

Can women take the floor in parliament? Evidence from the Spanish lower chamber

Marc Sanjaume-Calvet^{a,*}, Joan-Josep Vallbé^b, Marina Muñoz-Puig^a

^a Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain

^b Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

Women's numeric representation has increased worldwide, still gender inequalities within parliaments hinder women's chance to effectively conduct legislative work. 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 women's descriptive representation and their level of parliamentary work. This article explores 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 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

This article demonstrates that even when gender equality in numeric representation is achieved, pervasive inequalities are still embedded in parliaments, which result in an unequal distribution of positions, roles, and tasks between men and women legislators. Actually, although legal quotas enforcing gender equality in the electoral system are a common practice in 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 the possibility to conduct legislative activity on equal terms. A more equal parliamentary representation does not always translate into a more equal parliamentary participation. Access to the floor does not necessarily depend on numeric equality between male and female MPs.

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 & 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

(Krook, 2016; Yildirim et al., 2021), thus hindering equal opportunity for women to become leading and active MPs. In a nutshell, persistent gender inequalities may be overlooked when narrowly focusing on the numeric presence of women, but they become clear when scrutinising the functioning of representative institutions and their office-holders' participation. Parliaments are “gendered institutions” and “gendered workplaces” (Dahlerup, 1988) although the specific causal mechanisms explaining gender inequalities are still understudied (Erikson & Verge, 2020).

In this article we use individual-level data of the Spanish lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) during four legislative terms (2000–2016) to explore to what extent gender equality in descriptive representation leads to equality in speech making. While this is the first systematic study of gendered access to parliamentary floor in Spain, the article expands the empirical work on gendered parliamentary activity and the role of women in legislative institutions (Bäck et al., 2014; Murray, 2010; Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017), in particular, on the gendered selection of MPs in relation to speech making by demonstrating a gender gap in access to the floor in spite of the existence of electoral quotas and a more equal overall female representation. We consistently show that more equal numeric representation does not necessarily lead to equal MP participation, providing evidence that Parliaments are indeed ‘gendered institutions’ that include, protect and promote power relations between genders (Erikson & Verge, 2020). Therefore, equal representation does not necessarily imply equal MP participation as we

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: marc.sanjaume@upf.edu (M. Sanjaume-Calvet).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102694>

Received 13 January 2022; Received in revised form 11 January 2023; Accepted 16 February 2023

Available online 23 February 2023

0277-5395/© 2023 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

will see in the next sections. The Spanish political system is a relevant scenario to analyse 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 gave <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 (Vallbé & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2021).

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 towards the prevalence of a gender gap in gender parliamentary work.

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.

2. Previous literature

Parliaments are “gendered institutions” (Erikson & Verge, 2020; Lowndes 2020). There is a growing literature focusing on the institutional resistance to gender equality (Krook, 2016) due to embedded power relations between genders through both formal and informal mechanisms. Electoral quotas have diffused rapidly, especially in the West, aiming to balance gender representation. However, in spite of an increasing numeric balance between genders, parliaments remain reluctant to equally distribute tasks and positions of power. This is due to a number 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 Czech, German, Estonian, Finnish, Irish, Norwegian and Swedish parliaments, (Bäck & 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 & Debus, 2019, 17). Also, in relation to 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.

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 (2016) “(...) almost 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. Murray (2010), studying the French case, found evidence that legal quotas “do the job” since she did not observe differences between male and female MPs in terms of quantity of tasks performed at the Parliament.

Nonetheless, the literature on gender representation has already pointed out the role of parties as gate-keepers (Kenny, 2013) to parliaments both in majoritarian and proportional electoral systems, which in turn help explaining gender inequality in representation in both parliaments and governments (Norris & 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 & Verge, 2016) or “secret garden” (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988), 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. Likewise, political parties play a central role in distributing tasks and positions among MPs, for instance, assignation to parliamentary committees or to senior legislative positions (Pansardi & Vercesi, 2017; Smrek, 2020). The Spanish party system is strongly determined by the electoral system design and the rules on party funding. The electoral system reinforces party elites by institutionalizing a system of closed and fixed lists selected by parties' senior members (normally males); while the funding system attributes resources to party organizations, not individual MPs, giving even more power to party elites. The combination of strong party elites and strict parliamentary rules in which parliamentary speakers normally are party leaders at the same time explain the central role of political parties (Vallbé & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2021).

Research on electoral systems and quotas has also shown that when the availability of offices is scarce (district size), women access less often to these positions (Norris & 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 & 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 (Krook, 2009; Paxton et al., 2010). Parliaments and MPs are not an exception to this rule.

Finally, the effects of active speechmaking and accessing the floor might be counterproductive to some extent for female MPs. Yildirim et al. (2021) analyzing individual Turkish MPs 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 et al. (2021) 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 & Sénac, 2018). Therefore, seniority is harder to achieve among women than men in legislative chambers and does not have the same effects.

In summary, more female representation might 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 in “gendered institutions” such as parliaments. Representation of women MPs might easily turn into “presence without presence” (Clayton et al., 2014).

3. Relevance and characteristics of the case-study

In Spain, the introduction of state-wide legal quotas in 2007 was

¹ See: IPU, Women in national Parliaments: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> ²Ley de Igualdad (Gender Equality Act), passed in March 2007.

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 has 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, especially 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 et al. (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 et al., 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 channelled through political parties' structures.

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's positions, timing and other activities. At the same time, individual MP access to the floor is virtually always controlled by group leaders. According to the Standing Orders of the Congress of Deputies, the distribution of parliamentary work, committee's composition and speaking-time are decided by the Board of Spokesmen (*Junta de Portavoces*), that is the meeting of parliamentary group speakers. Through this institution chances to “freely” access the floor for an individual deputy is virtually inexistent. Discussions are moderated by the parliamentary presidency (Vallbé & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2021). 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 3 min. In legislative debates the time limit is normally 15 min (two times if is a Law Proposition) plus 10 or 15 min for reply except for investiture, motions of no-confidence and motions of confidence in which interventions can last for 30' (without time limit for the candidate). However, these time limitations are a minor constrain, since the opportunity to speak is constantly controlled by the parliamentary group speaker (Vallbé & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2021: 698). 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 (Bermúdez & Cordero, 2017; Hopkin, 2009). 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 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 et al., 2016), being less experienced and having relatively less power positions than male counterparts within “gendered institutions” such as parliaments (Erikson & Verge, 2020; Verge et al., 2018) might frustrate their willingness to access the floor in spite of increasing their descriptive representation. Therefore, a first general hypothesis should reflect the power imbalance within the parliament as a non-neutral gendered institution (in spite of a potentially similar numeric representation), that is the idea of “presence without presence” (Clayton et al., 2014):

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 anticipate 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. Our hypothesis here is that women will gain power over the years achieving a more equal status compared to their fellow men MPs.

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 among parties who have measures of positive action towards gender equality and those who don't. In spite of the “secret garden” of these very influent gate-keeper organizations (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988) not only to parliament but also to floor access, we hypothesize that party organizations with a gender policy legacy will be more prone to promote equal access to the floor. We anticipate that the existence of party-level mechanisms for gender equality should provide more opportunities to female MPs belonging to this party's parliamentary group which 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. While gender quotas are used as a tool to increase the number of women elected in parliaments, they have favourable effects beyond increasing female's descriptive representation. Indeed, quotas are shown to promote women's access to party leadership (O'Brien & Rickne, 2016). In addition, they may contribute to positively change the culture within parliament, as well as legitimizing the position of women as political actors (Franceschet et al., 2012)). Moreover, research has shown that female elected politicians through the quota are as competent as their male counterparts (Murray, 2010). Furthermore, we may also expect 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). Also, research on the impact of the quotas on leadership positions and parliament committee assignments in the election right after its implementation, shows a limited improvement that yet doesn't reduce extensively the gender gap (Oñate, 2014). Hence, we need to analyse the effect of the quota on other dimensions of the parliamentary setting. We thus take a naive stand in this hypothesis. In fact, research on the impact of the quota on leadership positions and parliament committee assignments in the election right after its implementation, show a limited improvement that yet doesn't reduce extensively the gender gap (Oñate, 2014). Thus, we need to analyse the effect of the quota on other dimensions of the parliamentary setting.

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 ($N = 1639$). The timeframe analysed allows us to consider the difference in women's access to the floor before and after the gender quota introduced in 2007, and its interaction with party-led mechanisms. This timeframe captures two conservative (2000–2004 / 2011–2016) and two socialist majorities (2004–2008 / 2008–2011) and analyses a period of party system stability before the 2016 electoral changes. 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 speeches² given during all parliamentary sessions of the Spanish lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) in all four legislative terms. By “speeches” we mean all MP speeches in plenary sessions of >50 words in all types of parliamentary debates (investiture, law proposition and law project including budget law). Speeches in parliamentary commissions are not included in our dataset. 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 et al., 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 speeches were given by 1016 different Spanish MPs ($N = 1639$) throughout the four legislative terms under study (2000–2016).³ In order to reduce noise in the dependent variable, we

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of individual MP, party, and district characteristics.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Number of speeches	1639	36.55	73.67	0	683
Sex (Female)	1639	0.36	0.48	0	1
Party size	1639	141.91	52.94	1	186
Seniority (terms)	1639	1.30	1.69	0	9
Age	1490	48.78	9.31	23.57	85.02
Party Family	1639	2.20	1.29	1	5
Committee Chair	1639	0.15	0.65	0	10
Minister	1639	0.03	0.17	0	1
Government party member	1639	0.51	0.50	0	1
Legislative party leadership	1639	0.09	0.29	0	1
Party leader	1639	0.01	0.10	0	1
Exposure	1639	0.82	0.28	0.01	1.00
List ranking	1639	3.68	3.83	1	28
District size	1639	12.16	10.76	1	36
First year MP	1638	1.47	0.50	1.00	2.00
Native district	1485	0.67	0.47	0.00	1.00

have removed all speeches containing <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,⁴ 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 Volkens 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. Modelling 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 & Trivedi, 2013). Count data can be better modelled through log-linear regression models that assume more realistic distributions in the response data, such as Poisson (Gelman & Hill, 2006). To that effect, we fit Poisson regression models to test the 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

² A total of 59908 speeches.

³ The Spanish lower chamber has 350 seats, but several MPs serve during more than one legislative term. Our dataset has 1639 rows, but only 1016 unique MPs.

⁴ We are well aware of the normative difference between gender and sex. However, in the context of the article, we do not judge necessary changing sex or gender as used in the text since this is part of our rhetoric to avoid reiterative use of terms and we think the readers can understand this.

31.6 % of speeches given in parliament, as can be seen in Fig. 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 association with female access to the floor.

Moreover, in the analysis we observe that male MPs tend to give more speeches than female MPs at all levels of seniority. In addition, we find 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. Along a similar note, 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 Fig. 2). 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 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.

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. It is our main interest to account for unobserved variation produced at term level. For this reason, all our models include fixed effects for term, which fit varying intercepts within each term while forcing a unique slope for

each predictor variable that measures the average effect of these variables across all terms. This standard fixed-effects model is considered a type of multilevel model, and this specification yields equivalent results as a multilevel model where each group's parameter is given a distribution (Gelman & Hill, 2006). In our case, both types of specification yield mostly identical results (see Tables 2 and 3 in Annex A).

Gender yields a significantly negative coefficient for female MPs, which proves robust to our fully specified models. In particular, although the explanatory weight of gender decreases when models include controls, it remains sizable and significant. These results are consistent with findings of previous research (Proksch & Slapin, 2015) and especially (Bäck et al., 2021). Fig. 3 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.

On the other hand, Fig. 4 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.

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 et al., 2021)—systematically give female MPs less prominent roles in parliament, which in turn would make seniority endogenous to party organizational strategies. On the one hand, although our descriptive analysis gave support to the hypothesis that the Spanish conservative PP

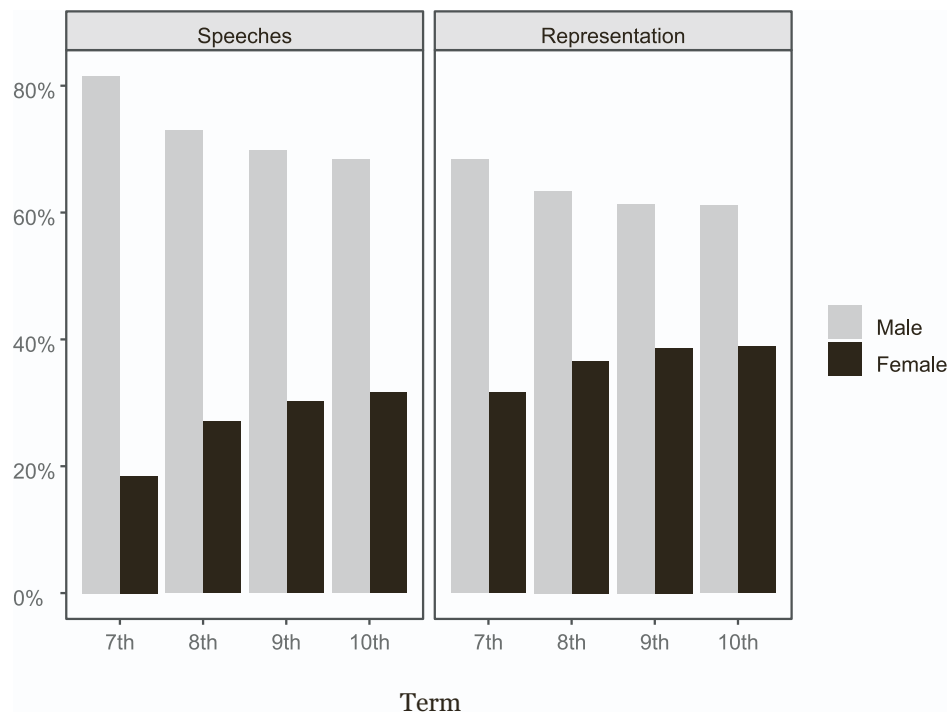


Fig. 1. Distribution of variables by sex and term.

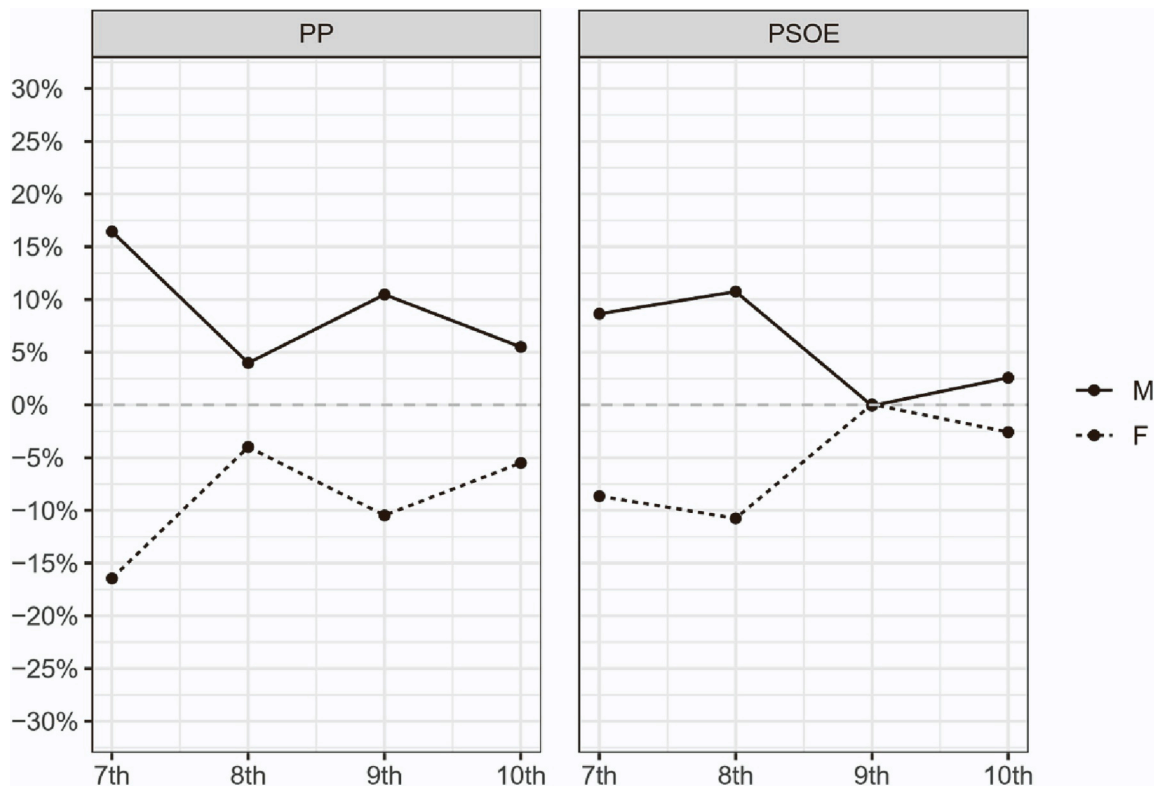


Fig. 2. Difference between MPs representation and speeches by sex and terms in the two largest parties.

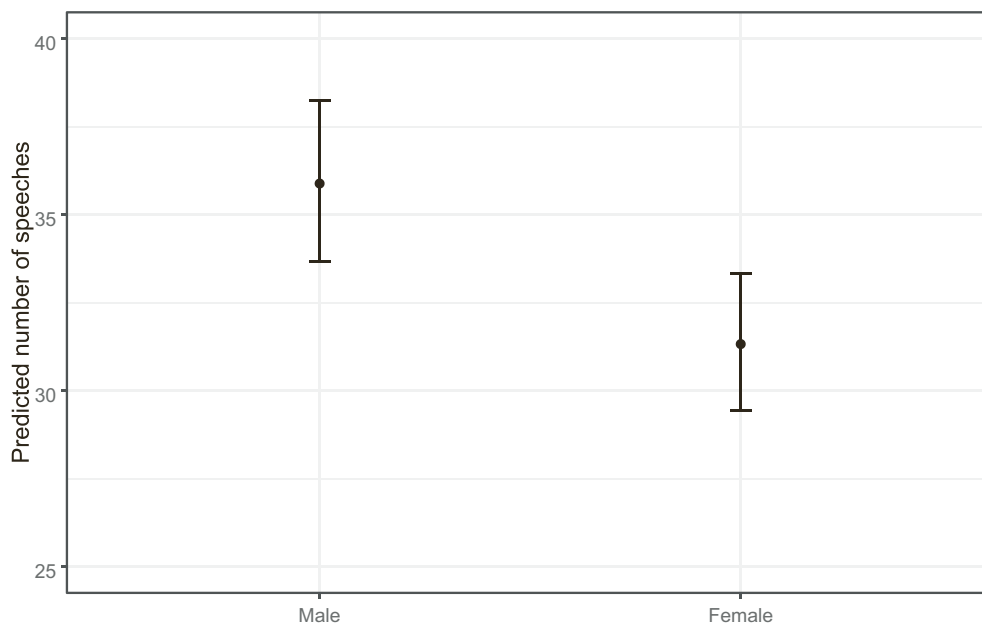


Fig. 3. Predicted number of speeches given by male and female MPs.

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 Fig. 5, 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.

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

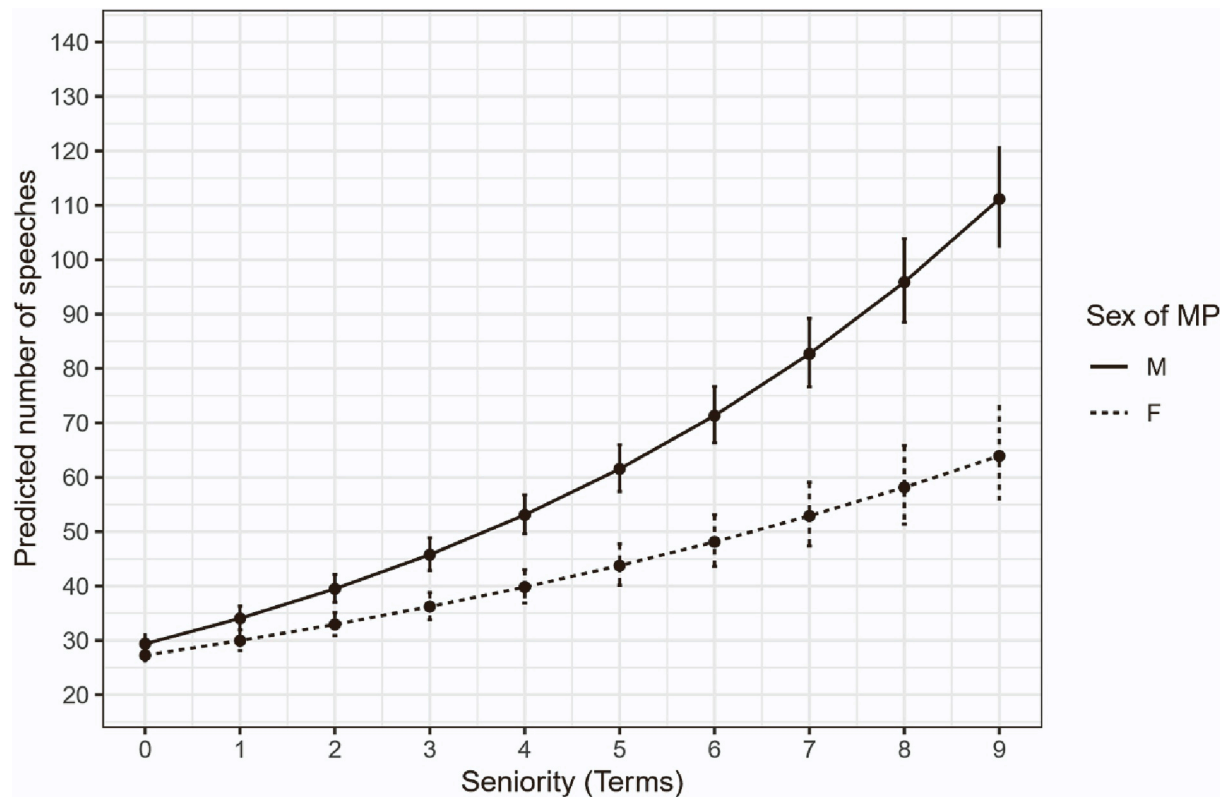


Fig. 4. Predicted number of speeches in the Spanish parliament by seniority.

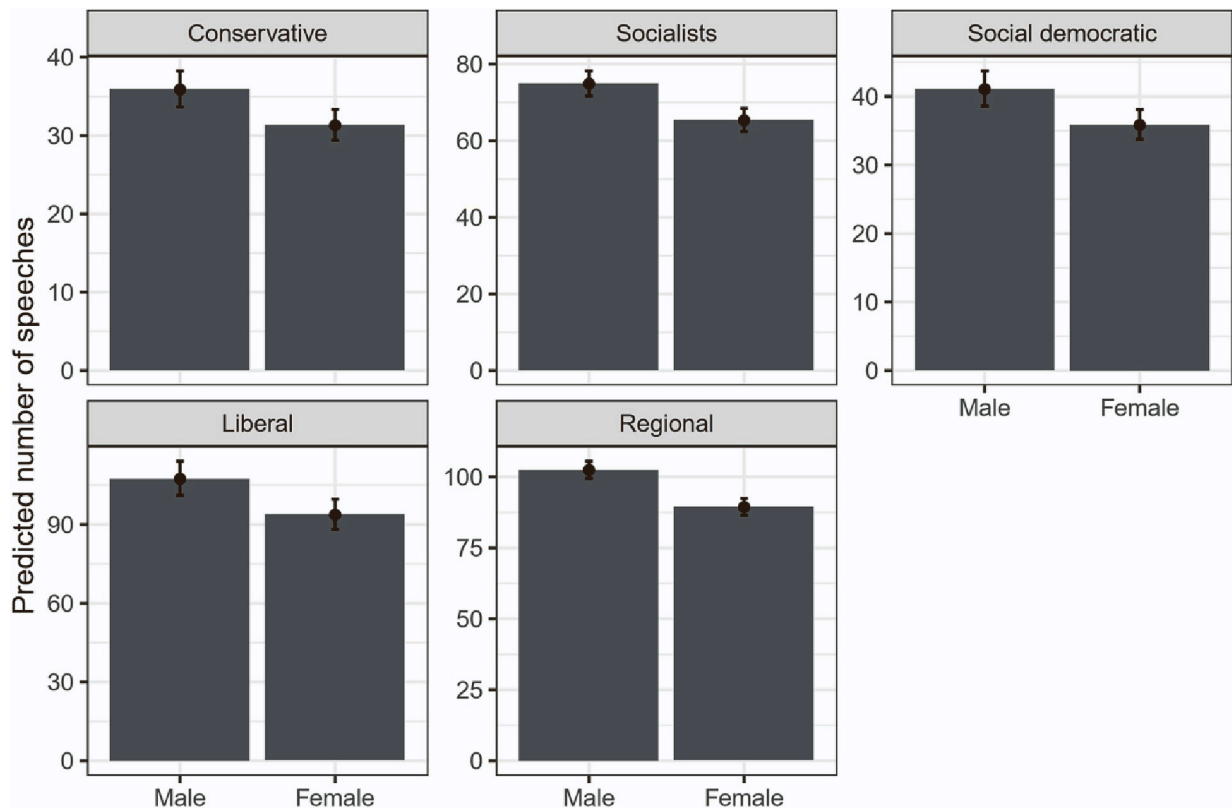


Fig. 5. Difference in floor access between male and female MPs by party family.

< 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 Fig. 6. 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.

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, the results indicate 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.

7. Conclusions

Women are increasingly numerically present in democratic parliaments. However, improving female representation in legislative chambers does not automatically translate into their equal access to the floor. In this article we provide evidence that parliaments are “gendered institutions” (Erikson & Verge, 2020; Lowndes 2020) that might provide women an increasing “presence without presence” (Clayton et al., 2014). 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. Indeed, an unequal participation in parliaments may frustrate the advancement of women's concerns in policy debates, and thus weaken the legislative process legitimacy. 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 & Sénac, 2018).

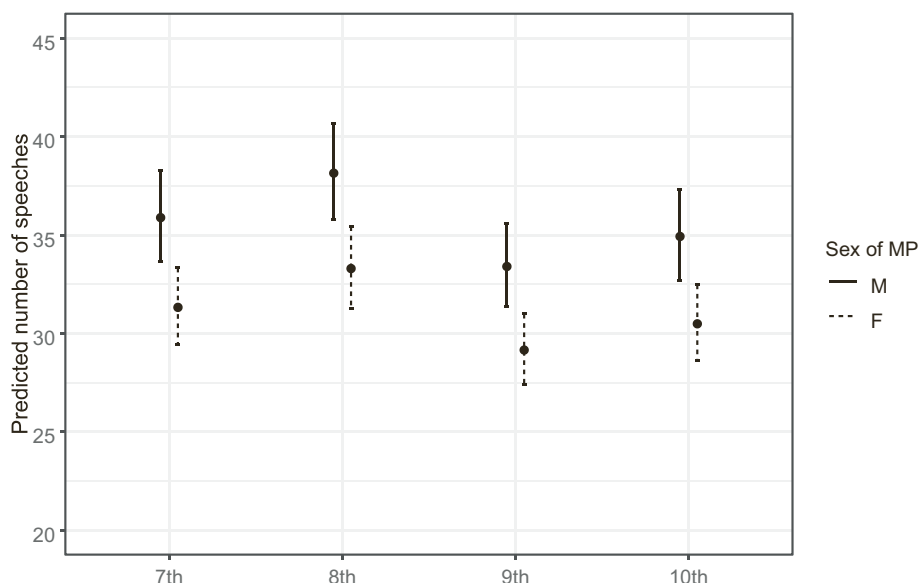


Fig. 6. Predicted number of speeches in the Spanish parliament by sex and term.

Access to the floor is another example of the deep roots of how gendered representation entails deep inequalities.

Further research on individual factors associated with 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 such as party structure, party organization, party gender balance, individual character or psychology influence female parliamentary participation. Parliamentary inequalities seem an evidence in Spanish politics but we share the view that there is still a lot to analyse in this field (Erikson & Verge, 2020). Therefore, further research is needed to shed light on gender gap when accessing the floor in liberal democracies.

Appendix A

Table 2

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

	Dependent variable:			
	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	1639	1489	1484	1444
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

Changes in the total number of observations are due to incomplete variables in our dataset (age and native_from_district variables).

* $p < 0.1$.

*** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3

Count multilevel regression model of speeches in the Spanish Parliament on individual MP characteristics.

	Dependent variable:			
	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*** (0.005)		0.070*** (0.005)
Age squared		−0.001*** (0.0001)		−0.001*** (0.0001)
University degree		0.304*** (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		2.552*** (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			−0.572*** (0.016)	−0.663*** (0.016)
Minister			2.052*** (0.016)	2.007*** (0.016)
Governing party			−0.136*** (0.013)	−0.080*** (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	3.734*** (0.060)	0.235** (0.119)	5.231*** (0.049)	2.293*** (0.134)
Fixed effects (term)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1639	1489	1484	1444
Log Likelihood	−68,622.480	−38,937.350	−26,350.400	−21,755.620
Akaike Inf. Crit.	137,251.000	77,896.690	52,728.810	43,555.250
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	137,267.200	77,955.060	52,803.040	43,671.300

* $p < 0.1$.** $p < 0.05$.*** $p < 0.01$.

References

- Bäck, H., & Debus, M. (2019). When do women speak? A comparative analysis of the role of gender in legislative debates. *Political Studies*, 67(3), 576–596.
- Bäck, H., Debus, M., & Fernandes, J. M. (Eds.). (2021). *The Politics of Legislative Debate Around the World*. Oxford University Press.
- Bäck, H., Debus, M., & Müller, J. (2014). Who takes the parliamentary floor? The role of gender in speech-making in the Swedish Riksdag. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(3), 504–518. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914525861>
- Bermúdez, S., & Cordero, G. (2017). Who is recruiting our crew? Contextual determinants of MPS' selection. *Acta Politica*, 52(3), 265–285.
- Bjarnegård, E., & Kenny, M. (2015). Revealing the 'Secret Garden': The informal dimensions of political recruitment. *Politics & Gender*, 11(4), 748–753.
- Brescoll, V. L. (2011). Who takes the floor and why: Gender, power, and volubility in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 56(4), 622–641.
- Cameron, A. C., & Trivedi, P. K. (2013). Regression analysis of count data. In *Econometric society monographs* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clayton, A., Josefsson, C., & Wang, V. (2014). Present without presence? Gender, quotas and debate recognition in the Ugandan parliament. *Representation*, 50(3), 379–392.
- Dahlerup, D. (1988). From a small to a large minority: Women in Scandinavian politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11(4), 275–298.
- Erikson, J., & Verge, T. (2020). *Gender, Power and Privilege in the Parliamentary Workplace, Parliamentary Affairs*. online first.
- Field, B. (2013). Resolute leaders and 'cardboard deputies': Parliamentary party unity in the New Spanish democracy. *South European Society and Politics*, 18(3), 355–374.
- Franceschet, S., Krook, M. L., & Piscopo, J. M. (2012). *The impact of gender quotas*. Oxford University Press.
- Galais, C., Öhberg, P., & Coller, X. (2016). Endurance at the top: Gender and political ambition of Spanish and Swedish MPs. *Politics & Gender*, 12(3), 596–621.
- Gallagher, M., & Marsh, M. (1988). *Candidate selection in comparative perspective: The secret garden of politics*. SAGE Publications.
- Gelman, A., & Hill, J. (2006). *Data analysis using regression and multilevel/hierarchical models. Analytical methods for social research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heinsohn, T., & Schiefer, M. (2019). Advancing to positions of power in parliament does seniority matter? *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 25(4), 511–532.
- Hopkin, J. (2009). Party matters: Devolution and party politics in Britain and Spain. *Party Politics*, 15(2), 179–198.

- Kenny, M., & Verge, T. (2016). Opening up the black box: Gender and candidate selection in a new era. *Government and Opposition*, 51(3), 351–369.
- Kenny, M. (2013). *Gender and political recruitment: Theorizing institutional change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Krook, M. L. (2009). *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- Krook, M. L. (2016). Contesting gender quotas: Dynamics of resistance. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 4(2), 268–283.
- Lowndes, V. (2020). How Are Political Institutions Gendered? *Political Studies*, 68(3), 543–564.
- Murray, R. (2010). Second among unequals? A study of whether France's 'quota women' are up to the job. *Politics & Gender*, 6(1), 93–118.
- Murray, R., & Sénac, R. (2018). Explaining gender gaps in legislative committees. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 39(3), 310–335.
- Norris, P., & Lovenduski, J. (1995). *Political recruitment: Gender, race and class in the British parliament*. Cambridge University Press.
- O'Brien, D. Z. (2015). Rising to the top: Gender, political performance, and party leadership in parliamentary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(4), 1022–1039.
- O'Brien, D. Z., & Rickne, J. (2016). Gender quotas and women's political leadership. *American Political Science Review*, 110(1), 112–126.
- Oñate, P. (2014). The effectiveness of quotas: Vertical and horizontal discrimination in Spain. *Representation*, 50(3), 351–364.
- Pansardi, P., & Vercesi, M. (2017). Party gate-keeping and women's appointment to parliamentary committees: Evidence from the Italian case. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 70(1), 62–83.
- Paxton, P., Hughes, M. M., & Painter, M. A. (2010). Growth in women's political representation: A longitudinal exploration of democracy, electoral system and gender quotas. *European Journal of Political Research*, 49(1), 25–52.
- Proksch, S.-O., & Slapin, J. B. (2015). *The politics of parliamentary debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rauh, C., Wilde, P. D., & Schwalbach, J. (2017). *The ParlSpeech data set: Annotated full-text vectors of 3.9 million plenary speeches in the key legislative chambers of seven European States*. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/E4RSP9>. May.
- Smrek, M. (2020). When is access to political capital gendered? Lessons from the Czech parliament. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 75(1), 76–93.
- Valiente, C. (2008). Women in parliament: The effectiveness of quotas. In M. Tremblay (Ed.), *Women and legislative representation: Electoral systems, political parties, and sex quotas* (pp. 123–133). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Vallbé, J. J., & Sanjaume-Calvet, M. (2021). Spain. A “cardboard model” of MP floor participation. In H. Bäck, M. Debus, & J. M. Fernandes (Eds.), *The politics of legislative debates* (pp. 692–712). Oxford University Press.
- Verge, T., & Troupel, A. (2011). Unequals among equals: Party strategic discrimination and quota Laws. *French Politics*, 9(3), 260–281.
- Verge, T. (2008). In , 123. *Cuotas Voluntarias Y Legales En España: La Paridad a Examen* (pp. 123–150). REIS: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2666449>.
- Verge, T., Novo, A., Diz, I., & Lois, M. (2018). Gender and parliament: The impact of the political presence of women. In X. Collier, A. M. JaimeCastillo, & F. Mota (Eds.), *Political power in Spain: The multiple divides between MPs and citizens* (pp. 43–59). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Volkens, A., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., Weißels, B., & Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin Für Sozialforschung (WZB). (2019). *Manifesto Project Dataset*. Manifesto Project.
- Yildirim, T. M., Kocapınar, G., & Ecevit, Y. A. (2021). Status Incongruity and Backlash against Female Legislators: How Legislative Speechmaking Benefits Men, but Harms Women. *Political Research Quarterly*, 74(1), 35–45.