

European Parliament

Debating in a Legislature with Competing

Incentives

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Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) can trace its lineage back to 1952 when it was called the Common Assembly, and it was a purely consultative organ composed of national parliaments' delegates. It was renamed in 1962, and it has been directly elected since 1979. Its size has been continuously increased after each enlargement, and today the European Parliament sits 705 legislators. The EP has progressively gained the status of co-equal legislator through decision-making reforms in the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty (Hix & Høyland, 2013; Hix, Noury, & Roland, 2007a; Ringe, 2010). Today, it has full voting powers in 85 EU policy areas, nearly all policy fields¹.

This legislature is extraordinary due to its multinational nature, and to the mixed legislative incentives to which its members are subject. It represents an excellent laboratory to test the effect of different electoral systems and rules of procedure on legislative speech behaviour. MEPs are elected under the minimum

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/decision-making/ordinary-legislative-procedure/>

common denominator of a proportional electoral formula, but since they are elected in different countries each running their own election, they are subject to different ballot types (closed vs. open list) and different district magnitudes (Däubler & Hix, 2018). Moreover, the EP is an interesting case when studying legislative speech-making because it follows both parliamentary and presidential models in its internal organization.. As outlined in the second theoretical chapter of this book, due to the clear separation between the legislative and executive branch and due to the decentralized nature of EP elections, party leaders in the EP should value individual MEPs exposure and party leaders' control over speech-making should be low. Because of its PR electoral rule and internal procedures favoring party leaderships over backbenchers, protecting the party label and ensuring party cohesion should also be highly valued.

This chapter tests Proksch and Slapin's (2015) model of legislative speech-making in this transnational legislature and finds that legislative behavior in the EP does conform to the expectations of this model. In particular, frontbenchers appear to take the floor more often than backbenchers. The frontbencher effect disappears in later terms, however, when the rules of procedures have been changed to allow for more individual floor access in EP debates. The analysis also looks at individual-level determinants of speech-making such as gender and seniority. Female legislators are not found to be at a disadvantage in EP debates. Senior MEPs are instead more likely to take the floor than more junior MEPs. MEPs in the minority (either coming from smaller countries or from extreme or niche party groups) tend to speak more.

Institutional and party system background

The electoral system used to elect MEPs mandates proportional representation with low thresholds, but the running of these elections is delegated to the member states, who have full autonomy over district magnitudes, ballot types, counting, and registration rules. Roughly half of the member states, for example, have adopted some form of preferential system (open list PR or STV) while the other half chose closed-list or flexible (semi-open) list PR (Hix & Høyland, 2013; Lehmann, 2008). MEPs are therefore subject to mixed incentives: some will come from party-centered systems, other from systems which encourage the personal vote. The EP elections have been often considered ‘second-order’ with European parties fading into irrelevance, and campaigns being used by national parties and voters as mid-term *national* elections (Hix & Marsh, 2010; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). The role of European Party Groups’ (EPGs) leaders, therefore, is often theorized to be weak. EPGs, however, have important prerogatives in the organisation of the EP’s work (Ringe 2010).

As a legislature, the European Parliament is closer to the presidential model than to the parliamentary one (Mair & Thomassen, 2010). There is in fact strong institutional autonomy between the EP and the EU’s executive branch (the Commission with the European Council), and EU government-opposition dynamics are not expected to play out in the EP, since the composition of the two branches of the dual EU executive – the Commission and of the European Council – is not contingent on European Parliament elections. Separation of powers systems often have strong and independent legislatures who value the exposure of individual

legislators and legislative committees over party loyalty, while parliamentarism and consensualism are associated with strong division of labour and strong partisan prerogatives (Lijphart, 1999; Mayhew, 1974; Shepsle & Weingast, 1994; Strøm, 1995).

In terms of internal organization, the main blocks in the EP are both its standing committees and the EPGs. The EPGs are ‘umbrella organizations’ joined by national parties according to ideological affinity, and are crucial organizations in the coordination of MEPs’ activities. Some EPGs are well-oiled machines, like the European Peoples’ Party (EPP), the Liberals (now ALDE), the Greens/EFA (formerly the Rainbow Group), and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D, formerly PES) – founded, respectively, in 1976, 1953, 1984 and 1973. Others are of more recent establishment or their internal membership fluctuates – prompting frequent changes of names. These parties are ideologically cohesive and range from far left (GUE/NGL group) to far right (ID: Identity and Democracy group) (McElroy & Benoit, 2012). Until the 8th parliamentary term the centrist grand-coalition (EPP and S&D) has been dominant both in terms of seats and in terms of voting behaviour, although since at least 1999 ideological coalitions became more prominent in structuring voting behaviour in the EP (Hix & Høyland, 2013). In terms of ideological dimensionality, the traditional left-right dimension dominates voting coalitions (Hix, 2002) together with a pro-anti EU dimension, which is progressively taking over the left-right dimension as the main dimension of political competition in the EP (Blumenau & Lauderdale, 2018; Otjes & van der Veer, 2016).

EPGs are highly cohesive, and are important units in the internal workings of the EP, which operates in partisan mode (Hix & Høyland, 2013; Hix, Noury, & Roland, 2007b; Ringe, 2010). Their very high roll call voting cohesion scores puzzle scholars, since EPGs are often considered ‘weak parties’ that do not have control over candidatures and EP election campaigns (Hix et al., 2007a). Being part of an EPG has strong procedural advantages, which may be part of the explanation for their very high voting cohesion. Being a member of an EPG, in fact, makes it easier for a national party to get rapporteurships, speaking time and committee chairmanships (as well as funding for administration/staff). The party system is a multilevel one, with MEPs bound by two principals: European parties and national parties, with the EPGs leaderships in charge of legislative appointments and rewards, and national party leaders in charge of elections and candidatures (Hix et al., 2007a; Ringe, 2010).

The EP has 20 standing committees, roughly mirroring the Commission’s Directorates General. Committees can have between 25 and 73 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Full membership is exclusive and lasts 2 ½ years. The list of members is decided by the EPGs. By regulation, committees have to reflect the composition of the parliament as a whole (Rule 199). The EP’s standing committees are powerful institutions, with strong law-making powers and acting as information conduits for the plenary. However, their internal workings are strongly partisan. Voting in plenary has been found to conform to decisions taken in committee, as fellow partisan MEPs follow their counterparts in the committee (Ringe, 2010). Committee chairs and rapporteurs are also allocated according to the

proportional rule, which makes EPGs the most powerful internal organisation block of the EP (McElroy, 2006; Yoshinaka, McElroy, & Bowler, 2010).

Overall, the EP conforms to the parliamentary partisan model in its internal organisation, but the presidential nature of executive-legislative relations in the EP as well as decentralized elections push it towards the individualized legislative model. Upon review of the electoral system used and of its internal organization, the European Parliament should therefore lie in the middle between systems incentivizing individual floor access (e.g. US Congress or UK Parliament) and systems incentivizing partisan control (e.g. parliamentary PR systems).

The institutional setting of legislative debate

The section above demonstrated how, given its basic requirement of proportional electoral rules and its internal organization guided by partisan proportionality and strong committees, the European Parliament does not conform to majoritarian legislative models. This has important implications for the nature of parliamentary debates in the EP, leading to the expectation of high party leadership domination of legislative debates. However, the clear separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, and the diversity of ballot types used across the member states in EP elections, could act as a brake to party leaderships prerogatives. The EP therefore mixes two models of legislative debate: the one where individual MEPs and the EP President – the ‘Speaker of the House’ – have important prerogatives, and the one where leaders of the EPGs and of the national delegations act as strict gatekeepers of speaking time. The section below outlines the main speech types in

the European Parliament, and summarizes the EP's Rules of Procedure on speech-making from 1979 to 2019.²

The EP's plenary agenda – containing debating sessions and their duration – is drafted by the EP President in consultation with EPG leaders and approved by the plenary through a vote. EP debates are subject to a strict schedule and automatically follow either a (non)-legislative report from an EP committee³, or plenary statements from the European Commission, the Council or the European Council. There are no precise time limits for MEPs in such debates – though the total amount of time to be devoted to debating the relevant agenda item depends on the time set aside in each plenary agenda, and political parties are allocated fractions of the total time (see below for more details). The debate ends when the speakers' list is exhausted or when the EP plenary votes to suspend the debate, after either the President, 1 EPG or 1/20th of MEPs propose it (EP - RoP, 2019: Rule 189).

² The register containing EP's Rules of Procedure can be found at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb/search/simple.htm?leg=&year=&lg=&eurovoc=¤tPage=1&sortAndOrderBy=&fulltext=&reference=&relValue=&codeTypeDocu=REGL&datepickerStart=&datepickerEnd=&auteur=&code_auteur=&autInstDesc=&autInst= last accessed on July 8th 2019. The register goes back to 2002 only. The documents were thus complemented with a search of the University of Pittsburgh's Archives of European Integration (<https://aei.pitt.edu/cgi/search/advanced>).

³ Some committee reports can proceed to a vote without a debate beforehand if the relevant committee registered very low – 1/10th of members – opposition to the report and if the minimum quorum for opposition to this decision in the plenary (1/20th of MEPs or 1 EPG) is not met (Rule 150).

Individual speakers have stringent topic constraints as they cannot deviate from the main topic of the agenda item debated (EP - RoP, 2019: Rules 123-124).

Since 1979 – the beginning of the directly elected European Parliament – there are also provisions to trigger ‘urgent’ debates or to allow debates on some pressing issue, even in the absence of a committee report or statements from the executive branch. The practice of extraordinary/urgent debates was strengthened during the 5th legislature (2004-2009) when a 60 minutes slot to debate extraordinary issues with repercussions for EU policy could be factored into each plenary agenda (EP - RoP, 2019: Rule 153). Moreover, since the 8th legislature (2014-2019), 120 minutes per plenary can also be requested to discuss ‘topical’ issues (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 153a). An additional 60 minutes can further be allocated to debate human rights breaches, again without the need for such debates to follow a formal report (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 135). The decision to request such extraordinary debates rests on the EP President – in consultation with EPG chairs. However, in contrast to traditional debates, there is also the possibility for either 1 EPG, 1 committee or 1/20th of MEPs to request them. The agenda, as usual, has to be approved by the plenary. Therefore, individual MEPs can’t trigger topics for debate on their own volition, but party leaders are not the sole avenue to schedule a debate either.

Speaking time for all the debate formats discussed above is allocated to EPGs proportionally according to their size, after a first fraction of speaking time is distributed to all groups (the Non-Affiliated (NI) are considered as one EPG in these calculations but receive only the first fraction of speaking time, exceeding fractions

are reserved for ‘formal’ EPGs). Partisanship is therefore an important component in the allocation of speaking time. Technically, individual MEPs ask to be entered in the speakers’ list. However, the list is drafted by the Conference of Presidents (EP President + EPG Chairs), which needs to ensure partisan balance, and gives priority to party frontbenchers (rapporteurs, committee chairs or EPG chairs/deputy chairs) when such priority is requested (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 162). Usually party groups devolve all their allocated time to designated spokespersons, but it is also common to set aside time for other party MEPs after spokespersons have been given the floor (Corbett et al., 2011: 197-198, 214-315). All MEPs have the right to speak on the official language of their choice, as simultaneous translation in all EU languages is provided (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 158). This freedom in the language medium makes EP debates particularly fascinating.

Avenues for individual floor access have multiplied since the 5th legislature. While initially the only additional speaking avenues that could be directly requested by individual MEPs were either personal statements (limited to 3 minutes and to rebuttals to personal remarks), or points of order (on procedural matters and limited to 1 minute), or vote explanations (limited to 2 minute per MEP and severely constrained in topic), in the 1999-2004 period MEPs were granted one-minute speeches, and, after 2009, the short presentation and the blue card procedures. One-minute speeches can be delivered in the 30 minute slot of the first sitting of a plenary and – as their name suggests – MEPs have only 1 minute each. The EP President has the sole right to call MEPs to speak, though he/she shall do so respecting partisan balance (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 163). The MEP is unconstrained in the topic

he/she wants to discuss but the time limits placed on this type of speech is quite stringent. The short presentation is a way to abridge a traditional report-based debate and has to be requested by the rapporteur or by the EPG Chairs. Though not triggered by individual MEPs, the procedure triggers a ‘catch-the-eye’ slot after the rapporteur presents the report to the plenary, instead of the traditional debate. The slot is only 10 minutes long and each MEP can speak for 1 minute only (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 151). One-minute speeches are completely devoid of party control as individual MEPs simply have to ‘catch the eye’ of the President, who then decides who can speak. Finally, the Blue Card procedure has added a deliberative component to EP debates: by raising a blue card, MEPs can signal to the EP President during a debate that they would like to ask a 30 seconds question to the MEP currently speaking. The President may decide whether to allow this or not, on the basis of time constraints and/or disruption concerns (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 162). In the January 2017 reform of the Rules of Procedure, the blue card procedure was amended by adding the caveats of 1) partisan balance, and 2) agreement from the speaker to take questions. Turn taking is therefore heavily regulated in EP debates, and MEPs have to follow strict speaking rules, even with the Blue Card procedure. The table below summarizes all types of debates in the EP.

Table 1: Summary of key debate types in the European Parliament

| Debate Type | Goals | Organisation Rules | Speaking Time per Plenary |
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|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Traditional debate | <i>Discussing a (non)-legislative report from an EP committee, or a statement made by the Commission, the Council or the European Council.</i> | <i>Follows automatically a report or statement. The speakers' list drafted by the Conference of Presidents and voted by the plenary. Floor time is allocated proportionally to parties. On request, precedence is given to frontbenchers.</i> | Total time decided by the Conference of President and voted by plenary. MEPs stop debating when the list of speakers has exhausted or when the Parliament votes to suspend the session (on the basis of a proposal from the President, or 1 EPG, or 1/20th of MEPs). |
| Extraordinary debates | <i>Debate extraordinary/topical issues with relevance for EU policy.</i> | <i>Called by the EP President in consultation with EPG chairs, or by 1 EPG, 1 committee or 1/20th of MEPs. The speakers' list drafted by the Conference of Presidents and voted by the plenary. Floor time is allocated proportionally to parties. On request, precedence is given to frontbenchers.</i> | 60 minutes in total for extraordinary debates, 120 for topical issues. |
| Human Rights breaches debates | <i>Debate cases of Human Rights abuses</i> | <i>Called by the EP President in consultation with EPG chairs, or by 1 EPG, 1 committee or 1/20th of MEPs. The speakers' list drafted by the Conference of Presidents and voted by the plenary. Floor time is allocated proportionally to parties. On request, precedence is given to frontbenchers.</i> | 60 minutes in total |
| Individual statements | <i>Either rebuttals of personal remarks, or points of order, or vote explanations.</i> | <i>Automatic slot after each agenda item. Individual MEPs ask to speak, the President decides who speaks.</i> | Max. 1 minute per MEP for points of order; 2 minutes for vote explanations, 3 minutes for personal statements. |
| One-Minute Speeches | <i>Give individual MEPs the opportunity to discuss any</i> | <i>Automatic slot in the first sitting of each part-session.</i> | Max. 1 minute per MEP, 30 minutes in total, extendable to 60. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------|--|---|---|-------------------------|
| | | <i>item/topic he/she may want to raise.</i> | <i>Individual MEPs ask to speak, the President decides who speaks.</i> | |
| Blue Card Procedure | | <i>Give individual MEPs the opportunity to ask a question to a fellow MEP</i> | <i>Automatic possibility in each debate.</i> | Max 30 seconds per MEP. |
| | | | <i>Individual MEPs ask to speak, the President decides whether to grant it, in agreement with the speaker to be questioned.</i> | |

To conclude, MEPs are given some important opportunities to independently request floor time. At the same time, these individualized types of speechmaking are severely constrained in time, the debating agenda is mostly decided by party group leaders (together with the EP President), floor time is allocated proportionally to party groups, and the rules of procedure constrain the President to give priority to party leaders and other frontbenchers (committee chairs, rapporteurs). The recent addition of the short presentation procedure, furthermore, also indicates a desire to enact time-saving devices to limit deliberations and speed-up decision-making. It empowers the figure of the rapporteur, usually a party loyalist (Yoshinaka et al., 2010), possibly signaling a desire towards more partisan control of the floor.

Proksch and Slapin (2015) classify parliamentary debate rules of procedure along a spectrum going from systems where individual members have unconstrained floor access – and where the neutral Speaker of the House/parliamentary chairman manages debates – to systems where political parties are the sole gatekeepers, drafting speakers’ lists, managing and monopolizing all debate avenues. The European Parliament (EP) is closer to the party gatekeeping model, where individual initiative and the role of the

Parliament's President are restricted, though not absent. However, the EP President's powers in regulating plenary debates has become increasingly important over time. That the EP appears at a first glance to offer a 'mixed model' of debate control is unsurprising given the mixture of consensualism and separation of powers elements typical of its internal organization.

What is the role of intra- and interparty politics in legislative debates?

Given what was discussed above, we would expect frontbenchers (which, due to the multi-level nature of the EP, include both EPG chairs/vice-chairs, but also Members of the EPG Bureau – i.e. the leaders of national party delegations or EPG spokespersons) to speak more in EP debate than backbenchers. We would also expect rapporteurs and committee chairs to speak more, given their institutionalized priority in floor access.

Rapporteurs are in fact required to give a speech in front of the plenary at the start of each debate originating from (non-)legislative reports (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 52a). They also may be given precedence if they request to be added to the speaker's list (EP – RoP, 2019: Rule 162). Committee chairs are high ranking legislators and, as such, they may be better able to exploit institutional rules and organization. They can also be considered part of the leadership and, as rapporteurs, they often are loyal party members (McElroy, 2001). It is important to control for these legislative roles. a

Studies demonstrate that legislators from opposition parties tend to speak more than those from governing parties (Bäck & Debus, 2016). Due to the

separation of powers quality of executive-legislative relations in the EU, government-opposition dynamics in speech-making are not expected. More precisely, the ideological majority in the European Commission is not expected to incentivize EPGs that constitute a minority in the Commission to speak more in European Parliament's debates. However, ideological extremism and niche status might also encourage speech-making, due to higher visibility needs of such parties (Bäck & Debus, 2016; Morris, 2001). We would thus expect that extremist and niche party families, with low intra-institutional status, and lower likelihood to influence the policy-making process through voting or successful amendments, would exploit debates to enhance their visibility and influence. In terms of individual-level predictors of speech-making, legislators' gender and seniority may also have an impact on the likelihood and frequency of legislative debate participation.

The data on speech counts for each MEP was scraped from MEPs' personal pages in the official website of the European Parliament⁴. Initially all MEPs since 1979 were scraped, but speech data was recorded in MEPs' personal pages only since the 5th term of the European Parliament (EP5). The analysis therefore covers the time period ranging from 1999 to 2019, and a total of 2,344 unique MEPs. Entries in the "contributions to plenary debates" section were counted. It was not possible to discriminate between the various typologies of speech, so the dependent

⁴ Url: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/directory/all/all> last accessed: 02/07/2019. The author would like to thank Luís Cavada Serralheiro for his invaluable help in designing the web scraping code.

variable is the aggregate count of speeches delivered by each MEP per legislative term. Due to data collection constraints, moreover, the number of words of each speech were not scraped. Debate identifiers were also not part of the scraping scheme so concatenation by debate is not possible. Any given plenary day can host more than one debate so concatenation by day was not a solution either.

Descriptive Analysis

Due to their socialization, females appear on average less assertive and more conscientious than men (Costa Jr, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). Furthermore, their socialization into ‘private’ roles (Schneider & Bos, 2019), and their weaker political ambitions (Fox & Lawless, 2004; McElroy & Marsh, 2010) also work against women’s likelihood to engage in the very public activity of legislative speech-making. Figure 1 below explores – in a descriptive fashion – whether male-female gaps in legislative speech exist in the European Parliament and whether the gap differs by party family. Female MEPs speech-making activity in fact, may be driven by liberal or left-leaning party groups, which, given their ideology, may attempt to incentivize the legislative visibility and equality of women. The potential for party-specific gender effects, therefore, needs to be investigated. Figure 1 below plots the percentage of speeches by gender and partisanship.

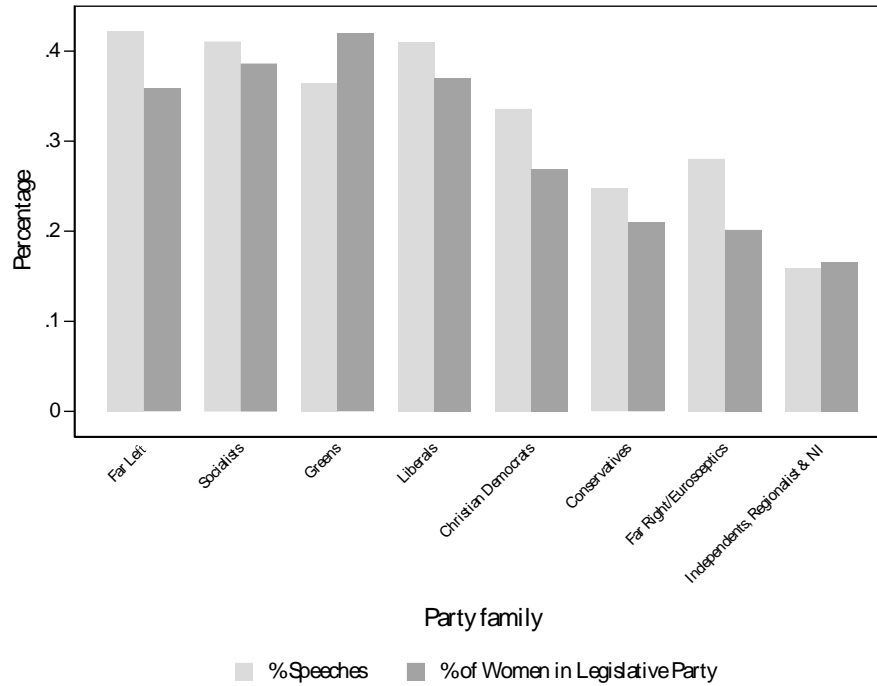


Figure 1. Percentage Speeches by Term by MEP's Gender across European Party Groups.

Contrary to the expectation of liberal/left-leaning parties incentivizing women debate participation, females MEPs seem to have disproportionately higher speech counts in all party groups (except for the Greens and the NI), and especially in the far-right party family. This startling finding may be potentially due to such parties having a strategic interest to increase the visibility of their female legislators, due to their well-established electoral disadvantage among female voters (Immerzeel, Coffé, & Van Der Lippe, 2015).

Legislative seniority may impact legislative speech counts as the superior informational and institutional resources of senior legislators may give them an advantage over newly elected MEPs in exploiting debate participation opportunities. Because they are better placed to overcome institutional barriers, and they are more familiar with rules of procedure, seniors are expected to speak more

than newer members of parliament. Empirical studies have found that seniority does increase the frequency of debate participation (Bäck & Debus, 2016; Slapin & Proksch, 2010). Figure 2 below offers an initial descriptive depiction of how seniority impacts speech-making in the EP, in combination with gender. It appears that MEPs that have served less than 1 term in the EP do speak less than veterans and that the women with very high seniority speak less than men with very high seniority. For all other seniority categories, it appears that women are more likely to speak than men. Speech-making behaviour at this descriptive level seems therefore to track generational changes in societal roles and culture.

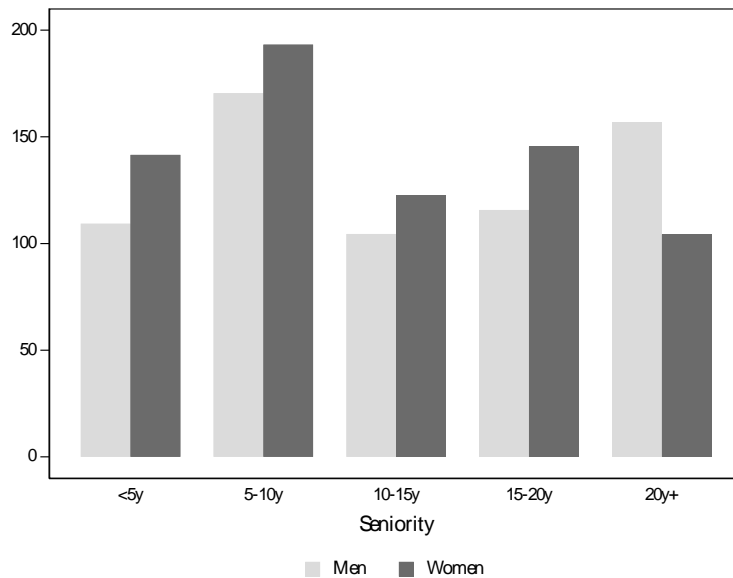


Figure 2. Average Number of Speeches by Term by MEP's Gender across Seniority Levels.

Multivariate Analysis

The dependent variable described above – *Number of Speeches by MEP* –, is strictly non-negative and skewed to the right. It ranges from 0 to 2,539, averaging

140 speeches by MEP per term, with a standard deviation of 239.5. A negative binomial model was therefore fit to the data, to account for its non-negative nature and for its over-dispersion. In addition, cluster-robust standard errors at the MEP level were added, to account for non-independence of the observations. The paragraph below gives an overview of the core independent variables and controls included in the regression model.

The *Leadership* variable is an ordinal-level variable receiving a score of 0 if the MEP was a simple EPG member, a score of 1 if the MEP was a member of the EPG Bureau (national delegation leader/EPG spokesperson) and a score of 2 if the MEP was the EPG Chair or Vice-Chair (European party leader). The information was collected from the MEPs' personal pages in the EP official website for each parliamentary term. If more than one role was served in any given term, the role held for the longest period of time was used. In the full data 82.6% MEPs were backbenchers, 11.4% were Bureau Members and 6% were Party Chairs/Leaders.

The *Governing status* and *Extremism* of MEPs' parties will be gauged when analyzing the results from the *EPG Membership* variable. The collection of governing status and ideological extremism of each national party for each term was beyond the scopes of the data collection.

Rapporteur and *Committee Chair* were similarly collected from the MEPs' personal sections of the EP's official website and measured at the legislative term level. They are dummy variables that measure whether the MEP was a rapporteur or a committee chair at least once in the given parliamentary term. 78.6% of units of observations were rapporteurs or shadow rapporteurs at some point in each

parliamentary term, while only 9.7% were committee chairs at some point during each parliamentary term.

Whether an MEP was a *Female* or not was manually entered for all MEPs serving between 1999 and 2019. The information was retrieved via a mixture of name and facial recognition from the MEPs' official personal webpages. 68.5% of MEPs in the four terms were male, 31.5% female.

MEPs' *Seniority* captures the number of days served by the MEP in the European Parliament, throughout the Parliament's existence. The variable was collected from the MEPs' official personal webpages and consists of a simple count of how many parliamentary terms are recorded in the webpage. It ranges from 1 to 14244 days, it averages 3468.2 days with a standard deviation of 2379.5 days.

MEPs' *Age* captures the MEP's age at the beginning of each parliamentary term. This is an important control as it may capture political experience: older legislators may be more likely to be given leadership positions and to have more institutional familiarity and experience. This might increase the MEP's likelihood to participate in debates. The variable was collected from the MEPs' official personal webpages. It ranges from 18 to 92, it averages 50.5 with a standard deviation of 10.5.

Party size captures the size of the national delegation in the relevant parliamentary term. The national party affiliation was scraped from the MEPs personal page in the EP's official website. It is calculated by taking the sum of MEPs in the parliamentary term members of the same national party and

discounting any outgoing-incoming dyad. It ranges from 1 to 43, it averages 10.8 with a standard deviation of 10.3.

EPG Membership variable records the European party group affiliation of the relevant MEP. The information was collected from the MEPs' personal pages in the EP official website for each parliamentary term. Given the changes of name throughout the period under consideration (1999-2019) the various EPGs were then re-coded into party families (far left, socialists, greens, liberals, Christian democrats, conservatives, far right, regionalist and non-attached). In the very rare cases where the MEP switched party family within a term, the longest party affiliation was used. 6% of MEPs in the full data were from the far-left, 26.8% from the Socialist party family, 6.3% from the Greens, 11% from the Liberals, 34.6% from the Christian Democrats, 4% from the Conservatives, 7.3% from the far right and 3.9% from regionalist parties or were independents.

The *logged exposure* variable is measured as the logs of the percentage of the parliamentary term served by each individual MEP. The variable is instrumental in controlling for the effect of being an incoming vs. outgoing member and therefore serving less time (and having less opportunity to speak) in the EP. It was calculated for each term from the dates recorded in MEPs' official webpages. It ranges from -2.9 to 4.6, averaging 4.3 with a standard deviation of 0.7. When not logged, the variable ranges from 0.05% to 100% of the term, it averages 82.9% with a standard deviation of 29.4%.

The country and EPG fixed effects further take into account the fact that – due to the peculiar nature of the European Parliament – MEPs are clustered by country and party. The parliamentary term fixed effects control for time.

Table 2 below presents the aggregate regression results with MEP-Term as the unit of analysis. Controlling for other prominent legislative roles, as well as for individual characteristics, partisanship and country of origin, we find confirmation in the data for the notion that party leaders strongly control floor access in the EP. Frontbencher status does predict the frequency of debate participation in the European Parliament. Being a national delegation leader increases the speech rate ratio by a factor of 1.47, while being an EPG leader increases it by a factor of 1.70. Rapporteurs, as outlined above, are often party loyalists and have institutionalized prerogatives in speechmaking: it is therefore not surprising that being a rapporteur increases the speech rate ratio by a factor of 1.44. However, committee chairs do not speak more often or less often than non-chairs. Their institutional prerogatives may be counter-balanced by their significant time constraints.

Governing status seems to matter somewhat: the centrist parties (socialists, liberals and Christian democrats) all had majorities in the core EU executive body – the Commission – throughout the period under consideration. They tend to speak less than parties that have been constantly excluded from Commission's top appointments, like the far left and the far right parties. Green parties and the Conservatives, however, also speak at the same rate of centrist parties, notwithstanding their clear opposition status in the EU political system. The role of government-opposition status in influencing speech-making in the EP can only be

fully explored via a dynamic design, that captures majority changes over time. The dynamic analysis will be provided in the country-specific section below. The model also controls for national party size, which can be a proxy of governing status at the national level, with bigger national delegations often (but not deterministically, due to the second-order nature of EP elections) being mainstream governing parties. It is clear that bigger national parties speak less than smaller parties – by roughly 1% for each additional seat –, which may be an indication of national government-opposition dynamics influencing speech-making in the EP.

Ideological extremism does matter: EPGs at either extreme of the spectrum speak more than centrist parties – parties that are always part of the EP parliamentary, as opposed to the executive, majority in the period under consideration. MEPs from the independent/regionalist/non-affiliated category also appear to speak more than centrist MEPs, which is not surprising since this party family has often contained niche and even pariah or ideologically extreme parties like the Italian and French radical parties or the Northern League. The Greens on average do *not* speak less than the centrist EPP: ideological extremism appears therefore to be more of a factor than simply being an opposition or niche party.

The analysis does not find support for the notion that female MEPs speak less in legislative debates: there is no difference in speech rates among male and female MEPs, a finding that confirms some previous findings on speechmaking in the European Parliament (Sorace, 2018), and findings from the broader literature on legislative debate (Bäck & Debus, 2016; Pearson & Dancey, 2011). Male and female rates of speech participation in the EP are indistinguishable. If anything, the

coefficient (as well as the descriptive analysis above) shows that female MEPs have a tendency to speak slightly more than male MEPs.

The expectation about the role of legislative seniority is confirmed: each additional day served in the European Parliament statistically significantly increases the speech rate ratio, and a standard deviation increase in the number of days served increases speech rates by 25%. MEP age also matters, with older MEPs speaking more (moreover, the statistically significant effect of age squared is an indication of a non-linear effect: the effect of age in fact is stable at lower age brackets but has an upward tipping point after 60 years of age). The analysis overall confirms the importance of institutional and professional experience for speech-making in the EP (Slapin & Proksch, 2010).

| | (1) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| | # MEP Speeches by Term |
| <i>Leadership</i> | |
| Bureau Member | 1.47 (0.14)*** |
| EPG Chair/Vice-Chair | 1.70 (0.23)*** |
| Rapporteur | 1.44 (0.13)*** |
| Committee Chair | 1.02 (0.09) |
| Female MEP | 1.06 (0.06) |
| Seniority (Total Days Served in EP) | 1.00 (0.00)*** |
| MEP Age | 1.04 (0.02)* |
| MEP Age Squared | 1.00 (0.00)** |
| National Party Size | 0.99 (0.00)*** |
| <i>Party Membership</i> | |
| Far Left | 1.62 (0.21)*** |
| Socialists | 0.91 (0.06) |
| Greens | 0.80 (0.11) |
| Liberals | 0.75 (0.07)** |
| Conservatives | 0.86 (0.13) |
| Far Right/Eurosceptics | 1.45 (0.15)*** |
| Independents, Regionalist & NI | 1.48 (0.19)** |
| Term Fixed Effects | Y |
| Country Fixed Effects | Y |
| Log(Exposure) | 3.21 (0.19)*** |
| Ln(Alpha) | 1.06 (0.03) |
| Observations | 3479 |
| AIC | 37722.7 |
| BIC | 38024.3 |
| Log-Likelihood | -18812.4 |

Exponentiated coefficients; Clustered standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression Analysis. Full sample, unit of observation: MEP-Term.

Figures 3 plots the coefficients from the Negative Binomial regression model to exemplify some of the most notable patterns highlighted by the regression table.

Figure 4 depicts the predicted speech probabilities by country, which allows to further explore country effects.

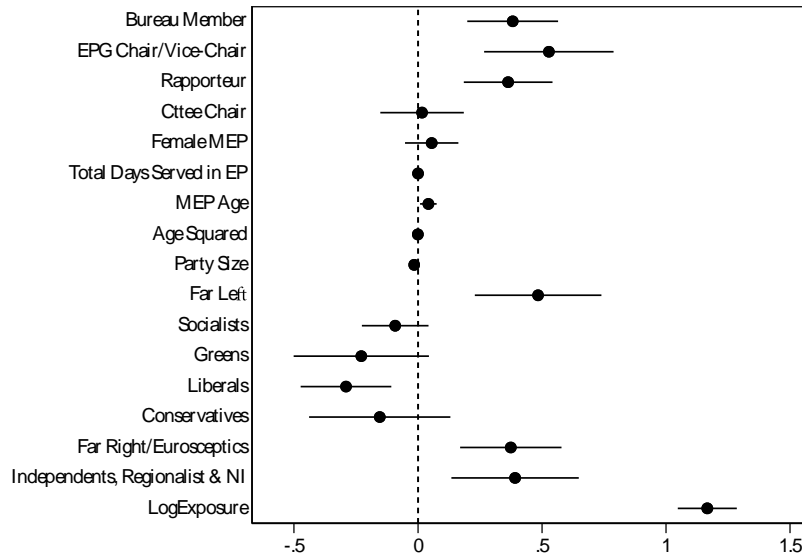


Figure 3. Coefficient Plot. Calculated from the full sample Negative Binomial regression. Country and term fixed effects included but not shown.

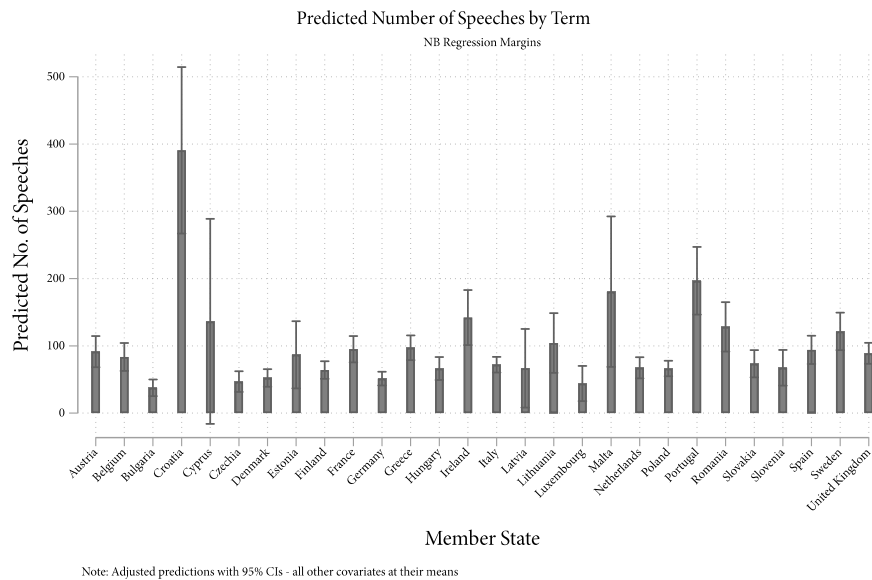


Figure 4. Predicted Counts Plot. Calculated from the full sample Negative Binomial regression.

The coefficient plot in Figure 3 shows that frontbenchers speak more than backbenchers in the EP, and it highlights how centrist/mainstream parties speak less than extremist ones, as evidenced by the clear curvilinear relationship between party family ideology and speech participation. Figure 4 explores country patterns. The notion that speeches are more likely to be used by MEPs who might feel at a disadvantage in the EP policy-making process (because they are ideologically extreme or because of their niche status) is further confirmed by the country-level patterns. MEPs from small countries, which are rarely allocated less seats in the EP, in fact, seem to be more active than MEPs from large countries. No clear patterns on the basis of debate tradition or electoral rule could be identified: MEPs from Sweden and the UK – polar opposites in terms of democratic and legislative organization models – have similar levels of EP debate participation. MEPs from Spain or the UK – which have traditionally used closed list PR electoral rules for

EP elections – have similar levels of participation in EP debates as MEPs from Sweden, or Austria (open flexible lists) but very different from Germany or Portugal, who also adopt closed list electoral ballots for EP elections. The role of electoral systems will be explored further in the country-specific section below.

The role of electoral systems and rules of procedure changes

The EP is very much a *sui generis* legislature, with legislators elected via a system of national elections and internally organized with a mixture of features from presidential and parliamentary (consensual) democracies. The analysis in this section leverages the different electoral rules used to elect MEPs, in order to gauge whether different ballot types influence their speech-making activities. It subsequently explores over-time patterns in speech-making to gauge the effect of changing rules of procedure on leadership and gender effects.

The impact of electoral rules

EP elections are organized nationally by each member state and are more akin to a series of parallel domestic elections than fully-fledged European elections. There is only a minimal uniformity requirement of using PR electoral formulas, but in terms of electoral thresholds, financing and campaign rules, ballot structure, and district magnitudes, electoral rules are free to vary.

The analysis below (table 2) exploits the variation in ballot structure in European Parliament elections, using data from Däubler and Hix (2018)⁵ to classify member states according to whether they adopted Open-List PR (the baseline), Flexible Lists, Closed Lists or the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in each election. The scholarship on electoral rules effects finds that ballot type influences campaigning, constituency work, party loyalty and representational roles (Däubler & Hix, 2018; Farrell & Shugart, 2012; Hix, 2004). The regression model below tests whether different ballot types incentivize higher speech rates and whether they act in interaction with leadership effects. Proksch and Slapin's (2015) model of legislative debate postulates that closed list electoral rules strengthen the incentives for the party leadership to tightly control the floor. The effect of being part of the EPG Bureau should be stronger in member states that adopt the closed list system in European Parliament elections (e.g. UK, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Hungary and Romania), somewhat strong in member states that use Flexible Lists, and weakest in electoral systems that incentivize the personal vote (Open List PR or STV).

⁵Complemented by data from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election/law/en/maps_en.htm (last accessed 30/12/2019) for the 1999 election.

| | (2) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| | # MEP Speeches by Term |
| <i>Leadership</i> | |
| Bureau Member | 1.35 (0.19)* |
| EPG Chair/Vice-Chair | 1.32 (0.22) |
| <i>Ballot Openness</i> | |
| STV | 1.29 (0.54) |
| Flexible | 0.27 (0.05)*** |
| Closed | 0.64 (0.17) |
| <i>Leadership*Ballot Openness</i> | |
| Bureau * STV | 0.70 (0.19) |
| EPG Chair/Vice-Chair * STV | 3.36 (2.39) |
| Bureau * Flexible | 0.90 (0.17) |
| EPG Chair/Vice-Chair * Flexible | 1.44 (0.44) |
| Bureau * Closed | 1.25 (0.25) |
| EPG Chair/Vice-Chair * Closed | 1.32 (0.36) |
| Rapporteur | 1.44 (0.13)*** |
| Committee Chair | 1.01 (0.09) |
| Female MEP | 1.07 (0.06) |
| Seniority (Total Days Served in EP) | 1.00 (0.00)*** |
| MEP Age | 1.04 (0.02)* |
| MEP Age Squared | 1.00 (0.00)** |
| National Party Size | 0.98 (0.00)*** |
| <i>Party Membership</i> | |
| Far Left | 1.64 (0.21)*** |
| Socialists | 0.91 (0.06) |
| Greens | 0.80 (0.11) |
| Liberals | 0.72 (0.06)*** |
| Conservatives | 0.87 (0.12) |
| Far Right/Eurosceptics | 1.45 (0.15)*** |
| Independents, Regionalist & NI | 1.48 (0.19)** |
| Term Fixed Effects | Y |
| Country Fixed Effects | Y |
| Log(Exposure) | 3.21 (0.19)*** |
| Ln(Alpha) | 1.04 (0.03) |
| Observations | 3479 |
| AIC | 37666.8 |
| BIC | 38031.56 |
| Log Likelihood | -18783.38 |

Exponentiated coefficients; Clustered standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. Negative Binomial Regression Analysis with Interaction Effects. Full sample, unit of observation: MEP-Term.

The analysis highlights that there is no statistically significant interaction between ballot type and leadership status⁶. MEPs elected via closed lists or flexible lists are not more likely to defer to frontbenchers than MEPs elected via open lists or STV. The direct effect of ballot type highlights a statistically significant lower propensity of MEPs elected from flexible list systems to speak relative to the baseline (Open List PR), but MEPs from closed list systems are not more or less likely to speak than MEPs from open list systems. That domestic electoral rules do not influence *absolute* speech levels in the supranational legislature may be due to the ‘double legislative constituency’ of MEPs, who find themselves ruled by two principals: national and European leaderships. This is compatible with previous findings on European Parliament speeches, that find that MEP that rebel against the EPG line actually speak more, especially if they were elected from closed list systems (Slapin & Proksch, 2010). The need to toe the national leadership line therefore makes MEPs from closed lists speak more, not less, in rebel situations. This may counteract any effect of the electoral rule.

The impact of over-time changes in rules of procedure

As outlined in the introductory sections, more recent EP terms have seen the introduction of types of speeches which leave more freedom to individual MEPs to request the floor. We would expect the frontbencher effect to be weaker in the 2009-

⁶ The analysis was re-run without country fixed effects and the results were identical.

2014 and the 2014-2019 terms, as different modalities of speeches became available to MEPs.

The introduction of less constrained form of speech-making could also have advantaged female legislators. The legislative context and political supply factors (committee and legislative position allocation rules, or rules enhancing leadership control over legislative activity supply) often work against women's likelihood to participate in legislative debates (Childs & Krook, 2009). The unequal participation of men and women in legislative debate is expected to be strengthened when legislative debate rules grant significant gate-keeping powers to party leaderships, and weakened when legislative debate diminish such gate-keeping opportunities. The split sample analysis below will allow to test whether gender effects are time-specific.

This second analysis splits the sample by term and re-runs the same regression model specification outlined above (barring the legislative term fixed effects) for each sub-sample. The coefficient plots in Figures 4 and 5 below present the results of each separate regression. It is clear that the effect of both national and European party leadership on speech rates is driven by the earlier terms (5th and 6th) while leaders are not more likely than backbenchers to take the floor from 2009 onwards. The hypothesis that the effect of leadership on EP speech-making is conditional on rules of procedure is thus confirmed: in periods where less controlled speech types were made available to MEPs, backbenchers caught up with leaders' participation rates. In recent parliamentary terms, therefore, leadership control and speech

participation has been lower, and statistically indistinguishable from the speech participation of backbenchers.

The hypothesis on the conditional nature of the gender effect is not confirmed: the male-female gap is not stronger in periods of higher leadership constraints on speeches. The coefficient is robustly not significant. The fact that male and female MEPs are indistinguishable in their speech rates therefore holds over time.

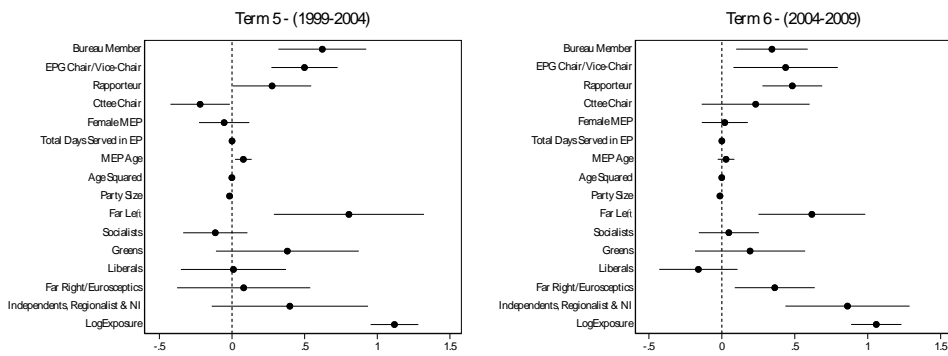


Figure 5. Split sample NB regression results EP5 & EP6. Coefficients expressed as incidence rate ratios.

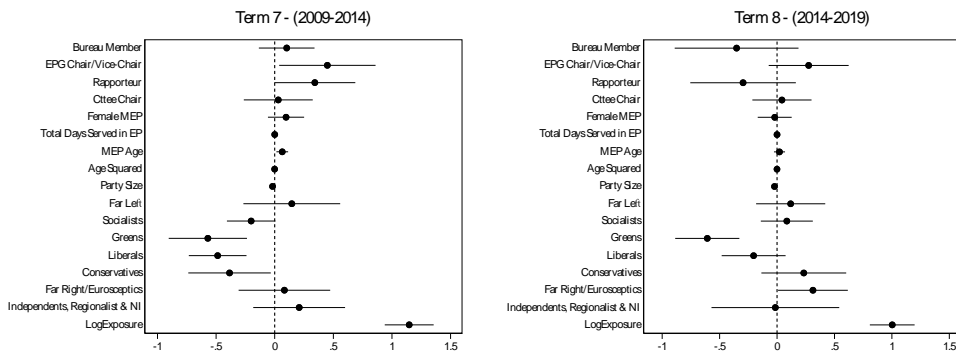


Figure 6. Split sample NB regression results EP7 & EP8. Coefficients expressed as incidence rate ratios.

The split sample analysis also offers the opportunity to explore government-opposition dynamics more clearly. It is evident, for example, that the high levels of speech-making of far left (GUE/NGL) MEPs is driven by earlier legislative periods (EP5 and EP6). After 2009, far left MEPs speak at similar rates than EPP members. The Greens have similar speech rates to the Christian Democrats (EPP) in the earlier terms but become less active in the later terms. Far right and Eurosceptics are more active in the 6th and 8th term only. We know that the European Commission had left-wing majorities in the 1999-2004 (EP5) and in the 2004-2009 (EP6) periods (Hartlapp, 2015). If government-opposition dynamics were at play, we would therefore expect left-leaning parties speaking less than the EPP (the baseline) during that period. Instead, we see the far left becoming more active in the 1999-2009 period, while Greens and Socialists are not less vocal than the EPP (main opposition party). Also, the socialists, the greens and the far left do not become more active in terms 7 (2009-2014) and 8 (2014-2019), where the Commission is dominated by the center-right. Notably, the two largest party groups in the EP – the socialists and the EPP – speak at similar rates throughout the period, no matter the ideological majority in the EU Commission.

Conclusions

The European Parliament is a mixed system offering mixed incentives to its legislators. It is elected via a common proportional electoral formula requirement, and grants strong frontbench rights in the allocations of its internal roles, which make it closer to the consensual model than to the Westminster model of legislative

organization. The rules of procedure regulating speech-making, on balance, appear to favour party leaderships rather than individual MEPs. This however changed in recent years with the introduction of more flexible debate types and of one-minute speeches. Moreover, its decentralized, second-order elections and the separation of powers nature of EU executive-legislative relations push the EP towards the UK/US individualized model of legislative organisation instead.

Proksch and Slapin's model (2015) of legislative speech-making hypothesizes that in party-centered parliamentary systems we should see domination of legislative debate by the frontbenchers, as party leaderships strategically draft speakers' lists to avoid endangering party label quality. However, the electoral incentives of parties serving in the EP are notoriously weaker, due to the decentralized nature of European Parliament elections, and to the lack of executive responsibility, which gives more freedom to individual legislators to take the initiative or deviate from the party line. It is unclear that national delegation leaderships and EPG chairs should systematically have a strong incentive to pack the speakers' lists with frontbenchers.

The analysis above finds that overall frontbenchers do speak more than backbenchers in the EP, but that the effect is conditional on time, and has weakened in more recent EP terms. The change in rules of procedure seems to have had a clear impact – in line with the expectations from the theoretical model – on the nature of legislative debate in the European Parliament.. The effect of changes in the rules of procedure appears to be strong, whereas electoral rules do not make a difference: MEPs elected via closed or flexible lists are not more likely to defer to the party

leadership. The frontbench dominance therefore varies across time but not across electoral systems.

EU-level government-opposition dynamics in legislative debate are marginal in the EP, which, in its legislative-executive relations is closer to the US separation of powers system than to the legislative-executive fusion of parliamentary democracies. Party groups that have a majority in the Commission do not speak less than party groups in the minority. Ideological extremism, instead, matters: party families (both of the left and of the right) do appear to dominate EP debates more than centrist/mainstream parties. This may reflect the higher need of extremist parties to exploit visibility opportunities, or to the ‘grand-coalition’ dynamic within the European Parliament.

In terms of individual-level determinants of speech-making, the analysis finds no gender gap in debate participation in the case of the European Parliament. The gender gap stays roughly constant across time and across parties. Seniority, however, does matter: legislative experience is important to gain floor access in the European Parliament.

Overall, legislative organization in the EP seems to impact partisan incentives in the expected direction: the EP is a mixed model and offers mixed incentives for party leaderships to dominate legislative speech-making, which is reflected in the inconsistent patterns of frontbench debate participation.

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