

Varieties of Accountability. How Attributes of Policy Fields Shape Parliamentary Oversight*

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how attributes of policy fields shape parliamentary oversight across policy fields. Building on the accountability literature, the study develops the argument that parliamentarians will more likely oversee policy fields where cooperative forms of governance are more present, since these policies are more difficult to assess and have a higher need of legitimation. Using the example of policy evaluation demand by members of parliament in Switzerland, the study suggests that parliamentarians seek more control in a policy field, where public activities are more often delegated to non-public actors or the need for legitimation is particularly high. Both effects increase with the policy field's closeness to science. These findings could be very relevant in order to understand how attributes of policy fields shape political institutions.

Keywords: Accountability, Parliamentary Oversight, Policy Fields, Evaluation

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1 Introduction

Accountability and its importance for contemporary democracies has been widely discussed in literature, especially in the relationship between parliaments and governments (Strøm, Müller and Bergman, 2006; Olsen, 2015). In doing so, the question of how parliaments execute their oversight function has attracted growing interest lately (Karlas, 2012; Winzen, 2012; Stapenhurst and Pelizzo, 2012; Blom-Hansen, 2013). However, these studies often ignore that parliamentary oversight might vary across policy fields, since policy fields differ in their institutional settings, involved actors and available resources. Indeed, several studies for the European Union show that accountability varies across agencies and policy areas (Egeberg and Trondal, 2011; Koop, 2011; Hanretty and Koop, 2012; Font and Durán, 2016). Given the different natures of policy fields, this study considers the question of why members of parliament (MPs) aim to oversee some policy fields more frequently than others.

This paper argues that policy fields are shaped by policy attributes, which influence the MPs' need for accountability differently. In general, the demand for accountability has increased in the last couple of decades, since the implementation process of many policy fields has changed fundamentally (Benz et al., 2007). While policies used to be implemented top-down by agencies, they are nowadays more often realized through private organizations within policy networks. The article develops the argument that the implementation process within policy networks leads to different needs of parliamentary oversight. In policy fields where cooperative forms of governance are more present, the need for accountability is higher, since the MPs have more difficulties to oversee such processes and have stronger incentives to control those areas (Papadopoulos, 2007). The study examines the hypotheses that the extent of delegation and legitimation in a policy field influences the MPs' likelihood to execute parliamentary oversight.

These arguments are analyzed by using the example of parliamentary requests demanding a policy evaluation in Switzerland. Several studies have recently shown that parliamentary requests or questions are used by the parliament in order to oversee the government and its agencies (Russo and Wiberg, 2010; Proksch and Slapin, 2011; Martin and Rozenberg, 2014). Parliamentary requests have a particularly important role for parliamentary oversight in Switzerland, since Swiss MPs are not fully professionalized and the oversight capacities are rather weak by comparison. Moreover, evaluations are particularly interesting for MPs to demand within parliamentary requests, as they assess the effectiveness or efficiency of a policy in a systematic and

transparent way (Widmer and DeRocchi, 2012, 14). According to Author (2016), evaluations do not only provide information for evidence-based policy making, but also help MPs to fulfill their oversight function towards the government. During evaluations, agencies have to provide information on the policy implementation process to the parliament. Hence, evaluations are an effective tool for MPs in order to hold the government accountable (Pollitt, 2006).

Empirically, the article analyzes a survey that was conducted amongst the Swiss MPs at the national and subnational level in 2014. In order to obtain information about their motivation for demanding policy evaluations, the MPs were asked about the role of evaluations within their parliament. Moreover, an expert survey amongst Swiss political scientists provides additional information about policy fields' attributes. Investigating legislative oversight by parliamentary requests, Switzerland is a particularly interesting case. On the one hand, the most common parliamentary requests can be found in the Swiss parliaments (Wiberg, 1995, 187-188). On the other hand, focusing on evaluation demand, the country does not only have a relatively high evaluation culture, but it also has the most developed institutionalization of evaluation within the parliament (Jacob, Speer and Furubo, 2015, 19).

This article demonstrates that a MPs' demand for accountability indeed varies across policy fields. In doing so, MPs interpret their oversight role differently depending on the policy field. In those policy fields where more public activities are delegated to private organizations or the need for legitimation is particularly high, MPs are more likely to demand an evaluation, since the need for accountability is higher. Both effects increase with the policy fields' closeness to science. The findings support the argument that policy fields' attributes have an important impact on how MPs fulfill their parliamentary oversight in a specific policy field.

The next sections are structured as follows: First, section 2 discusses how the change in policy implementation has affected accountability. Section 3 illustrates the parliamentary oversight institutions in Switzerland. Section 4 develops the argument and hypotheses. Section 5 introduces data and methods, together with the operationalization. Then section 6 presents the results of the analysis. Section 7 discusses implications for other countries and oversight institutions. 8 concludes the results and discusses the relevance of the findings for further research.

2 Policy Implementation and Accountability

The organization of policy implementation has gone through a fundamental change in the last fifty years (Benz et al., 2007). During the 1960s, policy makers were convinced that the administration could plan the policy implementation from top down. However, Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) showed that this way of implementation did not work, since the administration units did not necessarily implement a policy within the meaning of the policy maker. In doing so, the administration units are influenced by a complex set-up of individual and collective actors, which have varying interests. The literature often argues that modern societies have slightly shifted from government to governance (Mayntz, 2006; Sager et al., 2014).¹ Governance can be referred to as a circumstance, in which collective decisions are made in non-hierarchical independence between public and private actors. Within the so-called cooperative governance, the state does not pursue a sovereign position, but rather tries to steer policy networks indirectly and imperfectly when it seems appropriate (Rhodes, 1997, 53).

However, the policy implementation by networks, involving public actors and non-public actors, entails problems of accountability. According to Bovens (2007, 470), accountability is defined as "a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pose judgment, and the actor may face consequences". In doing so, cooperative governance is not primarily designed for democratization of policy making, but for a solution to functional problems. Papadopoulos (2007, 473-483) identifies four problems of accountability caused by cooperative governance: First, policy networks have a weak visibility. Decisions within policy networks tend to be informal and the responsibility is shared amongst a large number of actors (Bovens, 1998). Since policy networks are often uncoupled from the public authorities, the capacity for the administration units to oversee the networks' activities is complicated. Second, policy networks are typically composed of various actors, such as bureaucrats, policy experts, and interest representatives. Indeed, public servants are accountable to the government, but this administrative accountability is less pronounced than in other relationships (Christiansen, 1997). Furthermore, policy experts and interest representatives are even less accountable. Third, policy networks consist of complex structures on multiple levels where decisions are made across levels (Hooghe

¹The literature usually distinguishes between two different definitions of governance. Governance can either be understood as the opposing model to government or as all possible forms of governing (Bevir, 2013). This article refers to the first understanding.

and Marks, 2003). Negotiations across levels are often more informal and impede accountability, as these are usually not publicly accessible. Last, relations between actors in policy networks also cause problems with accountability. A peer accountability rises within a policy network when participants of policy networks evaluate their counterparts (Grant and Keohane, 2005). Particularly when the composition of policy networks does not change over time, there is a certain probability that participants may be more accountable to their negotiation partners than towards the public.

Public administration literature on third-party governance has mainly debated about to what extent policy networks can be made accountable (Posner, 2002; Koliba, Mills and Zia, 2011). However, the lack of accountability in cooperative governance not only affects the public administration, but also the parliament. In doing so, policy implementation within policy networks tightens the problem of parliamentary oversight due to agency problems. Naturally in all democracies, agency problems occur between the parliament and the administration. According to Strøm (2000, 266), the policy process can be described as a chain of delegation, in "which those authorized to make political decisions conditionally designate others to make such decisions in their name and place". In a legislative-executive relationship, MPs pass bills and delegate their implementation to the administration. The delegation process generates a principal-agent relationship between the parliament and the administration (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991). The parliament (principal) commissions the agency (agent) to implement the policy in exchange for a reward (financial and personal resources). Since an agency may have other interests than the parliament (*bureaucratic drift*) and it may also have an information advantage (*information asymmetry*), the MPs cannot be sure that the administration implements the public policies in their sense. Hence, the problems of bureaucratic drift and information asymmetry give the MPs incentives to oversee the government (Lupia, 2003, 44).

The way in which policies are implemented is crucial for MPs. If they cannot be sure whether the legislation is implemented in their favor, then they might feel that their personal goals are jeopardized. Several studies have argued that MPs are mainly driven by reelection and good public policy (Mayhew, 1974). While reelection depends on the public perception of the MP's performance within the parliament, good public policy relies on the assumption that the policy is implemented according to the MP's interpretation. On the one hand, voters will not reelect MPs if they have the impression that the politicians did not keep their promises. On the other

hand, a public policy will - from a MPs' point of view - not be good if it is not implemented according to the parliament. Since the policy implementation is so important for MPs to achieve their goals, the parliamentary oversight takes an eminent role for their mandate.

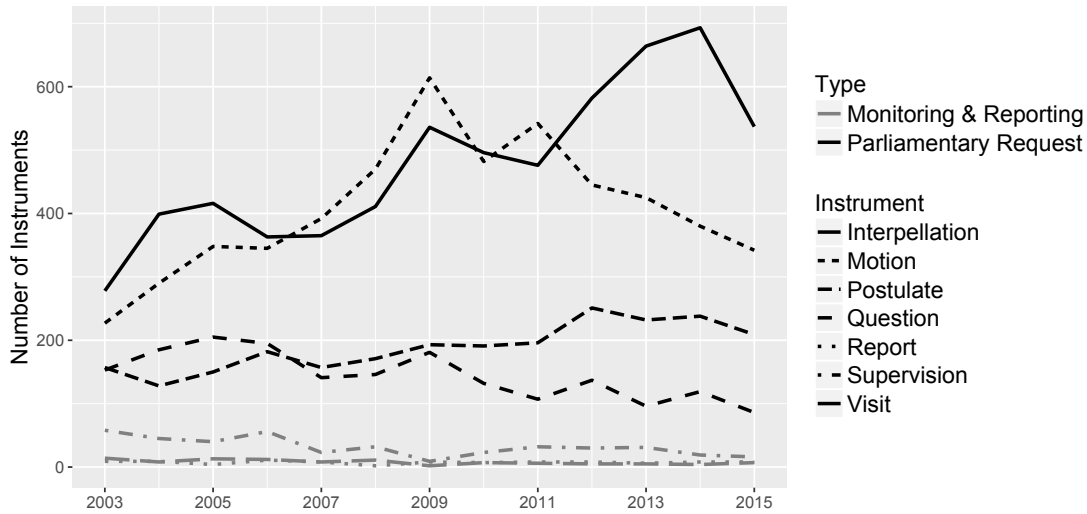
3 Parliamentary Oversight in Switzerland

Parliamentary oversight can have different forms of institutional design. [Kiewiet and McCubbins \(1991, 27\)](#) identify four key methods how parliaments may oversee the government with its agencies: Contract design, screening and selection, monitoring and reports, and institutional checks. While the first two categories apply before the delegation process (*ex ante mechanism*), the latter two appear thereafter (*ex post mechanism*).

In Switzerland, monitoring and reporting as well as institutional checks dominate the parliamentary oversight. In doing so, they are institutionally organized through oversight committees. While the control committees scrutinize the conduct of business by the government and the agencies, the finance committees exercise the supervisory control over the finances of the executive. In doing so, they carry out investigations as well as inspections and review the annual and management reports, which they sum up in written reports with recommendations for the attention of the government. However, the strength of those reports is restricted since the parliaments have limited institutional control capacities. According to [\(Schnapp and Harfst, 2005\)](#), the Swiss federal parliament especially lacks in structures and legal basis for controlling the government, which is essential in order to investigate the government. Unsurprisingly, the committees' reports are often affectless, as the governments often do not respond to their recommendations [\(Mastronardi, 1990, 139-141\)](#).

Since the institutions of parliamentary oversight are limited in Switzerland, MPs have to resort to other means. Recent studies have pointed out the importance of parliamentary requests and in particular of parliamentary oversight [\(Russo and Wiberg, 2010; Proksch and Slapin, 2011; Jensen, Proksch and Slapin, 2013; Martin and Rozenberg, 2014\)](#). This is particularly eminent in Switzerland, where a rich variety of parliamentary instruments are at the parliaments' disposal and the use of parliamentary requests has more than doubled in the last twenty years [\(Vatter, 2014, 298\)](#). In general, parliamentary requests enable MPs to propose new policies or to obtain information on specific issues. In doing so, parliamentary requests can be submitted by individual MPs, a parliamentary group or a committee. Usually they are signed by several

Figure 1: Parliamentary Requests vs. Monitoring & Reporting Instruments



Note: The figure illustrates the number of parliamentary requests as well as monitoring and reporting instruments at the federal level between 2003 and November 29th, 2015. Instruments are listed according to their frequency. Reports include evaluations by the Parliamentary Control of the Administration. Supervisions are investigations that are based on leads by a third party. Visits refer to official inspections of agencies by the oversight committees. Source: [Parlamentsdienste der eidgenössischen Räte \(2015\)](#); [Geschäftsprüfungskommissionen der eidgenössischen Räte \(2015\)](#).

MPs, but most of the time only one MP initiated the request (Author 2016b). As a consequence, the requests require very little preparation time, which is why they barely have any costs for MPs (Bailer, 2011). This is particularly important for Swiss MPs, since they rarely ever have personal assistants and the party offices are relatively small. Figure 1 shows that parliamentary requests appear more frequently than monitoring and reporting instruments, which are produced by the oversight committees.

In order to oversee the government, MPs may not only ask questions, but also demand policy evaluations. The request can directly ask for an evaluation or it can be designed in such a way that the executive decides to carry out an evaluation in order to answer the parliamentary proposal. In any case, the government shall pass the initiative to the responsible department or agency, which carries out the evaluation. Evaluations have the advantage that the government has to conduct a profound investigation in order to satisfy the parliamentary request, whilst a question can often be answered with a short response. During an evaluation, agencies have to make their actions transparent and provide information for stakeholders and particularly for parliaments. As a consequence, MPs do not only obtain information on how a policy was implemented, but also whether the policy was effective or efficient. By using a parliamentary request, parliaments can react to short-dated events and do not have to monitor all the activities

of the agencies, which is what they generally prefer (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984).

Hence, policy evaluations are frequently used to establish accountability in policy networks. While hearings and inspections are difficult and costly to establish with non-public actors, evaluations are an efficient instrument to oversee the policy implementation within policy networks. In doing so, the delegation of an evaluation to the agencies has appealing characteristics for MPs. Evaluation reports that are commissioned by the government are not only an opportunity for MPs to outsource the cost of producing policy expertise, but also to obtain authoritative and objective information. During the evaluation report, the contracted evaluators get access to all kind of information that helps them to understand the policy implementation and overcome the weak visibility of policy networks, as they have easier access to non-governmental policy experts and interest representatives.

However, the policy process differs across the policy fields, which is why the MPs have different incentives to fulfill their oversight function. Depending on the policy fields' attributes, they will submit more parliamentary requests in order to demand an evaluation in some policy fields than in others. Hence, the next section provides an explanation why some policy fields have a higher need for accountability than others.

4 Varieties of Accountability Across Policy Fields

Policy fields - also referred to in literature as policy areas, sectors, or domains - cover a certain group of policies, which have a similar social scope. They may be compared to what some authors refer to as *policy subsystems* (Sabatier, 1998). A policy subsystem consists of public and private actors who are interested in a policy problem or issue, and who regularly seek to influence a public policy in a domain. In doing so, they differ not only in their context (actors, size, resources), but also in their nature. As a consequence, policy fields are political arenas in which the political actors find different conditions for behaving.

Variation across policy fields is nothing new to public policy literature. For instance, Lowi (1972) distinguishes four types of policies - distributive, redistributive, constituent, and regulative policy - which shape the political arena by influencing the relationships between the political actors. Moreover, Baumgartner and Jones (2010) characterize the policy field in the *Punctuated Equilibrium Theory* (PET) as the arena where change happens. In doing so, policy fields are characterized by long terms of stability and are only punctuated by short, but severe

terms of crisis in which large-scale changes occur, which are caused by destabilizing events or by the accumulation of unaddressed grievances. Since those events do not affect all policy fields at the same time, we can observe policy change in some areas, but not in others. This is partly also true for parliamentary oversight. In doing so, policy fields have certain conditions for the need of accountability, which is the fundamental incentive for MPs to control the agency.

In the following, this section argues that two different characteristics of policy fields influence the need for accountability: The extent of *delegation* and the need for *legitimation*. While the extent of delegated public services is purely descriptive and affects the accessibility of parliamentary oversight, the need for legitimation is rather based on values and determines the MPs' motivation to oversee the policy field. First, the delegation of the execution of public activities to civil organizations is an important attribute of cooperative governance (Widmer, 2008). In doing so, the administration delegates parts or a full public service to private organizations, which are responsible for their provision. This process has a lot of advantages, since private organizations are often able to provide a public service with fewer resources or possess know-how to provide a better service. However, the delegation of public services also entails perils. The implementation process of a public policy that is delegated often lacks in accountability, since the implementation process is uncoupled by the administration and executed by a private organization, which does not necessarily have the need to be accountable to the public. Moreover, such an implementation is more difficult to oversee for the parliament, which is why the MPs have stronger incentives to fulfill their oversight function. Several studies have observed a higher evaluation activity in those policy fields that delegate more public activities to such actors (Verhoest, Verschuere and Bouckaert, 2007; Widmer, 2008). I argue, that in those policy areas where the administration delegates a noticeable amount of public activities to non-public actors, the MPs are more likely to demand an evaluation in order to overcome the accountability problem of the policy implementation process:

H₁: The more public services are delegated to non-public organizations in a policy field, the more likely a MP will demand an evaluation with parliamentary requests in this policy field.

Second, shifts from government to cooperative governance have consequences for the legitimacy of the state activities (Van Kersbergen and van Waarden, 2004). According to Scharpf (1999, 7-13), legitimacy can either be the procedures that allow the people to influence political decisions (input legitimacy) or the capacity of the political system to produce effective outcomes

(output legitimacy). It has been argued in literature, that policy networks are supposed to increase input legitimacy, since it includes the citizens in the processes of public policies (Benz, 1994). However, those policy networks may cause output legitimacy deficits, especially when democratic accountability is missing. From the perspective of a parliament - a key institution of input legitimacy - cooperative governance structure must not necessarily enjoy high output legitimacy. In general, a public policy is accepted and supported by the population when a policy can solve a problem of the society. Actors within policy networks are not always accountable to the public, but often represent other interests. The less accountable the policy implementation in a policy field is, the more the parliament will have the need to have those activities legitimated. Widmer (2009, 354-355) argues that evaluations can play an important role for the output legitimacy since they indicate which policies are effective and thus can contribute to the solution of a problem. Evaluations can legitimate a public policy ex post proving the rightness of a decision (Majone, 1996; Weiss, 1998). Hence, I argue that in those policy fields where the need to legitimate policy outputs is high, MPs will demand more evaluations in order to inform themselves about the performance of policy networks and to ensure that policies are implemented in their meaning:

H₂: The higher the need to legitimate policy outputs in a policy field, the more likely a MP will demand an evaluation with parliamentary requests in this policy field.

The next section introduces the data and the methods that the study uses in order to demonstrate how policy attributes influence the parliamentary oversight by Swiss MPs.

5 Data and Methods

In order to analyze the variation of evaluation demand across policy fields, the article uses data of an online survey amongst Swiss MPs at the national and subnational level, which was conducted during May and June 2014 (Author et al. 2014). The MPs were asked about their relationship to evaluation.² In doing so, the survey provided the MPs with a list of policy fields that they could select from. In order to reduce the complexity for the MPs, ten policy fields were identified on the basis of the Swiss corpus juris. In addition, the policy fields were supplemented

²Since MPs have a rather broad understanding of an evaluation, the survey gave a definition in the introduction: "In this survey, evaluations are interpreted as studies, reports or other documents, which assess a state's measure in a systematic and transparent way with respect to their effectiveness, efficiency or fitness for purpose."

with specific key words that illustrated the different areas within a policy field.³ In total, 1570 MPs participated in the survey, which comes up to a response rate of 55.3% (N=2841).

Next to the attributes *delegation* and *legitimation*, the study also considered the policy field's attributes *saliency*, *closeness to science*, and *conflictivity*, which are based on different studies about research on evaluation (Weiss, 1999; Haarich and del Castillo, 2004; Frey, 2010; Pattyn, 2014). The data on the policy fields' attributes was gathered by an expert survey with Swiss political scientists in order to obtain information on the attributes of a policy field.⁴ Hooghe et al. (2010, 692) suggests that expert surveys are appropriate if reliable information can rather be found with experts than in reliable documentary sources. Since no data is available for the policy fields' attributes in Switzerland, the experts were asked to rate the attributes of the different policy fields. In doing so, the survey provided the same list of policy fields with key words that were included in the survey amongst the Swiss MPs. Moreover, the survey defined the policy fields' attributes and asked the experts to rank the attribute on a scale between 0 and 10.⁵ In order to compare the expert's ratings with each other, the ratings have been standardized. In doing so, the values have been rescaled to a standard deviation of one and a mean of zero. Figure 2 illustrates the variation across the policy fields. Not only do the different attributes vary within a policy field, but they also differ across the policy fields. Moreover, the figure shows that the answers of the experts range within a certain spectrum, with some exceptions.

As the study focuses on the differences between the policy fields, the database has been stacked (Van der Eijk et al., 2006). A stacked data set is a matrix that derives from a normal one, the units of analysis do not represent a single MP, but MP \times policy field combinations. In this data matrix, each MP is represented by as many cases as there are policy fields. For every policy field, an entry is generated that indicates whether a MP has submitted a parliamentary request in a certain policy field. This allows us to distinguish between policy fields instead of MPs.

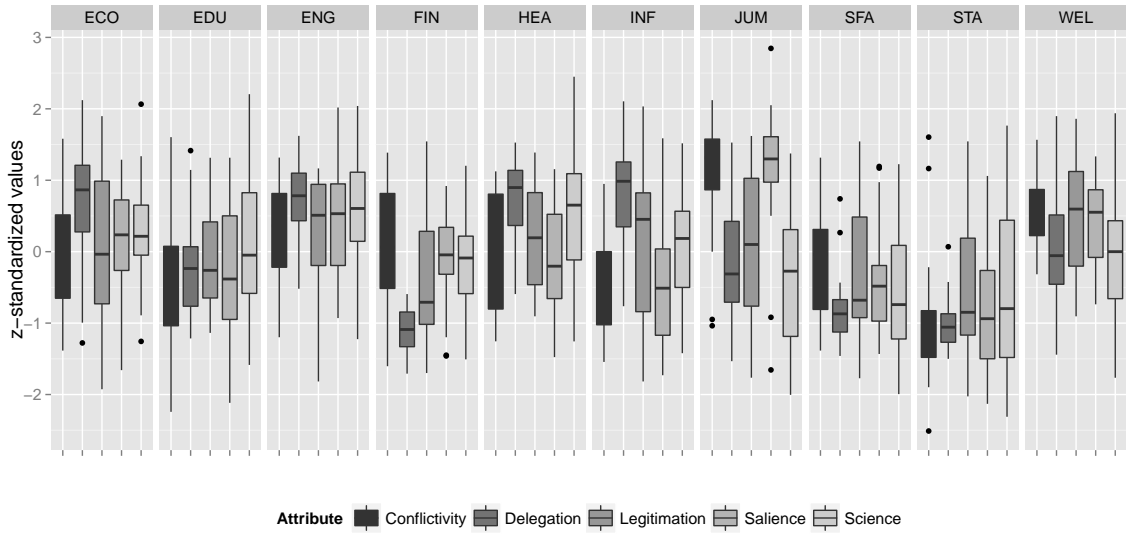
The analysis aims to answer the question of whether a parliament has demanded an evaluation in a policy field. In doing so, MPs were asked if they had submitted a parliamentary request in the last four years in order to investigate a public policy regarding its effectiveness

³A full list of the policy fields with the key words can be found in the Appendix (Table 2).

⁴The invited political scientists study Swiss politics and have also completed their PhD. The survey was conducted during April 2015 and generated a response rate of 68.9% (N=31).

⁵The definitions of the policy fields' attributes can be found in the Appendix (Table 3).

Figure 2: Distribution of Attributes across Policy Fields



or efficiency, and if so, in which policy field. The dependent variable "parliamentary request in policy field" is coded with 0 (no request) and 1 (request). The independent variables delegation, legitimation, saliency, conflictivity, and closeness of science are rated on a standardized scale between -2 (low) and 2 (high). In order to control for the institution dimension of a policy field, a variable is included that indicates the public expenditure of a policy field. Since the attributes of policy fields partly correlate, the variables are separated in the models and are combined in interaction terms in order to avoid multicollinearity (Brambor, Clark and Golder, 2006).⁶

Moreover, several other control variables on the individual and parliament level are tested. On the MP level, age, sex, level of education, party membership, member of an opposition party⁷, parliament experience, membership in the parliament board, membership in an oversight committee, as well as the attitude towards evaluation. On the parliament level, the models include the size of the parliament, if the canton/federation knows a general evaluation clause⁸ in the constitution, and the institutional position of the parliament⁹ towards the government.¹⁰

Since the data is structured in three different levels (MP, policy field, and parliament), I

⁶The covariance matrix of the policy fields' attributes is illustrated in the Appendix (Table 4).

⁷The canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden is characterized by a high percentage of nonpartisan MPs and government members, which however share common values (Vatter, 2002, 183). Since the members of opposition parties could not have really been determined, Appenzell Innerrhoden was excluded from the analysis.

⁸An evaluation clause is a passage in the bill that usually urges the government to evaluate a policy after a certain time. General evaluation clauses in the cantonal/federal constitution do not refer to a specific policy, but demand the government to frequently evaluate its policies (Bussmann, 2005, 97-99).

⁹Kaiss (2010) has built an index in order to identify the institutional position of parliament towards the government. The index is based on the three main functions of the parliament: election, legislation, and oversight. From the 17 indicators, I only included those that are relevant for parliamentary oversight.

¹⁰The operationalization is summarized in the Appendix (Table 5).

use a multi-level model in order to conduct the analysis (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). In doing so, a random intercept model tests variables on all three levels. In addition, the outcome of the endogenous variable is binary, which is why I will use a logistic regression model. The following three level model is used to estimate the likelihood to demand an evaluation with a parliamentary request:

$$Y_{ijk} = \gamma_{000} + v_{0k} + u_{0jk} + e_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

where Y is the likelihood to demand an evaluation at the levels i (MP), j (parliament) and k (policy field), while γ_{000} stands for the random intercepts. In addition, v_{0k} as well as u_{0jk} refer to the overall regression slopes, and e_{ijk} the random residual error terms at the three levels.

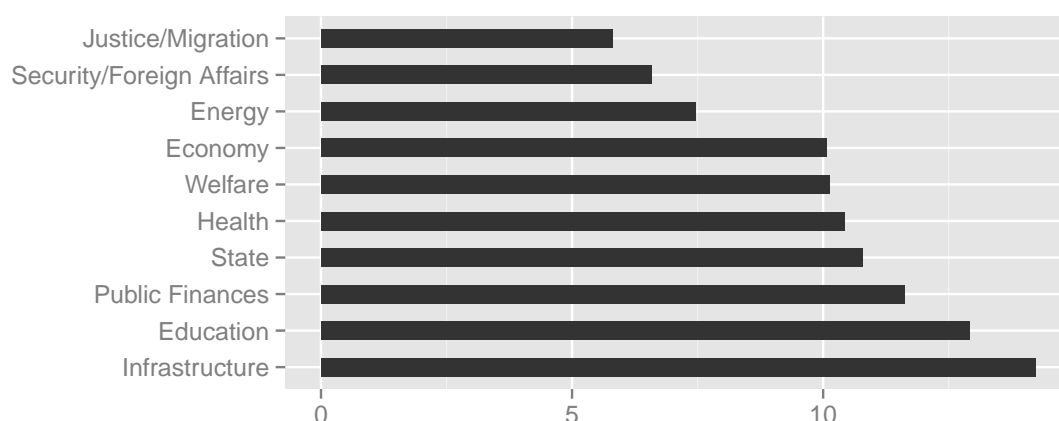
6 Results

During the survey, the MPs were asked whether they submitted a parliamentary request in order to examine a state measure in the last four years. If so, they had to specify in which policy field they proposed the parliamentary request. In total, 717 MPs (49% of the sample) submitted a parliamentary request in order to demand an evaluation. Although this percentage is relatively high, one has to consider that MPs can submit parliamentary requests by other members or with a whole committee. Moreover, not all parliamentary requests are successfully submitted to the government, since they do not find a majority in the parliament.

According to Figure 3, the distribution of evaluation demand differs highly across the policy fields. The MPs have most often submitted parliamentary requests in the policy fields of infrastructure, education, and public finances. In contrast, the fewest parliamentary requests were submitted in the policy fields of justice/migration, security/foreign affairs, and energy. In doing so, MPs have different preferences in the selection of the policy field. While MPs from right parties indicated to demand more evaluations in the policy field of justice/migration and economy, MPs from left parties proposed more requests in the policy field of welfare. Compared to the findings of previous studies on evaluation activity across policy fields, MPs tend to demand more evaluations in the field of infrastructure and public finances. In contrast, less evaluations are requested in the area of economy.

In order to investigate the variation of evaluations across policy fields, four different models are tested (Table 1). Model 1 tests the explanatory strength of the policy fields' attribute

Figure 3: Variation of Evaluation Across Policy Fields



In the last four years, in which policy fields did you propose a parliamentary request in order to examine a state measure with regard to implementation and impact?

delegation. The model illustrates that the extent of delegation of a policy field has a significant influence on the probability to demand an evaluation in a policy field. In addition, the level of salience and the budget of a policy field also influence the parliamentary demand for an evaluation. The same is true or several variables on the individual level. In doing so, they indicate that MPs demand evaluations in order to fulfill their oversight function. Members of oversight committees and opposition parties have a significantly higher probability to demand evaluations. Moreover, the age, the experience of an MP as well as the membership in a parliamentary board also increase the likelihood for a parliamentary request. Regarding the party ideology, pole parties (Social Democrats, Greens, Swiss People's Party) also seem to demand more evaluations. In contrast, factors on the parliament level do not seem to influence the likelihood of demanding an evaluation. Model 2 includes the interaction term between delegation and science. The model shows that the effect is not only more significant, but also has a higher influence on the probability to demand an evaluation. The more evaluations are delegated in a policy field and the closer the policy field is to science, the more likely a member of parliament will demand an evaluation. Model 3 includes the variable legitimization. In contrast to delegation, the need to legitimate public activities only has a weakly significant influence to submit a parliamentary request in a policy field. However, if we build the interaction term with science, the effect gets substantially stronger and also becomes highly significant (Model 4).

Table 1: Individual, Policy Field, and Parliament Random Effects Models
(1404 MPs, 10 Policy Fields, 27 Parliaments)

	<i>Dependent variable: Parliamentary Request</i>			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Policy Field Level				
Delegation	0.094** (0.045)			
Delegation × Science		0.283** (0.111)		
Legitimation			0.285* (0.165)	
Legitimation × Science				0.941*** (0.336)
Salience	-0.337*** (0.065)	-0.384*** (0.072)	-0.400*** (0.087)	-0.405*** (0.074)
Budget	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Individual Level				
Age	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)
Men	0.042 (0.060)	0.042 (0.060)	0.042 (0.060)	0.042 (0.060)
Education	0.012 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)
Center Party	-0.155*** (0.056)	-0.155*** (0.056)	-0.155*** (0.056)	-0.155*** (0.056)
Opposition	0.176*** (0.063)	0.176*** (0.012)	0.176*** (0.063)	0.176*** (0.063)
Experience	0.021*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.003)
Parliament Board	0.156** (0.073)	0.156** (0.073)	0.156** (0.073)	0.156** (0.073)
Oversight Committee	0.199*** (0.055)	0.199*** (0.055)	0.199*** (0.055)	0.199*** (0.055)
Evaluation Attitude	0.493*** (0.046)	0.493*** (0.046)	0.493*** (0.046)	0.493*** (0.046)
Parliament Level				
Parliament Size	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
Evaluation Clause	0.028 (0.108)	0.028 (0.106)	0.027 (0.109)	0.027 (0.108)
Institutional Position	0.247 (0.310)	0.250 (0.310)	0.243 (0.311)	0.248 (0.310)
Intercept	-4.734*** (0.307)	-4.717*** (0.307)	-4.673*** (0.311)	-4.653*** (0.309)
Residual Variance				
Between ϕ (Parliaments)	0.213	0.213	0.214	0.214
Between ϕ (Policy Fields)	0.236	0.233	0.238	0.231
Observations	14,040	14,040	14,040	14,040
Log Likelihood	-4,839.194	-4,838.170	-4,839.889	-4,837.481
Wald χ^2	291.25***	293.10***	289.41***	294.56***

Note: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01; Regression coefficients shown with robust standard biases in parentheses.

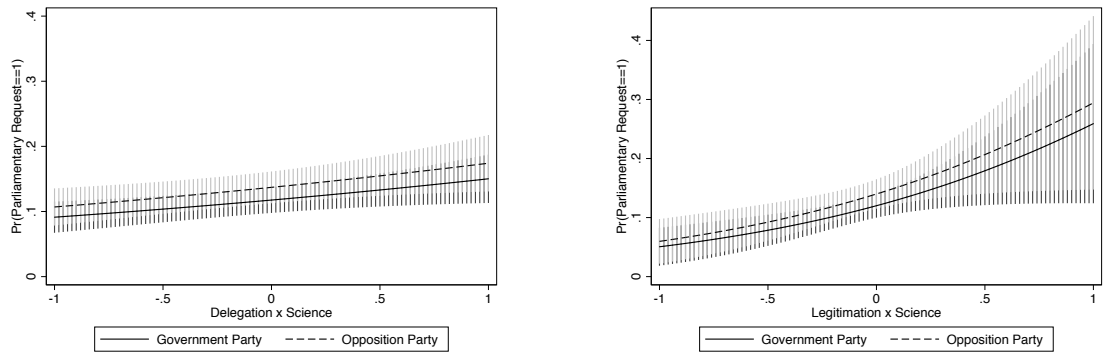
The results suggest that accountability seems to influence the extent of parliamentary oversight in the policy fields. First, the policy fields' attributes delegation and legitimation influence the MP's likelihood to demand an evaluation in a policy field. Based on the analysis, we can argue that cooperative governance may increase the need for accountability, since the parliamentary oversight is more difficult to fulfill (delegation) respectively more strongly needed (legitimation). Second, the analysis also provides evidence that the closeness to science plays an important role as an interacting variable. The closer a policy field is to science, the more likely a MP will demand an evaluation. This finding is consistent with the literature on the use of knowledge in the policy process, which proclaims that the attributes of the administrative structure of a policy sector influences knowledge shifts (Radaelli, 1995; Daviter, 2015). Even though MPs have incentives to demand an evaluation by the need for accountability in a policy field, they might more likely submit a parliamentary request if they have the impression that there are enough specialists that can provide evaluations.¹¹

These findings are important for understanding parliamentary oversight across policy fields. The study shows that not only institutional settings influence the level of accountability, but also the nature of a policy field. Although individual attributes influence the MP's probability to demand evaluations, the effect for the policy fields' attributes is still higher. Figure 4 illustrates that the effect for legitimation and delegation is stronger than for being a member in an oppositional party. While a MP's likelihood to demand an evaluation increased by 5.1% in the interaction between delegation and science, the probability to demand an evaluation in a policy field with a high need for legitimation increases to more than 26.5%. In contrast, the effects for parliament experience, partisanship, or member of an oversight committee are all smaller, even though significant.

However, the study has three limitations. First, most of the relevant data has been gathered through a parliamentary survey. Although this approach provides a comprehensive overview of the parliamentary demand for evaluations, survey data always entails methodical problems that question the analytical power of the sample (Author et al. 2016). In doing so, problems of self-selection and misreporting are likely to appear, even if the measurement errors should be distributed equally across the policy fields. Second a generalization of policy fields' attributes is

¹¹However, it is also argued in literature that science may potentially raise more conflicts of interest and thus lead to more parliamentary oversight, respectively to a higher evaluation demand (Brown, 2009). Though, the attributes science and conflictivity do not correlate with each other (see Table 4).

Figure 4: Predicted Probabilities to Demand an Evaluation for Legitimation



Note: Predicted probabilities to demand an evaluation with a parliamentary request, as a function of the interaction between delegation and science as well as legitimation and science for MPs of governmental parties (full-line) and oppositional parties (dashed-line). The values are calculated for MPs with the following attributes: men, membership in an oversight committee and in the parliament board. All other individual and parliamentary variables are at the median.

challenging. It is unclear whether the policy fields' attributes are constant over the cantonal and the federal level, since there are no studies investigating this problem. Last and most important, the concepts delegation and legitimation might correlate with each other, which the empirical measurement indeed suggests. For instance, public services might especially be delegated in those policy fields in which the need for legitimation is particularly high, since the agencies want to implement the policies with the most important stakeholders in policy networks. Moreover, policy fields that are particularly close to science might receive more parliamentary oversight, as they are the ones most likely to be delegated to non-state actors and have a higher need for legitimation.

7 Implications for Other Countries and Oversight Institutions

Although the political system certainly has some particularities, the Swiss case is by far not disentailed from other countries. The use of parliamentary requests as an oversight tool can also be observed in other countries, as discussed in section 3. Moreover, several studies recently showed that evaluations are also frequently demanded by other parliaments (Speer, Pattyn and De Peuter, 2015; Zwaan, van Voorst and Mastenbroek, 2016). However, this does not mean that the findings of the analysis can simply be generalized, but that the dynamics detected in Switzerland should not be understated as the product of a specific context.

First of all, all parliaments have incentives for parliamentary oversight in temporary democ-

racies. Previous studies have shown that the MPs want to control the executive due to the chain of delegation. This is not only true for parliamentary democracies (Saalfeld, 2000; Strøm, Müller and Bergman, 2006), but also for countries with presidential systems (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991). Furthermore, several studies show that MPs attempt to oversee the executive regardless of their oversight institutions (Yamamoto, 2007; Winzen, 2012). However, although parliamentary requests and questions might be widely used as an oversight tool in other countries, their use might still differ according to the context of countries Rozenberg et al. (2011).

Countries differ not only in how they have institutionalized their parliaments, but also in how they implement their policies. On the one hand, parliaments might have other instruments for parliamentary oversight. In contrast to Switzerland, those institutions for parliamentary oversight could either focus on other oversight mechanisms or have better resources for monitoring and reporting. On the other hand, the way of how policies are implemented might vary significantly across countries. As a consequence, policy networks might be more strongly developed in some countries than in others. However, these different settings do not change the mechanism of how attributes of policy fields shape parliamentary oversight. Even if MPs use other instruments (committees, hearings etc.) in order to control the government, they will still rather focus on those policy fields, which have a higher need for accountability. Several studies suggest that MPs focus on specific policy fields for accountability reasons. While Winzen (2013) shows how European integration has an influence on national oversight institutions, since governmental parliamentary groups want to enhance policy participation, Den Boer, Hillebrand and Nölke (2008) demonstrate that security policies are less investigated by the European Parliament, as the field raises fewer legitimacy concerns.

Hence, the findings of this article can be applicable to other countries with other oversight mechanisms. More particularly, there are three different implications for other countries. First, parliaments can have weak oversight institutions, but their members might still find a way to fulfill their oversight function. The Swiss case illustrates how MPs use parliamentary requests in order to oversee the agencies. Second, policy fields differ in their attributes as they do not only have to deal with different policies, but they also implement them in varied ways. While some fields delegate more policies to private organizations, other policy fields lack in political legitimation. This does not mean that these attributes converge across countries. Other countries - depending on their institutional and traditional settings - might have another distribution

of those attributes across the policy fields. Third, those attributes have a significant influence on the need of accountability. Hence, in many countries MPs will have a distinct perception of what policy areas should be overseen more intensively than others. The findings presented in this article suggest that the effects of policy fields' attributes on parliamentary oversight are diverse, but clearly observable.

8 Conclusion

The article offers empirical evidence that parliaments execute their oversight task variably across policy fields. In doing so, the analysis shows that MPs interpret their oversight role differently, since they demand evaluations more frequently in some policy fields than in others. In those policy fields where more public activities are delegated to private organizations, MPs are more likely to demand an evaluation. The same is true if the need for legitimation is particularly high in a policy field. Both effects increase with the policy field's closeness to science.

The findings contribute to the literature on accountability, parliamentary oversight, as well as comparative public policy. First, the analysis highlights the importance of distinguishing between different levels of accountability across policy fields. It is evident that we should study the nature of policy fields and how their attributes affect accountability. Second, the findings highlight the importance of studying parliamentary oversight across policy fields, since policy fields vary in their level of accountability. Using the example of policy evaluation, the study provides an example that parliaments execute their oversight function unequally across policy fields. Last and most important, the article has important implications for comparative public policy literature. In the 1970s, [Lowi \(1972\)](#) already argued that policies determine politics. He argues that not the actual outcomes, but the expectations on what the outcomes can be, influence the decision-making process. In contrast to Lowi, this study shows that policy can also influence the political actors, since they execute oversight differently. Hence, the article contributes to public policy literature by using a comparative approach to understand differences of policy fields. Although in-depth studies on the specific policy sectors are important, a systematic comparison between the policy fields must be made in order to advance public policy research.

These findings therefore point to the potential of policy fields' attributes for public policy research. Although the importance of policy fields are not new in public policy research ([Baumgartner and Jones, 2010](#)), many scholars have so far neglected the influence of policy

fields' attributes on politics and have only given attention to institutional differences of policy areas. Although the Swiss case has some peculiarities, the study has important implications for other parliaments, since parliamentary oversight can be characterized by various institutions. Depending on the perceived need of accountability, these focus on different policy fields. Further research yet needs to explore how policy fields' attributes develop and how they shape politics. I believe this study provides a helpful starting point for such research.

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Appendix

Table 2: Definition of Policy Fields

Policy Fields	Specification
State	People, Political Institutions, Cantons, Municipalities, Church
Education	School System, Sciences, Research, Culture
Security/Foreign Affairs	Military, Civil Defense, Police, International Relations
Public Finances	Taxes, Subsidies, Cuts
Energy	Electricity, Water Power, Nuclear Energy, Renewable Energy
Infrastructure	Building, Housing, Environment, Telecommunication Private and Public Transport, Spacial Planning
Health	Healthcare Provision, Food, Veterinary, Health Promotion and Prevention
Welfare	Family, Social Insurance, Social Assistance
Economy	Labor, Services, Industry, Trade, Craft, Agriculture, Forestry
Justice/Migration	Civil and Criminal Law, Immigration, Asylum, Integration, Naturalization

Table 3: Definition of Policy Fields' attributes

Attribute	Definition
Delegation	Delegation is an act where an administration unit that is responsible for a public service delegates the execution of the public service to a private organization.
Legitimacy	Legitimation is the moral conviction that an administration unit produces public activities, which are valid and eligible to solve a social problem.
Conflictivity	The level of conflict reflects the degree of incompatibility of basic beliefs of competing coalitions over policy goals in a policy field.
Science	Closeness to science describes in what extent scientific research deals with issues of a policy field.
Saliency	Saliency of a policy field is the quantity of attention, which policy issues of a policy field get from external actors and how these actors value the need for action that has to be taken in a policy field.

Table 4: Covariance Matrix of Policy Fields' Attributes

Variable	Delegation	Legitimation	Saliency	Conflictivity	Science
Delegation	1.000				
Legitimation	0.769	1.000			
Saliency	0.270	0.551	1.000		
Conflictivity	0.209	0.565	0.950	1.000	
Science	0.830	0.636	0.210	0.169	1.000

Table 5: Operationalization of the Variables

Variable	Operationalization	Source	ER	HYP
Dependent Variable				
Parliamentary Request	In the last four years, in which policy fields did you propose a parliamentary request in order to examine a state measure with regard to implementation and impact? Categorical: Policy Fields (see Table 1)	Parliament Survey		
Policy Field Level				
Delegation	On a scale from 1 to 10, where do you position the extent of delegated public services in the following policy fields during the last four years? Continuous scale, standardized: -2 (small) - 2 (large)	Expert Survey	+	C
Legitimation	On a scale from 1 to 10, where do you position the need to legitimate public activities in the following policy fields during the last four years? Continuous scale, standardized: -2 (weak) - 2 (strong)	Expert Survey	+	C
Salience	On a scale from 1 to 10, where do you position the salience of the following policy fields during the last four years? Continuous scale, standardized: -2 (inconspicuous) - 2 (salient)	Expert Survey		
Conflictivity	On a scale from 1 to 10, where do you position the level of conflict in the following policy fields during the last four years? Continuous scale, standardized: -2 (consensual) - 2 (conflictive)	Expert Survey		
Science	On a scale from 1 to 10, where do you position the closeness to science of the following policy fields during the last four years? Continuous scale, standardized: -2 (distant) - 2 (close)	Expert Survey		
Budget	Public Expenditure of a Policy Field Continuous scale; square root	EFV 2014		

Variable	Operationalization	Source	ER	HYP
Individual Level				
Age	Age of a MPs in years Continuous scale	Parliament Survey		
Sex	Dummy: 0 for male, 1 for female	Parliament Survey		
Education	What is your highest degree of education? Continuous scale: 1 (compulsory school) - 8 (university)	Parliament Survey		
Center Party	Party membership in a center party (FDP. The Liberals, Christian Democratic People's Party, Green Liberal Party, Conservative Democratic Party, Christian Social Party, Evangelical People's Party Dummy: 0 for other party, 1 for center party	Parliament Survey		
Opposition	Party membership in an oppositional party Dummy: 0 for governmental party, 1 for opposition party	Parliament Survey		
Parliament Experience	How many years of experience do you have in a communal, cantonal and/or national parliament? Continuous scale	Parliament Survey		
Membership Board	Membership in the parliament office Dummy: 0 for no, 1 for yes	Parliament Survey		
Oversight Committee	Membership in an oversight committee Dummy: 0 for no, 1 for yes	Parliament Survey		
Evaluation Attitude	Index of three dimensions: - During the last four years, how many times did you read an evaluation summary? - Evaluations are a useful instrument for me as a member of parliament. - Whenever possible, my political decisions are supported by evaluation or other studies. Categorical scale: 1 (never/strongly disagree) - 4 (frequently/strongly agree); square	Parliament Survey		
Parliament Level				
Size of Parliament	Size of parliament Continuous scale	Badac 2011, supp.		
Evaluation Clause	General evaluation clause in the cantonal/federal constitution Dummy: 0 for no, 1 for yes	Horber 2007, supp.		
Institutional Position	Institutional position of the parliament towards the government Continuous scale	Kaiss 2010, supp.		

ER = Expected relationship; HYP = Hypothesis corroborated (C) or proven false (F); supp = Data supplemented