Strategies of Policy Evaluations in Parliaments

Pirmin Bundi†

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Abstract

This article considers the question of which strategies parliamentarians pursue when they use parliamentary requests demanding an evaluation. In order to be re-elected, parliamentarians can either appeal to their constituency or to their party by adopting legislative roles. The study is based on twelve case studies of parliamentary requests from the Swiss parliament between 2010-2014. The analysis shows that parliamentarians of legislative committees submit parliamentary requests in order to oppose a policy, while parliamentarians of oversight committees submit parliamentary requests to obtain information on specific policies. On the contrary, the party membership of the responsible Federal Councillor does not influence the strategy. These findings suggest that parliamentarians use evaluations depending on their parliamentary allocation.

Keywords: Policy Evaluation, Parliament, Parliamentary Request, Case Study

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†Department of Political Science, University of Zurich (www.pirminbundi.com).
1 Introduction

Policy evaluations fulfill an important function within contemporary democracies. They assess a public policy in regard to its effectiveness, efficiency or fitness for purpose. This information is not only potentially interesting for the public administration, but also for other institutions. Members of parliament (MPs) are often confronted with an information overload (Mayne, 2007; Van Dooren, 2011), which is why evaluation studies may provide them with information. Moreover, recent studies show that MPs use evaluations for accountability (Speer et al., 2015; Bundi, 2016) as well as agenda-setting (Zwaan et al., 2016). In doing so, parliamentary requests take a prominent role for parliaments in order to demand evaluations.

Parliamentary instruments allow MPs to initiate new policies or to receive information about them, which is why they belong to the most powerful tools of parliaments (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2012). On the one hand, some studies argue that parliamentary instruments allow parliaments to align the government’s actions with their own voters’ preferences, as they enable MPs to set the agenda (Raunio, 1996; Martin, 2011a; Bailer, 2011). On the other hand, authors state that parliamentary requests are a useful tool to control the government, since they provide information on how the government implements policies (Russo & Wiberg, 2010; Proksch & Slapin, 2011). Policy evaluations meet both needs for MPs, since they provide information for legislation and oversight. However, previous literature fails to explain which purposes MPs pursue when they submit a parliamentary request in order to demand an evaluation. Thus, this article aims to look behind the scenes of parliamentary procedures in order to understand the strategies of policy evaluations in parliaments.

This article considers the question of which strategies MPs pursue when they use parliamentary requests in order to demand an evaluation. The paper argues that MPs are mainly driven by the aspiration of re-election. In order to achieve this goal, they have two possibilities: Either they appeal to their constituency by their legislative role or they promote their party in order to get rewarded by the party leadership. Previous studies suggest that MPs are mainly influenced by two organizational allocations: Committee and party group membership (Bowler & Farrell, 1995; McElroy & Benoit, 2007). Depending on their allocation, MPs pursue different strategies with policy evaluations. Since MPs of legislative committees want to position themselves by policy advocacy, they demand evaluations in order to find evidence for or against a policy. In contrast, MPs of oversight committees submit parliamentary requests in order to
obtain information on policies to present themselves to their constituency as controllers of the government. In addition, MPs seek evidence against or for a policy depending on the party group membership. MPs from the same party group as the responsible Federal Councillor will demand an evaluation in order to support a policy, while MPs from different party groups will pursue the strategy to oppose a policy in order to blame the political opponent. In both cases, MPs expect to be rewarded by their party in the next election.

Empirically, the analysis is based on a comparative case study approach (Yin, 2014). In doing so, I investigate twelve parliamentary requests, which were submitted between 2010 and 2014 at the federal level in Switzerland. Evaluations are particularly well established in the Swiss political system and are highly institutionalized in the parliament compared to other democracies (Jacob et al., 2015). Furthermore, Switzerland is a least likely case for the observation of legislative roles. On the one hand, the Swiss parliament has weak oversight capacities and only knows a limited opposition system due to the consensual character of the Swiss democracy (Vatter, 2014). On the other hand, parliamentary groups still tend to have a powerless position within the parliament, which can be observed by their low voting unity (Bailer & Bütikofer, 2015; Coman, 2015).

The study shows that MPs indeed pursue different strategies with evaluations. On the one hand, the committee membership has a considerable effect on the strategy of an evaluation. While MPs from oversight committees seek information with evaluations, MPs from legislative committees demand evaluations in order to oppose a policy. On the contrary, the party group membership does not influence the evaluation strategy. These findings suggest that parliamentarians react to electoral vulnerability with parliamentary requests. MPs rather tend to appeal to their constituency than to their own party, since they expect a higher reward by the former. Moreover, MPs use evaluations depending on their parliamentary allocation, since they adopt different legislative roles.

The article is structured as follows: Section 3 introduces the theoretical framework. Section 2 presents a brief overview of the parliamentary requests in Switzerland and illustrates the process of parliamentary evaluation requests. Section 4 discusses the research design and case selection. Section 5 presents the findings of the case studies, which are discussed in section 6. Section 7 concludes the results and discusses the implications of the findings for research on evaluation.
2 Theory

Strategic behavior is an important component for MPs, as several studies have illustrated the importance of strategic voting in parliaments (Farquharson, 1969; Clinton & Meirowitz, 2004; Rasch, 2014; Büttikofer & Hug, 2015; Hug et al., 2015). Moreover, MPs also express their strategic nature by the use of parliamentary requests (Bowler, 2010; Martin, 2011b; Kellermann, 2013, 2015; Martin & Rozenberg, 2014). According to these studies, MPs submit parliamentary requests to attract attention from the public, since they are influenced by their electoral vulnerability. This argumentation is based on the assumption that MPs have incentives to maximize their votes in order to succeed in elections (Norris, 2004, 98-101).

In order to get re-elected, MPs mainly have to consider two different actors when they submit a parliamentary request: Their voters and their party leadership. On the one hand, voters elect the candidates into the parliament. Depending on the electoral system, they either vote for a party or select a candidate from a party list (Farrell, 2011). On the other hand, the party leadership is often responsible for nominating the candidates, and they also have the power to obstruct a MP from the election, if the MP does not seem favorable for them. Since both actors have a strong influence on how MPs behave in the parliament, MPs sometimes face a dilemma between what is in the interest of their own party and what is important for their voters (Carey & Shugart, 1995). The crucial point for MPs is to satisfy both interests, without offending the other actor at the same time.

By rule, MPs are authorized to act on behalf of their voters by their election. Since the voters delegate their policy preferences to the MPs, the latter are also accountable towards them (Müller et al., 2006). Therefore, MPs spend a considerable amount of time and effort in order to appeal to their voters, by responding to their mail or attending public events (Kellermann, 2015; Giger & Lanz, 2016). Also, they focus on the topics in the parliamentary arena from which they believe that voters will reward them in the next election. In doing so, MPs can use parliamentary requests in order to propose a political project, which is favorable to their voters (André et al., 2014). Moreover, it can lead to additional publicity for the author, since media frequently reports about parliamentary requests (Van Santen et al., 2015). However, not all parliamentary requests might be in the interest of the MPs party.

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1However, André et al. (2014, 234) argue that voters need to have the possibility to monitor the MPs’ actions, and also to sanction or reward them for their performance.
Party leaders also want to maximize their party’s votes, but they pursue a slightly different goal. In order to enforce their policies preferences, parties depend on their internal cohesion. According to Kam (2014, 399), party cohesion is the degree to which members of the same party work together in order to pursue the party’s goal. Most prominently, MPs from the same party should coordinate their votes to pass the policy (Krehbiel, 2000; Kam, 2009). As a consequence, parliamentary questions should not request an issue, which contradicts the party’s opinion or is detrimental to it. More important, parliamentary questions could put government members of the same party to inconveniences, if the request reveals a governmental failure (Jensen et al., 2013).

Legislative roles\(^2\) are important in order to satisfy both voters and party leaders. Various studies emphasize the role difference’s amongst MPs (Wahlke, 1962; Andeweg, 1997, 2014; Scully & Farrell, 2003). Strøm (2012) argues that MPs pursue different goals depending on their situation in the parliament. In doing so, their situation is often influenced by their organizational allocation. In most parliaments, MPs are divided in legislative and oversight committees in addition to their membership in their party groups. According to Saalfeld (2000), these memberships have a high influence on how MPs interpret their role in the parliament. While members of oversight committees rather focus on the control of the administration, members of the legislative committees seek to promote themselves by policy advocacy.

Evaluations are a particularly interesting tool for both roles, since they provide information for legislation (Weiss, 1989; Christie, 2003) and for overseeing the government (Lees, 1977; Bundi, 2016). In addition, evaluations can also be demanded in order to show a policy failure and to emphasize a policy change. However, previous research on evaluation has argued that decision makers demand evaluations in order to find evidence for or against a policy (Whiteman, 1985; Kingdon, 1989; Weiss, 1998; Frey & Widmer, 2011). Moreover, MPs seek confirmation of their own opinion in the evaluation report. In the following, I argue that the evaluation strategy is shaped by the MP’s expected benefit for a re-election from the perspective of their voters. On the one hand, MPs from legislative committees want to influence the legislation process by policy advocacy. They can achieve this by demanding an evaluation, which provides evidence against an existing policy and serves as a basis for a policy change. On the other hand, MPs of an oversight committee want to appeal to their voters by displaying themselves as controllers of

\(^2\)In literature, the term legislative roles is often used to describe the behavioral patterns or routines that MPs adopt. However, these patterns can also include oversight goals next to legislative aspects (Strom, 1997).
the public administration to their constituency (Strøm, 2000; Bovens, 2005). In doing so, they submit parliamentary requests in order to obtain information on a certain policy and to fulfill their oversight function. Therefore, I will test following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** MPs from legislative committees will more likely demand an evaluation in order to oppose or support a policy than MPs from oversight committees; MPs from oversight committees will more likely demand an evaluation in order to obtain information on a policy.

In order to please the party leaders, MPs might point out how effective their party works in parliament, as effectiveness is often regarded as high legitimacy aspect (Scharpf, 1999; Widmer, 2009). In doing so, they submit a parliamentary request in order to demand an evaluation, which should illustrate the virtue of their party. In contrast, MPs can also blame the political opponent by demanding an evaluation, which should reveal policy failures. As a consequence, MPs hope to get benefitted by their own party in the next election. Therefore, the following hypothesis is tested:

**Hypothesis 2:** MPs from the same party group as the responsible Federal Councillor will more likely demand an evaluation in order to support a policy; MPs from a different party group as the responsible Federal Councillor will more likely demand an evaluation in order to oppose a policy.

The next section presents the different types of parliamentary requests in Switzerland and illustrates how MPs can use them in order to demand evaluations.

### 3 Evaluations by Parliamentary Requests

The Swiss Federal Assembly\(^3\) has different ways to demand evaluations. Either committees can commission evaluations directly or they include evaluation clauses in the legislation. However, recent studies have shown that MPs prefer to demand evaluations by submitting parliamentary requests (Bundi, 2016). In doing so, Swiss MPs know different types of parliamentary requests, which they can use in order to demand an evaluation.

Parliamentary requests are considered as the instruments, with which MPs can influence the political agenda directly, since the agenda of committees is mainly determined by the Federal

\(^3\)The Swiss Federal Assembly is a bicameral parliament. In contrast to other countries, the lower (National Council) and upper house (Council of States) are perfectly symmetric, since they have exactly the same prerogatives (Büttikofer & Hug, 2010, 178)
Council and its departments (Vatter, 2014, 285). In doing so, they enable MPs to propose a new policy or to obtain information on specific matters. In general, one can distinguish between four different requests: Motion, postulate, interpellation, and question. The requests vary in their procedure and goal. A motion instructs the Federal Council to initiate a new policy proposal or to undertake a certain action. A postulate requests the Federal Council to examine and report on whether to submit a new policy proposal or to undertake a certain action. In addition, MPs can also request a report on a different matter with a postulate. Finally, an interpellation or a question requests the Federal Council to provide information on matters that are related to the Swiss Confederation. While the interpellation is only discussed in the Council of States, the question is neither discussed in the National Council nor in the Council of States. While the motion requires an acceptance in both chambers, the postulate needs only one supporting chamber. In contrast, interpellations and questions are both submitted without a vote in the parliament. A parliamentary request can be submitted by individual MPs, a parliamentary group or a committee. Although they are often signed by several MPs, usually only one MP is the author of the parliamentary request.

Depending on the parliamentary request, MPs have different possibilities to demand an evaluation. With interpellations and questions, MPs ask the government whether they would support an evaluation for a certain policy. In contrast, a motion includes an evaluation of a policy within the new bill, which finally results in an evaluation clause if the legislation is passed in the parliament (Bussmann, 2005). The most direct way to demand an evaluation is the postulate. In doing so, the MP requests a report about a policy regarding its effectiveness or efficiency. (Bund et al., 2016) have identified all parliamentary requests, which demand an evaluation in the National Council and the Council of States between 2010 and 2014 (Table 1). Since 2010, between 33 and 45 parliamentary requests were submitted by MPs in order to demand an evaluation. Hence, the amount of such parliamentary requests has been relatively constant for the last ten years (Janett, 2004). However, only a small number of motions are accepted within the chambers, while almost fifty percent of the postulates are finally submitted to the Federal Council.

4In addition, the National Council has a question time every second or third week of session. During the question time, the Federal Council orally answers written questions, which their members have received in the beginning of a session. Furthermore, MPs can submit parliamentary initiatives in order to propose a new bill. However, these initiatives are directly treated by a legislative committee instead of the Federal Council (Vatter & Wirz, 2015).

5Art. 118-125 ParlG, SR 171.10.
Table 1: Submitted Parliamentary Requests for Evaluations, 2010-2014 (Bundi et al., 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliamentary Request</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motion</td>
<td>6(1)</td>
<td>7(1)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>2(0)</td>
<td>3(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postulate</td>
<td>6(3)</td>
<td>8(4)</td>
<td>12(6)</td>
<td>7(3)</td>
<td>4(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpellation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 2014 covers the submitted parliamentary requests until June 20, 2014. Number of accepted motions and postulates in parentheses. Information provided for the National Council and the Council of States.

Independently from the type of parliamentary request, the processes of the demanded evaluations show similar structures. Figure 1 identifies the process and illustrates how policy evaluation demands develop. In doing so, the case studies reveal that the processes resemble and consist of four key elements: Background, trigger, strategy and purpose of a parliamentary request. Figure 1 illustrates the parliamentary evaluation requests’ process.

**Background:** MPs react to certain circumstances with parliamentary request. Either a policy has turned out to be a failure or a policy has changed and it is uncertain whether the change causes new effects. In order to spot such policy failures, a MP may demand an evaluation in order to obtain information about the deficient policy. In contrast, a policy change harbors perils due to its unknown effects. Hence, policy changes also often increase the need for information in order to calculate the impact of the change.

**Trigger:** Two factors usually trigger MPs to submit parliamentary requests to a specific issue. On the one hand, MPs have a special interest in a certain policy field due to their personal background or their specialization within the parliament (Searing, 1991; Bowler & Farrell, 1995). Since MPs only have limited resources, they often specialize in certain policy areas in which they are a member of a committee. On the other hand, several studies have shown that interest groups are often the main driver behind parliamentary questions (Raunio, 1996; Bailer, 2011). According to Richardson (2000, 1009), interest groups provide information in order to influence the decision-making process. Therefore, interest groups are interested in evaluations due to their information content.

**Strategy:** Previous studies show that evaluations can be used analytically or politically (Weiss, 1989; Frey, 2012). While analytical use refers to situation where decision makers are open to evidence, political use indicates that an opinion is already made and the evaluation is used to justify a decision (Eberli, 2015, 4). Depending on their openness to evidence, MPs
demand evaluations in order to oppose or support a policy or to get information in order to make decisions. While opposition is characterized by the MPs’ goal to eliminate or replace an existing policy, support aims to protect and keep a policy. In contrast, the strategy information reveals nothing about the MPs’ attitude towards the policy, only that the MPs seek information about this issue.

**Purpose**: MPs pursue two main purposes when demanding an evaluation. Either they want to change an existing policy or they want to keep the status quo, yet sensitize some actors to it. While policy change is well established in public policy literature (Sabatier, 2006; Sabatier & Weible, 2014), policy awareness has rarely been discussed. In contrast to policy change, policy awareness emphasizes the importance of a certain policy for a specific group within the society. Hence, it is more focused on keeping the status quo - a task which is often as important for MPs as to change a policy (Tsebelis, 1994, 131-135).

The following section discusses the research design that I use to examine the hypotheses. Since the analysis is based on a comparative case study, the section introduces the case selection and gives an overview on the used data and methods.

4 Research Design

The basis of the empirical analysis are twelve comparative case studies (Yin, 2014). A case is defined as a parliamentary request, which has been submitted by a MP and demands an evaluation. The cases were selected by keeping as many independent variables as possible constant, while the parliamentary requests differ in the MP’s organizational allocation. First, the parliamentary requests vary in the MP’s committee membership; legislative or oversight committee. Second, MPs of oversight committees are often also members in a legislative committee, since the latter is more frequent. I have allocated the MPs due to their statements within the interviews.
Table 2: Selected Cases of Parliamentary Requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislative Committee</th>
<th>Oversight Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different Party Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Stalking (Mot. 13.3742)</td>
<td>(2) Supplementary Benefits (Post. 12.3673)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) New Buildings (Post. 13.3903)</td>
<td>(10) Professional Integration (Quest. 10.1124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Party Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Gender Equality (Inter. 13.3270)</td>
<td>(6) Poster Children (Inter. 11.4077)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Lötschberg-Tunnel (Post. 11.3626)</td>
<td>(12) Federal ICT-Projects (Post. 13.4062)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Doctor Admission (Post. 12.3218)</td>
<td>(4) Regional Policy (Post. 11.3697)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Mot. = Motion; Inter. = Interpellation; Post. = Postulate; Quest. = Question; Number of Case in parentheses.

I distinguish the parliamentary requests between the MP’s ideological affiliation. In doing so, I have compared the party membership of the parliamentary request’s author (MP) and its recipient (Federal Councillor). According to recent studies (Kriesi et al., 2006; Bornschier, 2015), the main cleavage of the Swiss party system proceeds along the left (Social Democratic Party, Green Party) and liberal-conservative parties (Christian Democratic People’s Party, FDP, The Liberals, Swiss People’s Party). Although these MPs are not in the same party, they are also anxious to embarrass their allied parties, since the federal election allows list combination (Bochsler, 2010). The twelve cases were selected on the basis of the study of (Bundi et al., 2016) following the variation of committee and party group membership. Moreover, I selected eight matching case. The cases have the same author, but differ in their context, since some MPs have changed their committee or have submitted the parliamentary requests to different departments. According to King et al. (1994, 199-206), matching is one of the most valuable strategies to estimate the causal effect of a variable, since most other control variables are held constant. The case selection included parliamentary requests from both parliamentary chambers. Finally, the selected cases differ in several other factors (e.g. political party, type of parliamentary request, federal department). Table 2 shows an overview of the selected cases. Although MPs from legislative committees submitted more parliamentary requests, MPs from oversight committees have more submissions in relation to their size, since the number of oversight committees is smaller than legislative committees. In addition, MPs tend to submit more requests to Federal Councillors, which are from a different party group. The parliamentary requests are distributed as follows: 79 (36.2%) legislative committee and different party group, 73 (33.5%) legislative committee and same party group, 38 (17.4%) oversight committee and different party group, and 28 (12.8%)
In order to investigate the cases, I gathered data from a document analysis and guideline-based interviews (Bailer, 2014). In doing so, I analyzed the text of each parliamentary request, which are available on the database of the parliament (Curia Vista, 2016). The database reveals the full text of the parliamentary request, its author, the date of submission, the responsible government department, and a short justification. The guideline-based interviews with the MPs were conducted during March 2016. The study uses a causal-process observation in order to test the influence of the parliamentary allocation on the strategy of policy evaluations. According to (Brady & Collier, 2010, 318), causal-process observation is "an insight or piece of data that provides information about context, process, or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference". I focus on mechanism causal-process observation, which provides information about whether an intervening event posited by a theory can be observed (Mahoney, 2010, 128-129). The study reconstructs the process of parliamentary requests demanding an evaluation with the help of the interviews and analyses what factors lead to the specific strategy of the evaluation.

5 Findings

Table 3 presents an overview of the findings of the case studies. The case studies show that the evaluations were mainly used in order to oppose or to get information on a policy. A MP demanded an evaluation only in one case in order to support a policy (Case 11). The analysis suggests that the committee membership plays a crucial role for the choice of strategy. While MPs of oversight committees tend to ask for evaluations in order to obtain information, legislative committee members demand evaluations in order to oppose an existing policy. However, the case studies do not provide evidence for the influence of legislative committee members on the strategy to support a policy. In contrast, the case studies show no party group effect. In order to illustrate the mechanisms of causality behind these variables, the next sections provide detailed information from the case studies.

7 More details to the cases can be found in Table 4 in the Appendix.
8 One interview was conducted per email, since the MP only had limited time resources (Case 3).
Table 3: Overview of Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No.</th>
<th>Parliamentary Request</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Committee Hypothesis</th>
<th>Party Group Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Motion (13.3742)</td>
<td>Stalking</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Different (Y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Postulate (12.3673)</td>
<td>Supplementary Benefits</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Oversight (Y)</td>
<td>Different (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Postulate (11.3626)</td>
<td>Lötschberg-Tunnel</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Same (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Postulate (11.3697)</td>
<td>Regional Policy</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Oversight (Y)</td>
<td>Same (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interpellation (14.3163)</td>
<td>Axpo</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Different (Y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interpellation (11.4077)</td>
<td>Poster Children</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Same (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Postulate (13.3903)</td>
<td>New Buildings</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Different (Y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interpellation (13.3270)</td>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Same (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Postulate (12.3218)</td>
<td>Doctor Admission</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Legislative (Y)</td>
<td>Same (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Question (10.1124)</td>
<td>Professional Integration</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Oversight (Y)</td>
<td>Different (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Interpellation (12.3498)</td>
<td>Prevention Programmes</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Interest Group</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Oversight (N)</td>
<td>Different (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Postulate (13.4062)</td>
<td>Federal ICT-Projects</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Oversight (Y)</td>
<td>Same (N)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Support for the hypotheses in parentheses in row committee and party group (yes/no)

Committee Membership

In total, seven parliamentary requests were submitted by a MP of a legislative committee that aimed to oppose a policy (Cases 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9). In the parliamentary request "Stalking" (Case 1), a prosecutor called the MPs attention to unavailable possibilities of punishment against stalking. In addition, the MP was dismayed by the stalking accusation against the former Chief of Army. Although he admitted some of the stalking accusation, the charge was dismissed. As a consequence, the MP deeply believed that the existing policy was useless to persecute stalking. According to the MP, the evaluation should confirm her information and should exert pressure on the Federal Council to take action. The other cases are similar, since the MPs aimed to demonstrate that the existing policy has failed and that one should consider a policy change. In case 3 "Lötschberg-Tunnel", the MP requested an evaluation in order to assess the safety of the tunnel and to oppose the current stage of the tunnel. However, in her opinion it was clear
that the report would show that an extension of the tunnel was necessary also due to capacity reasons. In all of these cases, the strategy of the evaluation was always to oppose an existing policy by illustrating its failure in the evaluation report. In contrast to former cases, the case 9 "Doctor Admission" reacts to a policy change. However, the MP also seeks to oppose the current policy, since he would aim to reintroduce the old policy.

In contrast, members of an oversight committee rather aim to collect information about a policy instead of opposing it (Cases 2, 4, 10 and 12). In doing so, the main difference between members of legislative and oversight committees lies in the MPs’ openness towards the results of the evaluation. In case 2 "supplementary benefits", the MP made it clear that he was not against the supplementary benefits with the social insurances IV and AHV. However, he observed that the costs have highly increased after the rearrangement of the fiscal equalization scheme between the Swiss cantons. He assumed that the reason behind this increasement could be found in the long term care insurance. Since he was not entirely sure, he demanded an evaluation in order to obtain information on the reason behind the supplementary benefits. The MP wanted to have an information basis for the next revision of the retirement provision. Case 12 illustrates similar behavior patterns, as the MP knew that the ICT projects were poorly managed, but he was lacking the information to demand a policy change, so he wanted to give the Federal Council the possibility to adjust the management of the ICT projects. In case 4 "Regional Policy" and case 10 "Professional Integration", interest groups played an important role. Both MPs were approached by interest groups that a policy had been changed and that some part of society might be disadvantaged. Since the effects of the policy were uncertain, the MPs demanded an evaluation in order to obtain information. Case 10 differs from this pattern, since he pursued the strategy to support a policy. In doing so, the MP did not directly demand an evaluation, but wanted to discuss an already existing evaluation report. Since he knew that the evaluation was very positive, he hoped for promoting another policy (national health prevention), which is closely related to this policy and was discussed a couple of weeks later.

**Party Group**

The party of the responsible Federal Councillor does not seem to have an influence on the MP’s strategy for the evaluation. In only three cases (Cases 1, 5, 7), a MP from another party group than the responsible Federal Council aimed to oppose a policy, while four parliamentary requests
(Cases 3, 6, 8, 9) pursued an opposition of the policy, although the MP and Federal Council were from the same party group. Moreover, the only supportive evaluation were submitted by a MP from another party group. The double cases 5 and 6 display the missing effect of party group. Although the parliamentary requests were submitted to two different Federal Councillors by the same MP (one from the same party, the other from another party group), they both pursued the same goal to oppose a policy.

During the interviews, almost all MPs emphasized that the party membership of the responsible government member would not play a role for the submission of the request. One MP stated that the own Federal Councils were not under preservation order. This would be especially the case for the Council of the States where the party orientation would be less important than in the National Council. Though, some MPs argued that the communication between the MP and the Federal Councillor would be easier. A MP stated that if the Federal Councillor would have been from her party, the person might have informed her about the limited acceptance chances within the Federal Council. From time to time, Federal Councillors call the MP’s attention to specific issues, so they have the possibility to become active. However, these MPs must not necessarily be from the party, as one MP explained. In addition, several MPs emphasized that the Federal Council is a collective board in which the decisions are taken together with the other members. An other very important point is the Federal Councillor’s agenda. Even if the Federal Councillor is from the same party, a parliamentary request could potentially interact the coherent strategy of the Federal Councillor.

6 Discussion

The case studies suggest that the membership in a legislative or oversight committee shapes the MPs evaluation strategy significantly, while the party group of a Federal Councillor does not seem to have an effect. In doing so, the difference between legislative and oversight committee members lies in their use of evaluations. According to the case studies, the MPs from legislative committees mainly interpret an evaluation as means to an end, since their main objective is to influence the policy agenda in order to appear as a policy advocate. This becomes apparent in the statement of one MP: "The evaluation should have come out so that it confirms the information that I already had". In contrast, all MPs from oversight committees emphasize that they are more aware of evaluations and parliamentary oversight in general due to their membership in
an oversight committee. Previous studies have shown that MPs from oversight committees demand evaluations more often (Speer et al., 2015; Bundi, 2016). Evaluations were important instruments for parliamentary oversight and they would be necessary to fulfill their oversight function. One MP highlighted that evaluations are elementary to understand the processes of a policy, since the administration has to provide information on the implementation of it. As a consequence, they position themselves in a different way. One MP explained that he cannot distinguish himself with issues from parliamentary oversight, but he can do so more generally as a MP who controls the government. On the contrary, MPs from legislative committees focus more on the policy agenda. Although those MPs argued that parliamentary oversight is important, they admitted to not being very aware of the function and relinquish these tasks to the specific committees. If they demand evaluations, they want to influence the political agenda. This finding partly confirms the study of Zwaan et al. (2016, 15), who argue that MPs of the European Parliament demand evaluations for an ex ante agenda-setting outlook by asking about information on actions that must be taken.

In contrast to the committee membership, the missing influence of the party group membership can be explained by several factors. On the one hand, an evaluation is often perceived by MPs as something very technical, which makes it less attractive for party ideological strategy. One MP argued that from time to time there are parliamentary requests, which aim to oppose a policy in order to harm the political opponent. However, evaluations would be too complicated to realize that. Evaluations would be neutral, as they are independently conducted and provide information for specific questions. As a consequence, one MP argued that if he would have to harm the other parties, he would have done it more straightforwardly. On the other hand, the Swiss political system is characterized by a strong consensual democracy, which integrates all major parties in the government and makes oppositional behavior in the parliament unusual (Lijphart, 2012). Moreover, the national parties are almost absent in the national election campaigns. Since parties in Switzerland are mainly a loose confederations of cantonal parties, the federal party is less important for the re-election of an individual MP (Linder, 2012, 83-85). Hence, MPs have fewer incentives to please the own national party.

Although the case studies do not provide evidence for an influence of a party group, they still illustrate how MPs react to electoral vulnerability with parliamentary requests. First and

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9However, Bochsler et al. (2016) argue that Switzerland shows a trend towards a stronger nationalization of the party system.
most important, the committee membership provides an opportunity for MPs to present themselves in a specific role to their constituency. Second, in seven of twelve presented cases, an interest group was the trigger behind the parliamentary request, which demanded an evaluation. Switzerland has a strong reputation for the importance of interest groups, since the central state is underdeveloped and the national parties weak are due to limited resources. In contrast, interest groups are well equipped and also institutionally recognized by public authorities (Gava et al., 2015, 2). According to Giger & Klüver (2016), some types of interest groups even influence the link between MPs and their voters. Since interest groups are so powerful, they are also important for MPs in order to get re-elected. Therefore, MPs seek their support when they submit parliamentary requests.

7 Conclusion

Policy evaluations are an important tool for the legislative and oversight function of MPs (Lees, 1977; Weiss, 1989). This article has investigated which strategies MPs pursue with evaluations by looking at twelve parliamentary requests at the Swiss Federal Assembly between 2010 and 2014. The analysis found that MPs from legislative committees demand evaluations in order to oppose a policy, while MPs from oversight committees request evaluations to obtain information on policies. In contrast, the evaluation strategy is not dependent on the party membership of the MP who submits the parliamentary request and the Federal Councillor who is responsible for responding to it. The findings suggest that parliamentary requests are elementary for MPs in order to appeal to their constituency by adopting legislative roles. Depending on the focus within the parliament, the MPs choose different strategies to promote themselves in the public. According to the cases, the appeal to the voters is more important for MPs than to their own party. These findings provide new insights in how electoral vulnerability shapes legislative behavior.

This study has some limitations. First and most important, since the analysis is based on a comparative case study with small-n, the external validity has to be discussed (Yin, 2014, 48-49). However, the case selection provided a solid basis in order to assume that the findings are generalizable beyond this study. Second, the case studies are mainly conducted by interviews with MPs. Literature on elite surveys and interviews suggests that the answers of MPs are not always reliable, which might also be a problem for elite interviews (Bailer, 2014; Bundi
et al., 2016). However, the analysis had the opportunity to compare the answer with the written request and thus weigh the answers. Last, the study did not take timing into account, which might have a strong influence on the MPs motivation for re-election (Fujimura, 2016). Parliamentary requests at the end of the legislative term might be more strongly affected by electoral campaigning compared to those in the beginning. However, the case studies do not provide any evidence that time was an issue. In particular for motions and postulates, the debate and vote within the parliament is often difficult to forecast.

Research on evaluation has mainly focused on the use of evaluation (Weiss, 1998; Kirkhart, 2000; Patton, 2008; Johnson et al., 2009). Weiss (1999, 477) has argued that evaluators often find it hard to understand why policy makers - including MPs - do not transfer evaluation results directly to legislation. This study provides an answers to this question regarding the parliamentary arena. Evaluation is not only a tool to learn about a policy, but also to control how a policy was implemented. Since evaluation help MPs to oversee the government, they contribute to democracy by strengthening the parliament in their oversight function. In order to make evaluation more relevant for parliaments, evaluators should emphasize the aspect of accountability of an evaluation. Even if parliaments rarely use evaluations for evidence-based policy making, they still rely on them. However, evaluators should keep in mind that MPs use rather evaluation than evaluation results.
## Appendix

### Table 4: Detailed Information about the Selected Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No.</th>
<th>MP</th>
<th>Request</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Responsible Department</th>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Accepted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Doris Fiala, FDP</td>
<td>Motion</td>
<td>Stalking-Thema nicht auf die lange Bank schieben</td>
<td>EJPD (Sommaruga, SP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alex Kuprecht, SVP</td>
<td>Postulate</td>
<td>Ergänzungsleistungen zu AHV und IV. Perspektiven 2020</td>
<td>EDI (Berset, SP)</td>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Viola Amherd, CVP</td>
<td>Postulate</td>
<td>Folgerungen aus dem Brand im Simplontunnel für den Lütschberg-Basistunnel</td>
<td>UVEK (Leuthard, CVP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Erich von Siebenthal, SVP</td>
<td>Postulate</td>
<td>Evaluation der neuen Regionalpolitik</td>
<td>EVD (Leuthard, CVP)</td>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jacqueline Fehr, SP</td>
<td>Interpellation</td>
<td>Wird die Axpo zum nächsten Fall Swissair oder UBS?</td>
<td>UVEK (Leuthard, CVP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jacqueline Fehr, SP</td>
<td>Interpellation</td>
<td>Stopp der Geschäftemacherei mit Pflegekindern</td>
<td>EJPD (Sommaruga, SP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Alec von Graffenried, GPS</td>
<td>Postulat</td>
<td>Sind Ersatzneubauten energetisch besser als Gebäudesanierungen?</td>
<td>UVEK (Leuthard, CVP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Alec von Graffenried, GPS</td>
<td>Interpellation</td>
<td>Zeitgemässer Geist für das Gleichstellungsgesetz?</td>
<td>EJPD (Sommaruga, SP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Stéphane Rossini, SP</td>
<td>Postulat</td>
<td>Auslaufen des Zulassungsstopps für Ärztinnen und Ärzte. Evaluation der Folgen</td>
<td>EDI (Berset, SP)</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Stéphane Rossini, SP</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Kredit für die berufliche Integration in der Bundesverwaltung</td>
<td>EFD (Widmer-Schlumpf, BDP)</td>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Joachim Eder, FDP</td>
<td>Interpellation</td>
<td>Nationale Präventionssprogramme Tabak, Alkohol &amp; Ernährung und Bewegung</td>
<td>EDI (Berset, SP)</td>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Joachim Eder, FDP</td>
<td>Postulat</td>
<td>IT-Projekte des Bundes. Wie weiter?</td>
<td>EFD (Widmer-Schlumpf, BDP)</td>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


