

Finland

Legislative Speechmaking in a Changing Parliament

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes plenary debates in the *Eduskunta*, the unicameral legislature of Finland. Recent constitutional reforms have strengthened the role of the *Eduskunta*, which the findings also reflect. Access to the floor is relatively unconstrained in Finland, but there is also a strong element of party control involved. The chapter shows that opposition MPs, small parties, and party leaders make active use of plenary speeches. The constitutional reform increased the likelihood of frontbenchers and experienced MPs to deliver speeches. Gender and partially seniority have little effect on who gets to speak in the plenary, but there is also quite a significant variation between political parties. Overall, our results indicate that the plenary has become a more important arena in Finnish politics, both for the cabinet and the opposition.

Keywords:

Finland, Eduskunta, debates, plenary, parties

Introduction

The standard image of the unicameral national legislature of Finland, the *Eduskunta*, is that of a typical Nordic “working parliament,” where the emphasis is on pragmatic legislative scrutiny in committees instead of lively and confrontational plenary debates (Arter [1999](#); Raunio and Wiberg [2014](#)).

Nevertheless, there are reasonable grounds for arguing that this picture is not entirely accurate. Constitutional reforms enacted since the early 1990s have transformed Finland from a president-led regime towards a parliamentary system. The government is responsible for domestic and European Union (EU) matters, while foreign policy is co-led between the president and the government. Hence the *Eduskunta* and political parties are much more in the center of things than under the old constitution (Karvonen [2014](#); Karvonen et al. [2016](#)).

Politically, Finland has followed the general European trend, with increasing party system fragmentation, a decline of the left-wing parties, and the rise of populism. Particularly noteworthy is the breakthrough of the populist and nationalist Finns Party in the 2011 elections, as the party has undoubtedly introduced more adversarial elements into the otherwise somewhat cautious debating culture. The constitutional reforms have also increased the gap between the government and the opposition. However, Finland continues to be ruled by ideologically heterogeneous coalition cabinets that often bring together parties from both the right and the left. These developments indicate that the parliamentary opposition, not least the populists, has a stronger incentive than

before to use plenary debates for criticizing the cabinet and the political establishment.

This chapter analyzes plenary debates in the *Eduskunta*. The next two sections provide the necessary contextual information by explaining the electoral and party systems' main features and the parliamentary procedures regulating access to the floor of the chamber. The empirical sections, in turn, uncover interesting dynamics about legislative debates. Gender and partially seniority have little effect on who gets to speak in the plenary, but the analysis displays variation between political parties. More importantly, the results show that opposition MPs, small parties, and party leaders make active use of plenary speeches. This indicates that the plenary has become a more important arena in Finnish politics, both for the cabinet and the opposition.

Institutional and Party System Background

Finland certainly has one of the most candidate-centered electoral systems in the world. The 200 members of the *Eduskunta* are elected for a four-year term from one single-member and twelve multimember electoral districts, with the Åland Islands entitled to one seat. In the latest election (2019), district magnitude varied between seven (Lapland) and thirty-six (Uusimaa) seats. Each district is a separate subunit, there are no national adjustment seats, and the d'Hondt method is used in allocating seats to parties. Candidate selection is decentralized to district-level party branches, and the national party leadership has only limited possibilities to influence candidate selection. Voters choose between individual candidates that

appear on party lists in alphabetical order. The “party brand” is an electoral asset, but at the same time, there is arguably more competition within than between parties. The combination of an “open list” and the decentralized candidate selection means that the whole system is very local or district-based—and this should create strong incentives for credit-claiming in the *Eduskunta*, plenary speeches included (Raunio and Ruotsalainen 2018).

While the electoral process is very decentralized and candidate-centered, the opposite applies to actual parliamentary work. The *Eduskunta* is, without any doubt, an institutionalized legislature. Its internal structures have evolved gradually over the decades, and party discipline is strong, with MPs expected to follow the party line in both the plenary and in the committees. This applies, particularly, to governing parties. It is commonly accepted among the coalition partners that the government program forms the backbone of the cabinet and that it is binding on all the parties and their MPs. The government parties also monitor that their party groups support the program. The cooperation rules between the governing parties’ parliamentary groups that have been in use since the early 1980s effectively prevent any disagreements or public conflicts between the government and the party groups. Dissenting MPs can expect tough sanctions, including expulsion from their parliamentary group. The only exceptions are matters that are clearly “local” by nature and specific questions of conscience. Thus, the *Eduskunta* is a party-dominated legislature—and has become more so since the 1990s, as a result of constitutional reforms. *Eduskunta*’s decision-

making is based on the interaction between party groups and committees, but the parliament operates in the shadow of broad oversized coalition governments.

Turning to political parties, five intertwined features appear characteristic of the Finnish party system—high degree of party system fragmentation, increased weakness of the left, the strength of the Centre Party, waves of populist protest, and changing cleavage structure (Arter [2009](#); Karvonen [2014](#)). In terms of fragmentation, since the declaration of independence in 1917, no party has even come close to winning a majority of parliamentary seats (the post-Second World War high is 28.3 percent won by SDP in the 1995 elections), and this fragmentation contributes to cooperation between the main parties. As the class cleavage was crucial in the emergence of Finnish parties, it is not surprising that class dealignment has contributed to increasing electoral instability, both in terms of party system fragmentation and electoral volatility. However, despite the entry into the *Eduskunta* of new party families such as green, Christian and populist parties, the party system has remained rather stable, with the three core parties—the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, and the National Coalition—mainly holding on to their vote shares in recent decades. The rise of the Finns Party has produced a situation where the party system has four quite equally-sized large parties. Forming majority cabinets is, therefore, not possible unless the government has at least three parties. Also, the increased weakness of leftist parties means that the prospect of a government consisting of only left-wing parties has not been realistic for several decades, and except for the SDP-led cabinets formed after the 2019 elections all cabinets formed since the 2003

elections have been led by center-right parties. The persistent strong support of the Centre Party, in turn, is a rare case of survival of what is agrarian politics in the twenty-first century. Located ideologically between the Social Democrats and the National Coalition on the left–right dimension, the Centre has formed coalition cabinets with both left-wing and right-wing parties.

The rise of populism has shaken party systems across the world, and Finland is no exception. In 1970 and 1983, the populist Rural Party had already won a couple of spectacular victories in the *Eduskunta* elections. Its successor, the Finns Party (formerly known as the True Finns), achieved a major electoral breakthrough in the 2011 elections, winning 19.1 percent of the votes, a staggering increase of 15 percent from the 2007 elections and the largest ever increase in support achieved by a single party in *Eduskunta* elections. The Finns Party repeated its strong performance in the 2015 and 2019 elections. According to surveys, voters were drawn to supporting the party mainly because they wanted to shake established patterns of power distribution and to change the direction of public policies, especially concerning immigration and European integration. The Finns Party also benefited from the changing cleavage structure. The dominant cleavage has traditionally been the left–right dimension. However, since the early 1990s, the sociocultural dimension, which is linked to the rural–urban/center–periphery divide, has become the second primary cleavage, partly because the European integration and the opening of borders have emerged on the political agenda (Westinen 2015).

In international comparison, Finnish cabinets have tended to be outliers in three respects: their parliamentary support, level of fragmentation, and ideological diversity. Finland used to be characterized by short-lived and unstable governments living under the shadow of the president. However, cabinets appointed since the early 1980s have stayed in office for the whole four-year electoral period. These mainly surplus coalitions have controlled safe majorities in the *Eduskunta*. Except for the center-right cabinets of 1991–1995 and 2015–2019, cabinets have brought together parties from both the left and the right. Consequently, the opposition has been both numerically weak and ideologically fragmented. As a rule, recent governments have included two of the three main parties: the Social Democrats, the agrarian/liberal Centre Party, and the conservative National Coalition.

The Institutional Setting of Legislative Debate

When examining Finnish legislative debates, one needs to remember that not so long ago, the plenary was hardly relevant in national politics. Whereas in the early 1980s, the annual number of plenary speeches made by the prime minister could be as low as one or two, since the 1990s, the PM visits the plenary weekly to answer questions from the MPs. The *Eduskunta* has also introduced reforms that have elevated the status of plenary debates. Debates on topical matters can now be held at short notice. During oral question time, MPs can put spontaneous questions to the ministers, and overall the government is constitutionally obliged to provide more reports to the *Eduskunta* that are then debated in the plenary.

Procedurally the debates have elements of party control, but individual MPs are relatively unconstrained as long as they respect the interests of their parties. The Speaker's Council brings together the Speaker, the Deputy Speakers, and the chairs of all committees (in the *Eduskunta*, virtually all matters are handled by committees before they are subject to plenary debates and votes). The Speaker's Council, which can take decisions by majority vote if needed, issues instructions on procedures to be followed in plenary sessions (regarding such things as plenary speeches or referring matters to committees), approves plenary session plans, and also issues general instructions regarding committee work and serves as an advisory body to the Speaker. However, it is the Speaker who decides the final order of business. The Speaker directs parliamentary work together with the Speaker's Council and is assisted by two Deputy Speakers. The Speaker or a Deputy Speaker chairs the plenary sessions, grants the floor for speeches and replies, makes voting proposals, and decides on the final order of business. Other tasks include checking the records of plenary sessions and signing *Eduskunta's* responses and communications. While the Speaker has quite broad powers in managing the work and agenda of the plenary, she or he must also be impartial and respect the parliamentary norms, rules, and the decisions of the Speaker's Council.

Table [17.1](#) lists the five most important types of *Eduskunta* debates. It must be emphasized that it can be challenging to predict the relative salience of the various categories of debates. Overall, items on the plenary agenda consist of government bills, including the annual processing of the state budget, debates on

various government reports and announcements by the prime minister, oral question time (held on Thursdays and televised live), interpellations tabled by the opposition (that are followed by votes of no confidence), topical debates, and international and EU affairs, and potential amendments to the constitution. The plenary debates are held from Tuesday to Friday and streamed live on the *Eduskunta* website.

New laws generally originate in legislative proposals from the government. Following a dispatch debate, the *Eduskunta* plenary first sends the bill to a committee for preparation. Once the committee's report has been issued, the proposal is considered in two readings in the plenary. In the first reading, the committee report is debated, and a decision on the contents of the legislative proposal is made. In the second reading, which occurs no earlier than three days after the conclusion of the first reading, the plenary decides by simple majority whether to accept or reject the legislative proposal. The annual state budget is discussed in the plenary only once based on a report by the Finance Committee. Most bill proposals do not produce any real debates, whereas the budgetary debates are lengthy, involve many votes, and MPs' budgetary motions, with representatives defending issues important for their constituents.

Turning to question time, initially, MPs could table only written questions (introduced in 1906), with oral questions introduced in 1966 and questions to the Council of State (i.e., the government) introduced in 1989. The questions to the Council of State were introduced in order to enable the parliament and the government to engage in a more open dialogue on topical issues. In 1999 the oral

questions and questions to the Council of State were merged into question time, during which MPs can spontaneously put questions to the ministers on topics of their own choice. Question time lasts around an hour and seldom involves any real drama, but the media and ministers take them seriously. The same applies to interpellations that have become the standard form of the no-confidence vote. Although an individual MP can initiate an interpellation, they are usually put forward by opposition party groups. A minimum of twenty signatures (10 percent of MPs) is needed for an interpellation to be presented to the cabinet or an individual minister. The most recent cabinet resignation caused by a vote of no confidence following an interpellation occurred in 1958. Their main objective is to raise the profile of the opposition and perhaps also to stimulate debate on topical issues. When tabling the interpellation, the opposition knows that it will not result in the cabinet being voted out of office.

Before the early 1990s, the incoming government was not obliged to present its program in the *Eduskunta*. A new vote of investiture was first used in 1995. Under the new constitution, the cabinet shall without delay submit its program to the parliament in the form of a statement, to which a debate and a mandatory confidence vote ensue. The decision rule is a simple majority. Before the investiture vote, the *Eduskunta* has already elected the new prime minister with a simple majority, and the president has appointed the government into office. However, at least the investiture vote enables the *Eduskunta* or the party groups of the governing parties to set certain *ex ante* limits or guidelines for cabinet behavior. Debates on government reports (such as those on defense and security

policy) and the prime minister's announcements as well as topical debates and those related to citizens' initiatives (introduced in 2012) have also become routine tools of parliamentary debate.

The Speaker allocates speaking turns to the MPs and ministers present in the chamber. According to Section 31 of the constitution, "Each Representative has the right to speak freely in the parliament on all matters under consideration and on how they are dealt with. A Representative shall conduct himself or herself with dignity and decorum and not behave offensively to another person. If a Representative is in breach of such conduct, the Speaker may point this out or prohibit the Representative from continuing to speak."¹ The debating culture is quite cautious and polite, but there is also some back-and-forth dialog between ministers and MPs, as well as some interruptive shouts from MPs. Before giving the floor to those MPs that had requested the right to speak on the matter (such requests can also be made during the debates), the spokesperson for the party group/responsible committee opens the debate. Individual MPs have access to the floor in the order of the requests. In the case of interpellations, after the minister has replied, the first to speak is the MP who is the first signatory in the interpellation. Speeches by party groups (presented by their leaders or their spokespersons on the issue) are customarily reserved for debates on the state

¹ The Constitution of Finland, June 11, 1999 (731/1999, amendments up to 817/2018 included). An English translation is available at:
<http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>.

budget, interpellations, and government announcements and reports. However, obviously, parties can express their positions on all matters debated in the plenary. The largest party group presents its views first, and the smallest party group brings up the rear. During question time, the first question is usually put forward by the largest opposition party group. Also, more broadly in “dialog” debates between the government and the opposition, the *Eduskunta* has decided to allocate more speaking time to the opposition parties. MPs can either speak from where they sit or from the podium. Replies by MPs are always given from where they sit, and they are much shorter speeches.² Except for the question time, there are no exact time limits for the debates. Plenaries have session plans (rough timetables), and the Speaker normally allows debates to proceed as long as needed. The Speaker, can, however, also terminate debates, especially in situations where no new arguments are presented by MPs any more.

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According to Proksch and Slapin (2015), Finland belongs to the category of “party lists favored, individual access.” It appears that Proksch and Slapin based their categorization on parliamentary rules, as Finnish parties did not respond to their survey of internal party practices. However, we lean more towards freedom

² See the Parliament’s Rules of Procedure (Eduskunnan työjärjestys 17.12.1999/40 v. 2000), unofficial translation, amendments up to 63/2015 included, is available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/naineduskuntatoimii/Documents/RulesofProcedure_20150416.pdf.

of individual MPs to access the floor. To be sure, party groups do exercise some level of control. Specifically, in more salient issues and/or when debating time is limited, such as during oral question time, parties have an incentive to allocate speaking time to their frontbenchers or MPs known for their expertise on the matter. Loyalty to the party also plays a role, but overall, party groups refrain from interfering with members' right to speak. Allowing MPs to access the floor may, of course, result in some representatives criticizing their parties publicly. At the same time, it is a way to maintain group solidarity and cohesion.³ However, our empirical analysis in the rest of the chapter shows that internal party hierarchies do matter, particularly after the constitutional reforms that strengthened the role of the *Eduskunta*.

The Determinants of Floor Access in Finland

This section analyzes legislative debates in Finland from the beginning of the 31st *Eduskunta* (April 1991) to the end of the 84th session of the 36th legislature (December 2015). The data comes from the ParlSpeech dataset (Rauh et al. [2017](#))

³. A major row broke out in October 2016 when the chair of the Social Democratic party group, Antti Lindtman was accused of drawing up lists of MPs who would be allowed to speak during the question time. Social Democratic MPs were outraged by the revelations. See O. Lindqvist and A. Blencowe, “Lindtman sai ankarat nuhteet demariryhmältä—salaisia puhujalistoja puhemichistölle,” Yle 28.10.2016, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9,257,528>.

and contains 245,852 legislative speeches delivered by 626 unique MPs. It has to be noted that the dispersion is very high. In one legislature, it ranges from one to 2047 speech(es) per term. Of all four-year electoral terms (31st to 35th *Eduskunta*), the 34th is the one with the highest variance and range.

The first dependent variable measures the total amount of speeches delivered by an MP per legislative term. All speeches delivered from April 1991 to December 2015 are taken into consideration. We make use of negative binomial regressions to analyze the data. The second dependent variable measures the total number of words pronounced by an MP per legislative term. Because of the nature of the Finnish language that necessitates only a few words to express a statement, speeches of less than fifty words are taken into account. With this variable, we make use of OLS regressions.

Five main independent variables are included in the models. The first two variables measure intra-party politics. One dummy takes into consideration leadership positions within the party during the term under study. The second dummy is about positions within the party groups. It has to be noted that these intra-party appointments do not follow the same timetable as other positions in the *Eduskunta*. Parties and party groups' chairs might be (s)elected in the middle of one term, and each party has its own schedule. Each MP who has been a chair during the term receives the code "1" even if (s)he did not chair the party or its parliamentary group for the full term. Two other variables take into consideration ministerial appointments and committee chairs. Again, within-term changes may occur for these positions. Our coding strategy is the same as above. Seniority is

measured by the number of terms spent in parliament. Periods in government are also included in the measure. The size of the party group corresponds to the number of MPs affiliated to the group. Measurement of exposure is also added to the model in order to control for the time the MP held her/his seat in parliament. Gender is a dummy with female legislators/ministers coded “1.” Finally, one variable indicates if the MP is in the opposition or member of a party group in the governing coalition. The descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 17.2.

<COMP: INSERT TABLE 17.2 ABOUT HERE>

First, we assess the gender division of legislative speeches. The literature highlights a general trend about the impact of gender on the likelihood of being an orator during plenary sessions (Bäck et al. 2014; Wang 2014). In Finland, such a general trend is not observed since the effect of gender mainly depends on party affiliation. The under-representation of women does not reach critical levels, neither in terms of the number of speeches nor the number of pronounced words. From Figure 17.1, it is possible to highlight two main patterns. The first pattern is an equal allocation of speeches, namely a share of speeches delivered and words pronounced by female MPs similar to the share of women in the party groups. This pattern applies to the right-wing populist, the social-democrats, and particularly the Christian Democrats. The second pattern is a distribution that has an under-representation of female MPs. The liberals, Conservatives, Ecologists, and Socialists are in this group.

These numbers may be surprising in many respects. The first is the distribution of speeches among the right-wing populist party (here, The Finns

Party). Although this party has a vast majority of male MPs, they did not access the floor more frequently, at least relative to their number. The similar pattern observed among the Social Democrats is less surprising considering its pioneering role in promoting gender equality in the 1980s (Christensen [1999](#), 81). The Green League and the Left Alliance are the single parties to have adopted formal gender quotas for internal elections before the Social Democrats (Christensen [1999](#)). However, it seems that such rules do not result in more open access to the floor for women. Regarding the ecologists, the hiatus between the share of women in the parliamentary group and the gender distribution of speeches can be explained by the presence of one particularly active MP, Erkki Pulliainen, responsible for 30 percent of all speeches and a bit less than 50 percent of the speeches by male MPs.

<COMP: INSERT FIGURE 17.1 ABOUT HERE>

The conservatives, liberals, and socialists show an opposite pattern. In these party families, not only were women under-represented, but they also had a lower likelihood of access to the floor. If this result is not surprising concerning the first two families, the case of the Socialists (here, the Left Alliance) is unexpected. This party was among the first to introduce internal gender quotas (in 1990) and, more generally, to address the under-representation of women. However, questions about gender were arguably politicized and used in campaigns by the party only more recently under the leadership of Li Andersson (since 2016). Our data covers thus a period of transition during which the party moved from its communist origins to a progressive left-wing party oriented towards, among other

policies, the promotion of social justice. Hence, one may expect a different pattern had the data also covered the most recent years. These results confirm previous findings in specific contexts (Wang [2014](#)) and contradict others (Bäck et al. [2014](#)). Also, utilizing data from the 2003–2007 *Eduskunta* term, Bäck and Debus ([2016](#), 81–87) showed that female MPs delivered 32.4 percent of the speeches while the share of female representatives was 37.5 percent. 29.3 percent of the speeches on macroeconomics were by female MPs, whereas the figure was much higher for health issues, 53.8 percent. Overall, Bäck and Debus ([2016](#), 92–97) found that Finnish MPs with more extensive parliamentary experience or membership in the responsible committees, and ministers delivered more speeches.

The second aspect studied is seniority. Figure [17.2](#) plots the average number of speeches delivered by Finnish MPs differentiated by gender and seniority. On average, first-term MPs deliver fewer speeches than their senior colleagues. However, the increase is more significant among male than female MPs. Finally, female MPs in their, at least, fourth term deliver, on average, only fifteen more speeches per term. This number reaches sixty among male MPs. The rather stable pattern among female MPs may be explained by the distribution of leadership positions between genders. The majority of ministers and party leaders were men during the period under study. As we will see in the next section, these positions are associated with a critical involvement in the debates in the plenary session. They are reserved for more experienced politicians.

Despite being under-represented (relative to the size of their group), it has to be noted that junior MPs are not discriminated at critical levels. We observe that the difference between the share of speeches and the share of MPs in their first term is not that large. Hence, junior MPs have access to the floor, and experience may not be a necessary condition for delivering more speeches. Also, there is no culture of generalized self-censorship among junior MPs. The next section will provide further evidence that seniority is not the critical factor. As explained above, positions of party leadership and ministerial offices are more robust predictors for explaining the likelihood of being selected for floor access.

<COMP: INSERT FIGURE 17.2 ABOUT HERE>

The estimates for the number of speeches are displayed in Table [17.3](#). Model 1 includes the indicators of intra-party politics. Model 2 includes the offices MPs can be appointed to. Finally, the third model compiles all the variables. All models include the dummy majority–opposition, the control variables, and have legislative terms fixed-effect. The principal coefficients (based on model 3) are also displayed in Figure [17.3](#).

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The three models highlight three clear trends. The first is the role of inter- and intra-party politics in legislative debates. The four indicators have a positive coefficient in all three models. It indicates that the likelihood of being selected for delivering a speech is higher for frontbenchers than for backbenchers. In detail, we observe that two indicators appear to be even more important: leadership

positions within the party and the minister dummy. Thus, it suggests that positions related to the party are better predictors than positions related to the parliamentary party group (committee chairs and leadership positions within the party group). This finding shows thus the essential role parties and their leaders (ministers included) play in the work of the *Eduskunta*. Despite free access to the floor, internal party hierarchy matters.

The second trend is the higher likelihood of opposition MPs to deliver speeches. This finding is not surprising in itself, but the strength of the effect is somehow unexpected in the Finnish context. As argued above, Finland is frequently labeled as a consensus democracy, and the *Eduskunta* is considered as a working parliament, with committee work much more critical than plenary debates. However, our findings show that the opposition parties widely use the floor. Finally, seniority and gender have—at best—a limited impact on the likelihood of delivering speeches during plenary sessions. Gender is just significant (at $p \leq 0.05$) and shows that women access less frequently the floor than men. This factor is, however, of less importance than government portfolios and leadership positions within the party.

Turning to the number of words per term, the pattern is different. Coefficients are displayed in Table [17.4](#) and plotted (based on model 3) in Figure [17.4](#).

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Except for ministers, none of the front positions is a good predictor of the number of words pronounced by term. In other words, intra-party politics affect

the number of speeches, but not their length. Among all estimators, only one is significant at $p \leq 0.01$, the government–opposition dummy. It indicates that opposition parties not only take the floor more frequently but also deliver longer speeches. This result fits with the argument of the floor being used mainly by those who have little access to decision-making and mainly by MPs whose name and party affiliation are absent from the final act. If this result indicates that the floor may be quite conflictual, it also shows that the conflict looks one-sided. Gender and seniority are significant at a lower level and confirm previous literature on the topic (Bäck and Debus [2016](#)). Women deliver fewer and shorter speeches. A similar pattern applies to junior MPs, but the effect is lighter than previously. Again, being a female and/or junior MP is not discriminant at critical levels.

The Impact of Constitutional Reforms on Legislative Speechmaking

As explained above, the Finnish political system has experienced several reforms that have strengthened the role of the parliament. Previous studies have essentially argued that the *Eduskunta* nonetheless remains in the shadow of secure coalition cabinets. (Karvonen et al. [2016](#); Raunio [2004](#); Raunio and Wiberg [2008](#)).

However, whether these reforms have influenced the daily work of the parliament remains unknown.

In this section, we thus explore whether and how constitutional reforms designed to strengthen the role of a parliament impact legislative speechmaking. Through the empowerment of the *Eduskunta* and the government, we expect the constitutional reforms to bring more conflict to the plenary sessions. Considering the nature of the reforms and the parliament's initial weakness, we expect the effects to be weaker under the previous constitutional rules (before 1999) than after the reform. More precisely, we expect the impact of the government-opposition, party leadership, and ministerial appointments dummies to be weaker before 1999. All variables are the same as in the previous section.

Table [17.5](#) displays the results. We run six models with the number of speeches per term as a dependent variable. The first includes only data between 1991 and 1999, while the second model focuses on the later period, between 1999 and 2015. The last models include interaction terms between the term dummy and the relevant variables. They do not include time fixed-effects since time is an independent variable. The interactions are plotted in Figures [17.5](#) through [17.7](#).

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Models 1 and 2 display interesting results. The constitutional reforms strongly affected legislative speechmaking. The main impact is the role of party leadership. Party leaders are more active in the *Eduskunta* after 1999, thus providing evidence of increasing political (and partisan) conflicts in the parliamentary arena. The similar pattern observed about ministers also gives credit to this statement.

Moreover, the constitutional reforms did not influence all MPs in the same way. They increased the polarization between frontbenchers and experienced MPs on the one hand and backbenchers and unexperienced MPs on the other hand. The constitutional reforms also strengthened the gender gap. Between 1991 and 1999, gender did not affect the likelihood of delivering a speech. The pattern is much different after 1999, as a male MP increases the probability of delivering a speech in the plenary. Hence, the constitutional reforms resulted in a more substantial involvement of both party leaders and ministers in the parliament's daily work. In that respect, the reforms seem to have reached their objectives. The parliament became a favored venue for party leaders and members of the government. It was, however, done at the cost of junior and female MPs.

Models 3 to 6 highlight the same changes in a different way. We include interactions between the term dummy and ministerial appointment (model 3), government–opposition dummy (model 4), and gender (model 5) and party leadership (model 6). The relevant predictive margins are displayed in Figures [17.5](#) through [17.7](#). Party leadership is dropped because of the lack of significant variations.

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Before the constitutional reforms, ministers did not adopt a different behavior from regular MPs (Figure [17.5](#)). The number of speeches was very similar. The pattern has changed after the reform. On the other hand, the behavior of non-

ministers did not change; the number of speeches per legislative term remains very stable. Hence, there is an observable consequence of the constitutional reforms on the daily work of the parliament. Ministers are more active during the sessions. Figure [17.6](#) shows that the constitutional reforms also influenced the impact of the government–opposition dummy. Although opposition MPs still have a greater likelihood to deliver speeches, the gap is smaller after the reforms. By bringing the parliament to the center of Finnish politics, the reforms also brought more conflict to the plenary. It is thus not surprising to observe a lower difference between government and opposition MPs. Finally, Figure [17.7](#) displays the growing importance of the gender gap. However, it is difficult to know whether this is due to the constitutional reforms or a broader trend. However, as explained above, the constitutional reforms impacted negatively on the less experienced MPs and backbenchers. Figure [17.7](#) shows that it also concerned female MPs.

Our results are encouraging. They show that, despite a strong committee system and consensual policy-making procedures, floor speeches are essential for the opposition, party leaders, and small parties. Also, the empirical analysis suggests that despite the candidate-centered electoral system, parties favor speeches delivered by their leaders. It has to be noted that the interaction effects between the indicators of intra- and inter-party politics and the party families are not significant (not displayed here). Hence, the practices we observed are similar from one party to another. In other words, in all parties, leaders and frontbenchers have a higher likelihood of access to the floor. Finally, our results also show that the constitutional reforms designed to strengthen the *Eduskunta* affected MPs’

behavior. It increased the likelihood of frontbenchers and experienced MPs to deliver speeches. On the other hand, female MPs, junior MPs, and backbenchers deliver fewer speeches.

Conclusions

Plenary debates have become considerably more critical in Finland as the *Eduskunta* gained significant new powers through the constitutional reforms of the 1990s. The PM and other ministers now appear regularly in the chamber to defend the track record of the government, the media covers the proceedings, and the *Eduskunta* itself has introduced procedural changes that contribute to the quality of the debates. While the debates rarely offer any real drama or new arguments, at least the public and the media have a better opportunity to follow parliamentary politics and the positions of parties and individual MPs.

This indicates a shift in parliamentary culture from committee-based scrutiny towards more public debates. However, the *Eduskunta* remains a relatively non-transparent institution, with MPs appreciating the confidential nature of committee meetings (Arter [2012](#); Seo and Raunio [2017](#)). The justification for committees meeting behind closed doors is to facilitate confidential exchanges of views, both between parliamentary groups and between the legislature and the executive, which in turn should result in more informed and constructive decision-making. Committees are the central arena for bargaining between parties of different ideological colors, including between the government and opposition. Interviewed MPs described committee debates for the most part as constructive

and facts-based, while plenary debates were full of “campaign speeches” (Pekonen [2011](#)).

The empirical analyses show that floor access in the *Eduskunta* depends mainly on the MPs’ position within the party hierarchy. Regardless of the party family, frontbenchers have a higher likelihood of delivering plenary speeches. This finding may be surprising considering the highly personalized electoral system (Proksch and Slapin [2015](#)). As stated by Poyet ([2019](#)), Finnish parliamentary work is the preserve of parties despite the electoral system. It is particularly true after the constitutional reforms. To a certain extent, the reforms turned the *Eduskunta* more into a “majoritarian” legislature. Leaders and senior MPs deliver speeches. Hence, one should thus not overestimate the impact of the Finnish electoral formula. This chapter also indicates that the label of “working parliament” often attributed to the *Eduskunta* may deserve reconsideration. The plenary sessions matter and are used as a tribune by small parties and, more recently, by the Finns Party, a radical-right populist party. Opposition MPs make active use of plenary speeches to attack the governing coalition.

While this chapter has offered new insights into how the *Eduskunta* works, future research should focus mainly on two inter-related questions. The first one is the content of the speeches. According to Arter ([2016](#), 215), the use of plenary speeches for introducing controversial topics—mainly by small parties and populist movements—is also a reality in the Nordic region. However, there is a lack of empirical work on this topic. This chapter shows that these parties tend to use the floor more widely, but there is no information about the content of their

speeches and the possible differences with mainstream parties. Second, scholars should focus on the impact of the rise of the Finns Party on parliamentary practices. Has the rise of populism challenged existing routines or brought about more conflictual debating cultures in the plenary and the committees? However, already, the overall message of our chapter is undoubtedly good news: much of the decision-making continues to take place behind the closed doors of committees and party groups, but the plenary debates have become more important and livelier in recent decades.

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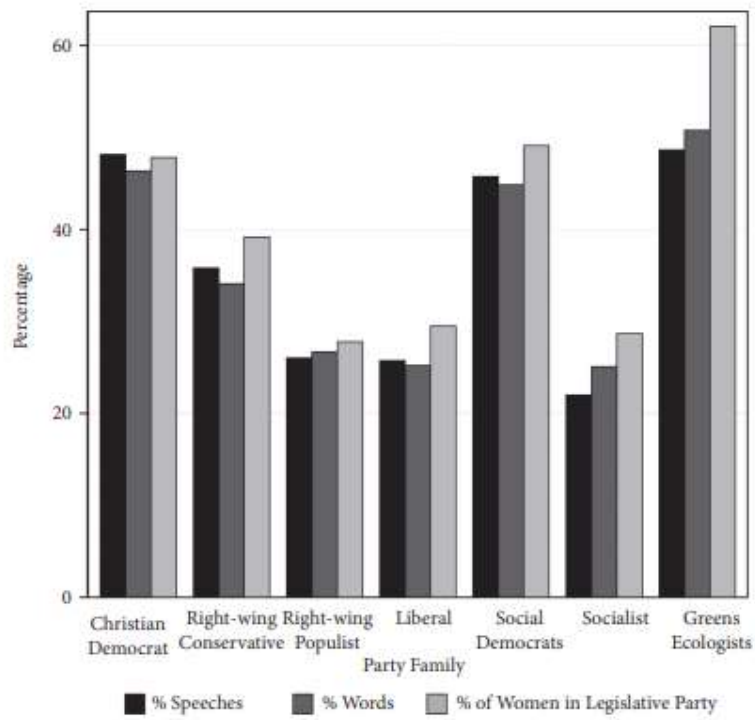


Figure 17.1 Gender numeric representation and speechmaking in Finland

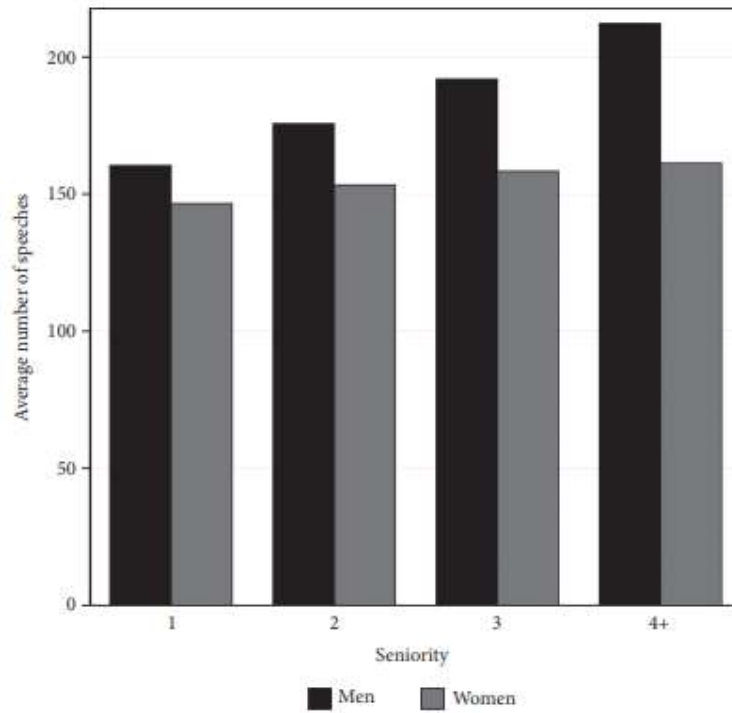


Figure 17.2 Average number of speeches, by seniority and gender in Finland

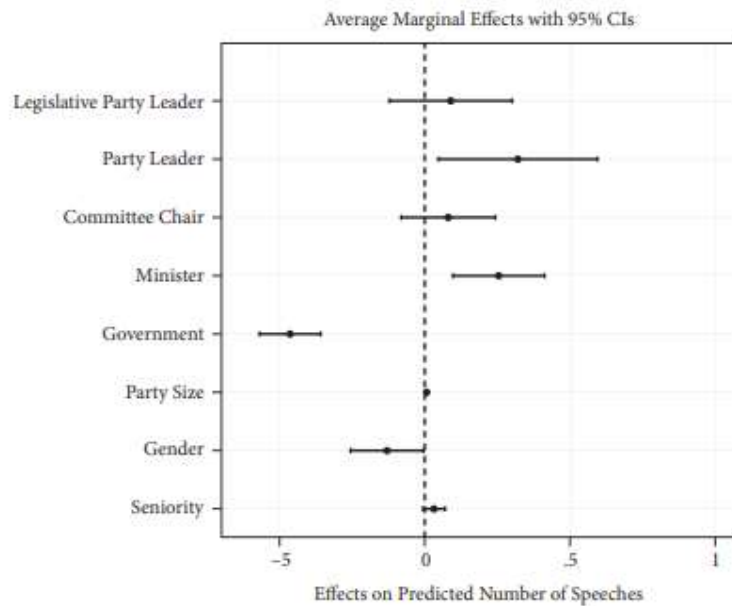


Figure 17.3 Marginal effects on predicted number of speeches in Finland

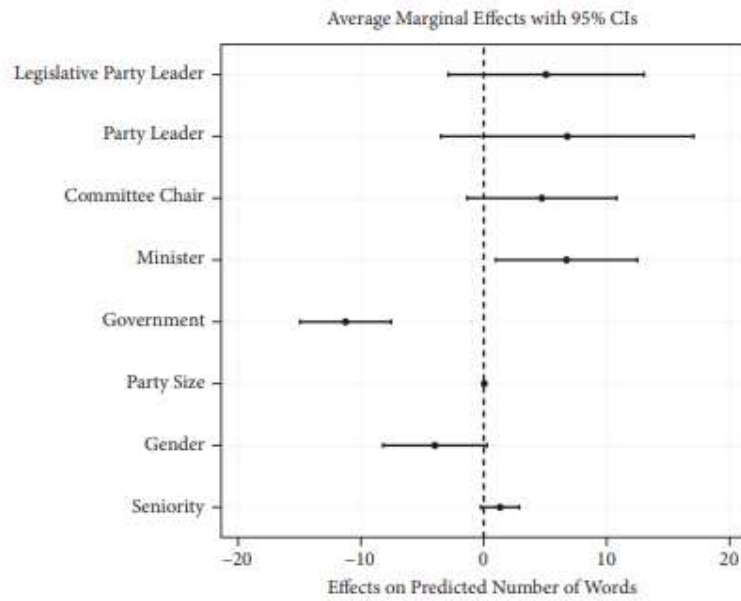


Figure 17.4 Marginal effects on predicted number of words uttered in Finland

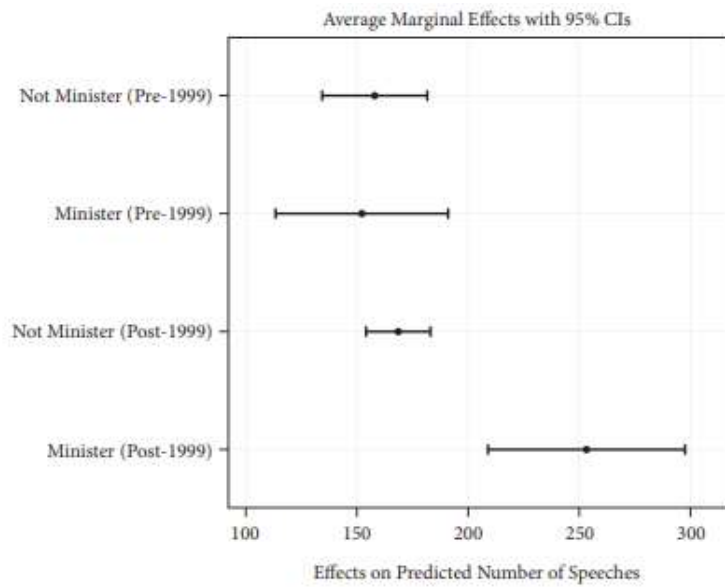


Figure 17.5 Marginal effects on predicted number of speeches, by constitutional reform and government portfolio in Finland

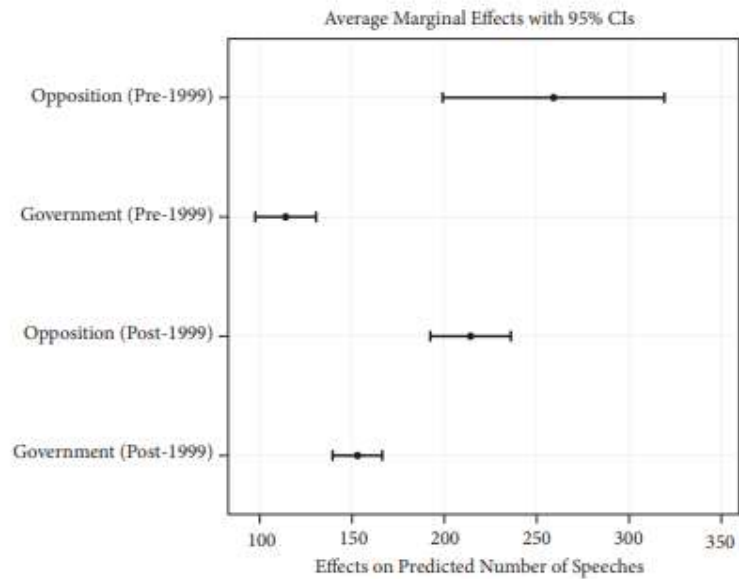


Figure 17.6 Marginal effects on predicted number of speeches, by constitutional reform and government-opposition in Finland

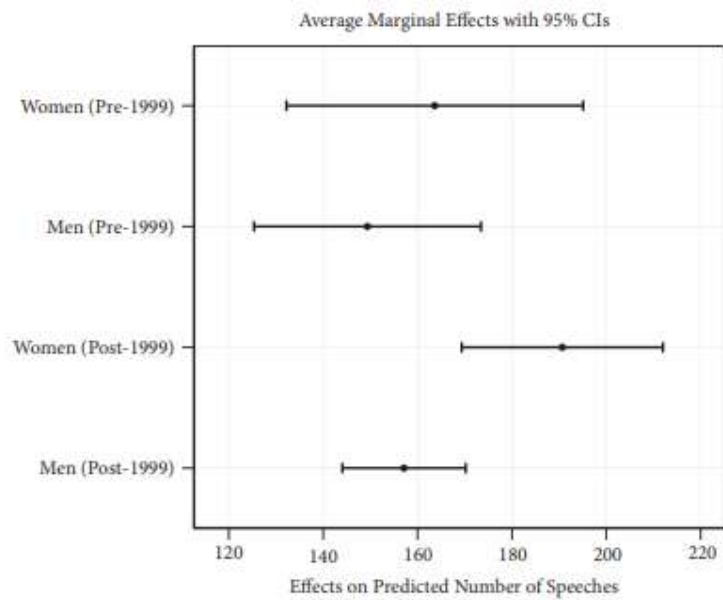


Figure 17.7 Marginal effects on the predicted number of speeches, by constitutional reform and gender in Finland

Table 17.1 Parliamentary debate types in Finland

Debate type	Goal	Total time
Debates on law proposals <i>(Lakiehdotus)</i>	Pass laws	No time limit
Budget debate <i>(Talousarvioesitys)</i>	State budget	No time limit
Interpellations <i>(Välikysymys)</i>	Topple government	No time limit
Question time <i>(Suullinen kyselytunti)</i>	Government oversight	Around 1 hour
Government programme <i>(Hallitusohjelma)</i>	Investiture	No time limit

Table 17.2 Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
# Speeches	171.8	185.8	1	2047
# Words	40,059.8	41,840.6	59	393,429
Seniority	2.6	1.7	1	11
Party size	37.8	16.4	1	63
Exposure	.963	.148	.060	1
Legislative party leader	.055	.230	0 (no)	1 (yes)
Party leader	.052	.222	0 (no)	1 (yes)
Committee chair	.119	.324	0 (no)	1 (yes)
Minister	.119	.324	0 (no)	1 (yes)
Government	.637	.481	0	1
Gender	.386	.487	0	1

Table 17.3 Determinants of floor access in Finland

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Legislative party leader	.075 (.090)		.087 (.089)
Party leader	.401 (.112)***		.268 (.112)**
Committee chair		.081 (.080)	.083 (.081)
Minister		.341 (.075)***	.270 (.074)***
Government	-.332 (.044)***	-.377 (.047)***	-.376 (.047)***
Party size	-.002 (.003)	-.004 (.004)	-.003 (.004)
Gender	-.107 (.062)*	-.143 (.061)**	-.127 (.062)**
Seniority	.043 (.018)**	.029 (.019)	.030 (.019)
Ln(exposure)	1.10 (.114)***	1.09 (.117)***	1.09 (.117)***
Time FE	YES	YES	YES

Party FE	YES	YES	YES
AIC	16885.62	16877.36	16872.30
BIC	17006.74	16998.36	17003.96

Source: Parlspeech. Negative Binomial Regression. Standard error clustered by

MP in brackets, $P \leq 0.1 = *$; $p \leq 0.05 = **$; $p \leq 0.01 = ***$. N=1'431.

Table 17.4 Determinants of words uttered in legislative debates in Finland

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Legislative party leader	4.66 (4.05)		5.07 (4.05)
Party leader	9.82 (5.14)*		6.79 (5.24)
Committee chair		4.70 (3.06)	4.72 (3.10)
Minister		8.19 (2.94)***	6.73 (2.93)**
Government	-10.15 (1.70)***	-11.34 (1.84)***	-11.25 (1.89)***
Party size	.050 (.076)	.018 (.079)	.042 (.077)
Gender	-3.70 (2.14)*	-4.29 (2.10)**	-3.98 (2.15)*
Seniority	1.77 (.782)**	1.36 (.800)**	1.32 (.794)*
Time FE	YES	YES	YES
Party FE	YES	YES	YES
R ²	.099	.102	.105

Source: Parlspeech. OLS Regression. Standard error clustered by MP in brackets,

p≤0.1= *; p≤0.05=**; p≤0.01=***. N=1'431.

Table 17.5 Determinants of the impact of constitutional reforms on speechmaking in Finland

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Parliamentary party leader	.160 (.144)	.029 (.090)	.085 (.103)	.071 (.097)	.101 (.103)	.094 (.107)
Party leader	.046 (.241)	.251 (.109)**	.252 (.122)**	.285 (.123)**	.264 (.124)**	
Committee chair	.110 (.142)	.077 (.080)	.062 (.087)	.073 (.087)	.075 (.087)	0.71 (.086)
Minister	.300 (.161)*	.323 (.072)***		.309 (.085)***	.318 (.084)***	.317 (.083)***
Government	-.676 (.128)***	-.291 (.047)***	-.422 (.051)***		-.423 (.052)***	-.425 (.052)***
Party size	.009 (.005)*	-.004 (.003)	.003 (.004)	.005 (.003)	.004 (.004)	.004 (.004)

Gender	-.077 (.105)	-.139 (.064)**	-.164 (.068)**	-.166 (.003)**		-.165 (.068)**
Seniority	-.037 (.035)	.044 (.020)**	.026 (.020)	.024 (.020)	.023 (.020)	.024 (.020)
Minister*pre-1999			-.003 (.140)			
Not Minister*post-1999			.072 (.074)			
Minister*post-1999			.488 (.106)***			
Government MP*pre-1999				-.771 (.120)***		
Opposition*post-1999				-.174 (.127)		

Government MP*post-1999				-.477 (.115)***		
Women*pre-1999					-.099 (.116)	
Men*post-1999					.153 (.093)	
Women*post-1999					-.036 (.133)	
Leader of the party*pre-1999						.272 (.241)
Not leader of the party*post-1999						.119 (.070)*
Leader of the party*post-1999						.386 (.153)**
Ln(exposure)	1.62 (.157)***	.897 (.099)***	.973 (.121)***	.964 (.115)***	.976 (.121)***	.975 (.121)***

Time FE	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
Party FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
AIC	12164.26	12164.26	17320.3	17307.89	17325.99	17326.68
BIC	12278.04	12278.04	17430.89	17418.48	17436.58	17437.27
N	391	1040	1431	1431	1431	1431

Source: *Parlspeech*. Negative Binomial Regression. Standard error clustered by MP in brackets, $P \leq 0.1 = *$; $p \leq 0.05 = **$; $p \leq 0.01 = ***$.