RESEARCH
TRAINING IN CIVICS AND ATTITUDES REGARDING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN NORTHEAST MEXICO
JUAN ENRIQUE HUERTA

Juan Enrique Huerta is a post-doctoral researcher at the Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, and a professor at Instituto Tecnológico and de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Monterrey Campus. Avenida Eugenio Garza Sada 2501 Sur, Colonia Tecnológico, 64849, Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico. Email: jehuerta@itesm.mx

Abstract:
This article questions the following aspects: How are future citizens being trained? What are their attitudes regarding civic awareness and political participation? What is the role of agents like the media and family discussions on politics? A report is given of the findings of two surveys carried out in 2006 and 2007, involving sixth-graders in three cities of northeastern Mexico (Monterrey, Saltillo, and Victoria). A structural model of variance is proposed and analyzed. The available evidence points to the centrality of the home setting in the socialization of civic and political attitudes among Mexican children.

Keywords: political education, citizenship, values, education and communication, quantitative research, Mexico.

For three decades, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has conducted the Civic Education Study among adolescents in twenty-four nations, on all continents. The group lead by researcher Judith Torney-Purta (2004, 2007) has found diverse levels of civic commitment and willingness to participate in politics, but in a constant manner, Latin American adolescents show less willingness than others. Mexico’s journals of education, and in an important manner Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa, have explained that interest in civic education is a powerful cause of transformation in today’s difficult environment in Mexico and the rest of Latin America.

Concerns about civic education not only attempt to diagnose the status of children’s and adolescents’ attitudes in their civic and political participation, but also try to discover the factors that explain the formation of those attitudes. A recent study by Tirado and Guevara (2006) discovered that factors like the parents’ education, the number of books at home, family income, and the number of hours that fourteen-year-olds watch television influence their degree of civic awareness.

Other authors in the same Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa have been interested in diagnosing the state of political values of Mexican children. Araújo-Oliveira and collaborators reported on a qualitative study carried out in twenty-two secondary schools in Morelos to explore the status of civic formation as the result of a recent school reform in the state. Their findings show that democracy is defined by the adolescents of Morelos as a search for consensus, “an idea of broad democracy, in which participation is based on equality and occurs in all walks of life …” (Araújo, Yurén, Estrada and De la Cruz, 2005:25-26). According to the views of the study participants, democracy is defined as a supra-value that is explained and legitimated in many ways. A conflict exists, however, since the participants view democracy as positive and desirable and politics appears as something fragile. As the researchers correctly theorize, the conflict is difficult to overcome because democracy is far from being an abstract concept; it is defined by its institutions and actors, and political mediation plays a role that cannot be ignored. The study participants report disinterest in formal politics, and the data suggest that their feelings are due in part to the way civics is taught in the school setting. It is of interest, however,
that the same data suggest that adolescents are critical of endemic problems in the Mexican political system, such as corruption.

The attention Mexican researchers pay to the processes of political socialization has become relevant in recent times. In addition to the authors mentioned above, researchers like Fernández (2005), Ibarra (2003), López (2003), Nateras (2007) and Tapia (2003) have consolidated a line of research that in Mexico dates back to the classic study by Segovia (1975). Those who diagnose the state of citizen formation agree in identifying children as subjects who are critical, with more or less sophisticated knowledge, of the actors and processes that conform the public setting. Interests have also been diverse. Araújo-Olivera et al. seem to be interested in evaluating specific educational programs; Ibarra (2003) and López (2003) have emphasized the socializing function of the media, while Fernández (2005), Nateras (2007), Tirado and Guevara (2006), and Tapia (2003) have been concerned about children's political knowledge and critical spirit, in a line of research closer to the traditional lines of Segovia (1975), and in the international sphere, to Torney-Purta (2002, 2004).

How are future citizens being trained? What are their attitudes with respect to key elements in democracy, such as civic awareness and political participation? What role do mediating agents like the media and family discussions play? This paper seeks to contribute to the research that other authors have developed and to provide answers to these questions, based on empirical research that interviewed sixth-graders in three cities in northeastern Mexico: more specifically, Monterrey, Saltillo, and Victoria, in the states of Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas, respectively.

Some Initial Concepts

Political Participation

The indicator that is used most frequently to refer to the quality of a democracy is the degree its citizens participate in the public sphere. The notion of political participation has its roots in Alexis de Tocqueville’s description of democracy in America, but its modern argument is much more recent and is based on Marshall’s also classic distinction of political, civil, and social rights. According to this classification, citizenship can be defined as participation in the civic, political, and social institutions of modern society (Habermas, 2006; Marshall, 1997). Political participation is defined as the individual exercise of political rights, including the right to participate in the exercise of political power as a member of a body invested with political authority, or as a voter (Hagopian, 2007; Marshall, 1997). In Mexico, for many reasons, in addition to citizens’ lack of interest, the exercise of political power has often been the monopoly of an elite. Therefore, various institutions, such as the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), have considered the aspiration to participate in public life as a desired goal among new Mexican citizens.

What are the factors in the literature that explain the willingness to participate in politics? McDevitt and Kiousis (2007) proposed various structural models of covariance among US high school students, evaluating US children’s attitudes toward support for conventional politics and activism, as the observed variables. The researchers found that discussion between parents and students was the main predictor of political participation, measured as the intent to vote in the 2004 election. This variable also influenced the “intent to become involved in politics as adults” and “political ideology” in a related structural model (Kiousis, McDevitt and Wu, 2005).

In a study carried out in Nepal, Wagle (2006) found that socioeconomic status influenced the frequency of voting in an important manner. The implication is that in developing countries, the exercise of political and social rights may be limited to certain socioeconomic groups. In Mexico, various projects have found evidence that the socioeconomic level is one of the main factors in a higher
level of political knowledge among children, as well as in their civic values (Buendía and Somuano, 2003; Tirado and Guevara, 2006; Nateras, 2007).

From the perspective of this article, not all forms of political participation will tend to lead to social improvement, but only those that show interest in citizen interaction, or more specifically, citizen awareness. In other words, factors like knowledge and interest in politics will lead to social improvement if they demonstrate interest in cooperating with others, in the understanding that others are part of the nation. Without this democratic filter, interest in political aspects can contribute to participation, yet will be motivated only by the desire to favor some instead of others. The conception of democratic participation is constant in the way children view participation outside of the formal political sphere. For example, the children in the study by Gingold and Winocur (2000) believe that the concept of participation extends to the family and is related to assuming domestic chores, keeping the neighborhood streets clean, or helping family and friends.

**Civic Awareness**

As in political participation, the available evidence indicates that the awareness of civil rights is limited by the socioeconomic level (Papanastasiou and Koutselini, 2003). In Marshall’s classic definition, social citizenship is defined as citizens’ exercise of their civil rights, beginning with their freedom of expression, ownership, and equality in the eyes of the law (Hagopian, 2007; Marshall, 1997). Citizenship begins with awareness; in other words, with individual knowledge of having such rights. In Cyprus, Papanastasiou and Koutselini (2003) asked secondary school students to identify their degree of agreement with civil rights, such as participating in activities like public protests, community events, the promotion of human rights, and the signing of petitions. In Mexico, the National Survey of Political Culture has asked people at regular intervals about their willingness to exercise their freedom of expression by writing letters to newspapers and to their political leaders. According to IFE (2003), one out of every ten adult Mexicans has reported exercising his freedom of expression in this manner.

An ethnographic exercise—with elementary children from low socioeconomic levels—regarding the implementation of citizenship and participation suggests that children consider these two definitions as opposites. In the study by Elizondo-Huerta (2000), school and teachers encountered a very important challenge in the form of the children’s resistance to school authority; this resistance was frequently encouraged by the parents, who saw their children’s confronting teachers as positive behavior. The apparent disconnection we find in Mexican literature between citizenship and participation may well have its origins in the confusion of authoritarianism. Gingold and Winocur (2000), for example, suggest that one of the problems of civic education is that its definitions do not coincide with the definitions the children construct. According to their point of view, this is a trait of authoritarianism. The children clearly have no reason to agree: they must simply learn the civic education that adults have constructed in a consensual manner.

The cognitive aspect of evaluating democracy has also been a concern of models of intervention in countries like Great Britain and the United States. In fact, one of the reasons such civic programs intervene, starting in sixth grade, is that children of that age are known to have attained a process of intellectual maturity that will lead them to “crystallize” the civic willingness they show at the time (Sears and Valentino, 1997).

**Television and Family Political Discussions: Agents of Political Socialization**

According to Habermas (2006), the deliberative tradition of democracy accents the political participation of active citizens as well as the ways that public opinion is formed; in other words, political socialization that can be defined as the process by which individuals develop self-conceptions
and conceptions of their world, including their direct experiences, judgment and inferences on the knowledge they have at that moment. Within socialization processes, agents like family, friends, school, and media contribute to the process of *internalizing* political concepts.

According to Gunter and McAleer (1997), political knowledge is related to the use of the media and especially to the consumption of news and current events. This influence surpasses the plane of the traditional media. For example, Johnson and Kaye (2004) analyzed the influence of information available on the Internet in US political campaigns in 2000 and 1996, discovering that this source of information improved political attitudes about democracy and participation.

Television has been a recurring factor in Mexico’s public concerns. Omnipresent in the political campaigns of this young century, political advertisements, news coverage, and the budgets assigned to television broadcasters have put the topic of their effects on the table. No conclusive data exist on the topic of effects in Mexico. Where studies are available, they are reduced to a city or region, without the possibility to refer to Mexicans or concretely to the effects of ads or political campaigns on television (Huerta and Cerda, 2003; Huerta, Garagarza and Villegas, 1999).

What is known is that television is the media citizens use most to obtain information about what is happening in politics. According to the available data, television at the national level attains from 62% to 74% of the reported preferences for the media used to obtain political information; these data agree with those from other studies (IFE, 2003).

A recent study in the United States (Paseck *et al.*, 2006) discovered that the young people who watched the most films and television during an electoral campaign showed an increase in political knowledge and participation. According to this finding, it was not the global exposure to television but the use of media and specific content, like newscasts, that demonstrated the increase in knowledge and participation. The discovery also suggests the hypothesis that age as a predictor of knowledge and political participation can be a function of the exposure to news; in other words, young people who watch more news may be more willing to participate than older individuals who are not exposed to the news.

Other studies (Kiousis *et al.*, 2005; McDevitt and Chaffee, 2002; Sears and Valentino, 1997) have found that exposure to television interacts with the size of interpersonal communication networks to increase the level of political knowledge and willingness to participate in politics. Kiousis and collaborators (2005) defined the size of interpersonal communication networks as the number of people and/or places where a person interacts with others regarding political topics.

Although the direction of causality between greater exposure to political contents and the size of communication networks is not known, it is known that homes where greater exposure to specific topics occurs are also the homes where politics are most discussed and where children know more about these topics and show greater willingness to participate. In fact, studies about television have shown, in a consistent manner, that the amount and quality of children’s exposure is associated with the parents’ exposure, and more specifically, the mothers’ exposure. The same factor occurs with the political topic. Sears and Valentino (1997) have shown that the degree of political knowledge in children and adolescents is intimately linked to that of their parents. The family, as McDevitt and Chaffe (2002) have indicated, constitutes a social system that maintains balance in various domains of social interaction, including social skill; the family also increases political assimilation and generates the motivation to vote and other forms of participation outside of the home. Researchers add that within this formative process in political topics, the acquisition of knowledge and opinions is accompanied by discussion with parents (McDevit and Chaffe, 2002).

In terms of communication networks, not much is known in Mexico. Flores and Meyenberg (2002) reported that only 22% of a national sample responded that politics were discussed at home, while 70%
indicated that they were not. But data from the Center of Studies on Public Opinion—CESOP (Flores and Meyenberg, 2002; IFE, 2003) have remained at a descriptive level and it has been impossible to infer if discussion at home would contribute in some manner to internalizing knowledge, values, or the willingness to participate in politics.

A Model of Citizen Training and the Political Socialization of Mexican Children

Based on the above discussion of concepts, this article seeks to contribute to answering the following questions: a) How are future citizens being trained? b) What are their attitudes with respect to the key elements of democracy, such as civic awareness and political participation? c) What is the role of mediating agents such as television newscasts and family political discussions? Literature on the topic considers attitudes regarding political participation as the best measure of future participation, which in turn is an indicator of democratic (pre)citizens—to employ the term used by Fernández (2005) to refer to people with attitudes about exercising their civil rights—who have not yet reached the legal age to exercise their rights. Better citizenship attitudes, defined as the willingness to exercise civil rights, will be preferred as a predictor of the attitudes of political participation. On the other hand, previous models, particularly those that have involved Hispanic children in North America, establish that exposure to the news will be a positive influence on the attitudes toward political and citizenship willingness, and will improve when personal mediation or interpersonal communication increase. It is intuitive that training citizens may be greater, depending on the type of the children’s home setting. In an exercise of trajectory analysis using data from three national surveys, Huerta (2007) found that the school years function as the best predictor of democratic attitudes among adults.

This research report is part of a larger project of mixed methods. A first stage was similar to that of Araújo-Olivera et al. (2005). One hundred eighty group interviews were held with sixth-graders in schools in Monterrey, Saltillo, and Victoria (Huerta Wong, 2006). The data from this phase coincide in crucial points with those of Araújo-Olivera et al. (2005), as findings that children in northeastern Mexico discover as (pre) citizens who are critical of politics but see community work and democracy as desirable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the data on this particular point also coincide with the data found in other parts of Mexico, such as Mexico City (Fernández, 2005; Nateras, 2007), Guadalajara (Ibarra, 2003), Querétaro (Tapia, 2003), and Oaxaca (López, 2003). Based on the discussed literature and the qualitative findings, a hypothetical structural model was constructed (Figure 1), and compared with two samples from three northeastern cities. One reports on data in the framework of the federal election of 2006, obtained in March and April of that year. The second reports on data outside of an election, with data obtained in September and October of 2007. Based on the literature and qualitative findings, the expectation is that the model will be sustained at two different moments and will permit reporting conclusive data on the phenomenon. The model suggests the following causal relations:

1) Civic awareness influences the willingness to participate in politics.
2) Exposure to newscasts influences civic awareness and also willingness to participate in politics.
3) The frequency of family political discussions influences civic awareness and also willingness to participate in politics.
4) The home setting influences civic awareness and also willingness to participate in politics.
5) The frequency of family political discussions is related to the home setting and also to the exposure to newscasts.

The model will compare the relation among the consumption of television newscasts, the frequency children talk with their families about politics, and children’s home surroundings. In addition, the
model proposes that these exogenous variables explain children’s civic awareness which, along with the variables initially proposed, explain their attitudes regarding political participation. In short, it is a structural model composed by trajectory analysis, a tool of regression analysis and causal theory. The proposal is for the model to be robust for two samples in time: one taken in the framework of the federal election of 2006, and the other, more than one year later. The proposal is that the model will hold in spite of the novel electoral context of political effervescence, showing solidly the causal phenomenon that explains the willingness to participate in politics and the civic awareness of children in northeastern Mexico. This text is an analysis of the aggregate data and does not attempt to make comparisons among sub-samples.

In relation to the study’s context, one must remember that in 2006, Mexico had the most competitive electoral process in its history. Mexican families and children experienced a polarized setting characterized by an abundance of electoral advertising. It is not clear if or how the news influenced people, or if the setting of apparent political polarization also influenced people’s political attitudes beyond agreeing with a candidate. The hypothetical model proposes that any effect overcame the time-related context, and that children’s political attitudes do not change due to the context of the moment. The sample, which will be described in the following section, and the study’s analysis of results, permit regional generalizations. To learn the behavior of the relations proposed by the model in sub-samples by groups of population or in different cities, it will be necessary to make further analysis. Since this article compares a complete region, a greater description of each school’s context does not seem necessary. Basically, the comparison is made between the political attitudes of one year of intense electoral discussion and another year of markedly decreased political bombardment in the media.

FIGURE 1

Hypothetical Causal Model
Method
Participants
The project survey, entitled “Political Socialization, Television and Children in Northeastern Mexico” was designed—by the author as part of a project sponsored by the SEP-CONACyT basic science fund—in stages and conglomerates in elementary schools in Saltillo, Monterrey, and Victoria. The sample is representative of the conglomerates of northeastern Mexico, with a 10% margin of error. The study was conducted in two different samples: the first included sixth-graders in March and April of 2006, while the second was in September and October, 2007. The stages of selecting the participants were the following:

1) From the general listing of public and private schools, provided by the Secretariat of Education in each state (Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas), a determination was made of a percentage proportional to the total representation of the school population in each city, with respect to the universe; in other words, the sum of the schools in the three cities of reference. Seventy-one schools exist in the sample framework, as shown in Chart 1.
2) Subsequently, a similar calculation was made to obtain the representative nature of the public and private schools by city.
3) Lastly, if a school had more than one group of sixth-graders, the groups were selected in a random manner.
It should be mentioned that out of the 71 schools projected in the sample, in seven schools the authorities refused to permit use of the questionnaire. Therefore, the final sample was reduced to 64 schools.

The criteria for participant eligibility were the following: girls and boys in the sixth grade of elementary school, morning shift, located in the state capitals of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas.

For this sample, a simple random selection was made of public and private schools in the municipalities of Monterrey, Saltillo, and Victoria. In total, twenty-three schools (seventeen public schools and six private schools) in Saltillo, thirty-two (twenty-seven public schools and five private schools) in Monterrey, and nine (seven public schools and two private schools) in Victoria.

CHART 1
Population and Sample of Schools, by Cluster Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population of Elementary Schools</th>
<th>Sample of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Public Schools (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>109 (87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltillo</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>153 (74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterrey</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>207 (68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To compare the causal model, the final sample of 2006 was composed of 588 children in Monterrey, 551 in Saltillo, and 223 in Victoria, who were interviewed in March and April of that year by research assistants (studying for a master’s degree) Alejandra Rodríguez, Berenice Bañuelos, and Eduardo García. Because of the selection method, the data are analyzed with a 10% margin of error. In 2006, the total sample was 1,382 children. In 2007, the sample was composed of 631 children in Monterrey, 543 in Saltillo, and 370 in Victoria, for a total of 1,544 children.

Procedure
A city map was used to locate the schools’ addresses, which were marked for easy identification. A few days before taking the questionnaire to each school, a telephone call was made to confirm the fieldwork with the school’s director. Authorization was requested from the director and a brief explanation was given of the project. A specific request was made to work with a sixth-grade group.

A qualitative study carried out in January and February of 2006 (Huerta et al., 2006) was crucial for understanding the way children behave in the classroom and how their communication with each other and with their teachers could best be used for the study’s purposes.

For example, the teachers were requested to provide support by remaining in the classroom and helping with completing the survey in the classroom; the children were expected to understand their own teacher better than a researcher. This procedure facilitated organization in completing the survey and preventing unnecessary delay and distraction.

The researchers introduced themselves to the children, informing them: “Today we are visiting you because we are interested in knowing your opinions about politics. We would like you please to fill out
this questionnaire. It is not an examination. Do not worry: it is not going to be graded. Please take out a pencil and an eraser so that you can fill out the questionnaire.”

After this explanation, the children were helped to answer the questions. Each question was read aloud so that all the children would all answer at the same time. The children were invited to read the instructions and questions to their classmates; at the end, the children were asked if they had more questions, or if anyone had not yet finished. Individual questions were answered to prevent misunderstandings from limiting the results. If a child found something on the questionnaire difficult to understand, a call was made for volunteers to clarify the concepts. Other children were particularly precise in defining concepts clearly—concepts like unfairness, corruption, and democracy, that the research team had spent hours discussing during the previous meetings.

Variables

1) Home environment. Total of 4 items, on one hand, the children’s perception of a) father’s education and b) mother’s education plus the parents’ willingness to participate; on the other hand, the degree of agreement with the phrases c) “My father or mother would like to join others to protect the environment”, and d) “My father or my mother would like to work in politics” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.578).

2) Exposure to news programs. Total of 3 items, a) “How much do you watch national news”, b) “How much do you watch local news”, and c) “I watch a least a bit of news every day” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.697).

3) Frequency of family political discussions. Total of 5 items, a) “How much do you talk about politics with your father”, b) “How much do you talk about politics with your mother”, c) “How much do you talk about politics with your grandfather or grandmother”, d) “How much do you talk about politics with your schoolmates”, and e) “How much do you talk about politics with your cousins and brothers/sisters” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.687).

4) Civic awareness. Total of 6 items of degree of agreement with the question: To be a better citizen, I can a) Write letters to newspapers, b) Call the ambulance if I see an accident in the street, c) Report a water leak if I see one in the street, d) Correct an adult if I see him/her throwing trash on the ground, e) Collect signatures to fight unfairness, and f) Make a complaint at a government office (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.563).

5) Willingness to participate in politics. Degree of agreement with 5 items a) “Voting is important”, b) “I would like to be a member of Congress when I grow up”, c) “I would like to be a governor when I grow up”, d) “I would like to be my class’ president”, and e) “I would like to join with others to improve the nation” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.625).

Results

2006. Children in the Context of the Election

Use was made of trajectory analysis—multiple regression analysis in conjunction with causal theory—to compare the hypothetical model proposed in Figure 1. The AMOS 16 statistical package was used according to the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), and the hypothetical model was evaluated with the following indexes: Chi-square test, comparative fit index (CFI), normalized fit index (NFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). In addition, the significance of the trajectory coefficients was evaluated at p < .05.

Since the structural model of 2006 revealed very poor fit with the hypothetical model, a final model was developed as a result of the analysis of the modification indexes and the complete model. The
result is shown in Figure 2. The hypothetical explanation of social citizenship as a function of the frequency of family political discussions was found to contribute to reducing the model’s fit. The analysis also revealed the absence of a relation between the home setting and the act of watching the news—a finding consistent with the qualitative findings described by Huerta et al. (2006). The model in Figure 2 shows a non-significant Chi-square of $\chi^2 (1, n = 1382) = 0.01, p > 0.05$. In addition to the Chi-square test, other indexes of fit permitted excellent results, indicating that the new model fits the observed data at the most optimal level possible. Both the CFI and NFI indexes permitted 1.0, while the RMSEA reported a value of 0.01, consistent with the excellent scores of the model in general.

Willingness to Participate
Using the initial model, the influence of exposure to newscasts, the frequency of family political discussions, the home setting, and social awareness were compared with increased willingness to participate in politics. All the hypothesized relations were supported by the final model. Factors found to have a direct effect on the willingness to participate in politics were watching television newscasts ($\beta = 0.118, p < 0.001$), frequency of family political discussions ($\beta = 0.122, p < 0.001$), home setting ($\beta = 0.197, p < 0.001$), and social awareness ($\beta = 0.242, p < 0.001$).

Social Awareness
The initial model compared the influence of exposure to newscasts, the frequency of family political discussions, and the home setting, with increased social awareness. Surprisingly, family mediations had no direct effect on the formation of social awareness in this study’s data, leading to a correction of the initial model. Nor was watching television newscasts found to have a direct effect on social awareness. The only variable that reported this effect was the home setting ($\beta = 0.116, p < 0.001$).

Exogenous Variables
The model established the correlation between each pair of endogenous variables. The three relations were significant and moderate. Exposure to newscasts was positively associated with the home setting ($r = 0.126, p < 0.001$) and also with the frequency of family political discussions ($r = 0.201, p < 0.001$). The frequency of family political discussions was positively associated with the home setting ($r = 0.143, p < 0.001$).

Estimated Total Effects
Moderate effects were found upon examining the proportion of explained variance of willingness to participate in politics, the crucial endogenous variable. The results of the structural equation for willingness to participate in politics permitted a significant $R^2$ of 0.166. The other endogenous variable, functioning in the model as a mediator, was social awareness. The importance of this endogenous variable is weak, and the structural equation explains it with a significant $R^2$ of 0.07. The complete model illustrates that the home setting and even the exposure to newscasts are crucial for constructing willingness to participate in politics. In addition to the direct effects that Figure 2 reveals, the home setting ($\beta = 0.039$) and exposure to news ($\beta = 0.027$) showed indirect effects on the willingness to participate in politics, contributing to a total effect of $\beta = 0.225$ of the home setting on the willingness to participate in politics and $\beta = 0.133$ of exposure on willingness. As previously proposed, these findings are consistent with the literature that shows that exposure to news has a dialectic relation in the home with the frequency of family discussions and in total, in how children construct their relation with the public sphere.
Formation of Citizens in the Context of the 2006 Electoral Campaign

2007. *Children outside of the Context of the Election*

Use was made of trajectory analysis—multiple regression analysis in conjunction with causal theory—to compare two hypothetical models: the proposed model in Figure 1 as well as the model established in Figure 2. Both were evaluated with AMOS 16.0 and the following indexes: Chi-square test, comparative fit index (CFI), normalized fit index (NFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). In addition, the significance of the trajectory coefficients was evaluated at p < .05.

Since the structural model from 2007 revealed very poor fit with both, a third model was developed as a result of the analysis of the modification indexes and the complete model. The result is shown in Figure 3. The hypothetical explanation of social awareness as a function of the frequency of family political discussions was found to contribute to reducing the model’s fit, as well as the explanation of willingness to participate in politics as a function of social awareness. The resulting model (Figure 3) shows excellent levels of fit, with a non-significant Chi-square of $\chi^2(2, n = 1544) = 9.522$, p > 0.05. In addition to the Chi-square test, other indexes of fit permitted excellent results, indicating that the new model fits the observed data at the most optimal level possible. The CFI reported 0.986 and the NFI, 0.984, while the RMSEA showed a value of 0.042, consistent with the good scores of the model in general.

**Willingness to Participate**

The most discordant finding in this model was that watching television newscasts ($\beta = 0.117$, p < 0.001), frequency of family political discussions ($\beta = 0.075$, p < 0.001), and home setting ($\beta = 0.325$, p < 0.001)—but not social awareness—have direct effects on willingness to participate in politics. In reality, the lack of effects of social awareness on the willingness to participate in politics is the largest difference between the 2007 and 2006 samples, and leads to more questions on the role of...
interpersonal and mass communication in the discussion of civic rights in a non-election period (discussed in more depth below).

Social Awareness
Another major difference of the 2007 data is that exposure to television newscasts ($\beta = 0.115, p < 0.001$) is found to have direct effects on social awareness. In Figure 2, the effect of exposure to newscasts was not statistically significant, yet an indirect effect was mediated by the frequency of family political discussions. The data from 2007 suggest an inverse relation in non-electoral times, when the frequency of family political discussions—a synonym of interpersonal communication for the effects of this study—seems to be mediated by exposure to newscasts. In any case, what remains obvious is the dialectic relation that exists between both types of phenomenon and their importance in explaining social awareness. This is also partially explained by the home setting ($\beta = 0.169, p < 0.001$), a consistent finding in both models, with similar standardized coefficients in two different samples.

Exogenous Variables
Like Figure 2, Figure 3 established the correlation between each pair of endogenous variables. The three relations were significant and moderate. Exposure to newscasts was positively associated with the home setting ($r = 0.099, p < 0.001$) as well as with the frequency of family political discussions ($r = 0.166, p < 0.001$), which were also positively associated with home setting ($r = 0.221, p < 0.001$).

Estimated Total Effects
Once again moderate effects were discovered upon examining the proportion of explained variance of willingness to participate in politics, the crucial endogenous variable. The results of the structural equation for willingness to participate in politics permitted a significant $R^2$ of 0.162. The other endogenous variable was social awareness. The structural equation is explanatory with a significant $R^2$ of 0.06. The complete model illustrates that home setting, and even exposure to newscasts are crucial for constructing willingness to participate in politics. No indirect effects were reported. It is the variable that most supports the explanation of the endogenous variables, contributing with $\beta = 0.325$ to the explained variance of willingness to participate in politics, and with $\beta = 0.169$ to the explained variance of social awareness.

FIGURE 3
Formation of Citizens in 2007
Discussion

To begin this section, it is necessary to make certain delimitations. In general, Mexico is not expected to make conclusive studies, and on the other hand, the analysis of the formation of Mexican citizens is still in its incipient stages. It is probable, for example, that the analyses of reliability of social awareness—a variable with much tradition in the developed nations—are among the first reported in Mexico; therefore the constructs seem reportable in spite of their moderate character. Another important limitation (the author acknowledges the ruling made in this regard), is that the analysis of data has not been explored at the children’s level in each city. Without doubt, such analysis is necessary and relevant in terms of the regional understanding of children’s political behavior; it should be mentioned that the purpose here has not been to indicate the difference between those who live in different cities of northeastern Mexico, but to show, perhaps more superficially, the way a sociopolitical phenomenon exists in spite of the context of electoral conflict and advertising bombardment, as experienced in Mexico in 2006. As the same criticism has suggested, in addition to comparing electoral and non-electoral scenarios, more analysis is necessary to compare the sub-samples from cities and schools with difference types of financing (public and private) in order to comprehend the phenomenon better.

With all the caution the data deserve, the following question can be explored: How are the future citizens of northeastern Mexico being formed? To devise a response, based on the data shown, the research questions must be answered concretely by children’s attitudes toward civic awareness and political participation, as well as the role the media and family political discussions have on the conformation of such attitudes. An initial question is less empirical and more theoretical, and refers to the general formation of future citizens.

Attitudes about Civic Awareness and Political Participation

The models of trajectories showed that it is plausible to propose something that is assumed intuitively in the daily existence of education in Mexico: that the home setting is the factor that best explains the views of children’s worlds, and more specifically in this case, the willingness to participate in politics and social awareness.
**Television and Family Political Discussions**

The data from the trajectory analysis suggest that exposure to newscasts and the frequency children discuss political topics with their families lead to a dialectic relation. It has not been shown in this analysis, but the data suggest that this relation originates in children’s home setting, derived from parental education and also from the parents’ willingness to exercise their political and social rights.

All of this is relevant because it opens the door to the possibility of acting on the personal plane before the structural. In the context of the criticism of the media during the federal elections of 2006, and even after that criticism, the starting point was the principle of television’s centrality in the daily life of Mexico. A series of studies (Huerta, Garagarza and Villegas, 1999; Huerta, 2007) is added to the notion that the impact of television is less, at least among the inhabitants of northeastern Mexico, than the amount and quality of human interaction. In other words, the exposure to television seems always to be mediated by agents, in this concrete case by children’s socialization with family or teachers, as shown elsewhere (Huerta et al., 2006).

**Formation of (Pre)citizens**

The notion of pre-citizenship is relevant because by the sixth grade, according to pedagogues (Fernández, 2005; McDevitt and Kiousis, 2005), children have constructed their cognitive and value bases. Although a discussion exists in terms of the long-term effects of such bases (McDevitt and Kiousis, 2005), there is also a certain consensus regarding the way the available evidence does not permit distrust. In other words, the available data establish that no arguments exist to assume that children’s attitudes, consensus, and differences in the sixth grade do not prevail over the long term.

If so, optimism with respect to the future is possible. The children, or pre-citizens, from the sample will be ready to vote in 2012, with solid bases in terms of the evaluation of democracy. The relevance of interpersonal communication in the formation of political sophistication and evaluation of democracy suggests that intervention at early ages is the key variable for reinforcing a civic culture and greater willingness to participate in politics. However, it is not recommendable to leave schooling to its own devices if educational content is expected to make a difference. Just as Araújo-Olivera et al. (2005) have analyzed, the quality of schooling is a determining factor for a crucial topic like the factors that motivate willingness to participate in politics. In some countries, like the United States and Great Britain, the success of educational intervention for encouraging interaction and thus contributing to the formation of citizens has been proven (Buckingham, 2000; McDevitt and Kiousis, 2005). In Mexico, although the Federal Electoral Institute has indicated the need, consistent efforts have not occurred, regardless of whether or not the political parties receive earmarked funds for these ends. And such efforts are urgent, since the future depends on informed, aware, and participative citizens.

The good news from this study is that the factors closest to students show a greater influence than structural factors. This is good news because it establishes a controllable source for educational and social interventions. It will lead the way, for example, for the Federal Electoral Institute to finish its design of civic education, a crucial part of its 2000-2010 development plan, before becoming entrapped in the designation of advisors. The program has not been completely designed and still lacks financing and support from the SEP. The findings from this study suggest that programs that emphasize the use of exposure to media and that promote parents’ and children’s interaction through the discussion of content are recommendable. Success in this regard has already been seen in Great Britain and the United States, for example (McDevitt and Kiousis, 2005). As in the article by Araújo-Olivera et al. (2005), a central posture of this text is that civic education must be at the heart of Mexico’s educational policy.
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