

Behold... the Head of State's Spouse! A comparative study of the political rise of the First Lady in Poland, France and Spain

Ewa Widlak
Pompeu Fabra University (Spain)
ewa@ewawidlak.com

Jaume Guillamet Lloveras
Pompeu Fabra University (Spain)
Jaume.guillamet@upf.edu

Carles Pont Sorribes
Pompeu Fabra University (Spain)
Carles.pont@upf.edu

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Abstract

Profound changes in media and political communication contributed to granting private life greater importance in political reporting. Not only did media shift their attention from parties to politicians, they also took an interest in the politicians' entourage. The first lady, as the wife of the supposedly most powerful man in the country, became an object of public attention. Her ability to comply with social demands became of capital importance for the good image of her husband. Over the course of the last century, and despite an ambiguous media towards her political empowerment, the first lady has managed to emancipate herself as a new actor on the public stage.

This article studies the way in which the media became a key player in the creation, empowerment and definition of modern first ladyship in selected democratic countries: Poland, France and Spain. It does this through a mixed-methods approach: qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the press and extensive documentary research in the fields of political science, media and gender studies, political communication and first ladyship studies. The research finds that the press normalizes the presence of first ladies on the public stage and shapes public expectations toward spouses of heads of state.

Keywords: media influence, first lady, gendered frame, women's empowerment, politics.

Resumen. *¡He aquí la esposa del jefe de Estado! El estudio comparativo del ascenso político de la primera dama en Polonia, Francia y España*

Los profundos cambios experimentados por los medios de comunicación y la comunicación política han contribuido a conceder a la vida privada una importancia mayor en la cobertura política. Los medios han cambiado el foco desde los partidos hacia los políticos y sus familias. Así, la primera dama, en tanto que esposa del que se supone el hombre más poderoso del país, se ha convertido en un objeto de escrutinio público. Su habilidad para dar respuesta a las demandas sociales se erige en un elemento de importancia capital para la buena imagen de su marido. A lo largo del siglo pasado, y a pesar de una cobertura mediática ambigua, la primera dama ha logrado emanciparse y erigirse en un nuevo actor en la escena pública.

El presente artículo estudia cómo se han convertido los medios de comunicación en un actor clave en la creación, empoderamiento y definición de la figura moderna de la primera dama en una selección de países democráticos: Polonia, Francia y España. La aproximación metodológica es de carácter mixto: el análisis de contenido cualitativo y cuantitativo de la prensa y una investigación documental extensiva en los campos de la ciencia política, el periodismo, los estudios de género, la comunicación política y los estudios sobre la institución de la primera dama. La investigación concluye que la prensa normaliza la presencia de las primeras damas en la esfera pública e influencia las expectativas que tiene el público respecto a las esposas de los jefes de Estado.

Palabras clave: influencia mediática, primera dama, marco de género, empoderamiento de las mujeres, política.

1. Introduction

The first lady is at the same time a symbol of modern times, where the private becomes the public, and a recall of the Ancient regime, with Queens and their courts. She is one of the most controversial personalities on the political stage whose presence can awake antithetical reactions and question structures of modern democracies. The wife of the head of state is generally one of the most powerful people in her country holding strategic value for her husband, yet she is generally underestimated and reduced to the role of a mere decoration in the public eye.

The first ladyship is an example of a never crafted political office that has undergone deep evolution since the tenure of Martha Washington, the first to hold such a position. Although the function originated from ancient social norms, strictly reducing the place of women to the private sphere, during the 20th century it evolved from a simply protocol role, to a professionalised and institutionalised political function. This paper states that this evolution would not be possible without the extremely significant role of the media in both promoting and shaping the institution.

2. Theoretical background

Emergence of modern political communication and the transformation of political process

The birth of modern political communication resulted from a double process of State democratisation and the development of communication, both based on the 18th century democratic ideals (Wolton, 1989). Since then, it has strongly evolved and passed through distinctive stages. This last, postmodern stage is characterised by a strong professionalisation of both the candidate and their team (Norris, 2004) and a strategy concentrated on short terms and immediate results (Denton and Woodward, 1998).

Modern communication is characterised by a major shift toward continuous media presence and by an emphasis on the candidate rather than on the political programme or their party's ideals. Putting the candidate in the spotlight automatically leads to public interest in their private life (Mazzoni and Ciaglia, 2013), especially since the irruption of the Internet and informational overload. It caused increasing professionalisation of politicians in the management of the media (Cristante, 2011) and a boost of media and political populism caused by an excessive interest in private life and in emotions (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999) and the "politicisation of private persona" (Trimble *et al.*, 2013).

Another crucial characteristic of modern political life in advanced democracies is its relationship with media (McCombs *et al.*, 2011), shifting from the domination of politics over media to the active influence of media on politics. Not only did media become the privileged channel of communication between politicians and citizens, it also obliged politicians to adapt to the rules of media logic, dominated by societal processes and storytelling (Stromback, 2008). Media influence expands over both politicians' behaviour and issues they have to treat. Although researchers diverge about the extent of the media's power in the formulation of public issues (Casero-Ripollés and López-Rabadán, 2014), they generally agree that such an influence exists (Melenhorst, 2015; Schudson, 2002).

Women, politics and the media: between empowerment and the gender gap

Over the last century, the political empowerment of women became one of the major processes in international politics, increasing political representativeness, consistently reducing poverty and improving peace-building processes (Narayan *et al.*, 2005). In many countries, a greater participation of female politicians has had a positive impact on further involvement of women as citizens (Thames and Williams, 2013).

Despite significant advances in this field, women are still politically underrepresented and suffer from a gender stigma, mainly because of the persistence of stereotypes (Dittmar, 2015). Whether in politics or economy,

the most prestigious positions are associated with male traits and women are more exposed to criticism (Bligh and Kohles, 2008).

Additionally, media reality continues to be male-dominated and powerful women in news media are still exceptions (Lachover, 2012), thus reinforcing the vision of politics as a man's world. As to the coverage itself, the frame on women in gendered roles of sex symbols or mothers, the emphasis on private life and the use of explicit body markers, rather than a focus on their public statements engenders a de-legitimisation of women as political leaders (Trimble *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, the distorted media representation of female politicians helps in maintaining the gender gap on the political stage and negatively influences further possibilities of greater female empowerment in public life.

3. Research aim, scope and method

The expectation of this research is that media has strongly impacted, both positively and negatively, on the development of the first ladyship. Facing a lack of a commonly accepted method regarding first ladyship research (Sulfaro, 2007) and a severe limitation of scientific interest outside the United States (Widlak and Pont Sorribes, 2015), an approach based on press content analysis and documentary research was adapted with the aim of creating a workable and reliable methodology.

The content analysis method, working on both quantitative and qualitative variables (Taylor and Bodgan, 1984), was applied to a large selection of press articles from two print media deemed among the most influential in crafting the function of the first lady: general information newspapers and women's magazines. The logical-semantic and logical-aesthetic methods of Muchielli (2006), belonging to the group of content analysis procedures, were used. The first approach seeks to display the main frames of the coverage through three principal axes: theme, frequency and attitude. The second concentrates on the portrayal of the discourse's protagonist by analysing speech figures (passive or active verbs, choice of the vocabulary, connotations etc.). The actor's frame is an approach commonly used in first ladyship studies (Beasley, 2005; Burns, 2008, among others). Consequently, the main objective of data codification in the present study was to obtain relevant information regarding the actor and not covered events. All selected articles were published during the tenure of each first lady and implicitly quoted them by their first and/or second names (articles quoting only the role (*ie* "first lady", "the spouse", "presidential wife") were excluded).

The research covers cases of first ladyship in Poland, France and Spain and, although it does not properly include the United States, the American model is present as the main reference on both methodological and substantial levels. Beyond the European character, the common thread is their belonging to democratic societies. Indeed, as empirically demonstrated in democracies, the first ladyship is a durable institution and not a passing fade, as some

conditions necessary to the endurance of the institution, such as female political emancipation, press freedom and staple rules, are met. Moreover, the more powerful the head of state is, the stronger the public presence of his wife is, and vice versa. In order to reflect this relationship, chosen countries represent different levels of executive and legislative prerogatives held by heads of state. Poland is a parliamentary republic (the most common political system among Western democracies) and a young democracy with fifty years of Communism lying behind it. France represents the model of semi-presidential republics, with a relatively strong president, whose power can be severely limited when an opposition party dominates in parliament and government. Spain is a parliamentary monarchy, with a politically weak king as the head of the state, in which queen consorts fulfil the same responsibilities as first ladies in republican countries (Widlak and Pont Sorribes, 2015).

As for general information newspapers, the main corpus was composed of articles from benchmark dailies from Poland (*Gazeta Wyborcza*), France (*Le Monde*) and Spain (*El País* and *El Mundo*).¹ In total, 1140 items were collected from *Gazeta Wyborcza* (table I), 1477 from *Le Monde* (table II) and 666 from *El País* and *El Mundo* (table III). For each case in consideration, time-lapses were adapted to national political and cultural specificities (yet the final year of all of them was 2014). Indeed, given that the first ladyship is a process of unequal development in the world, a linear time analysis would offer a limited and erroneous view of the function. Consequently, the sample on the Polish first ladyship includes articles from 1990, the year of the first democratic presidential elections, while the span of the French case covers the whole period of the 5th Republic since 1958. Regarding the Spanish case, the 2009-2014 period seemed pertinent as it is highly representative of the whole tenure of Queen Sofia (Widlak and Pont Sorribes, 2015; Widlak, Pont Sorribes and Guillaumet Lloveras, 2016).²

TABLE I. COVERAGE OF POLISH FIRST LADIES 1990-2014 IN *GAZETA WYBORCZA*

	Danuta Wałęsa (1990-1995)	Jolanta Kwaśniewska (1995-2005)	Maria Kaczyńska (2005-2010)	Anna Komorowska (2010-2014)	Total number of articles
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	111	626	170	233	1140

1. Given the strong partisanship character of Spanish media (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), it was decided to analyse two politically opposed titles: left-wing *El País* and right-wing *El Mundo*.

2. Since the implementation of constitutional democracy in Spain in 1979 until 2014, the only Queen to hold the office was Sofia of Greece.

TABLE II. COVERAGE OF FRENCH FIRST LADIES 1959-2014 IN *LE MONDE*

	Yvonne de Gaulle (1959-1969)	Claude Pompidou (1969-1974)	Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981)	Danielle Mitterrand (1981-1995)	Bernadette Chirac (1995-2007)	Cécilia Sarkozy (2007)	Carla Bruni-Sarkozy (2008-2012)	Valérie Trierweiler (2012-2014)	Total number of articles
<i>Le Monde</i>	0	4	29	360	578	78	314	114	1477

Source: authors.

TABLE III. COVERAGE OF QUEEN SOFIA IN *EL PAÍS* AND *EL MUNDO* 2009-2014

	Queen Sofia (2009-2014)
<i>El País</i>	209
<i>El Mundo</i>	457
Total number of articles	666

Source: authors.

Regarding women and gossip press, articles were selected from leading women's magazines from each country: *Viva!* and *Twój Styl* in Poland (41 items – Table IV), *Elle* in France (169 items – Table V), *¡Hola!* in Spain (173 items – Table VI). The sample of the Polish women's magazines covers the same period as that of dailies. However, the French and Spanish samples cover shorter periods since in France the genuine process of mediatisation of the President and his spouse, started in 2007 with the tenure of Nicolas Sarkozy (Mayaffre, 2012), while in the Spanish case a three-year time-lapse (2011-2014) was considered as offering an extensive vision on the issue.

General information newspapers and women's and gossip magazines are the two significantly different press media which best correspond to the research objectives. General information newspapers allow collecting data that offer a reliable socio-historical testimony (Franzosi, 1987) and display information of interest for public opinion (Schudson, 2002). Moreover, it is also a medium of critical importance for politicians as an important influencer on social and political perceptions (Kiouisis, 2001). Nevertheless, since the 20th century the press has had to continuously readapt to changing media realities marked firstly by the appearance of radio and television (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) and, more recently, by the irruption of the Internet (Briggs and Burke, 2014). News featured in the press is still considered as the most trustworthy, outrunning news presented online and on TV (Kiouisis, 2001). Regarding women's and gossip magazines, although their analysis may seem controversial in the study of media and politics, their influence cannot be overlooked. Their emotional storytelling matches new standards of political communication marked by the use of the persuasive force of emotions to impact and engage voters. Moreover, the characteristic focus on women and a new interest in politics

(Demarest and Garner, 1992) opens a new communication channel for new heroines from the political world and among them, first ladies. Additionally, although this medium does not provide politically relevant information, it conveys ideas relative to class, family and women's place in society (Ytre-Arne, 2011), thus becoming an interesting mirror on the evolution of the role of the first lady in particular political and social contexts.

TABLE IV. COVERAGE OF POLISH FIRST LADIES IN *TWÓJ STYL* AND *VIVA!* 1990-2014

	Danuta Wałęsa (1990-1995)	Jolanta Kwaśniewska (1995-2005)	Maria Kaczyńska (2005-2010)	Anna Komorowska (2010-2014)	Total number of articles
<i>Twój Styl & Viva!</i>	2	31	5	3	41

Source: authors.

TABLE V. COVERAGE OF FRENCH FIRST LADIES IN *ELLE* 2007-2014

	Cécilia Sarkozy (2007)	Carla Bruni-Sarkozy (2008-2012)	Valérie Trierweiler (2012-2014)	Total number of articles
<i>Elle</i>	5	128	36	169

Source: authors.

TABLE VI. COVERAGE OF QUEEN SOFIA IN *¡HOLA!* 2011-2014

	Queen Sofía (2011-2014)
<i>¡Hola!</i>	173
Total number of articles	173

Source: authors.

The second method, documentary research, allowed for the validation of results from the press content analysis and their contextualisation. It was based on four different strands in literature: studies on first ladyship and testimonies on different first ladies, political communication, gender studies and historical scientific works. It was complemented by public opinion polls conducted by the most prestigious institutes of public opinion in each of the countries of interest: Polish CBOS, French IFOP, Spanish CIS and BRIE and American Pew Research Center.

4. Results

Media attention as a crucial factor in the empowerment of the first ladyship

Quantitative results demonstrate that in all countries studied there has been a significant and constant growth of press coverage of first ladies, testifying to

the increase of the media's interest. The analysis of pics of said growth indicates two types of elements influencing the coverage: micro- and macro-level.

TABLE VII. AVERAGE MONTHLY PRESENCE OF FIRST LADIES IN ANALYSED NEWSPAPERS AND WOMEN'S MAGAZINES (EXPRESSED IN NUMBER OF PRESS ITEMS PUBLISHED MONTHLY)

	First lady	Average monthly presence in analysed newspapers	Average monthly presence in analysed women and gossip magazines
Poland	Danuta Wałęsa	1.82	0.033
	Jolanta Kwaśniewska	5.17	0.26
	Maria Kaczyńska	3.21	0.09
	Anna Komorowska	3.82	0.05
Spain	Queen Sofia	5.55	4.8
France	Yvonne de Gaulle	0	NC
	Claude Pompidou	0.07	NC
	Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing	0.35	NC
	Danielle Mitterrand	2.14	NC
	Bernadette Chirac	4.01	NC
	Cécilia Sarkozy	15.6	1
	Carla Bruni-Sarkozy	6.16	2.51
	Valérie Trierweiler	5.7	1.8

Source: authors.

Micro-level elements correspond to media interest in particular first ladies or events, generally due to three reasons. Firstly, first ladies breaking with traditionally accepted attitudes of the political spouse generate large, yet strongly polarised coverage. For instance, Danielle Mitterrand (1981-1995), by refusing to play the traditional role of the presidential spouse and being extremely active in the field of human rights, attracted unprecedented public and media interest. Secondly, some first ladies willingly enter into the political game and seek media attention, like Jolanta Kwaśniewska (1995-2005) who put the role of the first lady on the political map in Poland. Thirdly, a crisis situation, or a scandal, can also generate media coverage of the spouse of the head of state, such as in case of Valérie Trierweiler (2012-2014) whose political *faux pas* generated public debate in France about freedom of expression of the first lady.

Macro-level elements indicate political, social and cultural processes that mark the media attitude toward first ladies. Primarily, the normalisation of women's public activity over the years naturally raised media interest in female

politicians and, subsequently, first ladies (Eksterowicz and Paynter, 2000). As the French case illustrates, the peaks in media coverage match the crucial moments of women's political empowerment. It rampaged in the 1980s and has continued to increase since then, matching the period of the opening of the political agora to French women and their appearance in the news media (Bard, Baudelot and Mossuz-Lavau, 2004).

Secondly, the increase of media attention on first ladies is due to a positive-sum game between media and politicians. While free, but market-driven media intrude progressively into the private lives of public figures, politicians adapt to this logic to communicate with voters. The first lady, floating between the private and the public spheres (Burns, 2008; Gutin, 2008), appears as a natural beneficiary of such an interaction. This particular process of the first lady's mediatisation could be observed in France during the tenure of Nicolas Sarkozy. Cecilia Sarkozy and Carla Bruni-Sarkozy became, in turn, active actors in his communication and generated large press coverage. Although it was not particularly positive, the spotlight cast on them attracted public interest toward their function, giving it a new significance on the public stage.

Finally, the globalisation and Americanisation of political marketing's standards further contributed to public exposure of the head of state's spouse. The interest shown by foreign media in the figure of the American first lady awoke interest in the same figure on the national stage. Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981), a supposedly French Jacqueline Kennedy, was the first spouse of a President of France massively exposed in French media. In the late 1990s, the Polish press noticed influences of Hillary Clinton on the first lady style of her Polish counterpart, Jolanta Kwaśniewska.

The increased coverage and a progressive shift of information from local pages to more relevant sections, such as national, international or political news, has normalised and legitimised the presidential spouse in the public eye and served to acknowledge her increasingly political image. Constant press coverage of the various duties of presidential spouses, helps to codify the role and partially institutionalise it.

An analysis of public opinion polls shows that first ladies have entered the political world and are often more popular than their husbands or other politicians, as was the case of Jolanta Kwasniewska or Queen Sofia. They also demonstrate a public change of heart. In the United States opinion polls by Pew Research Centre since the 1990s show that the popularity of American first ladies has grown in particular among men.³ In Poland, public opinion strongly changed its preferences as from 1996, when a retraced model of the first ladyship was preferred⁴ and opted thereafter for the strongly mediatised

3. Detailed results for 2009-2014 retrieved from: <<http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-questionnaires/01-27-14%20topline%20for%20release.pdf>>.

4. Study by CBOS from October 1996 entitled "Portret żony prezydenta" (Portrayal of the president's wife).

type of Jolanta Kwaśniewska.⁵ In Spain as from 2011, popularity for Queen Sofia increased⁶ while the Crown and King Juan Carlos II were suffering from popular distrust.⁷ In France since the mid-2000s presidential spouses have been a frequent theme of surveys and during pre-campaigning for the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections French respondents chose not only their candidate, but also the potential first lady.⁸

This popularity can be explained by the fact that in general first ladies gain positive or neutral coverage more easily. In extreme situations, abundant and empowering media coverage can propel the first lady to the top and turn her into her husband's political adversary and an independent public stakeholder. Such was the case of Jolanta Kwaśniewska, whose political popularity was so great that she appeared as a potential adversary of her own husband in the run for the president's office, generating a public debate about gender, politics and the possibility that a first lady trespasses the unwritten rule of being fully engaged in politics.

Beyond the influence on individual cases, media also formulated clear opinions about the first ladyship as a political institution, especially regarding its transparency. For instance, in Spain, in 2011 media enquiries about the financing of the Royal Household (and thus the Queen) led to an annual publication of the institution's budget and to granting the Queen an official salary. The political facet of the first ladyship also seems to be of increasing interest to women's magazines as evidenced particularly by the politicised vocabulary of the articles. In all analysed media, at least one first lady was presented as her husband's political co-worker, or directly called "a politician".

Media representation of the first ladyship

In addition to granting her notoriety and legitimising her in the public eye, the media are by no means neutral, but rather frame the first lady through strong gender stereotypes and can prone partisan critics according to their political alignment. This, in consequence, reinforces the sensitive challenge that political wives have to face: they are demanded to play an active role on

5. Information based on various opinion polls, among them: April 1998 "Najpopularniejsze kobiety w polskiej polityce" (The most popular women in Polish politics); December 2003 "Polacy o kandydatach w wyborach prezydenckich" (Poles about candidates in the presidential elections).

6. "Barometro del Real Instituto Elcano" from December 2012.

7. A historical analysis of CIS opinion polls shows that since 2011 Spanish people have distrusted the Crown (their level of trust has been continuously lower than 5 out of 10).

8. Information based on various opinion polls, among them: December 2008 "Les Français et la Première Dame de France" (French people and the First Lady of France); March 2012 "Le couple présidentiel préféré des Français" (The presidential couple preferred by the French).

the public stage, yet their legitimacy is questioned when they exceed what is traditionally conceived as their responsibilities.

Frames on first ladies are very similar in both newspapers and women's and gossip magazines and are set in four major roles: that of woman and mother belonging to the private domain and that of a political celebrity and social stakeholder being a part of the public domain. All those functions are inextricably linked and display the fluidity of the public and the private in the construction of the first lady's figure.

The roles coming from the private sphere are dominant, as media use them to both justify their interest in the first ladies and to illustrate political and cultural ideologies. Like in the American case (Burns, 2008; Beasley, 2005), the first ladyship in the countries studied embodies national perceptions on womanhood, captured in particular moments. The personal character of each first lady plays a role in the construction of her public image. However, an observed tendency to retract or moderate attitudes following media criticism (for instance, a radical change of the first lady's style of Carla Bruni (2008-2012) between the start and the end of her tenure) demonstrates that it is rather up to the first lady to adapt to the public imaginary than the other way round. This demand to fit to some kind of common imaginary is especially visible in press articles covering foreign state visits, concluding with the reflection on whether the first lady worthily represented women of her country. This representation is based, however, on physical attributes, and not on the content of her public presentation, thus reinforcing physical- and role-related stereotypes. In all collected data, the most used adjective was "elegant", testifying to the importance of aesthetics in the first ladyship, but also that of social norms, as it refers to a socially-established vision of what is acceptable regarding one's appearance.

The role of mother derives directly from the previous role and has lasting consequences in terms of public expectations towards a first lady's behaviour and responsibilities. Although some variations in the frame illustrate differences in the conception of gender roles between the studied countries, the ideal of the first lady, recurrent in women's and gossip magazines, is nearly the same. As a good mother, she has to be smiling, patient, caring and empathetic. She gives as much attention to her family as to other people, and especially children in distress (Widlak and Guillemet Lloveras, 2015). The notion of sacrifice, for her husband, family, but also for the country, is underlined. All her public actions result not from political calculations, but from moral blamelessness, modesty and her will to do the right thing. She incarnates thus an idealised version of politics, contrasting with the political world dominated by men and linked to negative stereotypes.

This exalted vision of the political mission of the first lady from women's and gossip magazines is articulated in general information newspapers through a description of acceptable behaviour, such as charity, and a criticism of the ones seen as transgressive, especially independent acting on the political stage. Our research confirms results of American studies (Sulfaro, 2007; Troy, 2006; Scharrer and Bissell, 2000) following which the more a first lady is covered, the

more the media examine her role on the public stage and the more polarised her coverage is. For instance, in Poland, Maria Kaczyńska (2005-2010) in her mid-term became a target of virulent attacks after publicly taking positions removed from the positions of her husband's party. Additionally, Cécilia Sarkozy suffered criticism in 2007 after having participated in a diplomatic mission to liberate Bulgarian nurses imprisoned in Libya. Although *Le Monde* did not openly express its criticism toward the political playing of the presidential spouse, the newspaper chose to present negative opinions of the political class, creating an aura of wrongdoing and overstepping of some unwritten rules.

The role of the social stakeholder emanates directly from the status of the "first woman and first mother". Generally, newspaper articles about social activities represent the biggest part of each first lady's news coverage (with some exceptions like Danielle Mitterrand), making them the principal duty of each spouse of a head of state. Paradoxically, this role is generally given a very small salience: the article is generally published in a less visible section of the newspaper and the first lady is often mentioned in the headline and in no more than one sentence of each article. This shows how newspapers use the first lady as a "decoy" to attract readers' interest and to increase the prestige of the covered event. In women's magazines, the role of the social stakeholder embodies public activity that concentrates on people and close to them, the opposite of "traditional" politics. The first lady is also an alter ego and ally of her spouse: while the head of state deals with important issues, albeit remote from ordinary citizens, his wife acts to compensate.

Eventually, the particular status of the first lady elevates her figure to a celebrity position. Throughout the studied periods, the media increased their coverage, passing from a simple description of their presence at institutional events to more complex analyses of the function and its political influence. Nevertheless, the interest in their private life has also grown and the label "wife of", placing them in a secondary position toward the political class, also persisted. In some particular cases, like those of Carla Bruni-Sarkozy and Jolanta Kwaśniewska, the role of the "jet setter" constituted part of the coverage and both media featured stories of friendships with music stars and other celebrities.

TABLE VIII. DOMINANT FRAMINGS ON FIRST LADIES FROM POLAND, SPAIN AND FRANCE

	First lady	Dominant frame	Dominant tone	Dominant context
Poland	Danuta Wałęsa	· Woman · Presidential helpmate	Neutral	· Institutional events
	Jolanta Kwaśniewska	· Social stakeholder · Political celebrity	Neutral / positive	· Social events · Presidential elections
	Maria Kaczyńska	· Social stakeholder · Public stakeholder	Neutral / positive	· Institutional and social events · Political statements
	Anna Komorowska	· Wife · Mother	Neutral	· Institutional events
Spain	Queen Sofia	· Woman · Mother · Social stakeholder · (After Annus Horribilis) Public stakeholder	Neutral / positive	· Institutional events · Social events · Member of the Royal Family
France	Yvonne de Gaulle	-	-	-
	Claude Pompidou	· Social stakeholder	Neutral	· Social events
	Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing	· Woman · Social stakeholder	Neutral	· Institutional events
	Danielle Mitterand	· Human rights activist	Neutral	· Diplomatic actions / incidents
	Bernadette Chirac	· Woman · Political stakeholder	Neutral / positive	· Institutional events · Political game within the political party UMP
	Cécilia Sarkozy	· Woman · Political celebrity	Neutral / negative	· Private life · Fashion · Public incidents
	Carla Bruni-Sarkozy	· Woman · Political celebrity	Neutral / negative	· Private life · Fashion · Public incidents
	Valérie Trierweiler	· Political celebrity · Woman	Negative / neutral	· Public incidents · Private life

Source: authors.

5. Conclusions

The results of the research confirm that media have played a crucial role in the evolution of the first ladyship and allowed for its political ascension. By putting first ladies into the spotlight and offering more in-depth coverage of their activities, the media have normalised their public presence and contributed to the sustainability, legitimacy and institutionalisation of the office. Subsequently, in all studied countries, the institution became considerably professionalised and first ladies nowadays have their own teams with the prominent figure of a press assistant and work in a strict cooperation with the office of the head of state. Nevertheless, media discourse, as the principal source of information about first ladies, impacts on public expectations and obliges politicians to adapt to those expectations in order to gain public approval. It seems that nowadays the gap between the genuine empowerment of the first ladyship and the media trivialisation of the figure is growing, as journalists' view on the matter is still heavily shaped by gender stereotypes, turning first ladies into political celebrities and reinforcing the dichotomy between women and politics. Polarising media coverage of some first ladies proves that there is still certain reluctance to a complete political empowerment of first ladies and reveals a strong inconsistency in media attitude, which expects first ladies to play a public role in the name of existing traditions and at the same time limit it severely in the name of democratic values. A further paradox sees the media diminishing the political relevance of the first lady all the while taking a political alignment, which sometimes leads to direct attacks against her.

The contradictory attitude of the media reinforces existing prejudices about relations between women and politics and the inferiority of the first lady and about the first lady's responsibilities as inextricably linked to the private sphere, relegating her to the peripheries of the political scene. From a broader perspective, the gendered vision also epitomises the difficulties of female politicians on the political agora who still have to deal with gender stereotypes to confirm their leadership.

The historical analysis of the media's attitude toward first ladies highlights that the whole process was strongly impacted by the modification of the media landscape in the 20th century and by changes in the media-politics relationships, but even more importantly, by the difficult relationship between the democratic principle of equality among citizens and a biased view of gender that continues to exist. As a result, this , represents a difficulty for the further development of the first ladyship, as the media imperil the idea of the first lady as a genuine political leader. Arguably, as long as such a point of view persists, possibilities of social acceptance of a further empowerment of the function are bound to be compromised.

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