes with a final elaboration regarding theoretical and public policy implications from those findings; more specifically, it offers guidelines for educational interventions that take advantage from the relevance of parents on shaping Mexican future citizens.

Keywords: Political socialization, political communication, civic development, public opinion, structural equation models.

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Mexican democracy is not running smoothly. After 10 years of completely government-independent federal elections, national surveys have shown that a large proportion of Mexicans are disappointed with democracy, and some of them disagree with democracy as a good political system (Lagos, 2008). The paradox of the masses claiming that the current political regime is frustrating has resulted in a revival for citizenship studies (Feinberg, Waisman & Zamosc, 2006; Tulchin & Ruthenburg, 2007a). Authors interested in Latin America (Oxhorn, 2006; Oxhorn, 2007; Tulchin & Ruthenburg, 2007b) have proposed going beyond the analysis of political institutions to concentrate on the analysis of the role of citizens and citizenship in Latin American democracies. It results that is crucial to understand how political attitudes are being shaped, and especially what kind of citizens are growing up. These questions relate to the field of Mexican children's political socialization.

In this context, several Mexican authors (Fernández, 2005; Ibarra, 2003; Tapia, 2003), have focused recently on political socialization processes, a formerly neglected research area not only in Mexico, but throughout Latin America. These studies propose going beyond political outcomes, and instead interrogating the processes through Mexican children are being politically socialized. Their findings have identified consistently children as critical observers from politicians and politics. Those studies have also suggested that the influence of media on children depend on the extent at which Mexican children discuss political issues with their parents, and even the extend at which children talk with their parents in general. Parents' points of view constitute the biggest influence to shape children attitudes to public issues.

The focus of this paper is to address the general question of how Mexican children are being politically socialized, and what is the role of television, parental disposition to political participation, and frequency of family political discussions in building citizenship, as reported in other countries, for example, the United States (Kioussis, McDevitt & Wu, 2005; Wagle, 2006). To examine these assertions, a hypothetical structural model is presented in the following pages, relying on data from a survey on 6th year children in Monterrey, Mexico. I theorize a causal model, and then investigate the role of both interpersonal and media communication in the non-formal civic education of future Mexican citizens.

1. Theoretical background

Political participation

Perhaps the most popular indicator of living in a democracy is the extent to which people participate or are willing to participate in the public sphere. Political participation is defined as people exercising their political rights, including their right to participate in the exercise of political power as members of a body invested with political authority or as electors (Hagopian, 2007; Marshall, 1997).

Political socialization studies have extensively included attitudes to political participation as dependent variable. McDevitt and Kiouisis (2007) tested it on high school students in the United States, defining support for conventional politics, support for activism and activism as observed measures. Support for conventional politics was defined as students contributing to a political party and wearing a Republican or Democrat campaign button. Support for activism was defined, among other variables, as students' support for confronting policy in a protest, participating in a boycott against a company, trespassing on private land to protest the cutting down of ancient forests, and refusing to pay taxes to protest a government policy. They found that student-parents discussion was the main predictor of political participation in the form of voting in a 2004 election. This main latent variable was the main influence for cognitive components for being involved in politics, such as partisan identification and political ideology (Kiouisis, McDevitt & Wu, 2005).

Torney-Purta and their colleagues at the IEA Civic Study (Torney-Purta 2002) defined that political participation is a component of civic engagement. Mirroring them, Wagle (2006) conducted a study among adolescents in Nepal, finding that civic engagement is a strong predictor of political participation measured as voting. Those research studies have consistently suggested that a high level of attitudes to political participation is a condition of high socio economic strata in developing countries. A Mexican study arrived at a similar conclusion (Buendia & Somuano, 2003).

Civic awareness

The relationship between civic awareness and political participation is not clear in the literature. The first reason is that there is no consensus for the political participation definition. Definitions have included, but not limited to, political efficacy, political attitudes, or political preferences (Almond & Verba 1963). Political participation definitions vary because of their author's approaches. Some authors relate to the ways as people can indeed be involved in politics (i.e., protesting, discussing about politics, voting), others relate to the goals of those activities or attitudes (i.e., advocating, changing rules).

The same is true for civic engagement. One useful definition of civic awareness is the individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern (Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs 2004). Civic awareness can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic awareness encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting (Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs 2004).

Civic awareness has been defined as the notion of good citizenship by Papanastasiou and Koutselini (2003). Those authors asked junior high school students in Cyprus about the extent to which the concept of being a good citizen is related to participating in a peaceful protest; participating in activities to benefit people in their community; taking part in activities promoting human rights; taking part in environmental activities; being willing to disregard a law that violates human rights; voluntarily helping poor or elderly people in the community; collecting money for a social cause; collecting signatures for a petition; and participating in a peaceful protest, march or rally. Their findings strongly supported that social participation is influenced by democratic values.

Delli Carpini and their colleagues suggest that civic awareness is a result of public deliberation, and this public deliberation occur in networks, i.e. small groups of friends. From their definition

of civic awareness is apparent that civic awareness is embedded with political participation in form of electoral participation, but also that civic awareness strength political participation. In other words, it is more probable that people meeting online or physically discuss public issues, and it is also more probable that they take steps to fix them.

The same causes of shaping political attitudes on adults seem true to children. McDevitt and Kiouisis (2007) found that student-parents discussion was the main predictor of political participation in the form of voting in an election in 2004. Also student-parents discussion was the main influence for cognitive components for being involved in politics, such as partisan identification and political ideology (Kiouisis, McDevitt & Wu, 2005).

Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak (2005) observed that the most important influence for civic awareness was interpersonal political discussion. This finding was consistent with other studies' findings (Kiouisis, McDevitt & Wu, 2005; McDevitt & Chafee, 2002). Civic awareness was defined as the frequency with which Chicago's citizens had engaged in the following activities: doing volunteer work, going to a club meeting, working on a community project, going to a community or neighborhood meeting, and working on behalf of a social group or cause.

Political socialization agents

The deliberative tradition of democracy influences not only political participation but also the ways in which the public sphere is shaped, i.e., the political socialization processes. Political socialization may be defined as the process through which individuals develop self and world conceptions, including direct experiences, judgments and inferences about their knowledge (Gunter & McAleer, 1997; Ibarra, 2003). Political socialization processes are influenced by agents like family, friends, school and media, all of them contributing to the process of internalization of political concepts (Gunter & McAleer, 1997); or as Sears and Valentino put it (1997), the process of "crystallization" of citizenship attitudes.

A first political socialization agent addressed in this paper is television news. Mexicans prefer television news (70%) rather than newspapers (21%) or radio news (43%) to know what is hap-

pening in a political campaign (Flores & Meyenberg, 2002; IFE, 2003). Recently, political advertising in television has been strongly limited by law, as a response to claims that powerful interest groups are influencing political campaigns and elections based on their ability to provide more funds to their candidates. Despite their frequent critics, there are no studies in Mexico examining the social or political influences resulting from television contents.

A second political socialization agent reviewed in this paper is the influence of interpersonal communication. A recent study in the United States found that youths more exposed to political news in movie theaters and television showed an increase in political knowledge and participation (Paseck, Kenski, Romer & Jamieson, 2006). Related studies (Kiouisis, McDevitt & Wu, 2005; Sears & Valentino, 1997) support the finding that TV viewing interacts with frequency of political discussions, increasing the level of political communication and anticipated political participation. Particularly relevant for this specific topic, Kiouisis, McDevitt and Wu (2005) have shown that the frequency with which children discuss political topics with parents and other close people accurately predicts political ideology, awareness and civic attitudes. They defined political discussions as interpersonal communication networks, in terms of the quantity of individuals and places where children communicate with others about political themes.

A third political socialization agent of interest for this paper is home environment. Sears and Valentino (1997) illustrated that the level of political knowledge in children and teenagers is linked to the level of political knowledge of their parents. As McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) have pointed out, family is a social system balancing different aspects of social interaction, including social attitudes, political assimilation, vote motivation and other expressions of participation beyond the home. Education and parental attitudes have a role on shaping children's worldviews. Papanastasiou and Koutselini (2003) designed a home background index, including parental formal education, parental reading and years of further education that teenagers were expected to complete after high school. They found that home background had direct effects on political interest, as did political discussions at home, and also that they had indirect effects on democratic values and social participation.

There is no known study in Mexico examining the effects of discussion networks, parental education or parental attitudes to the public sphere contributing to this literature review. The National Survey of Political Culture in Mexico (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2005), reported that 22% of adults reported occasionally discussing politics at home, whereas 70% responded that never did. This and other studies have reported discussion networks on a descriptive level and there are no inferential or conclusive studies noting an influence on political knowledge, values or participation resulting from such discussions.

2. Method

The theoretical assumptions stated so far can be formulated in the following structural hypotheses:

SH1. The heavier the TV news viewing of a child, the stronger is his or her civic awareness.

SH2. The heavier the TV news viewing of a child, the stronger is his or her anticipated political participation, in other words, his or her attitudes to political participation.

SH3. The more frequent the family political discussions of a child, the stronger are his or her civic awareness.

SH4. The stronger the perception of parents' political awareness of a child, the stronger is his or her civic awareness.

SH5. The stronger the perception of parents' political awareness of a child, the stronger is his or her anticipated political participation.

SH6. The stronger the civic awareness of a child, the stronger is his or her anticipated political participation.

SH7. The frequency of family political discussions of a child is positively associated to his or her perception of parents' political awareness.

SH8. The frequency of family political discussions of a child is positively associated to his or her TV news viewing.

SH9. The frequency of parents' political awareness is positively associated to his or her TV news viewing.

Participants

This study was conducted in 6th year students in schools chosen within the same sample. The sampling frame was defined as the total of public and private elementary schools in three cities of Mexico, namely Saltillo (State of Coahuila), Monterrey (State of Nuevo Leon), and Monterrey (State of Tamaulipas). Two different calculations were computed in order to get the final sample. First, a list of schools was obtained by calculating the proportion of schools that each city accounts in the total sampling frame. The total of schools obtained by using this method was 68. Second, that list was divided proportionally in private and public schools. All children in the 6th group at the participating school were asked to volunteer for this study. A third calculation in field was computed by a simple flip coin when field researchers found more than one group at the participating school. In each classroom all the children were asked to freely participate and consent signature forms were filled by teachers, parents and children. Four teachers refused to participate and then their schools were not included in the final sample. Final sample size for schools was 64, and for children was 1544. Most of them were 11 and 12 years old at the time they participated in this study.

Data collection

A group of three master's students collaborated with the author to gather the data. A qualitative study performed in early 2006 (Huerta, 2008) was crucial to understanding classroom's dynamics, and how to use peer and teachers' communication. It was on the basis of this study that the strategy described in this section was formulated.

Teachers were requested to remain in the classroom and facilitate the filling in of the questionnaire. The children seemed to understand better the teachers' explanations than those coming from the researchers. Time spent in the classroom became crucial to the successful data collection, because the children were observed to have been easily distracted in facing long activities.

The children were requested to read the questionnaire items aloud. Different children read different items, and all the items were filled in at the same time. The children asked for explanations,

and the adults acted as facilitators, but did not provide answers to the questionnaire. The children were asked to discuss the explanations and to ask each other for explanations at any time, but always in a calm and respectful environment. The children were observed to be impressively accurate in describing concepts that had previously been extensively discussed by the research team, such as justice, corruption, democracy, and so on.

Operationalization of the latent variables

- 1 TV news viewing. Extent of television news viewing, measured as the sum of three items: “How frequently do you watch National news? (a lot, sometimes, rarely, never)”, “How frequently do you watch Local news (a lot, sometimes, rarely, never)”, and “Do you watch news on a daily basis (yes, no)?” (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.7)

Those items can be formulated in the following correspondence hypotheses:

CH1: The heavier the TV news viewing of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will answer that watches National news “a lot”.

CH2: The heavier the TV news viewing of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will answer that watches Local news “a lot”.

- 2 Frequency of family political discussions. Sum of the people with whom children are involved in political discussion, measured by four items: “How often do you talk about politics with your dad?”, “How often do you talk about politics with your mom?”, “How often do you talk about politics with your grandpa/ma?”, “How often do you talk about politics with your cousins or siblings?” (a lot, sometimes, rarely, never). (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.7)

Those items can be formulated in the following correspondence hypotheses:

CH3: The more frequent the family political discussions of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will answer that talk about politics with dad “a lot”.

CH4: The more frequent the family political discussions of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will answer that talk about politics with mom “a lot”.

CH5: The more frequent the family political discussions of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will answer that talk about politics with grandpa/ma “a lot”.

CH6: The more frequent the family political discussions of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will answer that talk about politics with cousins or siblings “a lot”.

- 3 Perception of parents’ political awareness. Two item formulations: “My dad/mom would like to join others to change global warming”, “My mom/dad would like to work in politics (5 levels of agreement)”. (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.7)

Those items can be formulated in the following correspondence hypotheses:

CH7: The more frequent the perception of parents’ political awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “My dad/mom would like to join others to change global warming”.

CH8: The more frequent the perception of parents’ political awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “My mom/dad would like to work in politics”.

- 4 Civic awareness. Attitudes to citizenship behavior, measured as the sum of 5 items: “A good citizen is one who... “directs complaints to the newspapers”, “reports public malfunctions to the authorities”, “protests against an adult that is littering”, “registers a complaint in a government office” (5 levels of agreement). (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.6)

Those items can be formulated in the following correspondence hypotheses:

CH9: The stronger the civic awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “A good citizen is one who directs complaints to the newspapers”.

CH10: The stronger the civic awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “A good citizen is one who reports public malfunctions to the authorities”.

CH11: The stronger the civic awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “A good citizen is one who protests against an adult that is littering”.

CH12: The stronger the civic awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “A good citizen is one who registers a complaint in a government office”.

CH13: The stronger the civic awareness of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “A good citizen is one who collects signatures for a good cause”.

- 5 Anticipated political participation. Attitudes to being politically involved, measured as the sum of 3 items: “I would like to be... “governor when I am an adult”, “a congressman/congresswoman when I am an adult”, “my class’s president” (5 levels of agreement). (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.7)

Those items can be formulated in the following correspondence hypotheses:

CH14: The stronger the anticipated political participation of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “I would like to be governor when I am an adult”.

CH15: The stronger the anticipated political participation of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “I would like to be a congressman/congresswoman when I am an adult”.

CH16: The stronger the anticipated political participation of a child, the higher the probability that he or she will agree with the statement “I would like to be my class’s president”.

Construct Validity. All measures were evaluated by using exploratory factor analysis. All factors were found to be well defined by their initial eigenvalues and communalities.

3. Results

Descriptive Measures

Table 1 contains item wordings, along with the means and standard deviations. Looking at TV News Viewing, it is possible to observe that children report a trend to watch news sometimes. They report a similar trend for the frequency of family political discussions. It is apparent that children could mark similar and automatic responses for each question. However, standards de-

viations and even the slight differences in each item let to assume that children are thinking responses and then filling blanks. Those differences are more important for those items at Perception of parent’s political awareness. The perception of parents as joining others to change global warming is high, even if it is not the perception of parents willing to work in politics. It is apparent that children do not identify both of those two items as part of the same construct. This difference is addressed in the discussion of Table 2, that reports a correlation matrix testing discriminant validity. More to test for discriminant validity is included in the differences of Political awareness items. All the items scored high, but the differences across the items look important, ranging between 2.63 for “a good citizen is one who complaints to the newspapers” to 3.57 for “a good citizen is one who reports public malfunctions to the authorities”. Differences are similar for anticipated political participation. The willing to participate looks opposite to the strength of the political position. Participants report themselves more willing to participate as president’s class ($M = 2.93, s = 1.1$), that having a wish for becoming a governor ($M = 2.2, s = 1.1$).

Table 1. Item formulations and descriptive measures

(M = means, s = standard deviations, n = sample size = 1390)

TV news viewing		
How frequently do you watch National news? <i>A lot, sometimes, rarely, never</i> (recoded)	(news1)	M = 2.70 s = 0.9
How frequently do you watch Local news? <i>A lot, sometimes, rarely, never</i> (re-coded)	(news2)	M = 2.62 s = 1
Frequency of family political discussions		
How often do you talk about politics with your dad? <i>A lot, sometimes, rarely, never</i>	(disc1)	M = 2.74 s = 0.6
How often do you talk about politics with your mom? <i>A lot, sometimes, rarely, never</i>	(disc2)	M = 2.79 s = 0.6

How often do you talk about politics with your grandpa/ma? <i>A lot, sometimes, rarely, never</i> (disc3)	M = 2.59 s = 0.6
“How often do you talk about politics with your cousins or siblings? <i>A lot, sometimes, rarely, never</i> (disc4)	M = 2.50 s = 0.6
Perception of parents’ political awareness	
My dad/mom would like to join others to change global warming. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (parents1)	M = 3.12 s = 0.9
My mom/dad would like to work in politics <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (parents2)	M = 2.33 s = 1.0
Civic awareness	
A good citizen is one who directs complaints to the newspapers. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (aware1)	M = 2.63 s = 1
A good citizen is one who reports public malfunctions to the authorities. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (aware2)	M = 3.57 s = 0.7
A good citizen is one who protests against an adult that is littering. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (aware3)	M = 3.33 s = 0.8
A good citizen is one who registers a complaint in a government office. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (aware4)	M = 3.12 s = 0.9
A good citizen is one who collects signatures for a good cause. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (aware5)	M = 2.96 s = 1
Anticipated political participation	
I would like to be governor when I am an adult. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (partic1)	M = 2.20 s = 1.1

I would like to be a congressman/congresswoman when I am an adult. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (partic2)	M = 2.53 s = 1.1
“I would like to be my class’s president. <i>I agree not at all – 4 agree totally</i> (partic3)	M = 2.93 s = 1.1

To show the strength of associations between the items, Table 2 presents the correlation matrix. The values are Pearson correlation coefficients (with pairwise deletion for missing values). The correlations of the items that measure the same construct are highlighted and are all significant at the 1% level.

With regard to discriminant validity, notice that the items relating to each construct almost always correlate more highly with one another than with the items of the other constructs. For example the four items of frequency of political discussions range between .243 and .547, while their correlations with all other items are lower, ranging from .097 to .137. However, other correlations are problematic. Two examples are part1 and aware1. Part1 correlates stronger with news1 (.140), disc1 (.154) and disc4 (.151), than it does with partic3 (.129). Aware1 correlates stronger with disc1 (.125), disc2 (.112), partic1 (.133) and partic2 (.115), than it does with aware2 (.108). The scores for the two “parents” items resulted particularly problematic, as it results from the analysis of parents2 correlations. The item correlations for the constructs of TV News Viewing and Frequency of Political Family discussions are consistent and of an appropriate magnitude, but the same cannot be said for all the Perception of Parents’ Political Awareness, Civic Awareness, and Anticipated Political Participation. The violations to discriminant validity anticipated that not all correspondence hypotheses would be supported, but it was no possible at this point to decide which items discard for a full structural equation model.

Table 2. Correlation matrix of the indicators

ITEM	news1	news2	disc1	disc2	disc3	disc4	partic1	partic2	partic3	aware1	aware2	aware3	aware4	aware5	parents1	parents2
news1	1															
news2	.517**	1														
disc1	.058	.097**	1													
disc2	.102**	.137**	.547**	1												
disc3	.103**	.057	.342**	.381**	1											
disc4	.122**	.121**	.342**	.361**	.243**	1										
partic1	.140**	.104**	.154**	.126**	.127**	.151**	1									
partic2	.139**	.099**	.106**	.111**	.081**	.112**	.636**	1								
partic3	.020	.055	.050	.036	.043	.010	.129**	.184**	1							
aware1	.039	.068**	.125**	.112**	.065**	.075**	.133**	.115**	.078**	1						
aware2	.047	.053	.049	.000	.003	.001	.007	.026	.043	.108**	1					
aware3	.114**	.077**	.081**	.064**	.075**	.032	.052	.070**	.069**	.110**	.289**	1				
aware4	.056	.060	.058**	.038	.060**	.092**	.015	.031	.078**	.176**	.274**	.320**	1			
aware5	.036	.047	.021	-.033	.015	-.024	-.012	.013	.067**	.164**	.155**	.181**	.229**	1		
parents1	.034	.038	.109**	.068**	.057**	.039	.082**	.087**	.133**	.126**	.151**	.179**	.114**	.061**	1	
parents2	.083**	.091**	.195**	.185**	.150**	.164**	.382**	.339**	.120**	.124**	.032	.062**	.034	.005	.147**	1

n (min) = 1750, n (max) = 2078; ** = Signif. LE .01

Structural equation model

To examine the strength of the links between constructs and their items, the measurement models for the latent constructs were estimated simultaneously. A two-step process was employed because of the complexity of the empirical test. In the first step, the measurement models were tested via confirmatory factor analyses and were modified as necessary. In the second step, a structural equation model positing causal relations among the latent variables and retaining their measurement models was tested. All the estimates were produced using AMOS 16 (Arbuckle, 1997) and the estimation method of maximum-likelihood. The following modifications were introduced after several analysis, as well as consideration of empirical and theoretical implications:

Deletion of items “parents1” and “aware1” because of numerous significant residual correlations with other indicators;

Deletion of item “partic3” because of its low factor loading (.04).

As showed on Figure 1, with exception of the deleted items, all the correspondence hypotheses were supported. The factor loadings are significant ($p < 0.01$) and the corresponding signs concur with the hypotheses. The standardized values, from .36 to .85, confirm the formal validity of the individuals items. The explained variances of the items vary between .36 for the fifth item of

civic awareness (A good citizen is one who collects signatures for a good cause) and .85 for the first item of anticipated political participation (“I would like to be governor when I am an adult”), a range of magnitudes that are acceptable.

The Figure 1 also identifies the final structural model. The initial findings showed that the proposed model by the structural hypotheses did not adequately fit the data; therefore a final model was developed by analyzing the modification indices and overall model. Descriptively, the model works well, and this is confirmed by a goodness of fit index (GFI) of .986 and an adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) of .979. From an inferential point of view, the model was evaluated using the following indexes: the chi-square test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the RMR (root mean square residual). The maximum likelihood procedure was used to specify the path model.

The chi-square test was significant, $\chi^2(61, N = 1390) = 190.056, p < 0.01$. However, other high goodness-of-fit indexes yielded high results, indicating that the hypothesized model fit the observed data. The CFI yielded an index of 0.971, whereas the RMSEA reported a value of 0.032, also indicating a good fit of the model. The RMR (root mean square residual) of .027 is also not very far from the perfect fit of 0 (see Arbuckle, 1997).

Anticipated political participation

Structural Hypotheses 2, 5, and 6 are related to Anticipated political participation. SH2 predicts the effects of TV news viewing, SH5 predicts the effects of Parents’ political awareness, and SH6 predicts the effects of Civic awareness on Anticipated political participation. SH2 and SH5 were supported. TV news viewing ($\beta = 0.083, p < 0.01$), and Parents’ political awareness ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$) were found to have direct effects on Anticipated political participation. Notice that the effect of TV news viewing is very low whereas the effects of Parents’ political awareness is remarkably high, accounting for the most important relationship in the model. SH6 failed to be supported because there was not any relationship between Civic awareness and Anticipated political participation. In other words, from this study’s data, there was no relationship found

between the scores of civic awareness and those predicting the children's will to participate in formal politics when they are adults.

Civic awareness

Structural Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4 are related to Civic awareness. SH1 predicts the effects of TV news viewing, SH3 predicts the effects of Frequency of family political discussions, and SH4 predicts the effects of Parents political awareness on Civic awareness. Just the TV news viewing ($\beta = 0.121, p < 0.001$) was found to have direct effects on Civic awareness. It resulted that SH1 was supported, although SH3 and SH4 failed to be supported.

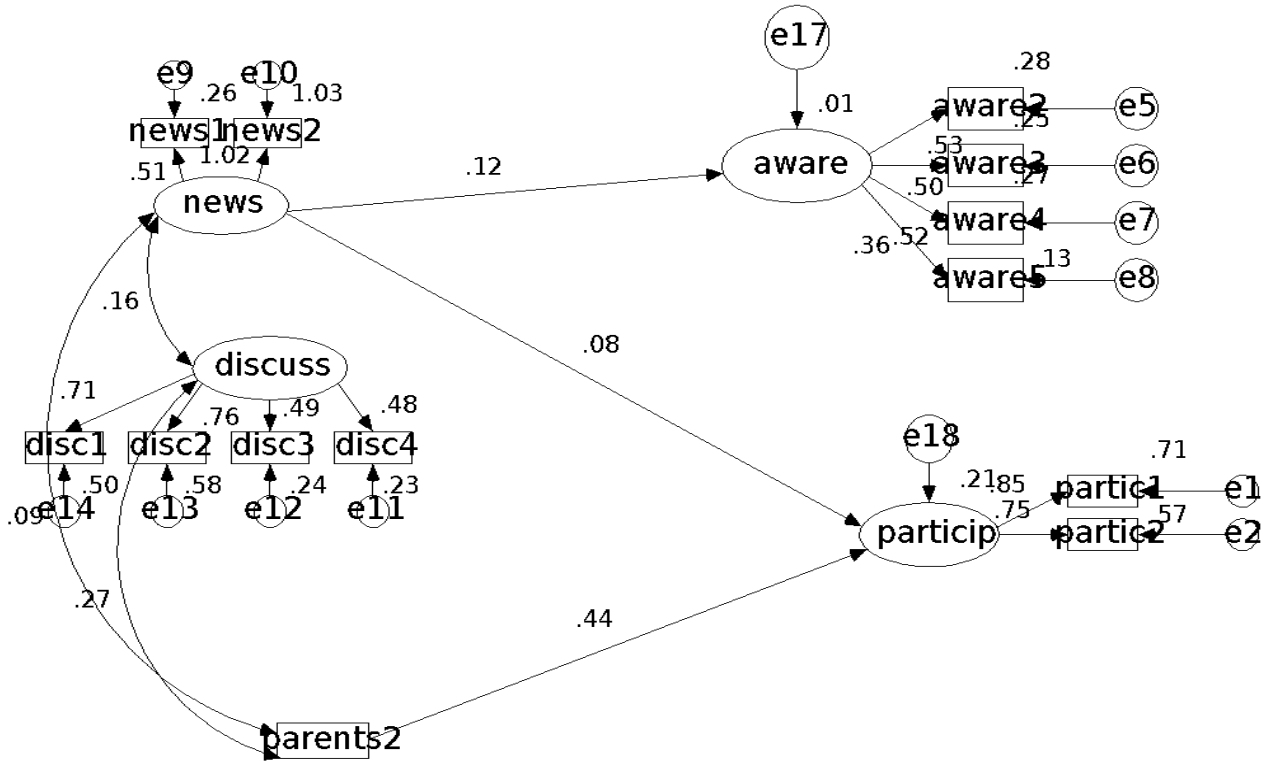
Exogenous variables

Structural Hypotheses 7, 8, and 9 established a correlation among TV news viewing, Frequency of family political discussions and Parents' political awareness. Frequency of family political discussions was positively associated to TV news viewing ($r = 0.16, p < 0.001$), and parents' political awareness ($r = 0.27, p < 0.001$), then supporting SH7 and SH8. TV news viewing was also positively associated to parents' political awareness ($r = 0.09, p < 0.001$), supporting SH9 weakly.

Effects estimates

Moderate effects were found in examining the proportion of variance accounted on Anticipated political participation, the crucial endogenous variable. Just a very small effect was found in examining the proportion of variance accounted on Civic awareness. The results of the structural equation for Anticipated political participation yielded a significant R^2 of 0.21, whereas results for Civic awareness yielded a significant R^2 of 0.13. The model illustrates that Parents' political participation is crucial on children political attitudes, but more evidence is needed in exploring the role of parents' participation on Civic awareness.

Figure 1. Structural model for Political Participation and Civic Awareness



4. Discussion

How, then, are future citizens being socialized? To address this final question, this section starts with a summary of the major research findings; this is followed by a final comment about pre-citizenship; finally, the implications for researchers, educators, and policy makers are discussed.

Anticipated political participation, civic awareness

Figure 1 showed that parents' political participation contribute importantly to explain anticipated political participation. Also, the structural model supported the hypothesis that TV news viewing contributes to explain political participation, then explaining political socialization, and that discussion networks have an indirect effect in that explanation. This relationship comes from the positive association from family political discussions to parental political participation and also

to TV news viewing. Beyond statistical significance, all predictors were found to be practically significant. The finding of parental political participation as a main predictor of anticipated political participation is important. It should be remembered that the data comes from children's perceptions and attitudes. It is apparent that anticipated political participation emerges naturally from the children's perception of political participation as intrinsically positive, since their parents seem to be in a good mood about being politically involved. One question emerges from the lack of relationship between civic awareness and political participation, and it is one relating to the motives of children and parents for being politically involved. The findings of the importance of perceptions of parental political participation are, in a way, an updated version of the saying "like father, like son". In other words, one can infer that "like parents, like citizens", or that parents apparently politically involved will nurture children with good political attitudes. This is relevant because it opens the door to family interventions in educational settings to explain, and even change, political reality in Latin America. More evidence is needed in order to explore more in detail other influences, i.e., the role of socioeconomic status, what have been found in the literature as important as well (Cho & McLeod, 2007; Papanastasiou and Koutselini, 2003).

Mention apart deserves the relationship between TV news viewing and civic awareness. It is interesting that parental political participation does not have a role on civic awareness, almost at the same level as the minimal influence of TV news viewing on anticipated political participation. The evidence suggests that, at least for the children on this study, TV news viewing is slightly effective in building citizenship, which is consistent with the literature reporting the association of exposure to news and concern for the public sphere.

Final remarks on children as pre-citizens

The concept of pre-citizenship is relevant to address this study's results. As developmental studies support (Fernandez, 2005), children have built their knowledge -and values- bases by the time they are in sixth grade. Although some authors disagree with the long term effects of such bases (i. e. McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2005), a consensus seems to exist that there is a lack of evidence to distrust such long-term effects. In other words, the available evidence establishes that it is diffi-

cult to argue against the long-term effect of political and social attitudes at the time children are in 6th grade.

If this is true, it seems possible to speculate about an optimistic future. The pre-citizens under observation will be ready to vote in the 2012 federal elections. Beyond the parental role, formal education has a role in building civic awareness and political participation attitudes. The relevance of parental political participation on anticipated political participation suggests that intervention on parents and children constitutes a key variable in reinforcing a civic culture and encouraging a climate of contribution to the public sphere. At present, almost every school in Mexico runs at least a small program in civil rights awareness, a first basis of civic awareness. A first qualitative phase (Huerta, 2008) showed that children are aware of their rights and also aware of having a place in the public sphere and in the processes of globalization.

The main challenge is that reality sometimes seems to encourage cynicism. As Buckingham (2000) has showed, pre-citizens are particularly receptive to cynicism as a result of the lack of democratic values they observe in politicians and that could be also true for Mexican pre-citizens. As Lagos (2008) has pointed out, the paradox of Latin Americans complaining about democracy is a result of the poor quality of democracies, not a complaint against democracy itself as a political and social system. As a result, the available evidence suggests a negative association between political knowledge and political participation (Huerta, 2008; Lagos, 2008). It is possible that this is the origin of the lack of association between civic awareness and anticipated political participation in this structural model.

Implications

Further research recommendations include controlling for more demographic variables that potentially threaten the overall conclusion of this paper. That control for demographic variables should include a control for political scenarios and even for different regions in Mexico, as well as in other parts of Latin America. Comparative studies involving children, teenagers and adults in election and non-election scenarios might appear as a plausible design. Panel data as reported in the literature might also provide a valuable contribution to this research topic.

As stated above, the overall good news is that in this study parents appear to be the main source in building social citizenship and anticipated political participation on the Mexican children under the study. This is good news because it establishes a controlled source for educational, social and policy interventions. Indeed the Federal Institute of Elections (IFE, in Spanish) established civic education as a main goal in its Development Plan for 2000-2010. However, this program has not been fully designed and it has not been implemented because of a lack of funding. Based on this study's findings, an educational program using media exposure and promoting talking with parents may be recommended, along the lines of the "Kids Voting" program in the USA (McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2005; Kiouisis, McDevitt & Wu, 2005). Also, civic education should be at the core of educational policy in Mexico. It is self-evident that building human capital through educational policies and programs is crucial to help developing countries to bridge their problems. Perhaps more than any other area of education, this seems also true for civic awareness and political participation.

5. References

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