Politics of Legislative Debates: Chapter 8

Australia

Speaker Time in an Adversarial System

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Abstract

This chapter examines speeches in the Australian House of Representatives from 1990-2019. Our findings are primarily determined by the nature of Australia's Westminster-style system, where the government tends to dominate proceedings. We find strong party effects, government versus opposition effects, and strong ministerial effects on the amount and duration of speeches. The descriptive statistics demonstrate that women and less experienced parliamentarians speak less than male and experienced ones. The gender effect also holds when controlling for ministerial selection. The latter is likely to be explained by men being given more important and prestigious ministerial portfolios. We also find that opposition MPs speak more on average than non-ministers on the government side. However, that is mostly a statistical artifact of their necessarily being fewer opposition MPs, but the rules give both sides of the House approximately equal time to speak. While both gender and seniority are predictive of how much people speak, this is mediated by the fact ministers speak more.

Keywords:

Australia; parliament; House of Representatives; Westminster System; parliamentary speeches; gender; ministers

Introduction

Australia is a Westminster parliamentary system, composed of two houses. The lower house, the House of Representatives, is government dominated and by convention, is the seat of the Prime Minister and a majority of the ministry. The upper House, or Senate, is a powerful chamber for a Westminster parliament and is rarely controlled by the government. Australian parliamentary debate is adversarial, especially in the lower House, indeed, commentators argue the House is now more of a bear pit than at any time in its history. Many claim the quality of deliberation is poorer now than in the past. While this view has not been subject to systematic analysis, it is true that levels of trust in politics have not recovered since the 2010–2013 minority government. The minority government illustrates the worst of the adversarial style of the Australian parliament with parliament's regular procedural business suspended almost daily, multiple episodes of high farce and prime minister Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech, attracting over one million YouTube views and was for some was a feminist call to arms.

This chapter examines who speaks and how often in parliamentary debate in the House of Representatives. We examine personal characteristics such as parliamentary experience and gender, in addition to institutional factors such as political party, government or opposition, and institutional roles comparing front and backbenchers.

Institutional and Party System Background

Australia is a federal system with six states and two territories. Under the constitution, specific powers have been allocated to the federal or Commonwealth government under s. 51, including powers that are exclusive to the Commonwealth and those shared concurrently with the state governments. In practice, the Commonwealth's tax-raising powers have allowed it

to take over agenda-setting powers traditionally belonging to the states. In particular, following the Uniform Tax Case in 1942 where the federal government collects income tax and then from 2000, a consumption tax through the Goods and Service Tax (GST) (Maddison and Denniss 2009, 28). So, through fiscal power, the federal government determines policy far beyond the remit suggested by the constitution. The States negotiate and implement federal policy through meetings of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). In this chapter, we are only concerned with the Commonwealth parliament and not with state parliaments.

Australian Commonwealth government is organized along Westminster lines, with two houses—the lower House of Representatives and the upper chamber, the Senate. During the period of our data, there were between 147 and 151 members in the House and seventy-six members within the Senate, with twelve drawn from each of the six states, and two each from both territories. The Senate was designed to act as a check on the most powerful states dominating government and preventing it from becoming concentrated in the capital. However, party loyalty has long overridden loyalty to the Australian States.

Elections for the House of Representatives must take place every three years with the precise timing decided by the prime minister while she maintains the confidence of parliament. Senators ordinarily serve for six years with half facing election every three years. There are provisions for a double dissolution when the entire Senate is re-elected simultaneously with the House of Representatives (Evans and Laing 2012; HORP 2018). This happens if the prime minister believes that the Senate is blocking relevant legislation and that an early election or a spilling all Senate seats will give the government a legislative advantage. Bills can then be passed by the combined numbers of both chambers in a joint sitting. In this way, any bills "blocked" become "triggers" or grounds to hold elections earlier

than the official election period. It is possible to hold elections for each chamber separately, but governments have opted to hold elections simultaneously from the late 1970s onwards.

Members in the lower House are elected through the Alternative Vote (AV), senators by Single Transferable Vote (STV) both called "preferential voting" in Australia (Farrell and McAllister 2006). The Senate uses an open party ticket list voting system. It has some proportionality whereby candidates must achieve a quota (14 percent for standard elections, 7 percent for a double dissolution) drawn from votes across the entire state. Voters must rank as many candidates as vacancies (usually six, but twelve in a double dissolution). However, voters overwhelmingly vote "above the line." They vote for a party, and the party determines the rank order of all their candidates and their preferred flows to other parties. After reforms to the Senate voting system in 2016, parties now only control the order on their lists, and voters must indicate their preferred party preference flow "above the line." These electoral rules typically pattern the government maintains a majority in the lower House but rarely commands one in the Senate. Before the Senate voting reforms, the system advantaged minor parties and independents since the major parties tend to rank other major parties much lower than ordinary voters. Overall, the system remains heavily weighted in favor of established parties. The strong party system ensures that MPs in the lower House vote the party line, and similarly in the Senate, members rarely vote against the party whip.

This voting typically produces strong and stable government. Essentially Australia has a two-party system, with Labor forming nine governments since 1970, and the coalition made up of the Liberal Party and the Nationals forming eleven government since 1970. Our data is from 1990 to 2012, so it includes seven Labor and four Coalition governments, though each side has been in power for about eleven years. There have been four different Labor prime ministers (Hawke, Keating, Rudd, and Gillard) and four Coalition prime ministers (Howard, Abbott, Turnbull, and Morrison). While there is party variation between the Liberal and

Nationals, for all intents and purposes, as a government, they can be considered one party. Ordinarily, candidates from each party do not stand against each other at Commonwealth elections. The Nationals are strong in rural constituencies, Labor traditionally stronger in urban areas. There is a tradition of independents, especially in the Senate, though they are typically party defectors. Within our time frame, we also have members from a host of different parties, with higher numbers in the Senate.[1]

Australia's executive–legislative relations are parliamentary or as some suggest semi-parliamentary (Ganghof et al. 2018; Taflaga 2018). The two chambers constitutionally have almost identical powers, although money bills can only be introduced into the House. Governments only need to secure the confidence of the lower chamber. The Australian Senate is one of the most powerful upper chambers in the Westminster world (Kaiser 2008), with strong scrutineering and legislative initiation powers. However, since the government is formed and maintained in the House, the latter is the major chamber. Only about 10 percent of bills are initiated in the Senate because they face virtually no chance of success without government support in the lower chamber.

As in other Westminster systems, the opposition has a critical parliamentary role. The Australian parliament historically comprises a governing majority party faced by a unified Opposition. The lower chamber is almost always dominated by the government, with the opposition almost powerless in that chamber. In rare cases of a minority parliament, most minor parties and independents tend to announce early after an election whether they intend to support the government or the opposition (though they may change their allegiance depending on the concessions they can demand from the government).

The situation is different in the upper chamber, given the government has rarely held a majority since 1980. The Senate can determine its own rules for procedure and even when it chooses to sit, though by convention it does not typically sit without the consent of the

government. In the Senate, governments are forced to build coalitions along issue-specific dimensions, and horse-trading is the norm. However, these coalitions tend to be predictable, with independents only demanding amendments to legislation for their support. The Senate has a powerful committee system that provides the strongest levels of scrutiny that the government is likely to encounter.

Both chambers are presided over by either the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate. Each is supported by two deputy speakers, who act in place of the chief presiding officer. The speaker is usually held by the government side in the House and resigns when there is a change of government. The government usually holds the first deputy speaker (though often the junior Coalition partner), the second by the opposition. In the Senate, the President is held by the government and the Deputy's position usually by the opposition. All positions are elected. Unlike the United Kingdom, the Speaker is not impartial. Individual speakers will choose the extent to which they will continue to participate in political activities openly, and most holders of these positions continue to participate as full government members. In both chambers, the government and the opposition are represented by their respective managers of business. Party leaders appoints these positions (the respective party MPs previously elected them), and they bear responsibility for managing their respective sides' parliamentary tactics. Together, they undertake negotiations for the running of the chamber. In the House, the government and opposition have a team of whips to manage the numbers within the chamber via pairing arrangements, speaking lists, and coordinating and counting votes. In the Senate, the four largest parties have an officially recognized Whip, reflecting more equal power-sharing arrangements. Finally, these elected officials are supported by the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Usher of the Black Rod in the Senate. These are bureaucratic positions that help to manage the overall business of parliament.

The Institutional Setting of Legislative Debate

The formal rules governing parliamentary speech are determined by each chamber and set down as official rules, known as the "standing orders" in *House of Representatives Practice* (HORP 2018) and *Odger's Guide to Senate Practice* (Evans and Laing 2012). Table 8.1 summarizes the debate types in Australia. These rules govern how parliamentarians (and strangers) may interact with the chamber, under what circumstances they may raise business, contribute to debate, seek information or demand censure or dismissal of the government, and dispute resolution. These rules are traditionally amended at the start of a new parliament. In 1994, there was a significant update of the standing orders in both the House and the Senate.

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Debate in the chamber is highly structured, with different times of the day dedicated to different activities. The day begins with prayers in both chambers, usually followed by government business. While bills have three readings, debate is usually only a feature of the second and third readings. In the House, there are other opportunities for members to make statements on issues of personal interest. All business and comments must be addressed through the Speaker or the President, and all members must be referred to by their title ("member for," "minister of"). The day concludes with the adjournment debate. Today this debate time is unremarkable, but in decades past, this was an opportunity for ordinary members to make significant (and politically explosive) contributions to parliamentary debate. All speeches and questions are timed, with twenty minutes the longest allowable time for a speech. Only on occasions of national significance is this rule relaxed.

The most visible element of the parliamentary sitting day is Question Time, held at 2 p.m. every sitting day and lasts for about an hour. During this time, ministers can be asked questions without notice about the portfolio they hold or represent if the minister is in the

other chamber. Since 2012, questions are no more than thirty seconds long, with answers kept to three minutes. Questions must be within the rules listed in the standing orders. The speaker or the president is the ultimate judge of what constitutes an "orderly" question and will disallow questions (HORP 2018, chapter 15). The presiding officer will refer to past precedents, as will the managers of both government and opposition business, when seeking to convince the speaker to rule one way or another. This principle applies to all forms of parliamentary discourse. However, it is during Question Time, that attempts to suspend standing orders or make censure motions that the partisan posture of the speaker is most explicit.

The visibility of Question Time has given Australian parliamentary debate a reputation as boisterous, rowdy, and at times crude. Question Time was the domain of the backbench member in decades past, but since the 1980s has increasingly become centrally controlled and ritualized, exaggerated by government backbenchers asking questions of ministers enabling them to sled the opposition.[2] By contrast, the opposition's questions can range from the technical or specific to the purely rhetorical. When parliament sits, both government and opposition have two to three detailed tactic meetings in anticipation of Question Time. Minister's offices spend much of their energy war-gaming possible questions and drafting potential answers—much of this effort is wasted. Question Time remains the peak of political theater, and it remains relevant because of the undercurrent of psychological warfare at its core. One route to high office is to be seen dominating opponents through the deft use of insult, humor, and argument.

Speech acts are also subject to some codified rules, with limits on language deemed "unparliamentary." Members are expected to speak without notes, though this is most often enforced when the opposition is seeking to disrupt or pressure the minister. This means that all debate must be directed through the speaker and there are restrictions on what kinds of

insults can be used. For example, "liar" is deemed unparliamentary but "mendacious" is acceptable. The Speaker regularly excludes members from the chamber whose conduct is deemed unparliamentary. A typical suspension is for one hour, but more extended penalties are enacted in severe cases.

The House is generally far more badly behaved than the Senate, which is generally less adversarial because the Senate lacks a government majority and can set its own rules giving greater scope to non-government actors through more access to the floor and a greater capacity to follow up and continuing questioning ministers.

It is widely believed by both parliamentarians and journalists that debating standards have decreased over time and notably since the mid-1990s televising of parliament. The media have dedicated significant resources to covering parliament but concentrate upon Question Time leading to an emphasis on slogans rather than sophisticated argument. It has also incentivized colorful, or "bad" behavior or props deemed more newsworthy and likely to garner attention. Ironically, this decline has seen fewer journalists bothering to attend Question Time. Historical accounts suggest aggression in the parliament has been cyclical, most intense around the political crises of the conscription debates during the First World War, during the Great Depression, in the aftermath of the constitutional crisis in 1975 and during the hung-parliament from 2010 to 2013. After the Second World War, the Australian chamber was dominated by men that had served in that war, which provided a certain level of mutual understanding and respect.

Australia's AV places the candidate's name above the party name on the ballot sheet, encouraging name recognition. In Proksch and Slapin's (2015) classification, the incentive to cultivate a personal vote distinguishes Australia from parliamentary systems without majoritarian electoral systems, increasing the incentives of party leadership to delegate speeches to backbench MPs. However, without the executive and legislature separation as in

presidential systems, incentives for party discipline are also high, creating similar speech delegation conditions as the UK's House of Commons.

However, due to the smaller size of the House of Representatives (147–151 seats in our time frame) relative to the UK House of Commons (currently 650 seats), governing parties typically command slim majorities. These small majorities make party discipline very strong. Australian MPs who cross the floor are often punished and with automatic suspension in the ALP. Because the costs of voting dissent are so severe along with single-member districts, there are strong incentives for backbench MPs to access the floor to demonstrate intra-party differences verbally.

The Determinants of Floor Access in Australia

We analyze speech and MP level data between 1990–2019 in the Australian House of Representatives. Data was collected through the scraping of the parlinfo.gov.au website, the Australian Federal Parliament's online repository of *Hansard*, and other parliamentary records. The speech data was merged with biographical and political information about individual MPs, collected by the authors and partially sourced from McAllister et al. (1997). Our data indicate a total of 95,151 speeches made to the House of Representatives between 1990–2019, increasing over time, though with significant variation year on year.

Table 8.2 shows some basic descriptive statistics. We see the mean number of speeches per MP is sixty-four, and with around 50,500 words but large standard deviations in both cases. The numbers do show the parliamentary debate is vital in the Australian parliament.

Numerical representation of women in Australia lags just behind the OECD average, with 29 percent representation as of 2017 and 30 percent in the current (elected 2019) sitting of the House of Representatives. Figure 8.1 takes the average percentage representation of

women in each major party group between 1990–2019, showing apparent numeric party differences in female representation. Labor had a higher proportion of women in its parliamentary contingent, including Julia Gillard, Australia's first female prime minister, except for the two parliamentary terms following Labor's loss of government (1996–2000). During the 45th parliament (2016–2019), Labor's parliamentary representation of women was 44 percent, the coalition was 17 percent.

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Explanations for differences between parties in gender representation often rest on candidate selection mechanisms and partisan factors (Beauregard 2018). There is considerable variation of candidate selection procedures as the main parties have sturdy state-level branches who determine candidate selection procedures. There is no legislated gender quota. The ALP has set a national goal for 50 percent of its seats in the federal legislature to be occupied by women by 2025 enforced through quota rules in its national constitution (Australian Labor Party 2018). The coalition has no formal quota rules but has an unenforced target to select 50 percent of women by 2025.

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Gauja and Cross (2015) show women were more likely to be selected than in electorates that required approval only by local members in the ALP than those that need both local members and state party elites. However, the opposite occurs in Liberal electorates. The number of speeches made by women in the House shows a similar pattern to their numerical representation. While women make a higher proportion of Labor speeches than the coalition, women are underrepresented relative to their numbers in the House for each of the three parties. ALP women made 81 percent of the speeches they would have under equal speech representation; Coalition women made 72 percent, indicating a further gap between parties of the left and right in terms of gender and contribution to parliamentary debate.

One possible explanation for the difference in speech representation across the parties might be in differential patterns of gender representation in ministerial selection. In Australia, cabinet members can be chosen from parliament. Women's increased parliamentary representation in the ALP has increased the pressure for greater equality in the frontbench and the cabinet positions, with an effective informal quota. Coalition governments have no such formal or informal requirements. The relative party differences in speeches from women may be due to under-representation in the ministry. We test this hypothesis further with the multivariate analysis below.

Parliamentary experience or seniority of MPs (here defined in terms of years of service) conveys no official meaning in the Australian Parliamentary system and does not formally affect access to the floor. The position of Father/Mother of the House, an honorific title granted to the longest-serving current member of the House grants informal status but is not accompanied by any procedural responsibilities or special rights. As we shall see, however, an MP's experience is de facto related to their access to the floor, even when controlling for ministerial status and membership in the government.

Figure 8.2 splits each party by its composition in terms of parliamentary experience. The experience measure is defined as the number of parliamentary terms between an MP's first entry to the House of Representatives until the day in which a speech was given. As the data is aggregated to the MP-term level, we take the mean experience over all speeches given in a parliamentary term and group them into five groups, from the first parliamentary term (0) up to MPs with four or more full parliamentary terms' experience.

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The House of Representatives' somewhat candidate-centered SMD electoral system and its short-cadence election cycle tend to depress legislative turnover. Australia's annual retention of sitting legislators is among the highest in the industrialized world between 1979–

1994, second only to the United States (Matland and Studlar 2004). Literature on the relationship between experience and legislative behavior in the Australian Federal Parliament is limited. Nevertheless, studies of the US Congress show that more experienced legislators are more likely to introduce and see their legislation pass (Volden and Wiseman 2014). While Australian MPs rarely introduce private member's bills—with only sixteen (seven from the House) having been successfully passed since Federation. (Notably within our period the Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act of 2017—legalizing same-sex marriage privately introduced in the Senate.)

Private members' bills will only pass with the government's acquiescence even if the prime minister does not insist on his party members voting for it. Given these legislative limitations speaking in the House provides an opportunity to scrutinize legislation and demonstrate command of a policy area, potentially increasing the likelihood that legislative amendments reflect parliamentary discourse. The preponderance of senior MPs in legislative speech may correspond to their greater legislative effectiveness or influence net of parliamentary position, majority party or coalition status, and party membership.

Within each category of parliamentary speeches, we find that speechmaking increases with parliamentary experience. Despite comprising less than 5 percent of the ALP's contingent in the House, MPs with more than twenty years' experience gave more than a quarter of the speeches, roughly seventeen times more speeches per individual than MPs in their first or second terms. In the Liberal Party, the most experienced MPs gave twenty times as many speeches as first and second term MPs. We also find that men are more likely to speak than women across each stage of their parliamentary career. Furthermore, as MPs gain experience, the gap between men and women by floor time increases. Men speak around 11 percent more often than women in their first term, which grows to 33 percent when they both have twelve or more years of experience. This may be a product of gendered nature of

parliamentary institutions or the changing nature of parliamentary careers, as tenure in the Australian parliament is getting shorter while women are entering parliament in higher numbers.

Next, we explore the role of politics in predicting legislative debate using regression analysis. First, we analyze the role of intra-party politics in determining House speechmaking, before considering how these institutional drivers may affect the speech representation of different groups. The models estimate the number of speeches, the total word count per MP per year (both fitted using negative binomial regression), and the number of words per speech (modeled using ordinary least squares regression).

Legislative debate in the Australian House is organized in government–opposition terms. When analyzing internal party politics, our principle variable is ministerial status (the proportion of the parliamentary term that the MP spent as a minister—either in the inner or outer cabinet). Also, we analyze the effect of seniority (the average seniority of the MP over all speeches that MP makes in a calendar year) and party leadership (the proportion of a parliamentary term that the MP was leader of her party) on speechmaking. We do not include information on committee chairs because committees in the House (as opposed to the Senate) are relatively unimportant. Committee membership among MPs is common, but given the government's dominance of the lower House, most House-only committees are low status with low efficacy.

Our primary measure of inter-party politics is government status (the proportion of speeches in the calendar year the MP was in the governing party). We also include party (Coalition, Labor, independent, or other), grouping together the Liberal Party and the National Party as the "Coalition" because of their continuing agreement not to compete electorally and cooperate in the Federal Parliament both in government and opposition (Table 8.3, Figure 8.3).

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In the Australian House of Representatives, government ministers have special rights to access the floor in the promotion and defense of government policy. They are often called upon to defend policies. One of the critical ministerial skills is to speak well in parliament. Therefore, we should expect to find that government ministers speak more than other MPs. Calculating marginal effects, our model shows ministerial status results in approximately fifty more speeches per MP year net of other factors (twice the average number of speeches, Model 3) and 28,000 more words than backbench and opposition MPs (Model 6).

A limitation of the MP-level data is that while information on ministerial status is included for governing parties, shadow cabinet and frontbench status is less readily available. Therefore, we proceed with caution when interpreting the effects of ministerial status (as well as majority status) in our models. For robustness, we estimate models including only MPs who were in the majority party (Models 2 and 5). The effect of ministerial status in these models was similar to the full model. In the governing party, ministers are twice as likely to speak as backbenchers net of other factors, responsible for three-fifths of speeches made by the government.

If ministers have privileged access to the floor, then party leaders are granted an almost limitless opportunity to speak. Our analysis suggests that, net of other factors, leaders make around one hundred more speeches per term than other MPs, speaking roughly 100,000 more words per parliamentary term, more than double the additional speaking time of ordinary ministers. Party leaders lead parliamentary debate in question time, which takes place up to four times per week. Such commitments drive up speech and word count for party leaders in a mechanical sense. Party leaders have license to represent their party in a personalized manner, sometimes drawing comparisons with a "presidential style" reflected in their ubiquity in parliamentary debate.

Ministers tend to be more experienced than the average for MPs and so the descriptive finding that experienced MPs talk more is primarily explained by their higher propensity to fill ministerial (and front bench opposition) roles. We find each additional year of experience is associated with only slightly higher rates of speech in the full model (roughly 0.4 speeches per year). However, this small rise in the number of speeches is not commensurate with a rise in the overall word count of more experienced politicians. In sum, the role of experience predicting parliamentary speech is primarily due to the executive roles of more experienced MPs.

We find the propensity to speak at the individual level is increased significantly among opposition MPs. The nature of Westminster parliamentary systems gives a natural dynamic of government–opposition speechmaking, and that dynamic is strong in the Australian House of Representatives. While the government almost completely dominates the legislative agenda, the opposition's primary role is to scrutinize and challenge government legislation. Opposition status predicts an increase of around twenty-five speeches per year for a typical backbench MP. This might be explained by the fact that a typical majority for the government in the House is between zero and 10 percent meaning opposition parties must find enough MPs debate every motion in the House. We explore this further below.

When we control for institutional and other personal characteristics, men make, on average, twelve more speeches in the House (approximately 8000 more words) than do women. We believe this discrepancy may be due to women being selected into less powerful ministerial roles than men. While MPs in Westminster systems tend to be generalists, barriers to the most influential positions in the ministry remain and women are more likely to be assigned roles in less prestigious ministries. However, this is slowly changing (O'Brien et al. 2015). The list of ministers speaking the most is dominated by influential ministerial positions such as the prime minister, foreign affairs, treasury, and Leader of the House. In

part, the relative absence of women in these roles (up to 2019) explains the gap in speechmaking between male and female MPs (Table 8.4, Figure 8.4).

Since political debate is highly adversarial and often aggressive, it is not surprising that women might tend to participate less often in parliamentary discourse. While minority MPs are not denied access to the floor, some suggest that cultural exclusion discourages them from participating (Chappell 2010; Chappel and Waylen 2013). Our data suggests that cultural exclusion operates more concretely underrepresentation in the ministry affecting participation in parliamentary speech.

In sum, we find that the major institutional driver of individual legislative speech in the Australian House of Representatives is leadership status, which dominates inter-party dynamics such as majority party status as an explanatory factor at the individual level. However, as we explore below, we find that there is still some room for inter-party dynamics related to the number of seats parties hold in the chamber, and their majority/minority status, relative to their parliamentary adversary.

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Minority and Majority Government Dynamics in Australia

Australia's House of Representatives is dominated by its government–opposition dynamic. In this section, we explore how the relative strength of the two principle parties of power (the ALP and the Liberal–National Coalition) affect speechmaking at the individual level. First, we examine how speechmaking is affected when the party of government does not hold an overall majority in the chamber (occurring during one period of our dataset, 2010–2013). We

also examine how individual speechmaking is affected as a function of minority-to-majority, moving from a forty-seat minority opposition party to a dominant majority government.[3]

Such is the strength of the assumption of government dominance in the House within the political elite, when the 2010 national election returned a minority government—the first since the 1940s—public commentary saw parliament as disorderly. This was despite the fact that nearly all State parliaments had experience of minority government since the 1990s. The advent of the first federal minority government in recent times upset both formal privileges and several norms and assumptions of parliamentary government. Before the Gillard government could guarantee support of the parliamentary crossbench, both government and opposition agreed to a set of parliamentary reforms aimed at resolving some of the asymmetries of power between government and opposition in the House of Representatives. These reforms, coupled with the impact of the government's lost majority, shifted both rules and the parliament's incentive structure.

The reforms changed several formal rules of parliamentary procedure. The length of questions and answers during question time was codified and shortened. Several measures were introduced to increase the opportunities for backbench MPs to participate in parliament through thirty-second statements to parliament, increased more prestigious (and short-lived) committee work and a temporary increase in private member's business. Furthermore, in minority, the government lost its capacity to control the flow of debate—most critically to remove the right of members to speak. Crossbenchers could speak more.

As for informal norms, the government was reluctant to put forward any bills it thought it might lose, reflecting the entrenched norm of government dominance of the lower chamber that the Labor government felt it had to meet. Ironically, the Gillard government was also one of the most legislatively productive in modern history, reflecting an increase in overall speech. Minority government opened up the tactical opportunities for the opposition,

including forcing the government to adopt measures against its will or attempting to bring down the government. The Abbott Opposition stretched parliamentary conventions, refusing government ministers parliamentary pairs to attend international meetings, funerals, and even the birth of a child. The opposition also used the crossbenchers' preference for more speech to be as disruptive as possible, by calling high numbers of censure motions and for near-daily suspensions of regular standing orders altering the progress of question time in particular. The Abbott opposition's approach to legislation was to be as harmful and hostile as possible in debate, but then to allow bills to pass. This strategy of maximum speech and disruption responded to a favorable incentive structure of higher media coverage. Some commentators argue that this minority experience has permanently shifted parliamentary speech to be more rhetorically negative, even when not reflected in voting behavior.

By contrast, the opposition led by Labor's Bill Shorten during the one-seat majority government under Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison (2016–2018), showed that many of the same incentives that apply in minority also apply in narrow-majority. The government was forced to be more present in the chamber, and, on one occasion, lost a vote on the floor of the chamber due to mismanagement of the pairing system. Labor agreed to allow the vote to be retaken to reflect the true "will of the House." When the Morrison government fell into minority in late 2018, they faced many of the same dilemmas as the Gillard government. However, the Morrison government, which was in crisis and close to the natural end of the parliamentary term, responded by drastically reducing the time in which parliament sat in the first half of 2019 (to April 11) to only twelve days. Underlining the point that the incentive structure for oppositions is not fixed, Labor did not opt for the same strategy of maximum disruption to bring down the government as Abbott had done. Instead, they chose to coordinate with the crossbench and the Senate to impose parliament's will upon the executive, most notably in the area of medical treatment for refugees. In sum, minority and

narrow-majority governments increase the incentive for government actors to be more present but open up options for opposition members. Overall, *if the parliament sits*, the incentive structure should see more speech, not less.

We define an indicator variable for MPs who were members of a minority government. Our expectation that minority government places an added incentive for governments to allow backbench members of the governing party to speak—or rather, the same requirements for legislative speech is spread between fewer government MPs—is reflected in the regression analysis. Model 7 shows a statistically significant positive effect. When calculating marginal effects from the negative binomial regression, we estimate an increase of roughly sixteen speeches. However, this increase in the number of speeches is not accompanied by a statistically significant increase in the number of words spoken by each MP (Model 9).

We argue, specifically with Australia's strong government–opposition dynamic, a party's seat-share, relative to its major adversary party is likely to affect how often its MPs take the floor. In two models including only MPs from Labor and the Coalition, we construct a variable representing the size of a party's majority status in the chamber (2(Party Group Seats-Total Seats/2)), which is the number of seats' advantage that a government has over an opposition or vice versa, assuming there are no minor parties. This is a reasonable assumption given that minor parties and independents combined have taken up no more than six seats in a single term throughout our data.

We assess the functional form of the minority/majority variable's effect on individual speechmaking. In both the speechmaking and word count models, we found the best fit with the linear term and a cubic polynomial, excluding the squared term, which was not significant in either case. This relationship is best viewed in terms of marginal effects and is shown in Figure 8.4. In a minority with forty fewer seats than the government, a typical MPs makes

roughly ninety speeches per term, compared with forty-five speeches from MPs in a majority of forty.

This is consistent with our expectation that governments and oppositions "pair-off" during debate. In a hypothetical House of Representatives, where the government holds ninety-five seats and the opposition just fifty-five, we nevertheless expect near parity for the number of speeches between government and opposition (95 seats $\times$ 45 speeches per MP = 4275 for the government; 55 seats $\times$ 90 speeches per MP = 4950 for the opposition). One caveat to this finding is that our model does not account for opposition shadow ministers, and holds other variables at their means. Observing trends in raw data, governing parties make more speeches than opposition parties but our analysis shows a significant compensation mechanism for opposition parties—requiring members to make more speeches in order to effectively scrutinize and hold government policy to account. Additionally, given the stark asymmetry of power between government and opposition in the House of Representatives, making speeches is one of the few rights opposition members can exploit (Table 6.5, Figure 8.5).

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Conclusions

Our findings on the speeches in the House of Representatives are directly related to the nature of Australia's Westminster strong two-party system, strong government, but with MPs who have individual profiles within their constituencies. This gives incentives for individual MPs to speak but also that party and governing–opposition, and government roles determine most of the findings.

Our descriptive statistics show that women and less experienced parliamentarians speak less than men and more experienced parliamentarians. It also shows that opposition members speak more on average than non-ministers on the government side. However, when we delve deeper into the analysis, we find that most of these effects can be explained by the fact that ministers speak more than backbenchers. Women speak less than men, both in the number of speeches and in the number words. Furthermore, this relationship holds when we account for ministerial roles. However, this finding may be explained by men being given more important and prestigious ministerial portfolios such as prime minister, foreign affairs, the treasury and Leader of the House.

Further investigation is needed to determine if there is a specific gender effect on speeches themselves not accounted for by seniority. Finally, we find opposition members speak more than government members when controlling for ministers. This is likely because the opposition necessarily has fewer MPs, and roughly equal time is allowed to both sides of the House in debate.

We provide a preliminary analysis of the nature of parliamentary debate in Australia that is highly dependent upon its Westminster system. In Westminster systems, the government almost completely dominates the parliamentary agenda. Thus, in presenting and defending bills and defending government actions ministers tend to dominate proceedings. Furthermore, the set-piece of a majority government and minority opposition facing off against each other with parliamentary procedure giving rough equality to both sides of the House means opposition members on average will speak more than government members. The other factor that might explain the nature of debate in the Australian parliament is that the chambers are relatively small, with only 151 members in the lower House. Furthermore, those who have served as ministers tend to leave parliament once they no longer have office, so there are fewer very experienced members on the backbenches.

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Table 8.1 Parliamentary debate types in Australia

Type of Debate	Goal	Rules	Time Limits
Government business	Debates on government legislation and business.	Government business is managed via the notice paper. Matters are moved by the relevant minister, most senior minister or the	Up to 20 minutes.

		Government Leader in the House.	
Question Time	Opportunity to ask Questions without notice to any member of the ministry (parliamentary secretaries cannot be questioned).	Questions alternate between the opposition and the government. The crossbench typically gets one question per session.	Questions are 30 seconds long. Answers are 3 minutes. Typically, 1 hour every sitting day.
Adjournment debate	This debate is specifically exempted from the normal rules of relevance, which provides Members with near-daily opportunity to speak on any matter they wish to raise.	The opposition typically receives the first call, with the chair alternating the call between opposition and government.	Up to 5 minutes. The debate is typically 30 minutes at the end of most sitting days.
Private Members bills	Bills presented by any member other than a minister or parliamentary secretary.	The government controls whether these will be debated. Government business is suspended to allow discussion of a Private member's Bill.	Up to 10 minutes.
Matters of Public Importance (MPI)	An opportunity for the parliament (effectively	Submissions made by letter to the Speaker.	The proposer and then next speaking member

the opposition) to debate a pressing issue of public importance. This debate is on all sitting days, except Mondays, shortly after Question Time.	The Speaker must rule them in order, then the MPI must be supported by 8 members for debate to commence.	are granted 10 minutes. All subsequent speakers granted up to 5 minutes. 1 hour is typically given to this debate.		

Table 8.2 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
# Speeches	63.56	65.95	0	652
# Words	50556.1	37017.89	0	317588
Gender	.21	.40	0	1
Seniority	8.61	6.84	0	41
Minister	.19	.37	0	1
Government	.54	.50	0	1
Party Leader	.021	.13	0	1
Age	49.83	8.72	22	74
Exposure	.97	.11	.055	1
Party Size	57.015	21.31	1	83
Minority Government	.09	.29	0	1
Majority	-2.27	15.17	-73	20

Table 8.3 Determinants of floor access in Australia

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Government	-0.42***		-0.38***
	(0.053)		(0.049)
Gender	-0.13*	-0.14*	-0.15**
	(0.058)	(0.062)	(0.057)
Seniority	-0.0025	0.012*	0.0097*
	(0.0039)	(0.0059)	(0.0042)
Minister	0.92***	0.83***	0.84***
	(0.078)	(0.075)	(0.070)
Leader	1.38***	1.44***	1.48***
	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Age		0.057*	0.057*
		(0.025)	(0.024)
Age Squared		-0.00068*	-0.00072**
		(0.00026)	(0.00024)
Exposure (Log)		2.07***	2.51***
		(0.48)	(0.21)
Party Size		0.0017	0.00096
		(0.0013)	(0.0013)
Other			0.22
			(0.14)
Constant	4.13***	0.17	0.23
	(0.067)	(0.84)	(0.65)

Party Family (base: ALP)			
Coalition		0.36**	-0.070
		(0.11)	(0.064)
N	1497	811	1495
AIC	14760.1	7718.5	14364.4

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Table 8.4 Determinants of words uttered in legislative debates in Australia

	(4)	(5)	(6)
Government	-15029.9***		-14201.1***
	(1804.4)		(2028.1)
Gender	-5233.9*	-10028.5**	-7100.8**
	(2621.4)	(3089.2)	(2613.8)
Seniority	-166.6	481.5	160.5
	(186.7)	(365.3)	(231.1)
Minister	31440.9***	25813.3***	29090.8***
	(4206.0)	(3801.0)	(3946.5)
Leader	98316.7***	126053.1***	98684.7***
	(17391.8)	(19327.8)	(16106.0)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Age		2583.6	1979.7*
		(1340.8)	(903.5)
Age Squared		-30.9*	-24.1*
		(14.0)	(9.40)
Party Size		113.7	72.4
		(85.9)	(71.7)
Other			11481.5
			(7427.9)
Constant	54022.8***	-25449.0	6740.9
	(2505.1)	(32274.2)	(22147.5)
Party Family (base: ALP)			
Coalition		-2890.7	-5250.2
		(6047.9)	(3081.5)
N	1497	811	1497
R^2	0.232	0.367	0.315

Standard errors in parentheses

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

Table 8.5 Determinants of floor access and words uttered in legislative debates in Australia (with country-specific covariates)

	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Speeches	Speeches	Words	Words
Government	-0.44***		-4628.0**	
	(0.056)		(1425.9)	
Minority Gov.	0.24**		-973.6	
	(0.076)		(2091.3)	
Majority		-0.029***		-993.4***
		(0.0039)		(159.2)
Majority^3		0.000032***		1.30***
		(0.0000083)		(0.39)
Gender	-0.15**	-0.16**	-1698.4	-7129.8**
	(0.057)	(0.057)	(1551.2)	(2624.8)
Seniority	0.0096*	0.0098*	-294.4*	145.4
	(0.0043)	(0.0043)	(145.8)	(238.4)
Minister	0.84***	0.82***	3002.5	27675.1***

	(0.071)	(0.070)	(2341.7)	(3808.2)
Leader	1.48***	1.48***	12297.7	99149.3***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(10995.4)	(16001.1)
Age	0.055*	0.056*	347.4	1834.2*
	(0.025)	(0.024)	(703.0)	(930.6)
Age Squared	-0.00069**	-0.00071**	-3.76	-22.4*
	(0.00025)	(0.00024)	(7.34)	(9.71)
Exposure (Log)	2.59***	2.59***		
	(0.22)	(0.22)		
Party Size	0.0015	0.0016	-11.8	71.7
	(0.0013)	(0.0013)	(47.2)	(76.4)
Party Family (base: ALP)				
Coalition	-0.050	0.033	-4453.9*	-3002.0
	(0.063)	(0.069)	(1911.5)	(3462.9)
Constant	3.36**	2.93*	-81209.0*	-63184.1

	(1.26)	(1.16)	(35366.6)	(51236.9)
N	1463	1463	1463	1463
R^2			0.718	0.314
AIC	14033.2	14030.2	33154.9	34455.0

Standard errors in parentheses

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

<TE: move the below endnotes to become footnotes>

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[1] Minor parties in Australia are often formed from party defectors. Often, minor parties are composed of one person, seeking to use party status to attract additional resources. During the period under investigation, the Australian Greens are the largest party of note and were not formed as a result of party defections or via personalized politics.

[2] Known as "Dorothy Dixers," these questions typically ask the minister to explain policy and usually end with "does the minister know of any alternatives," which grants the minister carte blanche to remain within the rules while attacking the opposition.

[3] The largest majority in our dataset was 45 seats, held by the first Howard Government following the 1996 Federal Election.