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Theories and empirical applications of legislative debate

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Abstract: This chapter explores the theoretical mechanisms underpinning the participation of Members of Parliament (MPs) in legislative debates across a wide range of parliaments. It argues that researchers must examine both strategic interactions within political parties and political institutions to develop an understanding of which MPs take the floor and how researchers can use legislative speeches to measure the essential concepts of polarization, intra-party dissent, and representation. The chapter discusses the basic institutional framework that governs debate across parliamentary democracies, provides an overview of an intra-party theory of parliamentary debate, and considers various possible extensions of the theory. Finally, the chapter illustrates how scholars can integrate insights from theories of parliamentary debates and text analysis of parliamentary speeches.

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Chapter 3

Theories and Empirical Applications of Legislative Debate

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Introduction

In parliamentary democracy, citizens go to the polls to elect Members of Parliament (MPs), and these MPs in parliament can make and break governments (Laver and Shepsle 1996; Strøm et al. 2003). While policy is often made in the ministries and in cabinet meetings, parliament is the primary arena for public arguments about these policies. Moreover, parliament provides opportunities for MPs, and the parties to which they belong, to demonstrate to voters that the political system represents their interests, even if these interests do not always translate directly into policy. Understanding who participates in parliamentary debates about policy and politics can help us to answer fundamental questions about politics: the study of debate can offer insights into the level of political polarization, and why it increases or decreases; which political issues get discussed publicly, which do not and why; how parties handle internal divisions and dissent; and how parties and their MPs represent the various interests of their publics. If we are to use debates to gain insights into these important questions of democratic governance in parliamentary systems, we must understand whose voices get heard on the floor of parliament. Why do MPs participate in parliamentary debate? Who determines which MPs may take the floor? Do some MPs participate more than others? What do they say when they speak? What role

do parties play in determining the nature and content of debate? The answers to these questions can offer invaluable insights into legislative and party politics, but also politics more generally.

It is only relatively recently that scholars of legislative studies have started to study these questions in greater depth. Prior to the last ten years, most work on legislative behavior focused on roll call voting, committee membership, and other activities, but only rarely on speaking and debate. Nevertheless, MPs view speaking on the floor as a valuable activity, and voters view participation in plenary as a key duty of their representatives. Recently, researchers have come to realize the importance of parliamentary speech and the amount of research on the role of speech in parliaments and legislatures has increased, as well. This research looks at variation in who takes the floor both cross-nationally and within countries. It also examines both inter-party and intra-party explanations for speech-making in parliament.

In this chapter, we explore the theoretical mechanisms that lead MPs to give speeches across a wide range of parliaments. Knowing who takes the floor and why is a requirement for knowing how to use the actual content of legislative debate to measure important concepts that we care about: polarization, intra-party dissent, and representation of various interests and issues, to name just a few. We begin by discussing the basic institutional framework that governs debate across parliamentary democracies. We then discuss our party theory of political debate, originally outlined in Proksch and Slapin (2012; 2015), and lastly, we discuss various extensions of our theory.

Institutions and Actors of Parliamentary Debate in Parliamentary Systems

To understand the institutions of parliamentary debate, we must consider who controls the legislative agenda (the actors—e.g. governments, parties, MPs,) how debate is structured (the rules of debate), and who can allocate speaking time to individual MPs. Parliaments need to deal with multiple issues affecting the country at any point in time, and the time available to debate and vote on policies is limited. Thus, the first institutional consideration relates to legislative agenda control: which actors are able to introduce items to the parliamentary agenda and set the timetable for them? In parliamentary systems, it is often the government that controls the agenda, especially with respect to bill initiation. However, there is significant variation and many opportunities for opposition parties to express their opinions. The extent to which the government can control the legislative agenda varies across countries, and has been the subject of much investigation (e.g. Döring 1995; Lijphart 1999; Tsebelis 2002; Cox 2006; Martin and Vanberg 2011; Rasch and Tsebelis 2011).

When considering legislative agenda control for parliamentary speech, we first must consider the rules governing different types of debate. Debate typically falls into one of several categories: debate on government bills that are introduced by cabinet members or governing parties, on motions proposed by opposition parties, on other non-binding resolutions and motions (e.g. adjournment debates in the UK, Australia, and Ireland or the *Aktuelle Stunde* in the German Bundestag), private member bills, as well as parliamentary questions time aimed the executive. Government bill debates constitute the most important of these debates, as governments introduce legislative proposals and these proposals are likely to become law. In systems in which governments have strong agenda control and parliaments are considered weak, the cabinet is able to curtail debate on government bills should it choose to do so. The instruments available to the prime minister and ministers include the right to call for an urgency procedure, limiting the

number of readings on a bill, calling a vote of confidence, or the right not to allow debate on amendments to a government bill. In other systems, where parliaments are stronger, the government is more constrained in the way in which it can limit bill debate. Other parts of the parliamentary calendar are specifically designed to provide opportunities for members to connect with constituents through what they say on the floor, or to provide opportunities for MPs to take the floor to demonstrate activity, when they might not otherwise have an opportunity to do so.

Next, it is essential to consider the actors who regulate access to the parliamentary floor. First, constitutions or the parliamentary rules of procedure determine the actors who organize debate (e.g. speaker of the house or a parliamentary business committee). In the UK, it is historically the Speaker of the House of Commons who determines the order in which MPs are recognized as speakers on the floor of parliament, and MPs need to catch the speaker's eye. Amidst the Brexit debates in the House of Commons in 2018 and 2019, the Speaker John Bercow has, in fact, become one of the most prominent British politicians due to his role in organizing parliamentary debate. In Germany, where parliament is elected based on proportional representation, all parliamentary groups jointly decide on the organization of parliamentary debate, and the parties have control over the selection of speakers rather than the President of the *Bundestag*. In New Zealand, debate retains many of the traditions of the Westminster system, but the actual operations underpinning debate mirror German rules ever since New Zealand switched its electoral rules to match Germany's in 1996.

We must also consider whether individual MPs have a guaranteed right to participate in debate. Can they decide to participate on their own or must they seek permission through their party? Parliamentary rules of procedure in some countries guarantee the speaking rights of members of parliament while in other countries parliamentary party groups are granted time,

which they in turn, allocate to individual MPs. Rules usually divide speaking time between government and opposition, and often allocate a proportional share of time to parliamentary parties according to their relative size in parliament. No matter what, parties may play a role through their internal rules, which are likely separate from those written into the rules of procedure of parliament. Such informal procedures may regulate floor access even when the formal rules may suggest that MPs have direct access. Conversely, even though parties may have formal control over their MPs speaking time, they may not actually exercise strict central control. While the leadership may indeed decide on the list of speakers in any given debate, in some instances, the party may be relevant than in others. Additionally, a subset of party members (e.g. spokespersons or committee members) usually has priority on the speaker's list according to internal party rules.

In short, the rules of parliament as well as internal party rules determine how parliamentary debate proceeds by dividing the legislative agenda into different types of debate, determining which actors take priority at different times (e.g. have agenda-setting rights), and often by naming the actors responsible for allocating time. Careful consideration of these rules is essential to understand how MPs get on the floor and speak, as debating time is limited in all settings in parliamentary systems. And understanding who takes the floor is necessary to understand what is that we can actually learn by studying parliamentary debate. Because parties are arguably the most important political actors in parliamentary systems, we start by focusing on the role of parliamentary parties and the way they divide up speaking time amongst their members.

An Intra-Party Theory of Parliamentary Debate

Knowing which MPs take the floor, what it is that they say, and why they are able to give a speech at all, can provide insights into party politics, legislative decision-making, and the representative link between what MPs do in parliament (legislative behavior) and how voters perceive them. Here, we present a summary of our intra-party theory of parliamentary debate (Proksch and Slapin 2012; 2015). The premise of the theory is that intra-party politics and electoral incentives determine three aspects of debate: (1) who gives a speech, (2) what gets said, and (3) how debate is organized. We distinguish between parliamentary party leaders and “regular” (backbencher) MPs who constitute the set of potential speakers on behalf of the parliamentary party in a debate. Following a large literature on the incentives created by electoral institutions for parliamentary behavior (e.g. Cox and McCubbins 1993; Hix 2002), we argue that party-centered electoral systems generate the need for a unified “party brand” while candidate-centered electoral systems mean that MPs must engage in activities to seek a personal vote (Carey and Shugart 1995). This implies that party leaders value the exposure of their MPs in parliamentary debate when this helps MPs create a name for themselves, whereas they place a stronger weight on party unity, when the party brand is relevant for voters’ decision at the ballot box. The same holds for MPs who consider their re-election chances when giving speeches. When MPs depend on their parties for their electoral success, they place a higher weight on toeing the party line, whereas they may be willing to express their own opinions and ideology when they have to run on an individual platform.

What makes parliamentary debate interesting as a setting is the fact that, unlike participation in legislative voting, not all MPs can actually participate in a debate and express an opinion. In our theory, the strategic selection of speakers thus drives parliamentary debate. We model this by assuming that party leaders have the ability to intervene in debates should they choose to because

of their privileged role as the primary spokespersons for the party. This creates a strategic situation in which leaders have to choose between delegating speaking time to one of the parties' MPs or to deliver a speech herself. Importantly, however, the latent (unobserved) disagreement between party leaders and MPs is the crucial variable that determines speaker selection. Leaders consider what MPs would say if they were to grant them speaking time: would MPs present and defend the party position on the floor, or would they deviate from this line due to a latent disagreement with the party leadership? When MPs rely on their parties for reelection, and parties place a high value on party unity, perhaps to preserve an electoral brand or image, MPs toe the party line and parties tend to give floor time to those MPs who are most loyal, all else equal. In particular, MPs holding party leadership positions may be more trusted to give speeches, and to express the party position than more junior backbenchers. These dynamics tend to play out in countries with closed list proportional representation electoral systems, where there are fewer reasons for MPs to deviate from the party line, and more incentive for party leaders to prize party loyalists.

But when electoral institutions generate incentives for MPs to create a personal name and identity for themselves, MPs with views that diverge from the party mainstream may give more speeches, and their party may be happy to have them speak their mind when they do. Some MPs may even have an incentive to express their differences as publicly as possible. Doing so can make them more recognizable to voters. Speech provides them with a relatively harmless outlet for voicing dissent. While voting against the party may, at least in theory, impact policy outcomes, speech does not have any direct policy consequences. Such dynamics, we have argued, are more common in open list systems with high levels of intra-party competition and in single-member district plurality systems, in particular where individuals' names appear

prominently on the ballot. In these systems, MPs must create a personal “brand” somewhat separate from that of their party. In single member district systems, giving a speech, especially one that deviates from the party line, can generate some attention in local news, may provide them MP with a sound bite to put on a website or on social media, or allow the MP to demonstrate to voters that they are working for them on the floor of parliament. All of these activities can help MPs establish a connection with voters. In open-list systems, such activities may help MPs differentiate themselves from intra-party competition. Mixed-member proportional electoral systems, such as in Germany or New Zealand, offer particularly interesting cases to study the possibly diverging incentives of leaders and MPs. In such systems, there are two tiers of MPs: those elected in single-member districts and those elected off a party list. Because the single-member district MPs, who represent a territorial constituency, may weigh such constituency concerns more, they may face pressure to deviate from the party line when constituency interests are at odds with an official party policy. For the party leaders, however, the overall electoral success is purely determined by the party list vote, not the set of MPs who win in the single-member districts. Thus, party leaders have an incentive to pay particular attention to who appears on speaker lists and what they say. Ultimately, they do so to protect the party brand to the greatest extent possible.

Table 3.1 offers a summary of the theory’s primary ingredients (electoral systems and the incentives that they generate for leaders and backbenchers to value unity) and implications for observed party unity as well as leader control in parliamentary debate. The country chapters in this book will explore empirically the variable that we can most consistently measure across countries, namely the degree to which party leaders or parliamentary group leaders are likely to speak during debates (column 7 in Table 3.1). When examining this variable, it is important to

carefully distinguish further positions that MPs may hold, in particular when parties are in government and ministers speak during debate in their role as cabinet members rather than party MPs. Some parliaments grant extra speaking time to cabinet members, which should not count when examining how parties internally allocate speaking time to their members. These effects are more likely to hold in larger parties. In parties with small parliamentary delegations of only a few members, virtually all members may hold a form of leadership role. Clearly, the theory requires a parliamentary delegation to be sufficiently large for our theoretical expectations to hold. Very small parties may tend to be more cohesive on average, reducing the need for leader control. The table, in addition to discussing fused parliamentary systems, it also presents expectations for two separation-of-powers systems, the US and the EU. We discuss the role of separation-of-powers below.

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The institutional structure of parliament, as well as party rules, may reflect the underlying incentive structures resulting from electoral rules. The rules of parliament may be structured to ensure that individual MPs can take the floor in systems where they need to, or may be structured to guarantee that parties can prevent MPs from taking the floor in systems where parties, rather than individuals, are of utmost importance. For example, at least technically, parties cannot prevent their dissidents from taking the floor in the UK House of Commons. MPs wishing to speak must stand to “catch the speaker’s eye.” In practice, though, they often register their interest in speaking beforehand. During Prime Minister’s questions, MPs register their desire to ask a question and then are chosen by lottery. Of course, party whips could strongarm MPs behind closed doors and urge them not to speak or to tell them to take a particular stance, but there is no official mechanism for keeping MPs desiring to talk off the floor. In other systems,

though, parties control the speakers' list. Often floor time during debates is divided up between parties on the basis of a pre-arranged agreement, and then an MP with a leadership position (oftentimes a party whip) is charged with doling out the party's allotted time to MPs wishing to participate.

While we have focused on parliamentary systems, there is nothing about the theory that is unique to them. Indeed, we have included separation-of-powers systems, such as US presidentialism and the EU in Table 3.1. Much literature has suggested that the institutions of parliamentary democracy, namely the confidence procedure, help to strengthen parties and increase party unity and, perhaps, the importance of the "party brand" (e.g. Huber 1996; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998). Thus, without the link between government and parliament through confidence procedures, parties in presidential systems may exercise less control over their members in legislative debate than their counterparts in parliamentary systems, *ceteris paribus*. Of course, this is a big *ceteris paribus* claim. Electoral systems generate incentives to control speech in presidential systems, as well. The US represents a case where party leaders should exercise low levels of control for several reasons. There is no connection between the executive and legislative branches, the electoral system is SMD first-past-the-post, and national parties exercise weak control over candidate selection. Thus, party leaders in Congress may still wish to preserve a national party brand through the party label, they have difficulty and face trade-offs if they seek to exert too much influence over speaker selection and speech content on the floor.

The EU's separation-of-powers system is marked by a comparatively weak electoral connection, with EP elections viewed as second-order national elections. Voters cast votes for national parties, whose elected members join together with other similarly minded parties from

other EU countries within the EP to form transnational European political groups, the equivalent of party parliamentary groups in national parliaments. While European political groups control access to floor time in the EP, national parties control candidate selection and greatly influence MEPs' chances at reelection. When there are policy conflicts between a national party and its political group, MEPs are likely to side with the national party. As group leaders do not have to worry about protecting a group brand, as voters do not vote for European parties directly, they have less incentive to keep rebels off the floor. MEPs, who care about their reselection by the national parties, are thus likely to take the floor to express disagreement through speech when it occurs (Slapin and Proksch 2010). Moreover, we would expect group leaders to engage in less monitoring than they would in national parliamentary systems, and also participate less in debate themselves when there is conflict.

From our theory, we can derive system-level implications about speeches, and not just about which individuals speak. In systems where the importance of the party label is high, we should observe relatively low levels of dissent in speeches regardless of the latent level of intra-party dissent. In these systems, when intra-party dissent is high, the leaders will either seek out suitable speakers, those most likely to toe the party line, or they may be more likely to give speeches themselves, delegating to backbenchers less often. For example, if we observe unified party speeches in Germany, it may mean the party is actually homogenous or it could mean that the party is actually heterogenous, but through a combination of strong party discipline and careful speaker selection, it manages to preserve a unified face. In contrast, when the importance of MPs' developing a personal brand is greater, more heterogeneity within the party is likely to lead to more diversity in the view expressed in parliament. In the UK, for example, if we observe unified party speeches it likely means the party is actually more homogenous in its beliefs. For

empirical tests of the theory, it is important to not just examine whether party leaders are more or less likely to speak than backbenchers, but also whether there is a need for party leaders to monitor and get involved in debate in the first place. Our theory expects this to be the case when latent policy disagreement in the party is sufficiently large. This concept is hard to measure empirically, especially in a comparative manner cross-nationally, and not addressed in the country chapters in this volume.

Theoretical Extensions: Inter-Party Conflict and MPs' Roles and Characteristics

Our original theoretical and empirical work offers a general argument about how electoral incentives moderate the relationship between latent ideological disagreement within parties and the allocation of speaking time. However, neither our theory or empirics made a distinction between when speech occurs in the parliamentary agenda, its purpose, and who speaks (beyond the distinction between backbencher and leaders and the ideological distance between the two). But not all parliamentary speech is the same, nor are all potential speakers. Parliaments have different rules for how speakers get floor time for bill debates, parliamentary questions, and other forms of speech. Parliaments may have special time set aside where MPs can discuss constituency issues, and different MPs may make use of this time than the MPs who speak during bill debates. Moreover, MPs may vary in their personal characteristics, which could affect who takes the floor. In the next section, we consider extensions to our theory along these lines. In addition the main variables discussed above—frontbencher vs backbencher status and

frontbencher participation—we now outline other variables that may impact legislative debate participation, some of which will be explored in the country chapters.

Government vs Opposition in Debate

One aspect of legislative speech that separates it from other types of political speech in parliamentary systems, such as campaign speeches or policy speeches given to particular audiences, is that it is structured by government agenda-setting and the government-opposition divide. The structure of governments and parliaments means that positions expressed in debate are not equivalent to policy positioning in campaigns. In campaigns, parties are free to position themselves as they wish. In parliament, opposition parties must react to whatever it is that the government puts forward. The speeches that we observe, at least on government bill debates—arguably the most important part of the legislative agenda as it is the most likely to produce policy change—reflect MP responses to the government’s policy program. During these debates, MPs’ positioning in speech is likely driven by as much by the reference point in debate (e.g. a bill proposal) as it is by the party’s latent party position (Proksch et al. 2019). This explains why, for example, Lauderdale and Herzog (2016) find that ideological positions extracted from speech in parliamentary systems reflect a government opposition divide rather than policy positions taken in election campaigns. Rather than scaling parliamentary speech to extract positions, it may be better to measure sentiment because sentiment can capture strength of opposition with respect to a reference point, namely the government proposal (Proksch et al. 2019).

Of course, not all debate takes place on government bills. If we are to understand who speaks and what gets said during these other parts of the parliamentary agenda, we must understand the data generating process here, too. In other work, we have demonstrated how

parties can use parliamentary questions to exercise oversight, especially parties that do not have access to any other oversight mechanisms. In the European Parliament we find that Members of the EP from national opposition parties tend to ask more questions of European Commissioners, and we argue that this might be because they lack other channels of oversight available to governing parties, such as participation in Council meetings (Proksch and Slapin 2011; Jensen et al. 2013). In other systems, parliamentary questions may offer an opportunity for MPs to connect with constituents (Martin 2011). They may ask questions of particular concern to their region, or point out noteworthy events in their constituency so that constituents know that they are being represented in the parliament. In Chile, there is a specific part of debate set aside for MPs to bring up these types of concerns (Aleman et al. 2017). The factors that lead an MP to participate in these types of debate are different from participation in debates on government bills. They might include how close geographically the MP's constituency is to the capital, with MPs from more far-flung districts needing to demonstrate that they are standing up for regions that are not usually at the center of debate. Alternatively, some types of MPs may be more likely to rely on constituency service activities for their reelection, usually more ideologically extreme MPs. They may be more likely to participate in questions.

Coalition Dynamics in Debate

Who participates in debate may not only be a function of an intra-party game, but also the result of inter-party politics. The literature on coalition policy-making offers insights into how governing parties resolve conflicts among each other. Martin and Vanberg (2008) discuss parliamentary debate within the context of coalition politics. They demonstrate that parties in coalition governments may use their backbenchers to keep tabs on their coalition partners.

Parliamentary debate and parliamentary questions may provide an opportunity for parties to engage their backbenchers in monitoring activities over other governing parties. While offering a new take on the theoretical reasons for why MPs take the floor to participate in debate, this logic is also perfectly compatible with our theory of parliamentary debate. Party leaders presumably still have a choice over which backbenchers should engage in monitoring through debate and could employ loyalist backbenchers for the task. The Martin and Vanberg theory assumes that parties exercise a fair amount of control over both speakers' lists and speech content, which means that it might work better in systems where the institutional rules offer such mechanisms for control. A possible extension of our theory could focus on the dynamic nature of the policy conflict between coalition parties as this may affect the party position that the leaders try to defend. While there has been significant advances in the work on coalition dynamics and policy-making in recent years, very little work has focused on parliamentary debate and its role in representation in coalition governments.

Responding to challenger parties in debate

Recently, there has been a substantial body of research examining how mainstream parties, i.e. parties with cabinet experience, deal with challenges from insurgent challenger parties, i.e. parties which have always been in opposition (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Following the seminal contribution of Meguid (2005; 2008), the primary focus of this literature has been on responses in a campaign context (e.g. Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018; Spoon et al. 2014). Populist parties are of particular interest in this regard, as they tend to campaign on anti-establishment rhetoric. However, it is not clear that campaign-based theories are sufficient to tell us how mainstream parties and populist challengers respond to each other in their speech and rhetoric once inside parliament. While campaign speech is relatively unconstrained, once in parliament, the interaction between mainstream and challenger parties is defined by the government-opposition divide, with the insurgent parties often (but certainly not always) in the opposition,

and responding to government parties. Again, the legislative agenda informs both position-taking and rhetoric in parliament. As more radical parties have gained a foothold in some parliaments, they have had to learn how to respond to government agendas in legislative speech. Likewise, mainstream parties have had to figure out strategies for handling radical comments within the context of debate. This has been the case, for example, in Germany, where the radical right AfD first entered parliament in 2017.

Policy Extremity

Our theory discusses the role of intra-party disagreement in who takes the floor, but does not consider the role of ideology other than through its relationship to intra-party divisions.

However, ideology may affect the demand for speaking time beyond its impact on intra-party ideological distances. It could be the case MPs taking a specific ideological position may demand more speaking time. In our work on parliamentary questions in the European Parliament, for example, we find that Eurosceptic MEPs are more likely to ask parliamentary questions than those with a pro-European bent (Proksch and Slapin 2011). Slapin et al. (2018) also find that ideological extremists are more likely to participate in debates when they vote against their party in the UK. Our theory would suggest that, to the extent that these ideological extremists deviate from the party leadership, the party leadership ought to try to reign them in. However, in systems where MPs need to generate a personal vote, such as the UK, they may be allowed to participate. Alternatively, parties might be perfectly fine to allow these MPs to speak more frequently during parliamentary questions or adjournment debates, but are more likely to exert control on debates of government bills or debates directly relating to the party's main policy agenda. But ideologically extreme MPs may not deviate from their party at all if their party, itself, espouses an ideologically extreme position. Members of populist far-right or far-left parties may seek more floor time to demonstrate to voters that they are working for them in

parliament, or exposing what they view to be the hypocrisy of the “elite.” These parties are often shut out of power and have fewer opportunities to influence policymaking, leaving them to take advantage of speaking time on the floor, instead.

Expertise, Seniority, and Parliamentary Committees

In our theory on speaker selection, we consider expertise as a factor that may reduce the set of potential MPs who could give a speech on behalf of their party. While we do not explicitly model information, we take it into account as a precondition for serving as a “qualified speaker.” We assume that party leaders only consider qualified speakers, i.e. those who are highly informed, when deciding who should participate. Expertise of MPs plays a role insofar as leaders would prefer to have knowledgeable MPs on the floor. Work on the Portuguese parliament has shown that expertise, measured through committee membership, increases the chances of being selected as speaker (Fernandes et al. 2019). Our work on the EP (Proksch and Slapin 2011) has also shown that members of the relevant committee are more likely to ask questions, where a match of committee membership and the related Commissioner portfolio serves as a proxy for expertise. Committee chairs may be particularly prone to speak during debates, as they also may play a procedural role in shepherding bills through the parliamentary process. Lastly, expertise may simply be related to seniority in parliament as MPs gain more experience and become more knowledgeable, both about their particular area of policy focus and also how the parliamentary process works. Thus, we would also expect that MPs who have served in the chamber longer, regardless of leadership position, are more likely to take the floor.

Gender Differences in Debate

Besides institutional and political factors that we have discussed above, other social factors may impact who participates in debate. Research has consistently shown that women MPs behave differently in parliament than their male counterparts (e.g. Cowley and Childs 2003) and speak relatively less than men (Bäck et al. 2014; Bäck and Debus 2019). But it is not entirely clear why this is the case. It could both be due to actions by the MPs themselves, or actions taken by the parties. Cowley and Childs (2003), for example, have argued that the new women MPs in the UK Labour Party elected in 1997 were less likely to rebel and more likely to abstain on votes largely because of a difference in style and women's approach to politics. Women saw rebellion and related speechmaking as "grandstanding" and not worth spending time on.

Of course, it could also be that party leadership relegates women MPs to speaking about so-called "women's issues" and denies them floor time at other points in the parliamentary agenda. Our theory does not address these issues, beyond saying that they may affect the pool of MPs that the leaders consider to be good candidates to give a speech. Even less has been written about the participation of minority MPs in debate than has been written about women. Unfortunately, in many European parliaments, there are probably too few minorities to conduct a meaningful empirical study of the question. But the presence of women and minorities on the floor of parliament is important for the descriptive representation of these groups, and clearly more empirical study is needed.

Connecting Theory and Empirics: Understanding the Content of Parliamentary Speeches

Our primary focus of our intra-party theory on parliamentary politics was speaker selection and participation. One important conclusion of our work was that if we are to use debate to understand political concepts and to measure substantive features of politics cross-nationally, we need to understand the data-generating process behind parliamentary speech. In this section, we offer potential ways in which scholars may be able to integrate our insights into their study of the content of parliamentary speeches.

First, it is important to understand what actually constitutes a parliamentary speech. This is particularly important for cross-national work of speaker participation. When we count the number of speeches MPs give over a parliamentary session, it is important to ask if it is possible to compare these across parliaments. For instance, can we compare a one-minute spontaneous intervention to a 5-minute carefully prepared and speech read from a transcript? Related to this concern are cultural differences in debates across parliaments. For historical (often path-dependent) reasons, debates follow a particular organizational and rhetorical scheme that is often unique to a political cultural context. For instance, it is customary to address other MPs in the House of Commons as “Honorable Members,” whereas the same is not the case in other parliaments. A better understanding of such stylistic rhetorical patterns, and how they may affect the substantive content of speech, is needed.

Second, an understanding of the data-generating process and speaker selection is of utmost importance to text analysis of speech. Parliamentary speech arguably holds tremendous potential for understanding concepts such as political representation, rebellion, or position-taking. Not all speech, however, may offer the same level of insight. For example, when trying to measure constituency or territorial representation from speeches, such concepts may be more likely to appear in private member bills, question time, or current event debates, rather than in

orchestrated government bill debates. Similarly, intra-party rebellion or dissent may not be visible on the floor, even though disagreements inside the party may be salient. The party leadership may use speaker selection or other creative mechanisms to keep contentious issues off the floor. Finally, it is important to consider how speech may actually reflect policy positioning. Applications of text scaling may not yield desirable estimates of policy positions that are comparable to campaign statements (Lauderdale and Herzog 2016). But once we consider legislative agenda control, other measures, such as sentiment analysis, may yield useful proxies for legislative conflict between parties (Proksch et al. 2019). Such measures, however, should be carefully applied to a comparable set of government bill debates, where the agenda-setter is held constant.

Conclusion

Parliamentary debates hold a tremendous potential for the study of representation and policymaking, as long as we consider the political context of speech generation, including electoral incentives and party control. We can learn about who gives speeches as a function of MPs' ideology, personal traits, partisan and electoral constraints. Citizens may value hearing MPs express views similar to their own on the floor of parliament, or seeing MPs who look, act or sound like them participating in parliamentary politics. But many questions about the relationship between debate, policy and representation remain unanswered. For example, little is known about the relationship between the quality or nature of policy outcomes and the amount of the debate that an issue receives. Sometimes, parliaments spend a fair amount of time discussing issues of little policy relevance, and less time on issues of significant importance. Or alternatively, crises might arise that leave parliaments with little time to debate options and

alternatives publicly. Another question is whether the way in which politicians debate in parliament is indicative of other political achievements, such as career advancement, public recognition, or government participation. These questions and the extensions to our theory mentioned above (e.g. the role of gender, coalition dynamics, responses to challengers, ideological extremity, expertise) need to be taken seriously going forward. The hope is that by addressing such questions we will be able to generate a more complete picture of the relevance and impact of parliamentary debate on representation.

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Table 3.1: Summary of Proksch and Slapin’s Theory of Intra-Party Politics of Parliamentary Debate (Proksch and Slapin 2015)

Regime Type	Electoral System	Party Leaders value	MPs value	Implication for Party unity in debate	Implication for leader control	Implication for relative party leader participation	Example
Parliamentary	Plurality	both MP exposure and unity	both ideology and party position	moderate	moderate	low	UK House of Commons
Parliamentary	Proportional	party unity	party position	high	high	high	Portugal Assembly
Parliamentary	Mixed-Member PR	party unity	both ideology and party position	high	very high	high	Germany <i>Bundestag</i>

Separation-of-powers	Plurality	MP exposure	ideology	low	low	low	US Congress
Separation-of-powers	PR with decentralized candidate selection	EP group leaders value MEP exposure	Re-selection by national party	moderate	low	low	European Parliament