

Can Women Take the Floor in Parliament? Evidence from the Spanish Lower Chamber

Peer-review document

September 2020

Abstract

There is a general understanding that equal gender representation in parliaments should lead to equal MP participation. Despite the varied range of institutional designs aimed at enforcing gender equality in the electoral process in several liberal democracies, the path to gender equality in MP participation is still far from straightforward. The variation in the institutional mechanisms to enforce legal quotas, electoral systems, and party strategies has led to mixed conclusions regarding the relationship between equal representation and equal participation. This article explores to what extent an institutional reform designed to enforce equal gender representation in parliament fosters equality in gender MP participation, and how party-level strategies neutralize the potential effects of such institutional designs. To do so, we use individual-level data of the Spanish lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) during four legislative terms (2000-2016). The case is relevant because it offers a clear-cut example of the introduction of a legal gender quota for legislative elections in a political system strongly controlled by party organizations.

1 Introduction

There is a general understanding that equal gender representation in parliaments should lead to equal MP participation. Actually, although legal quotas enforcing gender equality in the electoral system are a common practice in liberal democracies (e.g., zipper system in party lists), the path to gender equality in MP participation is still far from straightforward. The variation in the institutional mechanisms to enforce legal quotas, electoral systems, and party strategies has led to mixed conclusions regarding the relationship between equal representation and equal participation.

In this sense, recent literature on comparative parliamentary debates using data at individual level has shown that overall female MPs participate less, although particular case studies point out that, all other things being equal, female MPs are equally active as male MPs (Bäck and Debus 2019, 2). According to (O'Brien and Rickne 2016) increasing female representation might have “acceleration” or “spill-over” effects on other elements of the institutional structure. However, these effects might be mitigated by strong backlashes produced by political actors and accommodated by inherited institutional structures and networks (Yildirim, Kocapinar, and Ecevit 2019), thus hindering equal opportunity for women to become leading and active MPs.

In this article we explore to what extent an institutional reform designed to enforce equal gender representation in parliament fosters equality in gender MP participation. To do so, we use individual-level data of the Spanish lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) during four legislative terms (2000-2016). The Spanish political system is a relevant scenario to analyze the relationship between institutions, gender and inequality in participation for two main reasons. On the one hand, Spain offers an example of the introduction of a legal gender quota for legislative elections. Spain is currently 13th at the world-wide ranking of female representation in parliaments with a score of 41.1% of female MPs in the lower chamber.¹ In 2007, electoral quotas (60/40 for either men or women) were legally introduced by the government.² At the time of enforcing the new law, female representation almost reached 40%, although female MPs give less than 30% of speeches in Parliament. On the other hand, Spain is an example of a party-dominated institutional system. Parties are the main gate-keepers into institutional politics at all levels—candidate selection, access to Parliament, and MP behavior—and their structural power looms large even within the legislative chambers.

Therefore, the case is relevant because it offers an opportunity to explore how a clear-cut institutional reform (the establishment of the legal quota in 2007) and relatively high levels of female MP representation interact with party-led mechanisms oriented toward the prevalence of a gender gap in gender parliamentary participation.

The next section discusses the main literature with which our work dialogues, while section 3 offers relevant information about the Spanish political system with the aim of contextualizing the analysis. Section 4 connects our hypotheses with the theoretical and case-relevant elements introduced in the previous sections. After that, we carry out our empirical analysis and present our main results.

¹See: IPU, Women in national Parliaments: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

²*Ley de Igualdad* (Gender Equality Act), passed in March 2007.

2 Previous literature

In this article we aim to cross-pollinate at least three specific literature fields. On the one hand, we aim to contribute to the debate on female representation in parliaments (Bäck and Debus 2019; Kenny and Verge 2016; Verge et al. 2018; Verge 2013). On the other hand, more specifically, we engage with the literature on the determinants of individual MP participation in parliaments (Proksch and Slapin 2015, 2012; Chaqués, Palau, and Baumgartner 2015; Fernandes, Won, and Martins 2019); at the same time, we touch on how specific aspects of the Spanish political system constrain candidate selection and parliamentary behavior (Colomer 2008; García Roca 2016; Lago Peñas and Lago Peñas 2000).

Among the gender-specific difficulties in accessing politics, women access to the floor in legislative chambers is a relatively new field of study. Recent contributions to this field point out the existence of a severe gender gap in legislative chambers, beyond mere underrepresentation of women, due to a variety of reasons. In a specific analysis of parliamentary debates (Brescoll 2011) found that U.S. male senators in power positions speak more than women, “which may occur either because men and women have different motives for speaking within an organization, reflecting hierarchical relationships versus establishing rapport with others, or because women are concerned about the potential backlash stemming from appearing to talk too much” (2011, 629). This, though, is not specific to U.S. politics. Analyzing the variation in the number of delivered legislative speeches by policy area in the the Czech, German, Estonian, Finnish, Irish, Norwegian and Swedish parliaments, (Bäck and Debus 2019) found that in none of these parliaments the total number of speeches given by female MPs were higher than those given by men. In addition, these authors observed that the underrepresentation of female speeches is more acute when they represent parties with many serving female MPs (Bäck and Debus 2019, 17). Also, regarding party leadership (O’Brien 2015) found that it is harder for women to achieve party leadership, as they are only more likely to be party leaders in minor opposition parties.

Surprisingly, the effects of active speechmaking and accessing the floor might be counterproductive to some extent for female MPs. (Yildirim, Kocapinar, and Ecevit 2019) analysing individual Turkish parliamentaries from 1995 to 2011 found evidence that engaging in parliamentary activity has different effects among men and women MPs. Active women do not always benefit from parliamentary activity, instead according to (Yildirim, Kocapinar, and Ecevit 2019) they might face a backlash because of showing the “wrong” expected qualities from women, that is by looking too assertive. Women’s political careers tend to be shorter since political longevity is less possible if they enter later than men into politics and in many situations face both backlashes and self-exclusion due to social, cultural and psychological

issues (Murray and Sénac 2018). Therefore, seniority is harder to achieve among women than men in legislative chambers and does not have the same effects.

Regarding legal quotas, even if it is a general practice nowadays in liberal democracies there is no evidence of having a direct impact on access to the floor. According to Kenny & Verge “(...) [a]lmost every pluralist democracy uses gender quotas, either in the form of (voluntary) party quotas or statutory quotas introduced by regular legislation, electoral system reforms or constitutional amendments” (2016, 352). Legal quotas might explain women representation in parliaments in so far they imply a direct institutional intervention into election of candidates. Nonetheless, the literature on gender representation has already pointed out the role of parties as gatekeepers to parliaments both in majoritarian and proportional electoral systems, which in turn help explaining gender inequality in representation in both parliaments and governments (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). In this sense, candidate selection has received most attention in this field of research, as it severely affects the capacity of women to access politics and parliaments. The process by which parties select their candidates has been referred to as a “black box” (Kenny and Verge 2016) or “secret garden” (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015), given our lack of knowledge on how parties decide on candidates, although we do know that more often than not they discriminate women in both electoral list positions and in power positions in general even when quotas are legally binding.

Research on electoral systems and quotas has also shown that when the availability of offices is scarce (district magnitude), women access less often to these positions (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Therefore, proportional systems tend to offer more opportunities to women than majoritarian ones. Moreover, quotas work better with closed party lists and specific placement mandates (Verge and Troupel 2011). In a nutshell, although quotas might (obviously) increase female representation, they generally do not lead to gender equality in institutions. Therefore, for many reasons, men retain power positions and do not share power with women even when they are more present in terms of representation (Paxton, Hughes, and Painter 2010; Krook 2009). Parliaments and MPs are not an exception to this rule.

In summary, more female representation does not mean more access to the floor to female MPs. Quotas might have a positive effect, but other factors such as the institutional setting, and political parties organization, seem to be potential moderators of these effects.

3 Relevance of the case-study

In Spain, the introduction of state-wide legal quotas in 2007 was preceded by the practice of positive action within most leftist party organizations since the 1980s (PSC, PCE, PSOE, IU,

BNG, PNV, CC, ERC...), and by the enactment of some regional legislation in the same direction (Castile-La Mancha, Balearic Islands, Basque Country, and Andalusia). Therefore, since the restoration of democracy in 1978 a gradual introduction of positive action measures have taken place, starting simply as voluntary measures and eventually spreading across parties in a diffusion process influenced by both local and international events through social movements (Verge 2008, 400–411).

Yet, the evolution towards the introduction of legal quotas has not translated into effective equality between men and women. For instance, a clear bias can be easily observed in candidate selection, since winnable positions in electoral lists remain mostly reserved to men, specially among conservative parties (PP) at state-wide level. In fact, the PP opposed the introduction of legal quotas and appealed to the Constitutional Court against some of the regional legislation that intended to apply them to sub-national elections. For instance, Amalia Gómez, secretary general of Social Affairs in the first PP government (1996–2000), mocked such legislative efforts labelling them as “the wonderbra quota” (*la cuota del wonderbra*) (*El País*, May 18, 1997: 31) (quoted in Valiente 2008, 132). In a study on Spanish regional parliaments (Oñate 2014) found that discrimination persists at regional level in spite of quotas in Spanish parliaments, since committees and other bodies within parliamentary structures remain dominated by men. (Galais, Öhberg, and Coller 2016) comparing Swedish and Spanish MPs found Spanish women MPs more politically ambitious regarding their political careers probably due to their relatively recent entrance into politics. However, this ambition comes with a price since “to be an ambitious female politician in Spain is conditioned: candidates must fight harder than men in order to establish a family and are still more dependent on familial support in order to fulfill their career ambition.” (Galais, Öhberg, and Coller 2016, 617).

The Spanish parliamentary system is strongly dominated by political parties. According to (Proksch and Slapin 2015) in the Spanish parliamentary model individual MPs have little margin of maneuver to access the floor except when channeled through political parties’ structures. In fact, during the political transition agreements (in 1978) the Spanish parliamentary model was inspired by the canonical “parliamentary rationalization” designed by (Mirkin-Guetzévitch 1934) after the Weimar experience (García Roca 2016). A complex overlap of institutional features including legislative-executive relationships, parliamentary rules, electoral rules and the resulting party organizational characteristics make free representative mandate virtually nonexistent in Spain (Sánchez de Dios 1998). Inspired by the German Fundamental Law, the Spanish constitution has a clear preference for a strong executive. The prime minister is elected by a plurality vote in the Lower chamber, and then

the PM can appoint ministers at will. However, the PM can only be removed through a constructive motion of no-confidence followed by an absolute majority vote (that must include an alternative candidate)³. In parliamentary debates, members of the executive have priority to access the floor in all kinds of debates (Field and Hamann 2008). Actually, a huge majority of approved legislative pieces (roughly 80%) in the Spanish parliament are initiated by the government (Magone 2008). Executive relevance is made even weaker because of the bicameral division of the legislative branch. Although Spain's upper chamber is constitutionally defined as a chamber for territorial representation, it can hardly be considered as such: the number of senators elected through provincial electoral districts (208) largely outweigh those appointed by regional parliaments (58). As a consequence, the *Senado* is mainly a second reading chamber and has only a temporary veto power (two months maximum)⁴.

The Spanish electoral system is clearly intended to reinforce the institutionalization of political parties through “closed and fixed” lists (Heywood 1995). In spite of being formally proportional (with a d'Hondt formula), in practice it behaves as a majoritarian system in more than half of the districts. Up to 38 provinces elect less than 9 seats. As a result, the absolute majority in the lower chamber can be achieved with only 33% of state-wide popular vote. The overall average district magnitude to the lower chamber is 6.7 (the median is 5). Moreover, parliamentary rules constrain even more the notion of free mandate of MPs. Parliamentary debates are organized through parliamentary groups with strong party discipline led by the group leaders (called group spokespersons) who attend the Board of Spokespersons and organize parliamentary affairs including deciding on legislative committee positions, timing and other activities. At the same time, individual MP access to the floor is virtually always controlled by group leaders. In fact, the only chance to “speak freely” for an individual MP is when she speaks “by allusions”, and then she can only speak for a maximum of three minutes. Finally, the characteristics of the party system and party organizations within this institutional setting is, again, an additional constrain to individual MPs. State-wide party organizations remain highly centralized, and inclusive methods of candidate selection are only very recent and mostly occur at regional level (Hopkin 2009; Bermúdez and Cordero 2017). Moreover, in the case of state-wide parties the leaders of the parliamentary group tend to be the leaders of their party.

Summing up, access to the floor in Spain is constrained by a total dominance of parliamentary

³There has only been one successful motion of no confidence (out of 4 attempts) in the history of the Spanish democracy. It was in June 2018 against the conservative Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy led by the current Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

⁴The constitutional design of the Spanish upper chamber established the provinces as electoral districts (as in the lower chamber), a majoritarian electoral system, and replaced royal senators (a pre-democratic heritage) by regional senators appointed by regional legislative chambers (Colomer 2008).

group structures through at least three intertwined mechanisms related to party structures: electoral list composition, committee control and party leadership. The combination of all these characteristics makes the Spanish parliamentary system a model of leaders, discipline, party unity and “cardboard deputies” (Field 2013). This fact obviously affects female representation and in turn limits the participation of women in parliament, as we show in the next sections. In a recent study on Spanish MPs including state-wide and regional legislative chambers (Verge et al. 2018) found evidence of statistically significant differences regarding men and women MPs. According to these authors women MPs are single in larger proportion than their male counterparts, have less children, are more educated and more socially trained and start their political career at an older age. Moreover, both in regional and state-wide legislative assemblies there is vertical and horizontal segregation regarding committees; that is, female MPs are mainly concentrated in the parliamentary committees dedicated to social welfare, disability, equality, women, immigration, human rights and health but hold lower positions than men on average (Verge et al. 2018).

4 Hypotheses

Drawing on the literature and existing evidence on the Spanish case, we expect women to be less likely to take parliamentary floor during the period of our analysis. Although we know that women MPs might be more politically ambitious (Galais, Öhberg, and Coller 2016), being less experienced and having relatively less power positions than male counterparts (Verge et al. 2018) might frustrate their willingness to access the floor in spite of increasing their descriptive representation.

- *H1: Female MPs have less access to the floor than male MPs.*

However, we do expect to observe relevant variation in participation when controlling for individual variables, the most relevant of which is seniority. We assume that seniority will give more access to the floor to female MPs, as seniority is a generally-functioning, non-written rule in parliamentary behavior. For instance, (Heinsohn and Schiefer 2019) observed a positive effect of this rule to explain political careers within legislative chambers in Germany.

- *H2: The more female MP seniority, the more access to the floor.*

Institutional variables have been deemed relevant by the literature as well. We expect to observe differences among parties in terms of female MPs access to the floor depending on their ideology and internal organization, especially regarding measures of positive action towards gender equality. We assume that the existence of party-level mechanisms for gender equality

should provide more opportunities to female MPs belonging to this party’s parliamentary group. Since party organizations are the main gate-keepers not only to Parliament but also to floor access, we assume that party organizations with a gender policy legacy will be more prone to promote equal access to the floor. This would mirror their attitude before the introduction of legal quotas (Verge et al. 2018).

- *H3: Female MPs in parties opposing gender quotas (PP), or that never had internal gender quotas, will participate less in parliament than male MPs.*

The introduction of legal quotas in 2007 was first implemented in the 2008 general elections. Therefore, although we know that this institutional reform arrived when most parties were already implementing internal quotas, we expect a positive effect of the reform in terms of access to the floor compared to previous terms beyond descriptive representation. We are aware that quotas *per se* can be subverted by informal party practices in many ways placing women in “no-hope” seats (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015). However, we may also assume that given the history of internal party rules the introduction of quotas in Spain was part of a larger long-term cultural and institutional change (Verge et al. 2018). We thus take a naive stand in this hypothesis.

- *H4: Legal quotas increased female MPs’ access to the floor.*

5 Data and methods

We use data on individual MPs from the 7th to 10th terms (2000-2016) of the Spanish lower chamber (N=1,639). Our dependent variable measuring access to the floor or simply parliamentary participation is measured through the number of speeches given by a single MP. To do so, we use all speeches given during all parliamentary sessions of the Spanish lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) in all four legislative terms. We count any single oral participation of an MP as a separate speech, so we can expect MPs giving more than one speech in one single session. To count speeches, we use the updated dataset gathered by Christian Rauh, Pieter de Wilde, and Jan Schwalbach in the *ParlSpeech dataset* (Rauh, De Wilde, and Schwalbach 2017), which contains all speeches given in the *Congreso de los Diputados* during the period. From that, we extracted the number of speeches given by each individual MP each term. Regarding the other variables about individual MPs and their parties, they were gathered by the authors, except some of the variables from the 7th term that were kindly shared by the Q-Dem research group of the University of Barcelona.

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics of individual MPs. In sum, 59,908 were given by

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of individual MP, party, and district characteristics.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Number of speeches	1,639	36.55	73.67	0	683
Sex (Female)	1,639	0.36	0.48	0	1
Party size	1,639	141.91	52.94	1	186
Seniority (terms)	1,639	1.30	1.69	0	9
Age	1,490	48.78	9.31	23.57	85.02
Party Family	1,639	2.20	1.29	1	5
Committee Chair	1,639	0.15	0.65	0	10
Minister	1,639	0.03	0.17	0	1
Government party member	1,639	0.51	0.50	0	1
Legislative party leadership	1,639	0.09	0.29	0	1
Party leader	1,639	0.01	0.10	0	1
Exposure	1,639	0.82	0.28	0.01	1.00
List ranking	1,639	3.68	3.83	1	28
District size	1,639	12.16	10.76	1	36
First year MP	1,638	1.47	0.50	1.00	2.00
Native district	1,485	0.67	0.47	0.00	1.00

1,016 different Spanish MPs (N=1,639) throughout the four legislative terms under study (2000-2016).⁵ In order to reduce noise in the dependent variable, we have removed all speeches containing less than 50 words. The distribution of speeches is highly skewed. In fact, the overall average of speeches is 36.6 but the median is just 9.

On the other hand, we have data on a number of variables at different levels. At the MP level, we have sex, seniority (number of terms), age, number of committee assignments, list position in her district, and whether she is committee chair, minister, member of government party, member of the party leadership, and native from the district in which she was elected. An exposure variable has also been created to measure the proportion of term time (in days) served by each MP. At higher levels of data we have party size (number of seats), party family (following the classification by (Volgens et al. 2019)), and district size.

In order to test our hypotheses, we start with a simple descriptive analysis of the data and then fit Poisson regression models to test the main effects with and without controls. Because our measure of access floor participation is the number of speeches given by each MP in each term, it is actually bounded count data—with a strict lower bound in value 0. Moreover, 16% of MPs in our data gave zero speeches. Modeling variation of count data through linear models may cause estimation problems, given that OLS assumes that values are normally distributed and that the response variable can take any real value (Cameron and Trivedi 2013). Count data can be better modeled through log-linear regression models that assume

⁵The Spanish lower chamber has 350 seats, but several MPs serve during more than one legislative term. Our dataset has 1,639 rows, but only 1,016 unique MPs.

more realistic distributions in the response data, such as Poisson (Gelman and Hill 2006). To that effect, we fit Poisson regression models to explain variation in number of speeches as a function of gender, seniority, and the other variables of interest.

6 Analysis

6.1 Descriptive results

Throughout the four terms of our analysis (2000-2016), the representation of women in the Spanish lower chamber grew by almost 7 points (31.7% to 38.9%). In general, this growth in representation was accompanied by an increase in access to parliamentary floor, but with two relevant caveats. On the one hand, female MP's speeches increased at a higher pace than their representation, 13.1 and 7.2 points respectively, although female access to the floor remained significantly lower than their representation. In other words, at their peak of representation (38.9% of female MPs in the 10th term), female MPs only produced 31.6% of speeches given in parliament, as can be seen in Figure 1. On the other hand, the figure also shows that at the descriptive level the introduction of quotas in the 9th term does not seem to have had a significant impact on female access to the floor.

Regarding seniority, Figure 2 shows, first, that male MPs tend to give more speeches than female MPs at all levels of seniority. Secondly, it also shows that female MPs are at their peak of access floor when they are on their third term as MPs, after which their participation decreases. In contrast, male MPs increase their participation with seniority up until their fifth term.

Related to this, Figure 3 shows that when female MPs are serving their third term (seniority of two terms), both male and female speech share responds to the actual representation of male and female MPs in parliament. Before and after that level of seniority, male MPs' speeches are always overrepresented compared to the share of male MPs, while female's voice is always underrepresented.

In regard to party organization, the gender gap between representation and access to the floor does not follow a homogeneous pattern, although it is present in most parties across terms (see Figure 4). In the two largest parties, PP and PSOE, male MPs give more speeches than female MPs, although the percentage of male speeches is higher in the conservative party (PP, 76%) than in the social democrats (PSOE, 64%). The PP governed in the 7th and 10th terms while the PSOE did so in the 8th and 9th. In both parties, the evolution towards more access to the floor certainly reduced the gender gap, but a match between

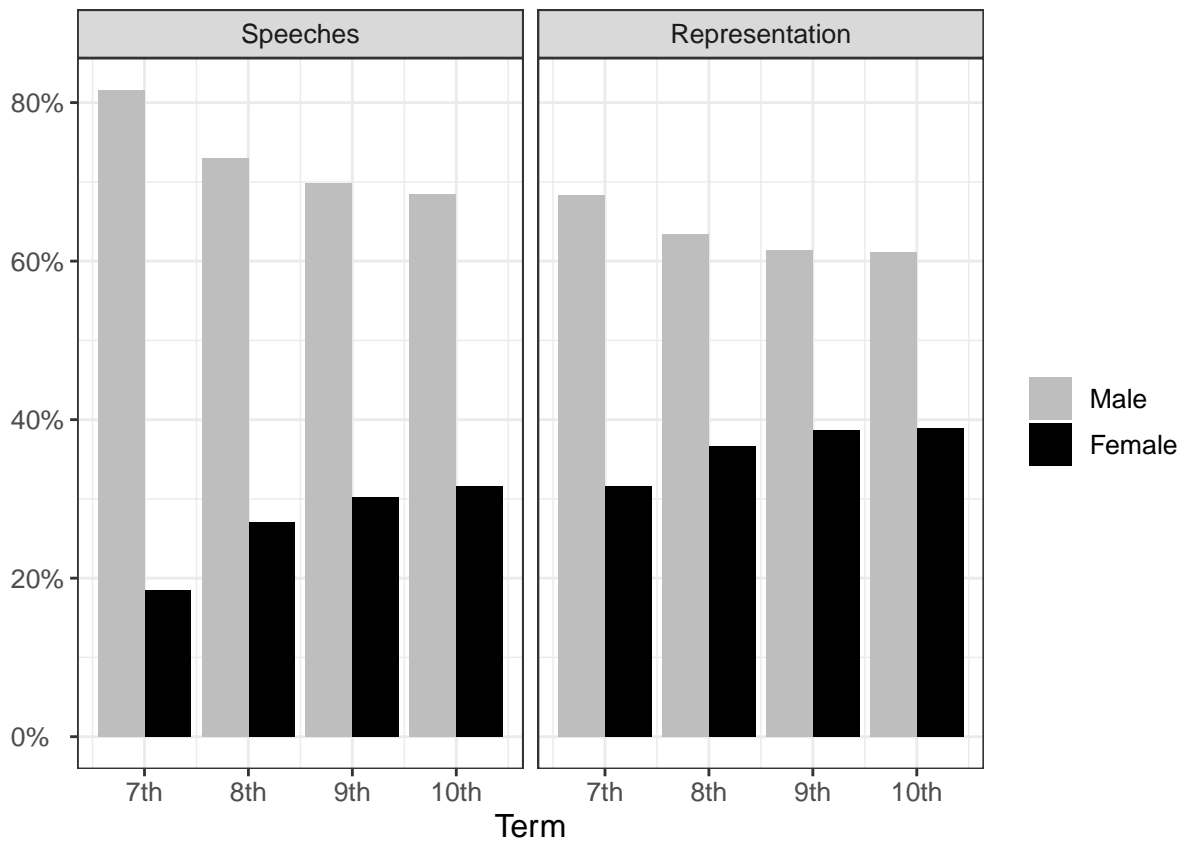


Figure 1: Distribution of variables by sex and term.

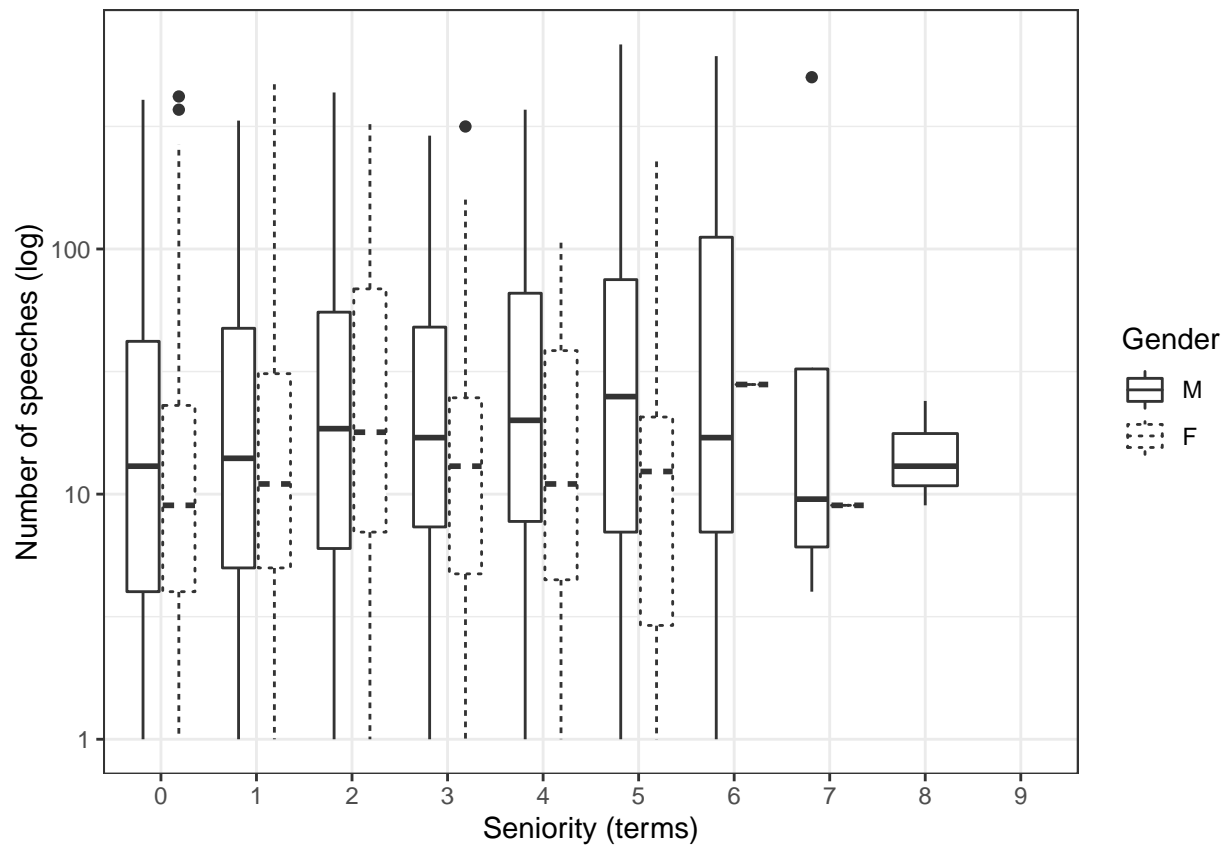


Figure 2: Number of speeches by sex and seniority.

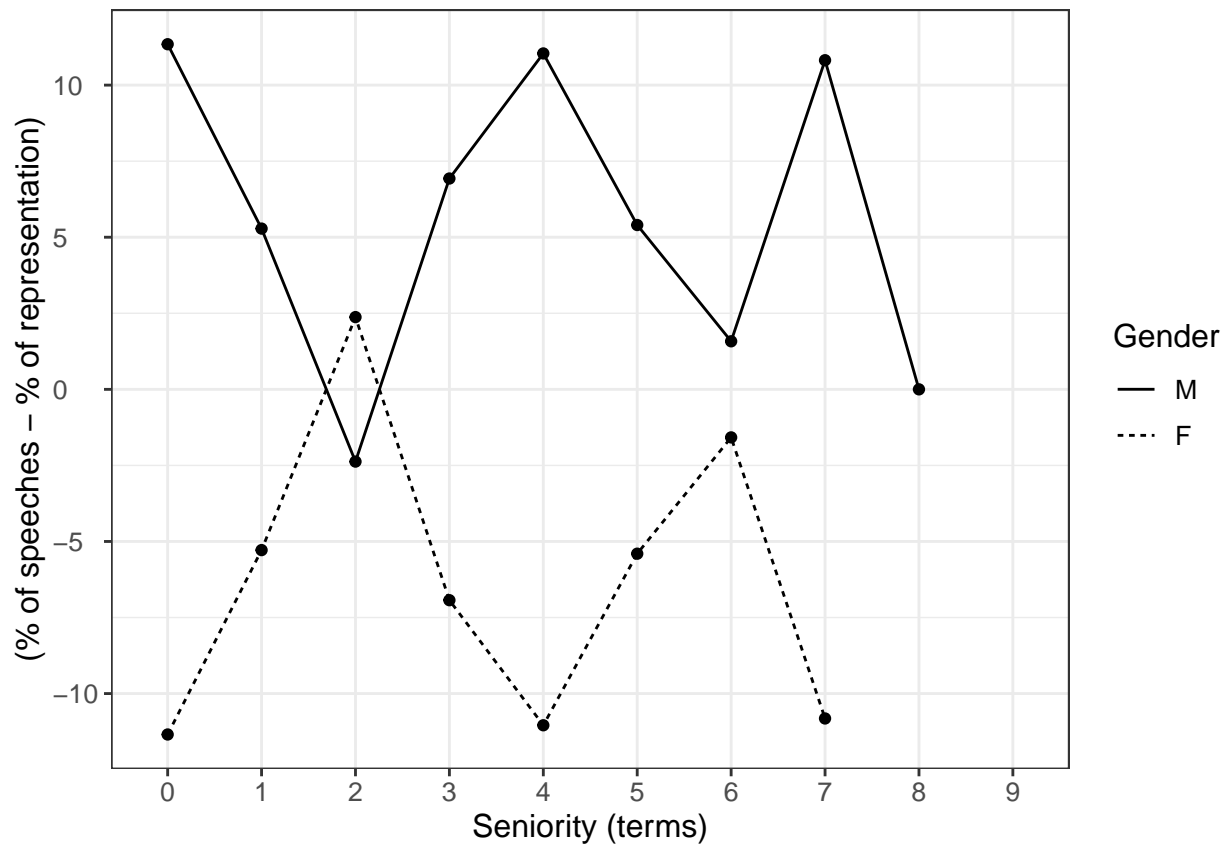


Figure 3: Difference between speeches and representation by sex and seniority.

gender representation and speeches only occurs in the PSOE in the 9th and 10th terms. On the other hand, only in smaller parties where female MPs are majority (UPyD, EA, Na-Bai and GBai) do female MPs give more speeches than male MPs, while in other small to medium parties (IU, CiU, PNV), male speech is dominant throughout.

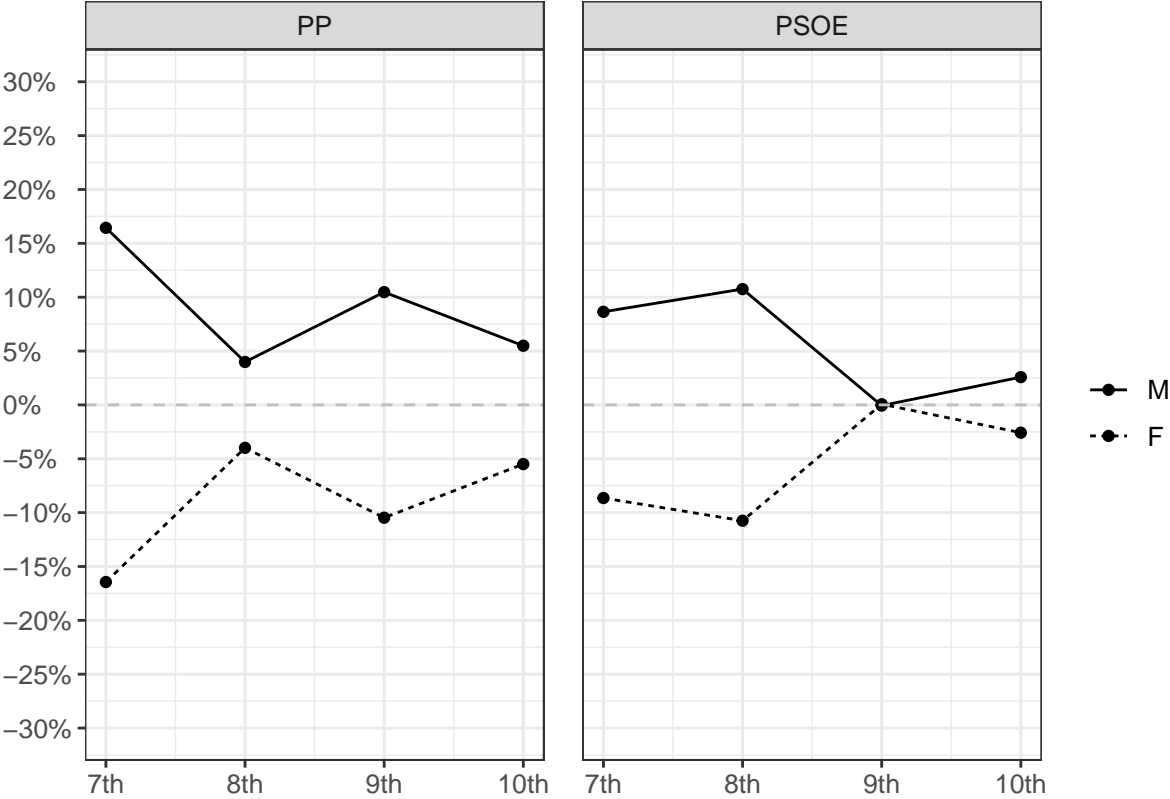


Figure 4: Difference between MPs representation and speeches by sex and terms in the two largest parties.

6.2 Multivariate results

The main empirical results of our count models on the number of speeches are shown in Table 2. We start with four different models, all including term fixed effects. The first model only includes gender as independent variable, while the second includes control variables such as MP age, education, party family, and exposure. The third model includes seniority and inter- and intra-party politics variables. The fourth one is a pooled model including all covariates and controls.

Gender yields a significantly negative coefficient for female MPs, which proves robust to our

Table 2: Count regression model of speeches in the Spanish Parliament on individual MP characteristics.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Number of speeches			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-0.449*** (0.009)	-0.212*** (0.010)	-0.214*** (0.010)	-0.136*** (0.010)
Age		0.116*** (0.004)		0.070*** (0.005)
Age squared		-0.001*** (0.00004)		-0.001*** (0.00005)
University degree		0.305*** (0.014)		0.300*** (0.015)
Socialdemocratic party		2.065*** (0.016)		0.736*** (0.032)
Regional party		0.132*** (0.011)		0.135*** (0.012)
Other left party		2.553*** (0.025)		1.096*** (0.042)
Liberal party		1.745*** (0.011)		1.049*** (0.030)
Exposure (ln)		1.030*** (0.016)		0.814*** (0.016)
Seniority (years)			0.131*** (0.003)	0.146*** (0.003)
Party size (ln)			-0.441*** (0.004)	-0.213*** (0.008)
Committee chair			-0.573*** (0.016)	-0.663*** (0.016)
Minister			2.052*** (0.016)	2.007*** (0.016)
Governing party			-0.136*** (0.013)	-0.079*** (0.014)
Legislative party leadership			0.458*** (0.013)	0.400*** (0.012)
Party leader			0.539*** (0.019)	0.764*** (0.022)
List ranking			-0.091*** (0.002)	-0.082*** (0.002)
District size			0.020*** (0.0004)	0.017*** (0.0005)
First year MP			0.022* (0.012)	0.129*** (0.012)
Native from district			-0.161*** (0.009)	-0.172*** (0.009)
Constant	3.730*** (0.008)	0.279*** (0.105)	5.264*** (0.028)	2.302*** (0.121)
Fixed effects (term)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,639	1,489	1,484	1,444
Log Likelihood	-68,609.750	-38,928.380	-26,339.350	-21,746.630
Akaike Inf. Crit.	137,229.500	77,882.760	52,710.690	43,541.260

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

fully specified models. In particular, although the effect of gender decreases when models include controls, it remains sizable and significant. These results are consistent with findings of previous research (Proksch and Slapin 2015) and especially (Bäck, Debus, and Fernandes 2021).

Figure 5 shows the predicted number of speeches by gender according to our full regression model (including all controls). Controlling for all other factors, women access the floor less frequently than their male colleagues—female MPs give on average between 5 and 6 speeches less than male MPs—, which gives support to our first hypothesis.

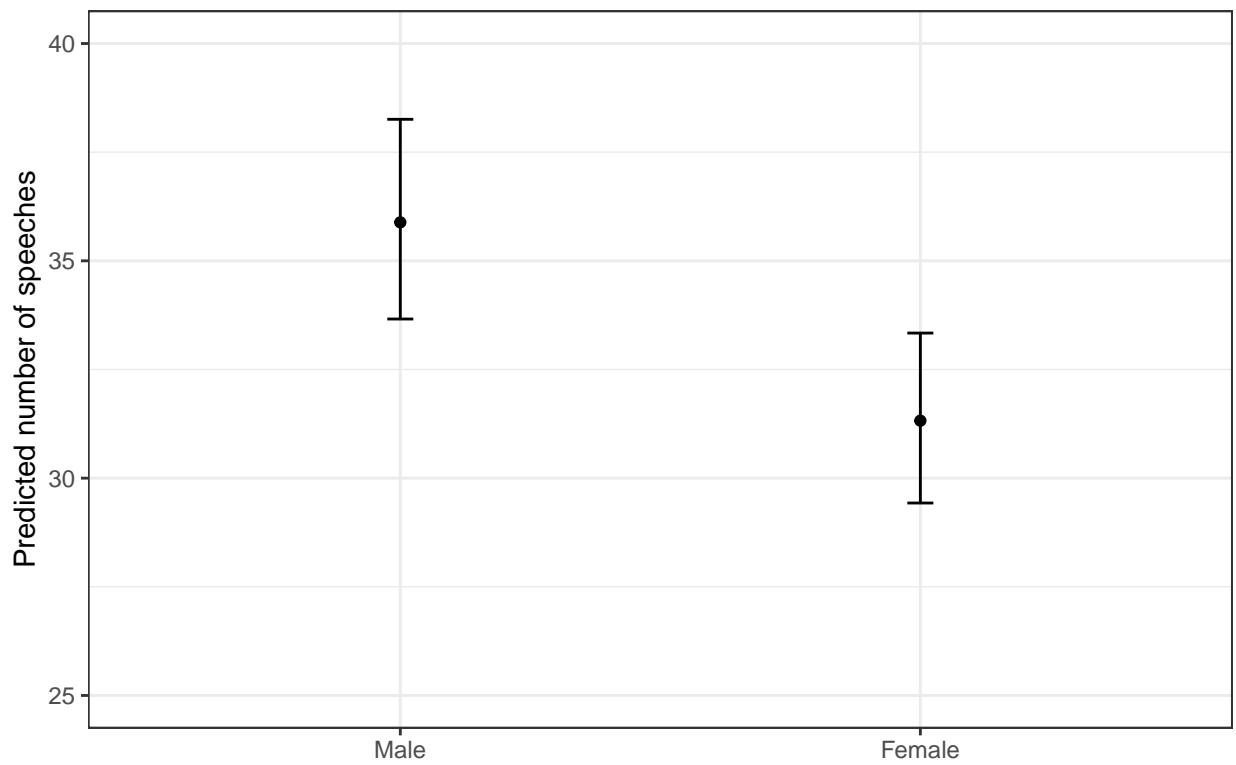


Figure 5: Predicted number of speeches given by male and female MPs.

On the other hand, Figure 8 shows the result of interacting gender with seniority. In both male and female MPs increase their floor participation as they grow more senior among their colleagues. However, consistently with our first findings, the interaction depicts a slower path to the floor for female MPs, which not only leaves female MPs clearly underrepresented in participation at later stages of seniority, but these differences start being significant at very early stages. For instance, at one-term seniority, male MPs give on average 5 speeches more;

at three terms, the difference increases to 9; at five it grows to 16 speeches, which increases to almost 50 speeches more given by male MPs among those most experienced MPs. If seniority is measured through years results are exactly the same: differences in participation between male and female MPs grow to the point of doubling at highest levels of seniority.

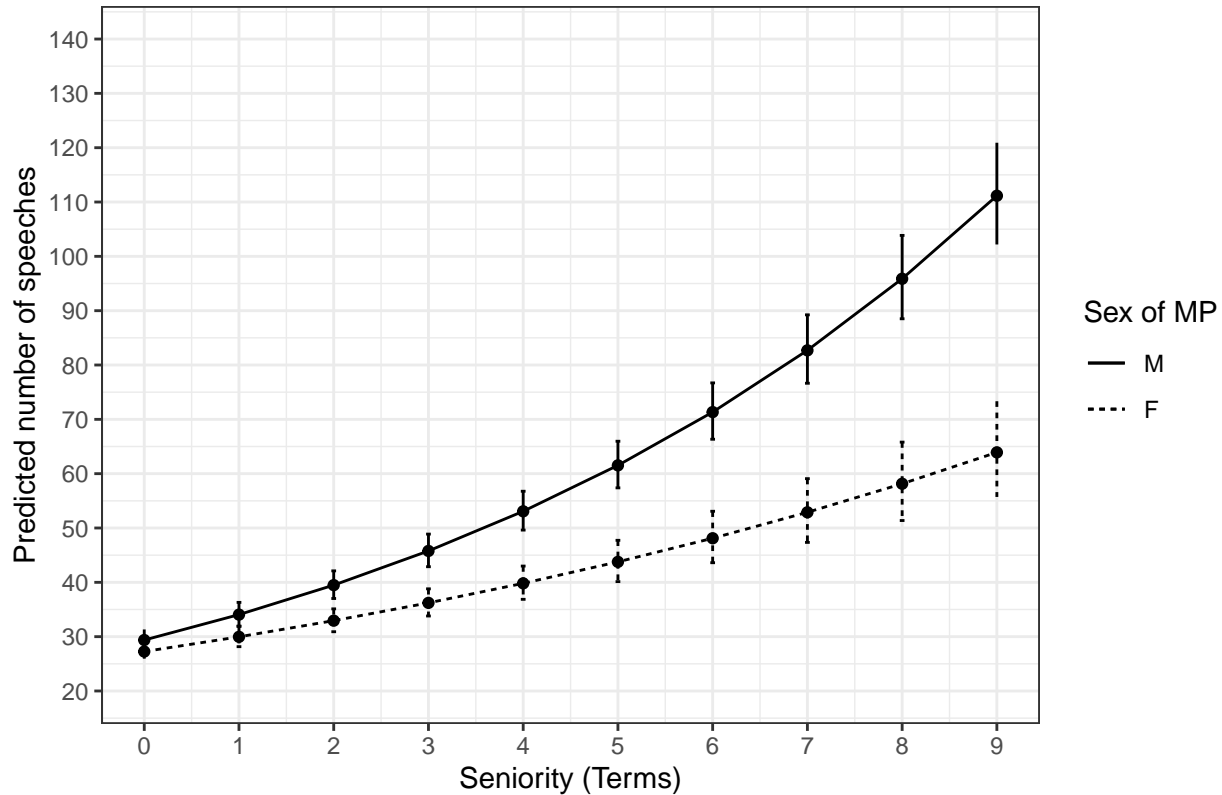


Figure 6: Predicted number of speeches in the Spanish parliament by seniority.

The results regarding the effects of gender and seniority suggest that the internal organization of Spanish parliamentary parties—the ones that control access floor participation in the Spanish lower chamber (Bäck, Debus, and Fernandes 2021)—systematically give female MPs less prominent roles in parliament, which in turn would make the effect of seniority endogenous to party organizational strategies. On the one hand, although our descriptive analysis gave support to the hypothesis that the Spanish conservative PP gives on average less opportunities to female MPs to access the floor, in our fully specified multivariate models the differences between parties practically vanish. As shown in Figure 7, the gender gap in participation is systematic and significant across all types of parliamentary parties. In both conservative and social democratic (PP and PSOE, respectively), the average number

of speeches given by MPs are lower than in the rest of parties because these two parties have large parliamentary groups and therefore on average each MP participates less. Yet, in all cases female MPs participate less than male MPs.

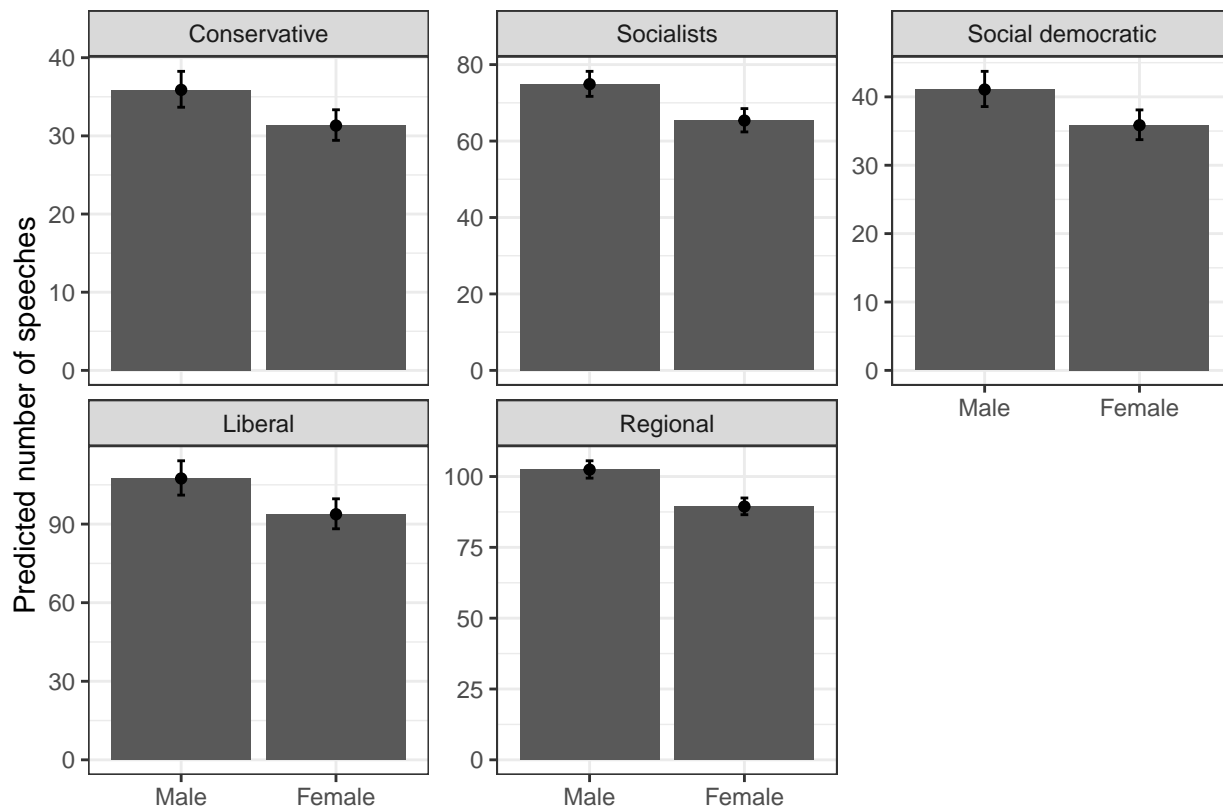


Figure 7: Difference in floor access between male and female MPs by party family.

In this respect, our multivariate results also show that organizational factors such as being a party leader, being assigned committee duties and occupying upper ranking positions in the electoral list during legislative elections—all factors strongly controlled by party apparatus—translate into more access floor participation, but at unequal levels for male and female MPs. Actually, throughout the 16 years under study (4 terms), the probability of being party leader is significantly lower for female MPs ($p < 0.05$), the difference in average electoral list position for male and female MPs is statistically significant in favor of male MPs ($p < 0.05$), and female MPs have on average less committee assignments (not statistically significant).

This leads us to our last hypothesis—whether the implementation of gender quotas in electoral lists reduced the gender gap in floor access. Given that quotas were implemented in the elections that led to the 9th legislative term, we fitted an interaction between gender and

term. Its effects can be seen in Figure 8. Overall, in the 9th term less speeches were given by both male and female MPs than in previous terms, because the 9th term was a bit shorter. Actually, this is the only change occurring in the 9th term, because differences in floor access between male and female MPs remain untouched despite quotas—female MPs always participate less, all other factors being equal.

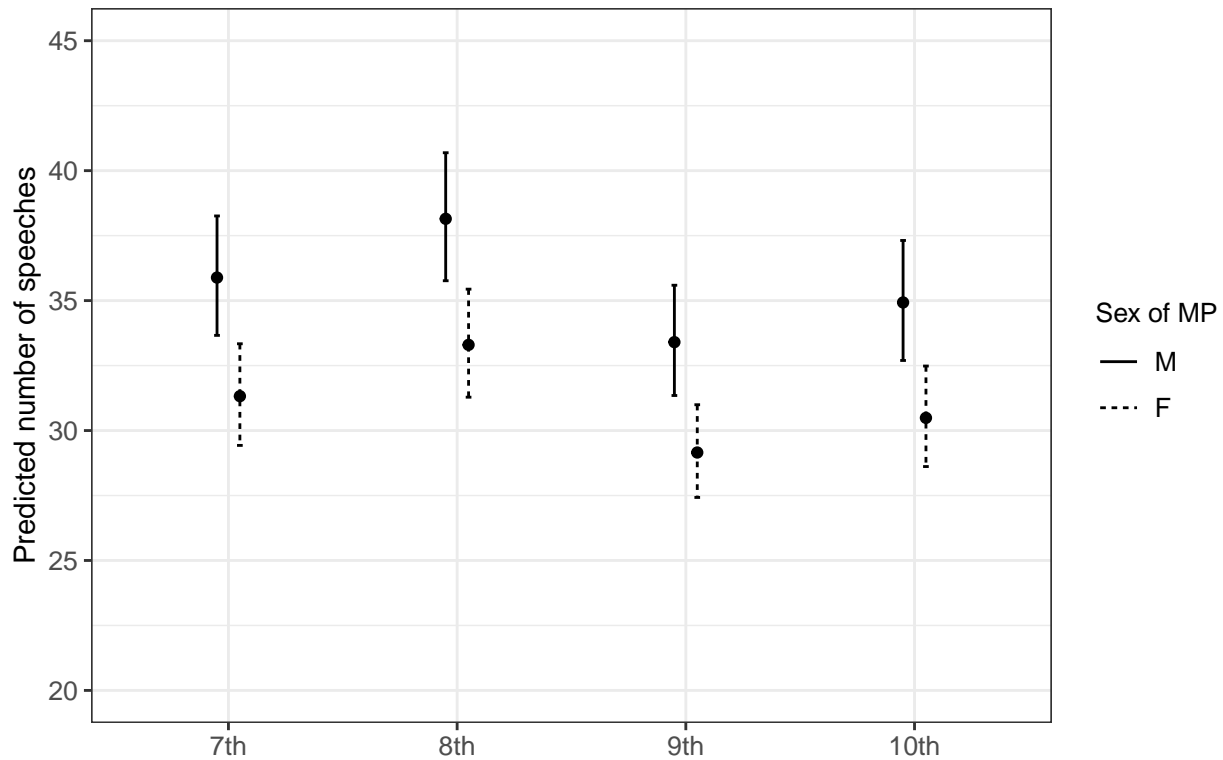


Figure 8: Predicted number of speeches in the Spanish parliament by sex and term.

We only observe some change in organizational factors that eventually affect participation such as electoral list position. The data show that the number of female MPs elected in the first position of their electoral list has doubled (21 to 41) throughout the four terms. This naturally has affected the ratio between male and female MPs on top of their lists. However, Figure 9 shows that although in the 7th term there were 5 times more male MPs at the top of their electoral lists, after the implementation of gender quotas this ratio decreased to 2. Still, this suggests that parties tend to secure positions for male MPs twice as much as female MPs, which in turn perpetuates the gender gap. Even more, despite the number of female MPs elected on top of their electoral list has increased, floor participation of female MPs is

still significantly lower than that of male MPs.

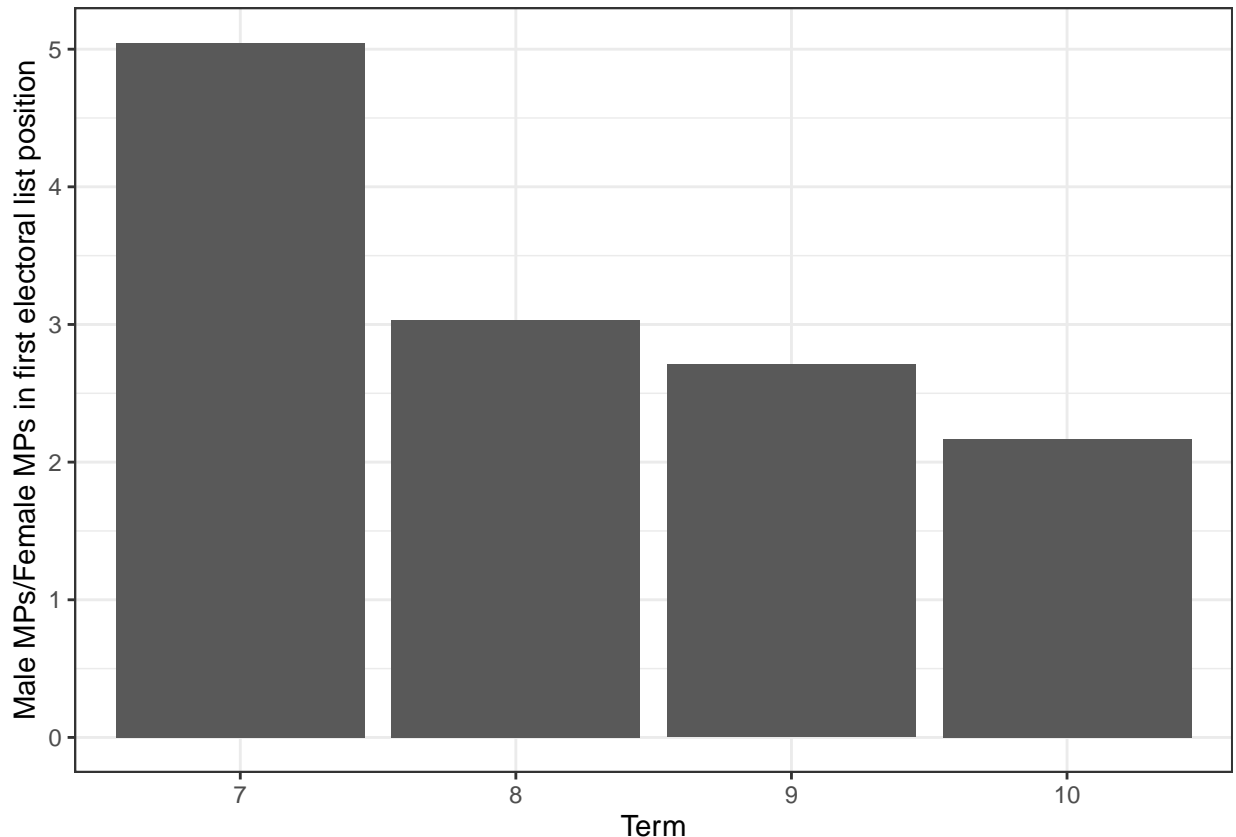


Figure 9: Average electoral list position of male and female MPs throughout the four terms.

7 Conclusions

Women are increasingly present in democratic parliaments. However, improving female representation in legislative chambers does not automatically translate into their equal access to the floor. Several factors prevent female MPs from taking part of legislative debates in the same conditions as their male counterparts. In this paper we find evidence of a gender gap in accessing the floor (measured through delivered speeches) using data from the Spanish legislative chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) during four legislative terms (2000-2016).

First, we observe a persistent and significant gender gap in accessing the floor. According to our empirical results and controlling for all other factors, female MPs access the floor less frequently than their male colleagues. Gender is a significant variable in all our models, and it always has a negative effect for female MPs.

Gender discrimination starts the first term served in Parliament and, according to our results, it grows in parallel to seniority. Seniority has positive effects both to male and female MPs, but these effects are stronger among men. At highest levels of seniority male MPs double their expected participation compared to female MPs. We think these effects are endogenous to party organizational strategies rather than ideology. In our models, when controlling by all variables, the effects of belonging to conservative or other parties practically vanishes, while organizational factors such as being party leader, holding committee duties and occupying upper positions in the electoral list have positive effects on floor participation.

Regarding these organizational aspects, moreover, we also find important differences between male and female MPs. The probability of being party leader is significantly lower among female MPs, there is a significant difference in average list position in favor of men, and female MPs hold on average less committee assignments (although this is not statistically significant). These findings are consistent with previous research in the field. Therefore, despite cultural and social changes, vertical and horizontal segregation in Parliament persists (Verge et al. 2018). Our main contribution is that we find evidence on how these organizational factors regarding parliamentary activity directly translate into a gender gap in terms of parliamentary participation.

We also contribute to a better understanding of the effects of institutional reform aimed at equal representation and participation. We do not find evidence of the introduction of legal quotas improving access to the floor of women MPs. However, we do find indirect effects of the introduction of legal quotas on how parties select their candidates. Before the introduction of legal quotas male candidates were 5 times more present than female candidates in party lists, whereas after the introduction of legal quotas (8th legislative term), this ratio decreased to two twice as much.

All in all, our findings reinforce the common assumption that the gender gap in politics reaches far beyond descriptive representation. Gender differences are “embedded throughout political careers, shaping qualifications, expertise, and perceptions. It is only when this cumulative effect is understood that the broader ramifications for gendered representation can be fully appreciated and more effective solutions proposed” (Murray and Sénac 2018). Access to the floor is another example of the deep roots of gender inequality in politics.

Further research on individual factors explaining parliamentary participation should dig deeper in these inequalities using richer datasets and a comparative approach. We do know that unequal access to the floor between male and female MPs is a product of organizational aspects, but we still miss the specific causal mechanisms. We also ignore how “demand”

factors such as political ambition or other external variables influence female parliamentary participation (Galais, Öhberg, and Coller 2016). Therefore, further research is needed to shed light on gender gap when accessing the floor in liberal democracies.

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