

## Research Project

### Parliamentary Careers in Comparison

#### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Parliamentary Careers in Comparison

**Principal Investigator(s)** [Bailer, Stefanie](#) ;

**Co-Investigator(s)** [Hug, Simon](#) ; [Manow, Philip](#) ;

**Project Members** [Huwylar, Oliver](#) ; [Turner-Zwinkels, Tomas](#) ; [Frech, Elena](#) ;

**Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Politikwissenschaft (Bailer)

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With the research project “Parliamentary Careers in Comparison” we propose to carry out an encompassing analysis of parliamentary candidates and parliamentarians and their activities in Switzerland and Germany as of 1949 until today. While parliamentary career research has often been rather descriptive, i.e. theoretically underspecified, confined to single countries, and/or non-dynamic, we aim to investigate biographical and behavioural data of parliamentary candidates and parliamentarians with partly novel tools (such as sequence analysis, see below) and over long periods of time in order to obtain a fuller and dynamic picture of parliamentary careers.

Why is this of importance? Elections are the quintessential ‘instrument of democracy’ (Powell 2000). Running as a candidate, being endorsed by a party and then elected by voters, and subsequently re-running, being re-nominated and re-elected – or not – constitutes the most basic mechanism that secures political responsiveness and accountability in a representative democracy (Manin, Przeworski, & Stokes 1999); see Figure 1, below. Within the party group the control of party leaders over the nomination process is also the most powerful tool to secure party discipline – and therefore one of the most important elements in the emergence of responsible government (Carey & Shugart 1995; Cox 1987). Yet, despite its centrality we still lack a systematic, individual-level and dynamic understanding of the process of democratic delegation – and we therefore also lack in-depth information on how political careers impact parliamentary behaviour. This is partly explained by the scarcity of available data – in particular on episodes anterior and posterior to a spell in parliament. The project at hand aims to collect and analyse these data for two exemplary and in many respect similar cases, Switzerland and Germany, over a long period of time. We plan to analyse this data with respect to career dynamics, representative roles, parliamentary behaviour, democratic accountability and conformity with the party line.

A first set of questions revolves around pre-parliamentary episodes. What are the various pre-parliamentary career paths (defined by party membership and political offices at the local/regional/national level) in Switzerland and Germany, and have they changed over time? To what extent are they dependent on the local, regional and national party? How can different pre-parliamentary career patterns be explained – are they a function of the personal preferences and characteristics of parliamentarians (e.g. gender, ambition, profession) or are they a function of the parties and the party systems, e.g. the regional structure of parties, their size, their local autonomy?

With a second set of questions we investigate how political institutions influence careers. What are the effects of electoral rules (district magnitude, effective and legal thresholds, proportional vs. majoritarian

rules) on careers? How do daily allowances and parliamentary pension schemes affect careers, what role does the interconnectedness of jurisdictional levels in federalist systems play? Do different degrees of 'institutionalisation' between militia and full-time parliaments lead to different career paths? Regarding post-parliamentary careers in Germany and Switzerland we will investigate whether and which individual and institutional factors drive the decision to retire, to continue the career or to seek higher public office or private employment after having served in parliament.

A third strand of research questions will focus on the consequences of the different career paths on parliamentary behaviour and future post-parliamentary careers, in particular with respect to voting, committee membership, higher offices etc. We analyse whether MPs with career paths closely linked to a party follow the party line more faithfully and whether the parliamentary behaviour is reflected in the subsequent nomination process: Are loyal and active MPs rewarded and passive or dissenting MPs sanctioned with good (bad) list positions or promising and hopeless districts, respectively? What role do committee membership and chance to obtain higher offices (committee chair, chamber presidency, party group leadership, etc.) play? Moreover, we aim to compare pre-parliamentary career paths and the choice of post-parliamentary positions and see under which circumstances parliamentary service is a stepping or stumbling stone in a career.

The project aims to provide a comprehensive and dynamic picture of the causes, courses and consequences of parliamentary careers in Switzerland and Germany. These two countries provide useful cases for comparison since they are both federalist countries but offer variation in important factors such as degree of parliamentary professionalization, electoral rules, and the differing power of national parties.

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