Floor access in Mexico's Cámara de Diputados*

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Abstract

This chapter describes the institutions of legislative debate in the Mexican Cámara de Diputados and assesses predictors of floor participation. Multiple regression models are fit on more than twenty-three thousand speeches between 2006 and 2020. They shows that majority party members get privileged floor access, in both the number of speeches delivered and their word-length, even after accounting for the negative effect of party size. Other status indicators, such as committee chairs, party leaders, and seniority, have more modest but also positive effects in debate. Women speak more than men. And the removal of single-term limits in 2018, which tend to personalize elections, associate with a significant surge in floor participation.

Keywords: Floor debate, speech, Congress, presidential democracy, Mexico

Word count: 6469 (including abstract and references)

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1 Introduction

Legislative studies are a relatively young field of Mexican politics. Its growth is remarkable and much has been learned in a wide array of areas. These include candidate selection (Ascencio and Kerevel 2021); congressional campaigns (Langston n.d.); redistricting (Magar, Trelles, Altman and McDonald 2016); vote trading (López Lara 2013); pork barreling (Kerevell 2015); instability (Heller and Weldon 2003); roll call voting (Cantú, Desposato and Magar 2014); federal influences (Rosas and Langston 2011); constitutional amendment (Casar and Marván Laborde 2014); executive success (Béjar Algazi 2012); divided government (Casar 2013); the budget process (Weldon 2002); executive predominance (Weldon 1997); and party discipline (Téllez del Río 2018), among others.

But there is no scholarship on legislative debate in sight. Other than brief and general mentions to the subject, I could find no systematic study of floor access. This chapter aims to start filling the void by describing the institutional setting of debate in the Cámara de Diputados and performing a systematic examination of the determinants of floor participation.

A disconnect appears between formal and informal institutions. Formal rules decentralize agenda power by granting members broad rights of recognition to take the floor and deliver speeches. Informal rules channel debate through legislative parties, leaders managing participation in centralized fashion. Unlike the U.K. Parliament, where delegation to the cabinet annuls most private members' formal rights (Cox 1987), the Cámara appears to belong in a middle ground, where the U.S. Senate probably also lies (Den Hartog and Monroe 2011).

Focus is on the Cámara de Diputados of the bicameral Congress. The chambers have symmetric powers over most legislation, but the Senate is excluded from adoption of the annual budget, and I leave it out. Moreover, due to time constraints, I further narrow the focus to three out of eight Cámara terms since the advent of competitive politics in Mexico. I examine the 60th Legislature (2006-09), the 62nd (2012-15), and the 64th (2018-21) up to the end of the second ordinary year—enough to investigate how the removal of term limits affects debate.

The chapter is organized thus. Section 2 describes political institutions, the party system,

and major changes to both. Section 3 describes the institutional setting of legislative debate in the Cámara. It identifies key players, the structure of debate, recognition-granting motions, and how party discipline works as a substitute to centralized agenda power. Section 4 performs data analysis. Multiple regression models reveal the mutual influences of parties and individual rights in the number of speeches deputies make and their length. Section 5 discusses minority rights in the context of Mexican politics, and concludes.

2 Institutional and party system background

2.1 Executive-legislative relations

Mexico is a presidential democracy. For most of the 20th century a hegemonic party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), held the strings of political influence in a tight grip nationwide. While the PRI's electoral fortunes suffered from societal change and from formidable economic setbacks in the 1980s, it was not until 1997 that competitive politics became the norm (Cornelius 1996; Cosío Villegas 1981; Molinar 1991; Scott 1959). For the first time in over six decades, the PRI lost control of the lower chamber of Congress in that year's midterm election. Then in 2000 the country's long-standing right-of-center opposition, the National Action Party (PAN) beat the PRI in the presidential race.

With democracy came two decades of divided government. The executive's control of the legislative process ended abruptly, inaugurating relative balance between the branches (Lujambio and Vives 2000; Weldon 1997). The president retained a prominent role in lawmaking, but genuine negotiation with the opposition was required to get things done (Béjar Algazi 2012; Casar 2013).

The competitive era had a system with three major parties and a handful of small opportunistic parties (see Díaz Cayeros, Estévez and Magaloni 2016; Moreno 2009). Majors included the PAN, the PRI, and a left-of-center Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). Competition was mostly between the PRI and another major at the local level. The PRI retained strongholds from its hegemonic era in rural Mexico, but neither party had particularly strong ties to social groups.

	60th	62nd	64th
	2006-09	2012-15	2018-21
Party	%	%	%
pan	41	23	16
pri	21	43	9
prd	25	20	4
morena			51
opportunistic w/ president		8	14
other opportunistic	13	7	6
Total %	100	100	100
N	500	500	500
President's party	pan	pri	morena

Table 1: Parties in three Legislatures of the Cámara de Diputados

Parties would have to rebuild a clientelistic coalition from near scratch at every electoral campaign.

The three-party system came crashing down in the critical election of 2018. After decades of infighting the left finally split. The faction loyal to Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, successfully launched the National Regeneration Movement (Morena), a new party, overcoming formidable entry barriers (Magar 2015). This feat paved his way to winning the presidency by a landslide. Riding AMLO's coattails, Morena acquired majority status in the Cámara, the first instance of single-party unified government since democratization. Inclusion of the incomplete 64th Legislature brings unified government to the study (data runs up to March 19th, 2020 which marks the end of the second ordinary year). The other terms offer perspective: a minority president in the 60th, an informal coalition with opportunistic parties in the 62nd.

2.2 Legislative parties

> "At the end of the day, the chambers are a mandarinate where the few decide for all."
>
> —Former lawmaker from the left, interviewed on condition of anonymity, June 17th, 2020

Weak parties in the electorate lie in sharp contrast to their strength in Congress, which stems from electoral rules. The formula is mixed member plurality—three-hundred deputies elected

by first-past-the-post in single member districts (SMDs), two-hundred more by closed-list proportional representation (PR) every three years (Weldon 2001). All seats are contested in races concurrent with the presidential election, then again at the presidential midterm.

A key feature are single-term limits, which the constitution set on every elected officeholder. Political ambition could only be progressive (Schlesinger 1966). On top of this is highly centralized ballot access: national and state party leaders control most nominations (Langston 2008; Rosas and Langston 2011).[1] This institutional combination not just removes personal vote incentives (Carey and Shugart 1995), it rewards discipline to party leaders. This, we see below, plays a fundamental role in floor access.

In a surprising recent development, single-term limits were eliminated for selected offices, including federal deputies. The 2021 midterm election will be the first since the 1930s where incumbents are allowed on the ballot (see Magar 2017 for details). This should introduce a degree of personal vote seeking among a subset of deputies with static ambition. While reformers further centralized nominations by keeping term limits in place for party switchers, this might not fully reign in competitive incumbents. Parties removing quality candidates—such as previous winners of elected office (Jacobson 1997), dynastic candidates (Enríquez González 2018), and what Zaller (1998) calls "prize fighters"—in order to secure nomination of docile newbies, risk losing those districts. The 64th Legislature, despite partial data, allows examination of the effect that static ambition has on debate.

3 The institutional setting of legislative debate in the Cámara

An overview of the structure of legislative debate shows members who have abdicated most formal speech rights to the party. The Cámara's Rules (Reglamento 2019) has prescriptions for debate, the Organic Law (Orgánica 2019) for congressional organization.

[1] Reliance in primaries for SMD candidate selection, mostly by the PAN (Ascencio and Kerevel 2021), on occasions by the PRI (Poiré 2002), opens room for exceptions to centralized ballot access.

Casar (2016) characterizes debate as party-centered: "[governing] bodies have the power ... to conduct floor debates, including assigning turns and time to speakers" (p. 154). This, we will see, comes from party discipline, because formal institutions establish individual member rights to be recognized by the presiding officer.

Proksch and Slapin's (2015) scheme, used across chapters in this volume, compares assemblies according to how members gain access to take the floor in order to deliver speeches (p. 79). They posit a continuum connecting two extremes: party-controlled and individual member-controlled floor access. Formal rules place the Cámara towards the individual member-controlled access limit of the continuum; but partisan rules pull it towards the party-controlled access side. The removal of single term limits ought to make this tension between formal and de facto institutions harder to manage for all parties.

3.1 The boards

There are two key actors in the legislative process, the Junta and the Mesa. The *Junta de Coordinación Política* is the Cámara's top decision-making organ. The leaders of all parties with no fewer than five deputies are represented. The majority leader presides the Junta throughout the term. In the absence of a majority party, however, the leaders of the top-three seat holding parties preside the Junta, alternating one year each. The Junta appoints and replaces committee members, prepares each session's order of the day (/orden del día/), and in general reaches and enforces party leader agreements. It decides by majority rule, with members' votes weighted relative to group sizes in the plenary. So majority status is crucial to control the Junta (cf. Cox and McCubbins 2005).

The *Mesa Directiva* is the chamber's steering board. The Mesa chair is the Cámara president ex-officio. The Mesa makeup has consensual traits, regardless of there being a majority party or not. It is elected yearly by two-thirds supermajority of Cámara members from candidates proposed by the Junta. While Mesa members can reelect, the chair must rotate between the top-three seat-holding parties, one year each.

Agenda control is frail. First, every committee report is guaranteed floor consideration and must be included in the order. If committees were adequate agents of the Junta majority, they might serve as gatekeepers by denying unwanted bills a report. But the Junta is required to distribute committee chairs (as well as committee seats) proportionally among the parties, so some committees are bound to be preference outliers.

Second, the open rule is the default for bill consideration in the floor. Debate takes place in two stages. The entire bill is first examined /en lo general/, then articles are considered individually for amendment or deletion /en lo particular/ (see Heller and Weldon n.d.). Members can always reserve articles for deletion or amendment, denying the Junta a useful procedural tool common in other assemblies: the closed rule (eg., Cox 2006; Magar, Palanza and Sin 2021; Weingast 1992).

Third, and most relevant, speakers can self-select. Individual members are entitled to take the floor when recognized by the presiding officer, for a duration set by rules or by party agreements. Party leaders allocate speaking time to a list of speakers but cannot preclude others from adding their names to that list, making debate resemble first-come-first-serve once parties have spoken.

3.2 The structure of debate

Rules set limits for different kinds of debate summarized in Table 2. The first entry refers drafters of new legislation, who who get first recognition to take the floor in order to persuade fellow lawmakers. The time limit is ten minutes when the draft is a new law, five minutes when it amends existing statutes. Deputies who wish to debate then get five minutes each. Bills that cannot be presented before the session ends migrate to the next day's order upon author's request /viva voce/ (otherwise they are referred to committee.) The rightmost columns report who selects the speaker—self-selection by drafting a bill, in this case—and who, if anyone, can veto the speaker's recognition—no one here.

Other speech types grant right of first recognition differently. Debate /en lo general/ grants it to the reporting committee chairperson or designated handler of the report for ten minutes (fifteen in constitutional amendments). The Cámara president can delay debate by recommitting the bill—

Debate type (in Spanish)	Goal	Durat.	Selector	Veto
1. Introduce legislation (iniciativa)	Author			
- a new law	presents	- 10′	- member	- no
- amend a law	the bill	- 5′	- member	- no
2. Committee report (dictamen)	Move			
- Debate en lo general vs SQ, chair	for floor	- 10′	- comm.maj	- pres.^1
- " " " others	consideration	- 5′	- members	- pres.^1
- Amendments (debate en lo particular)		- 5′	- members	- no
- negative report		- 3′	- comm.maj	- pres.^1
3. Resolutions (puntos de acuerdo)	Position			
- standard, author	taking	- 10′	- member	- comm.maj
- urgent, author (obvia resolución)		- 5′	- Junta	- floor
- other speakers		- 3′	- party	- no
4. Current events (agenda política)	Position	< 2hrs		
- Junta proponent	taking	- 10′	- Junta	- no
- other speakers		- 5′	- member	- no
^1 = President can delay/prevent speech by granting recommit.				

Table 2: Types of debate

and possibly prevent it if the committee kills the bill. /En lo particular/ amendments and Cámara resolutions grant it to the proposing member.

Party-appointed speakers get five minutes each, in reverse-size order, after the first /en lo general/ speech. Then members who request it then get five minutes each, the president arranging them in rounds, one for one against. After six such rounds, the floor can either proceed to vote, or continue with blocks of three such rounds. When the report deals with issues of great interest, debate can go on for several hours.

Cámara resolutions (/proposiciones con punto de acuerdo/) are tailor-made for members' position-taking needs, conditional on party leader support. If adopted, resolutions become the opinion of the chamber on some specific issue. But they require urgent status (/urgente u obvia resolución/) in order to avoid committee referral and move directly to the floor; only the Junta can request that the floor grants urgent status to at most two resolutions per session. If granted, the proposer takes the floor for five minutes. Parties then appoint one speaker each, for three minutes. The floor can then decide to vote, or open a rounds of debate with self-appointed speakers.

Current events (/agenda política/) are party leaders' position-taking venue. The Junta deter-

mines up to two themes for debate before consideration of reports and bills, party leaders appointing one speaker each. The promoting party speaker gets first recognition for 10 minutes, others 5 minutes each, and talk in reverse-size order. Current events debate cannot exceed two hours per session.

3.3 Recognition-granting motions

Debate under such rules becomes a succession of punctuated, mostly uninterrupted short speeches. Members can approximate back-and-forth talk, at least occasionally, by catching the president's eye from their seats in order to interrupt with a motion. The president has discretion to deny, or grant up to three minutes to elaborate. Such motions are distinct from points of order (which members can also make, see Reglamento art. 114 for typified motions). They grant recognition to speak. One (/cuestionamiento al orador/) to interrogate the speaker, who must also accept the question be made. Another is (/alusiones personales/), to give right of reply to alluded members by recognizing them right after the speaker ends. And (/rectificación de hechos/) wind up an additional name at the end of the list of speakers.

3.4 Party discipline as alternative to centralized agenda power

The Cámara's debate rules are ill-designed to prevent plenary bottlenecks (Cox 2006). Even in the presence of a majority party, individual members retain speaking rights that water down attempts by the Junta to cartelize the legislative process. So how does the Cámara prevent dilatory motions to get things done? The answer is parties. Party discipline operates as an alternative to agenda cartelization in many systems (Prata 2001).

Cohesion is near perfect across parties. Téllez del Río (2018) computed frequencies with which deputies voted against a majority of their party (excluding unanimous votes). The mean he reports for the 1997–2018 period stands at 2 percent, 3.4 percent when abstentions are coded as votes against the party majority (p. 25).

Three former deputies from the larger parties offered quick impressions on internal party

speech rules upon request.[2] One commonality (at least in this very small sample) is the informal erosion of formal individual members' debate rights in favor of centralized speech allocation (cf. Cox 1987). The PAN relies on a debate whip (subcoordinador de debate parlamentario) in charge of selecting speakers in debates. When two members wish to speak at once, the whip would let them figure who would get the party's slot in the debate, who would then speak for or against. The PRI leadership sets apart issues of party interest, appointing every speaker when debated. Members would communicate their wish to speak on unwhipped issues to their state caucus leader, who would seek authorization with party whips. Rules give parties one speaking slot each in many debates, regardless of size. Distributive conflict over speech is therefore more acute for larger parties, with longer speaker lists. A must for a dissenting member is a solid understanding of the Rules. That member can thus make individual speaking rights effective by introducing suspensive motions or amendments, both of which come equipped with recognition to take the floor.

Party leaders move the strings of lawmaking. Their influence, however, derives almost exclusively from party discipline (near-perfect across the board) and not from agenda power (which is quite diffuse).

4 The determinants of legislative debate

4.1 Data and methods

Digitized speeches come from the stenographic service (scraped from http://cronica.diputados.gob.mx/). I relied on regular expressions to de-htmlize the text and identify speakers and their speech, turning text into data for analysis.[3]

The dependent variable is a member's participation in plenary debate during legislative periods

[2] Email exchanges with Fernando Rodríguez Doval (PAN), Lupita Vargas Vargas (PRI), and an anonymous former lawmaker from the left, June 17th, 2020.

[3] Data analysis was performed in R (R Dev. Core Team 2011), all code is available at https://github.com/emagar/legdeb. I relied on libraries lme4 (Bates, Mächler, Bolker and Walker 2015), lubridate (Grolemund and Wickham 2011), margins (Leeper 2018), MASS (Venables and Ripley 2002), plyr (Wickham 2011), stargazer (Hlavac 2018), and zoo (Zeileis and Grothendieck 2005).

(see the appendix for terminology). The 60th, 62nd, and 64th Legislatures had six, eight, and five periods, respectively, totaling nineteen. Three are extraordinary periods, the rest ordinary. Mean days per period was 6.7 for the former, 31.4 for the latter, so the debate models control for period length.

I use two specifications of the dependent variable. One is *speeches(i,p)* equal the number of days that member i took the floor in period p. Owing to the permissive agenda, days when a deputy spoke from her seat by means of motions, without taking the lectern, count as debate. Days when deputy i spoke fewer than 50 words in total are arbitrarily considered non-debate and dropped, adding zero towards the member's aggregates. Since officers do not participate in legislative debate, all steering speech, as when the president recognizes a deputy or the secretary calls a voice vote to dispense reading of the bill, was also removed. So was speech by non-deputies, as in cabinet member hearings. Everything remaining is considered debate, members' daily totals added across sessions in the same period to produce aggregates for analysis.

The other specification is *words(i,p)* equal the number of words that member i spoke in period p divided by the number of days that i served as a proportion of all session days in period p—members can take leaves of absence, so many served less than the full period. So the denominators for two members i and j who both spoke 2 thousand words, i served uninterrupted throughout period p, j served only half of period p, are 1 and 0.5, respectively. This makes words(i,p)=2000 but words(j,p)=2000/0.5=4000 instead.

Table 3 has a summary of the dependent variable along others of interest. Member-period observations total 9494. The median member spoke once per period, delivering 607 words relative to days in office (593 words per period in absolute terms). At nearly 1400 words per period, means are substantially higher owing to a right-skewed speech distribution portrayed in Figure 1. Relevant to the choice of estimation methods, speech data might are not evidently over-dispersed (at 3.1, the standard deviation is not that much higher than the mean of 2.1), so both negative binomial and poisson regression will be used for estimation. And the nearly two out of five members who uttered not a single word in the period (37.6 percent) suggest adoption of a zero-inflated approach.

Part A: Continuous variables

	min	median	mean	sd	max	N
N speeches (DV1)	0	1	2.1	3.1	37	9494
N words / exposure (DV2)	0	607	1391	2716.3	50291	9494
N words	0	593	1366	2682.3	50291	9494
Days in office (exposure)	1	30	26.7	11.2	40	9494
Party share	0.4	25	29.2	15.9	51	9494
Seniority	0	1	1.7	2.2	17	9494
Previous terms	0	0	0.3	0.6	4	9494
Age	21	46	45.9	10.1	78	7332

Part B: Dichotomous variables

	0	1	tot	N
Spoke	37.6	62.4	100	9494
Majority	86.6	13.4	100	9494
Leader	98.3	1.7	100	9494
Chair	90.6	9.4	100	9494
SMD	39.3	60.7	100	9494
Suplente	94.2	5.8	100	9494
Extraord	84.5	15.5	100	9494
Female	64.2	35.8	100	9494
60th	68.2	31.8	100	9494
62nd	57.6	42.4	100	9494
64th	74.2	25.8	100	9494
PAN	72.8	27.2	100	9494
PRI	72.8	27.2	100	9494
Left	70.0	30.0	100	9494

Table 3: Variable descriptives

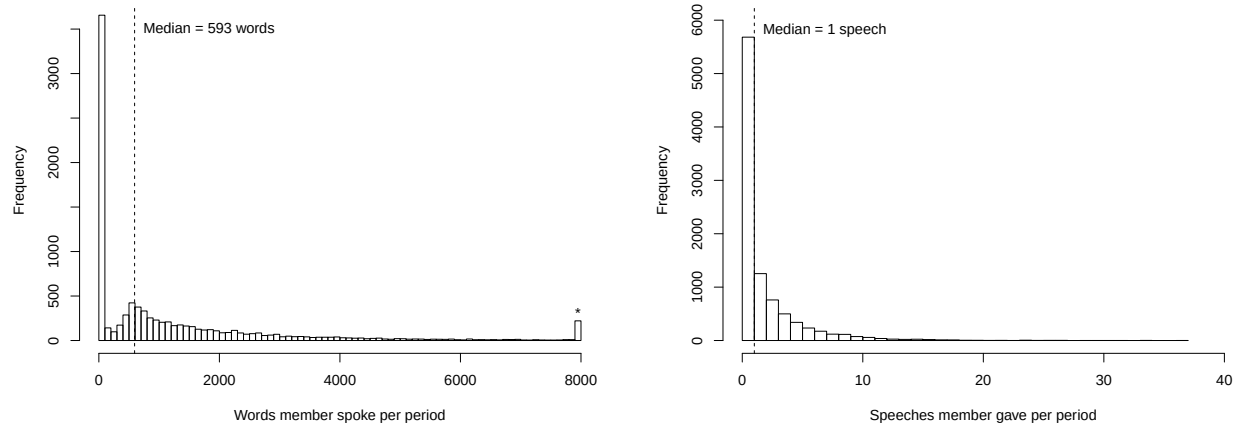

Figure 1: The dependent variable, number of words (left) and number of speeches (right). The column under a star in the left panel is fictitious, reporting 217 member-periods with 8 thousand words or more (2.2 percent of all, the actual distribution spreads these observations, with increasing sparseness, from 8000 to 50291).

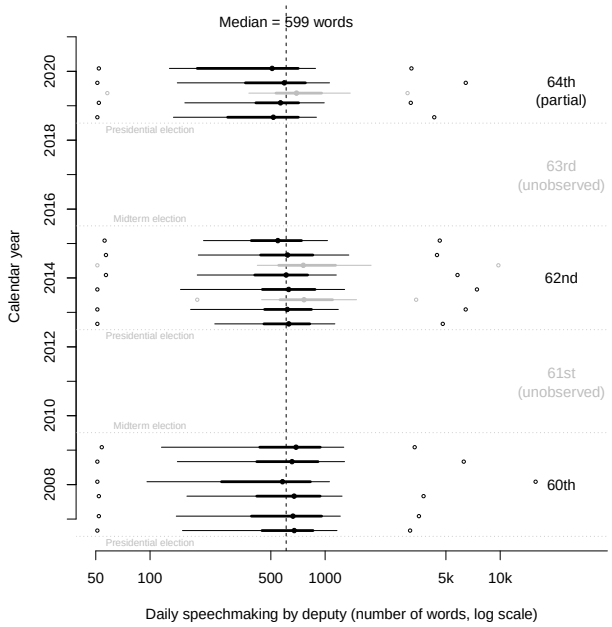

Figure 2: Daily speech length by legislative period observed. The plot excludes non-speaking members. Solid points indicate the median speech length in the period. Thick and thin lines connect the 25–75 and 10–90 percentiles, respectively. Hollow points are minima and maxima. Ordinary periods in black, extraordinary periods in gray.

Debate length is easier to grasp when expressed as daily totals instead of the period totals analyzed. In the median session, 36.5 different speakers contributed to daily debate, and six days had over 100 speakers. Figure 2 portrays member daily aggregates across the periods analyzed. For clarity, this plot includes speakers only (keep in mind that non-speakers are included in the period aggregates analyzed below.) Solid points report median daily speech length in words. With few exceptions, period medians are much the same as the overall median daily speech length of 599 words. Mild term effects show up too, the 60th medians slightly above and the 64th slightly below the overall median. Horizontal lines report the spread of the central portion of the density—the thicker line is the inter-quartile range, the thinner connects the first and ninth deciles. Period distributions are, in general, similar. The clearest exceptions are extraordinary periods, drawn in gray. The models therefore include controls for term and ordinary session effects.

Hollow points are minima and maxima. Diputada Valentina Batres holds the record for delivering the longest speech in the three terms examined. At 15,932 words, her speech delivered March 11th, 2008 is 50 percent longer than the runner-up and has about as many words as *Don*

	% women	of
Members	39	1710^
-60th	28	603
-62nd	41	640
-64th	47	531
Cámara presidents	35	31
Committee chairs	25	143
Party leaders	21	24
- major party	0	12
- opportunistic	42	12
Speechmakers	37	5926
Speeches	41	23601
Words spoken	41	17.5M
^Returning members counted once only.		

Table 4: Women representation and debate

Quijote de la Mancha's chapters 1 through 7 (forty-five pages in the edition I own). Batres and legislators close to AMLO used dilatory tactics throughout that day's session, delaying the vote of a national geostatistics law. I suspect that filibustering was probably aimed at a bill down the line, with plainer distributive effects (cf. Wawro and Schickler 2007). A systematic study of filibustering in the Cámara is worthy of further study. The names associated with extreme member-periods (those grouped in the left panel of Figure 1's starred column) are few: only nine deputies repeatedly surpassed 20 thousand words per period, mostly in the 62nd term. They are routine filibusters.

4.2 Gender and seniority

The relationships of gender and seniority with floor access are of interest across chapters. Of 1710 members observed, 39 percent are women (see Table 4). Owing to stricter quotas, 47 percent of the 64th Legislature were women, up from 28 in the 60th (Piscopo 2016). Women participation in debate exceeds their numerical presence: despite subrepresentation among committee chairs and party leaders (but not Cámara presidents), 41 percent of both speeches and total words were delivered by women in the floor. A degree of concentration is also manifest, as women represented 37 percent of unique speechmakers, who spoke more often and quite longer.

Single-term limits offer little leverage to evaluate how seniority impacts floor access. Members

Past terms	Mean number of speeches	Mean number of words	Member-periods
0	1.9	1181	7550
> 0	2.8	2082	1944
1	2.6	1944	1531
2	3.5	2892	330
> 2	2.5	1413	83

Table 5: Seniority and floor access, member-periods

wishing to return had to wait one term at least. It is remarkable that, despite this, 14 percent of members had previous federal deputy experience. This hints that the removal of single-terms will not be irrelevant due to lack of static ambition (as in Argentina, for instance). Freshmen spoke 1181 words per period on average, compared to 2082 for members with past terms as deputies. Member-periods with one past term made 37 percent more speeches and spoke 65 percent more words than those with none; with two past terms instead of one, 35 percent more speeches and 49 percent more words; but those with more than two past terms gave 29 percent less speeches and 52 percent fewer words than those with two. This drop could be attributable to earlier recruitment of senior members, antedating competitive politics; or it could be due to higher likelihood that senior members occupy positions that might depress willingness to speak despite floor access possibilities. The multivariate analysis might shed some light.

4.3 A model of debate

To analyze participation in floor debates, I fit multivariate event count models to words spoken. In the right side are status variables, member characteristics, and controls. Units are member-periods.

4.3.1 Status variables

A dummy for *majority* status indicates members from Morena in the 64th Legislature—the only party controlling over 50 percent of seats. If debate is an (imperfect) substitute for legislative outcomes, then minority members demand more frequent floor participation (Proksch and Slapin 2015). On the contrary, if members put value on debate per se, the majority may demand it as much

as others, possibly with better access to the floor. Next, a dummy for committee *chair* status. When producing a report, the chair has privileged access to the floor, and this should translate into more speech. A dummy for party *leader* status completes this set. Leaders allocate party speakers. Whether or not they take advantage of this privilege remains an open question, a good leader ought to distribute the goodies, or risk removal.

4.3.2 Member variables

Aside from *woman* and *seniority*, regressors in this group include *smd*, a dummy equal one for members elected in single-member districts. Systematic differences in members' pork requests are attributable to the method of election (Kerevell 2015), which may also translate into higher demand for access to the floor. I also interact this regressor with a dummy indicating the 64th Legislature, which dropped single-term limits (*smd x reelection*). The more personal vote should generate higher demand for floor access. *Party size* is the percentage of seats the member's party holds. Larger parties must divide the slot that all parties get to take the floor among more members, and this should show up as a negative regression coefficient. And a dummy *suplente* controls for substitute members. Regressors not in the right side include members' ages due to incomplete data, and party ideology, which made no difference in the estimates.

4.3.3 Other controls

Also in the right side are dummies for the *62nd* and *64th* terms (the 60th is the baseline) and another for *extraordinary* periods. Finally, with the option to take leaves of absence and have suplentes take over, some members served incomplete periods. The *exposure* is the number of days that the members served in the period, logged. Higher exposure offers more opportunities for floor access.

Table 6 reports the estimation of six different model specifications. In the left side are both flavors of the dependent variable. Models of words relative to tenure were fit with ordinary least squares (1, 2, and 3), models of the number of speeches with negative binomial regression (4 and

5) and zero-inflated poisson regression (6). Specifications vary the regressors. Models 2, 3, 5, and 6 include fixed term effects, capturing any heterogeneity between Legislatures that are pooled together. Model 3 estimates separate error terms for each member, intended to capture individual heterogeneity. And model 6 accounts for the excess of zeroes in the distribution seen in Figure 1. The overall fit is correct across models, likelihood ratio tests (not reported) reject the intercept-only model with much confidence.

Interesting patterns emerge from coefficient estimates. Party size exerted a negative and statistically significant effect in member floor access across specifications. This is easier to interpret from OLS coefficients: other variables constant, changing the party size from large (40 percent of seats) to small (15 percent) associates with a predicted drop of 1,700 words by member in the period. Martin Luther King took 16 minutes to deliver his famous "I have a dream" speech, which approximates that word count. I also find a positive, significant, and large effect of majority status, which acts against size. Far from letting legislative accomplishments speak for themselves, majority members take the floor systematically more than those of similar-sized parties. Figure 3 demonstrates the discontinuity through simulation with model 5 parameters. As party size crosses the majority threshold the member gets a bonus, delivering a number of speeches comparable to a party with 25 percent of seats.

Other forms of status also associate positively to floor access, but results are sensitive to model specification. Party leadership exerts a substantially larger effect than majority status on speech length, but much smaller on the number of speeches. Leaders get privileged floor access and appear to specialize in longer speeches, probably on more important legislation. Committee chairs also deliver more speeches than other members, but controlling for term and member effects bears upon OLS coefficient significance, both substantially and statistically, hinting to important differences in speeches length across committee jurisdictions and individuals.

I also find positive effects of seniority and gender that resonate with the bivariate patterns of floor access. The coefficient for *women* is not robust to random member effects nor to accounting for zero-inflation. This is probably due to the concentration of debate by women highlighted

	DV = Words/exposure in period			DV = Speeches in period		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Exposure (logged)				0.96***	1.30***	1.06***
				(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Majority	1,032.85***	1,494.59***	848.60***	1.22***	0.98***	1.11***
	(91.01)	(137.23)	(226.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.04)
Party leader	2,121.40***	1,906.26***	1,292.59***	0.34***	-0.04***	-0.04***
	(206.38)	(205.16)	(310.20)	(0.08)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Comm. chair	239.92***	145.14*	51.54	0.27***	0.31***	0.22***
	(87.49)	(86.86)	(146.09)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.04)
Seniority	224.72***	258.78***	262.58***	0.11***	0.25***	0.11***
	(48.14)	(47.53)	(85.76)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Woman	170.47***	131.49**	19.91	0.14***	-0.06*	-0.02
	(54.90)	(54.89)	(99.70)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Party size	-67.47***	-72.05***	-63.23***	-0.05***	0.25***	0.10***
	(2.00)	(2.26)	(3.85)	(0.001)	(0.05)	(0.03)
SMD	-25.24	-91.94	-115.00	0.03	0.12***	0.10***
	(55.84)	(64.91)	(115.48)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.01)
SMD x reelect		267.78**	7.68		0.09***	0.04**
		(120.85)	(189.51)		(0.03)	(0.02)
Suplente	-297.84***	-366.14***	-349.00**	-0.19***	-0.10*	-0.24***
	(110.56)	(108.95)	(140.66)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)
62nd Leg.		698.07***	836.08***		0.25***	0.24***
		(62.82)	(96.43)		(0.03)	(0.02)
64th Leg.		-114.31	508.02***		0.19***	0.17***
		(114.68)	(165.84)		(0.05)	(0.03)
Extraordinary		-1,102.30***	-1,109.17***		0.65***	0.68***
		(73.17)	(48.30)		(0.08)	(0.07)
Constant	3,077.93***	3,075.94***	2,807.58***	-1.53***	-2.91***	-1.91***
	(71.07)	(86.37)	(144.17)	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.13)
Fixed effects	no	term	term	no	term	term
Random effects	no	no	member	no	no	no
Estimation method	OLS	OLS	linear mixed-effects	negative binomial	negative binomial	zero-inflated poisson
Observations	9,494	9,494	9,494	9,494	9,494	9,494
R2	0.15	0.18				
Adjusted R2	0.15	0.18				
Log Likelihood			-85,188.83	-16,232.18	-16,126.53	-17,305.06
theta				1.55*** (0.05)	1.65*** (0.05)	
Akaike Inf. Crit.			170,407.70	32,484.36	32,281.06	
Bayesian Inf. Crit.			170,515.00			
Residual Std. Error	2,504.36 (df = 9485)	2,465.37 (df = 9481)				
F Statistic	210.29*** (df = 8; 9485)	170.19*** (df = 12; 9481)				
Note:						*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6: Models of legislative debate (standard errors in parentheses)

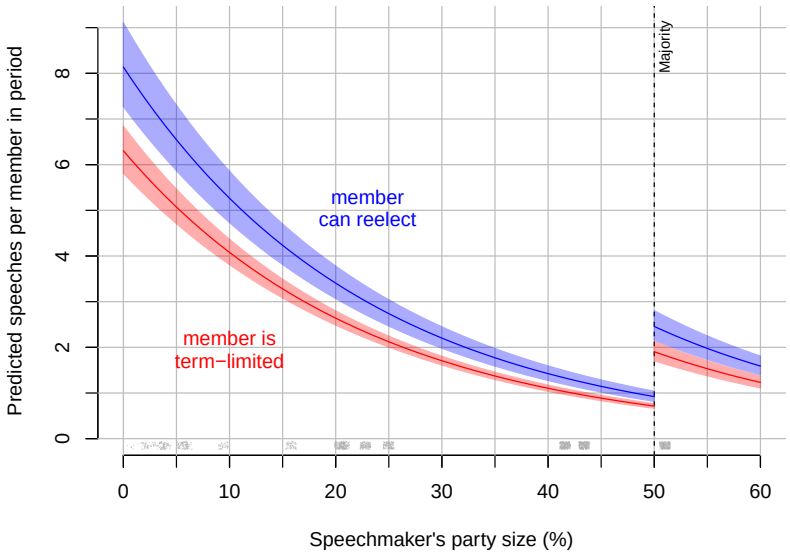

Figure 3: Predicted number of speeches by party size. Lines report point predictions using model 5, bands are 95-percent confidence intervals. Miniature gray points are observed members' party sizes, x- and y-jittered for visibility.

above, some deputies taking the floor disproportionally more than others. Overall, the effect of gender appears to be on par with that of one additional term of seniority.

A null finding of interest involves the method of election. The coefficient for *smd* is indistinguishable from zero across models. Figure 4 reports average marginal effects to interpret negative binomial regression coefficients: in contrast to PR members and with all other regressors at their mean, deputies elected in SMDs spoke slightly less, about 125 words in the period; the 95-percent confidence interval barely excludes the zero and this signal can't be discarded as product of chance alone. But look at the change in slope when interacted with reelection: this marginal effect is not just positive, but sufficient to cancel the negative pull of SMDs. Now a signal is discernible from random noise, even after controlling for majority status (the other big change in the 64th Legislature). Figure 3 makes this effect plain, a gap separates confidence intervals of predicted speeches by SMD members who can reelect and the term-limited. This finding hints to the invigoration of the personal vote after the removal of term limits and is worthy of more careful examination.

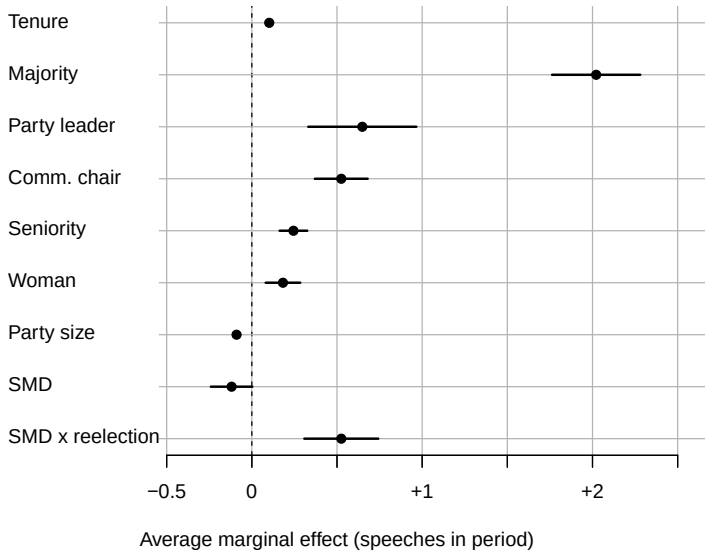

Figure 4: Average marginal effects from model 5. Circles report the effect in the expected number of speeches per period of a unit change in each independent variable, all else at mean values; bars are 95-percent confidence intervals.

5 Discussion: minority rights

(Forthcoming.)

Tension lies at the heart of legislative debate in the Cámara. On one hand, intra-party institutions have informally, but effectively managed to reign in members' capacity to take the floor. The effects that multivariate models uncovered for the majority, for leaders, and for committee chairs are all channeled through party structures in the Junta. On the other hand, formal institutions grant individual members formal rights of recognition to take the floor and, we have seen, these take many guises. The effect attributable to SMDs after the removal of term limits is, in all likelihood, associated to renovated personal vote incentives that members face.

Whether or not the informal solution to avoid plenary bottlenecks will continue to operate as it has so far is uncertain. Incumbents, some of them at least, may soon start overwhelming the system in their need to strengthen their electoral connection. The collapse of the three-party system in 2018 also plays against. Perhaps the heterogeneous coalition that gave Morena unified control of government will manage to consolidate, imposing a new informal arrangement, in spite

of the 2020 covid depression.

In any event, examination of legislative debate has offered an interesting and illuminating perspective on some of the challenges that Mexican parties now face.

6 Conclusion

(Forthcoming)

7 Appendix: terminology

- A *Legislature* is an elected chamber for a legislative term, between two congressional elections. The Mexican Congress relies on Roman numerals to distinguish consecutive Legislatures since the second half of the Nineteenth century.

- Legislative years break into two *ordinary legislative periods*, one covering the months of September through December, another February through April, all inclusive. *Extraordinary legislative periods* may be convened during the recess in order to consider a specific bill. Analysis aggregates each member's speeches in the duration of a given period (merging together all extraordinary periods that year, if any). So members in a legislative year like 2012-13 (that had no extraordinary periods) have two word aggregates in the dataset, one for each ordinary period; in a year like 2013-14 (that did), they have three word aggregates in the data. Periods are the units of observation in the analysis.

- A *plenary session* is a specific date in the calendar when diputados met. During ordinary periods, sessions are usually held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and may be scheduled in other weekdays if the Junta so decides. Diputados met on forty and thirty-one days in the first and second ordinary periods of 2013-14, respectively, and nine days in extraordinary periods, for a yearly total of eighty session days.

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