
13. Policy evaluation and parliaments

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parliaments are one of the most important institutions of contemporary democracies. In addition to representing the electorate, members of parliament are mainly dedicated to legislation and oversight: they revise or enact new laws and control the government, public administration and courts (Sieberer, 2011). To fulfill these tasks, members of parliaments can rely on external information, which provides them with knowledge about public policies (Jacob et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2020). Evaluation studies can be one source for parliamentarians to find this kind of information, next to the media outlets, scientific reports or public opinion research. In doing so, they are a useful instrument for parliaments, as they examine and assess government interventions based on criteria such as expediency, effectiveness, or efficiency. Members of parliament can thus use evaluations to assess the effects of new laws or to improve existing laws, thereby shaping impact-oriented, evidence-informed policy-making (Head, 2016). Moreover, evaluations can also be used for parliamentary oversight, as parliamentarians can demand them in order to discover deficiencies or grievances within the public administration (Bundi, 2018b).

Despite the exceptional relevance of evaluation for parliaments, research on evaluation has for a long time neglected this relationship and rather investigated evaluation use in the public administration (Askim, 2009; Bjørnholt & Larsen, 2014; Caracelli, 2000; Frey, 2012; Højlund, 2014; Johnson et al., 2009; Ledermann, 2012; Pollitt, 2006; Sanderson, 2002; Van Voorst & Zwaan, 2019). In the study of knowledge use in parliament, prior research has applied a broad definition of evaluation. Often authors talk about the use of policy analysis (Bogenschneider et al., 2013; Hird, 2005, 2009, 2018; Weiss, 1987, 1989; Whiteman, 1985a, 1985b, 1995, 1997) or social science research (Bogenschneider et al., 2013; Boswell, 2009), which both entail general knowledge about public policies beyond their effectiveness. Only recently has research focused more on the concrete use of evaluations (Bundi, 2016, 2018a; Eberli, 2018, 2019; Eberli & Bundi, 2017; Hardy, 2015). The reason for this academic neglect is certainly that studies recognized early on that members of parliament are not amongst the most extensive users of evaluations (Kingdon, 1984; Weiss, 1987, 1999) and that in most countries, evaluation does not enjoy a proper institutional embedding in parliaments (Furubo et al., 2002; Jacob et al., 2015).

Even though parliaments have the weakest institutionalization of evaluation in comparison to other organizations (e.g., government), the role of evaluation has increased in the last couple of years. In Switzerland, several new institutions were created to enhance the importance of evaluation for parliaments, including a general evaluation clause that urges the parliament to evaluate the government's actions (Horber-Papazian & Baud-Lavigne, 2019), while the French National Assembly created a bipartisan committee for evaluation and monitoring (Périvier et al., 2011). According to Jacob et al. (2015, pp. 19–20). Parliaments often lack their own institutional arrangements in order to conduct evaluations themselves, but they still

show great interest in evaluation (see Balthasar, 2009). According to Weiss (1987, p. 102), evaluations and parliaments appear to be often out of sync, as they do not always share the same objectives. In general, members of parliament do not base their decisions only on the “brainpower” of evaluations and other studies, as their behavior is influenced by other factors such as ideologies and interests, and they are ultimately embedded in the rules and norms of the parliamentary institution (Weiss, 1999). Moreover, evaluations usually provide detailed, in-depth information that contrasts with the more general, broad issues that parliaments often deal with (Peeters et al., 2021; Senninger, 2017). Given parliamentarians’ other duties, they also have a limited time to read reports or even summaries (Eberli, 2019; Eberli & Bundi, 2017; Eberli et al., 2014). In addition, oral communication is particularly more important in parliaments (Weiss, 1989). Finally, several studies emphasize that evaluation use depends on whether an evaluation is available at the right window of opportunity when the outcome can influence the political decision-making process (Balthasar, 2009; Weiss, 1989). Parliaments often possess a tight and highly structured schedule (Mannevuol et al., 2021; Norton, 2001), which is why evaluations often come too late to be used, as conducting them usually takes some time. As a consequence, evaluations face an almost hostile environment in parliaments, yet they still manage to be relevant, and be used.

This challenge forms the basis for this chapter on policy evaluation in parliament. Based on the two main tasks of parliaments (legislation and oversight), this chapter will present the functions of evaluations in parliaments and how they are used by its members. Based on previous studies on evaluation use (Alkin & King, 2016, 2017; Bundi, 2016; Eberli, 2019; Frey, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009), I will present an updated classification of evaluation use contextualized for the parliamentary environment that is based on two dimensions: utilization rationale and the legislative focus. Moreover, the chapter also aims to investigate whether evaluations play a different role in the United States, United Kingdom, and Switzerland. These three countries show important variations in the focus of their parliaments. In doing so, they range from non-parliamentary systems with a strong consensus character, like Switzerland, to parliaments of the Westminster system, with the United Kingdom being an example of a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, and presidential systems (the United States). The parliaments not only differ in their oversight role (Garritzmann, 2017), but the autonomy of parliamentary committees also varies considerably (Mickler, 2017). As a consequence, these parliaments focus on different areas. While the UK Parliament has stronger legislative powers (due to the fact the government is formed by the majority party in the parliament), the United States Congress traditionally has more competences in its oversight function (see also Chernykh et al., 2017). In general, I assume that institutional factors may have a potential impact on how parliaments use evaluations. However, my analysis shows that evaluations are mostly used politically despite the institutional differences across the three countries. The concluding section discusses possible perspectives for the role of evaluation in parliaments as well as future challenges.

2. WHY PARLIAMENTS (SHOULD) CARE ABOUT POLICY EVALUATIONS

Before I discuss how members of parliament can use evaluations, we must first understand the parliaments’ responsibilities. The various functions of parliaments differ across countries, but

usually their members are responsible for three main tasks: budget authority, legislation, and oversight. While the first is mainly interested in performance information or audit rather than evaluation (Peters & Pierre, 2020; Pierre et al., 2018; Pollitt, 2006), evaluations are frequently used for lawmaking and the control of the public administration (Eberli & Bundi, 2017). Hence, I will present these two functions and how they relate to evaluations.

Legislation is one of the main tasks of parliaments, since they are usually the authoritative institution of statutory law (Saiegh, 2011). Even though countries' lawmaking processes differs from each other, there are some principles that almost every parliamentary system shares. On the one hand, bills are formally introduced to specialized parliamentary committees before they are sent to the plenary session, which debates the policy proposal. The committee can propose amendments or add new elements before the bill is presented again to the plenary session for debate and voting (Olson, 2015). As Saiegh (2011) points out, the active roles of the committees differ across countries depending on the parliamentary system, the capacities of political parties, available resources, and other political factors. While working parliaments are characterized by a strong committee system and whose bills are therefore dealt predominantly in these committees, the committee stage is merely a formality in debating parliaments as the majority of bills are dealt with in plenary sessions (Dann, 2003). For instance, both the Swiss Federal Assembly and the United States Congress are working parliaments, while the House of Commons of the United Kingdom is a debating parliament. Naturally, information plays an important role in legislation. Previous studies show that members of parliament consider different interests in their voting decisions (Hix, 2002; Hix & Noury, 2009; Jackson & Kingdon, 1992; Kalt & Zupan, 1990; Levitt, 1996; Meserve et al., 2009; Sevenans, 2021). Albeit previous studies analyzed the relationship between policy information and individual positions of parliamentarians (see Fenno, 1973; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1989), only recently have experimental studies shown that policy information impacts legislative behavior (Zelizer, 2018).

Parliamentary oversight, to the contrary, is far less present in the daily discourse, but has recently enjoyed more academic attention (Bundi, 2018b; Martin & Whitaker, 2019; McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2013; Winzen, 2013). Overall, methods to oversee the public administration entails contract design, screening and selection, monitoring and reporting requirements as well as institutional checks (McCubbins, 2014). However, parliamentary oversight tools vary substantially across parliaments. Aberbach et al. (1981) show that the United States Congress plays a more powerful and independent role in overseeing policy implementation than most European parliaments. This oversight tool is particularly important for oppositional groups. Garritzmann (2017) compares the oppositions' opportunities to use oversight tools across 21 democracies and finds that consensual democracy is characterized by strong control mechanisms, while majoritarian democracies provide weak control mechanisms. Indeed, other studies show that members of parliament use evaluations to oversee the governments' activities and to enhance accountability (Bundi, 2018a, 2018b; Jacob et al., 2015; Pollitt, 2006). During evaluations, public agencies must report their activities in order to inform parliaments. In doing so, parliamentarians receive valuable information on policies that is usually extremely hard to obtain due to an asymmetric information relationship between the members of parliament and public servants. Moreover, evaluations often reveal how policies have been implemented and how effective they were in order to solve a public problem. According to Bundi (2016), evaluations allow parliamentarians executive selective oversight over policy domains, which they tend to prefer to monitoring all activities.

3. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EVALUATION USE?

Previous research on evaluation distinguish between different forms of evaluation use, the most common being instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic use. Instrumental use is defined as using evaluations as the basis for making decisions or taking actions. Conceptual use means that evaluations are used to better understand an issue, to gain new perspectives or new ideas. Symbolic use refers to using evaluations for political self-interest and includes many different actions (Johnson, 1998). For instance, evaluations may be used in the argumentative process, to convince others, to justify a position or to legitimate an action, which makes it highly political and less symbolic (see Frey, 2012). Moreover, demanding an evaluation can also be another form of evaluation use—for example, using evaluations for political self-interest also entails demanding that an evaluation is conducted or waiting for its results in order to delay a decision or to substantiate one's position (Bundi, 2018a; Vedung, 2017). However, despite being conceptually clearly defined, the different forms of evaluation use are not always easy to distinguish and to observe empirically. In line with these different actions, symbolic use has also sometimes been labeled as persuasive, legitimizing, tactical or strategic use (Johnson, 1998; Vedung, 2017; Whiteman, 1995). Instrumental and conceptual use differ from symbolic use because they require a certain openness to the evaluation and its results (Frey, 2012). Moreover, the problem-solving function of evaluations, according to which policies can be improved on the basis of sound knowledge about their conception, their results or their effects, is fundamental for instrumental and conceptual use. However, this rational notion of evaluations as a means to solve policy problems is to some extent also present in symbolic use because it is precisely the authority of knowledge that is being capitalized on (Boswell, 2008).

Research has mainly focused on instrumental and conceptual use, while comparatively few studies have investigated symbolic use (Johnson et al., 2009). In the beginning of evaluation research, instrumental use was seen as the ideal. However, it was soon observed that evaluations were only in rare instances applied in such a concrete, specific manner. Instead, as Weiss (1977) argued when introducing conceptual use or the “enlightenment function of social research,” evaluations were most often used in less discernible ways. While evaluation use for political purposes—that is, symbolic use—was also early observed, this was regarded as a less desirable, even improper form of use (Johnson et al., 2009). Hence, more recent studies distinguish between analytical—that is, instrumental and conceptual—as well as political—that is, strategic uses of evaluations (Eberli, 2019; Frey, 2012). As Eberli (2019) has pointed out, the distinction between analytical and political use refers to the fundamental difference between an analytical—improvement-oriented—and a political—strategic—logic of use. However, the two forms of use can manifest themselves in different ways. Analytical use captures the types of instrumental and conceptual use discussed in the literature to date, while political use includes all types of symbolic use, persuasive, legitimizing or tactical use (Alkin & Taut, 2002). This distinction overlaps with the policy learning literature, where researchers have distinguished instrumental and policy-oriented from political and power-oriented learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018; Zito & Schout, 2009). In more general terms, researchers of evaluation and learning have distinguished between a policy-seeking type and an office-seeking type of use, which represent two different intentions of decision-makers when they use evaluations and other information about the effect of policies (Budge & Laver, 1986; Evans, 2018; Strøm, 2000).

There are also connections with policy advice research, especially with the classical distinction between decisionist, technocratic, and pragmatic models of advice that overlap with evaluation use research (see Sager, 2007). According to Habermas (1976), political actors use research selectively and sometimes in pursuit of their own interests, while new scientific discoveries and their implementation in politics barely gain public attention. In contrast, the technocratic model refers to the situation where politics turns to science in order to receive valuable information when new problems arrive. Since political actors have not yet determined their positions, experts have the opportunity to influence the political arena. Last, science and politics mutually complement each other and no hierarchical relationship exists in the pragmatic model, which Sager (2007) considered the closest to what has been labelled governance.

In the parliamentary setting, political use and thus the decisionist model is supposedly most relevant and most common. Information stemming from evaluation is only one of many factors that parliamentarians can consider when taking a stance on an issue. As parliamentarians represent their electorate, it can be assumed that their ideological position or interests are central. Moreover, the parliamentary arena is only involved in a late stage of the policy process. Therefore, positions may already have been formed and evaluations are thus used to justify a position or to delay a decision in the parliamentary committee or plenary session. This is often depicted in a negative way, as Mark (2011, p. 108) describes: "Typically, the image portrayed is of a politician who spouts evaluation findings if (and only if) the findings suit his or her prior preferences." However, it can be argued that symbolic use fulfills an important function both for discourse and legitimacy. On the one hand, evaluation results do not speak for themselves, but they need to be revealed and explained (Henry, 2000; Majone, 1989). On the other hand, decisions also need to be explained, be advocated for, and criticism needs to be addressed or anticipated (Majone, 1989; Valovirta, 2002). Shulock (1999), in an interpretative view, also argues that policy analysis is used to frame political discourse, to rationalize legislative action in policy-making processes that are marked by complexity, ambiguity and time constraints, and as a symbol of legitimate decision-making processes. Using the example of referendum campaigns, Schlauffer et al. (2018) show that empirical evidence is often used as a narrative to construct images used in a story.

The parliamentary setting further influences the use of evaluation findings rather than the evaluation process. Parliamentarians are supposed to seldom participate in evaluation processes and thus, for example, to change their way of thinking about an issue as a result of this participation. Moreover, given the time constraints and the quantity of information that parliamentarians face, it can be assumed that parliamentarians learn from evaluation findings by reading summaries or by attending presentations or events (Hird, 2009; Weiss, 1989; Whiteman, 1995). This also means that it may not always be easy for parliamentarians to discern which piece of information has been gathered by the means of an evaluation.

Thus, previous forms of evaluation use only respect the parliamentary context to a certain degree, but do not factor in the specific role of parliamentarians as stakeholders. As I have argued above, policy evaluations are mainly useful for two responsibilities of parliaments: legislation and oversight. Depending on the type of evaluation use (analytical vs political), I might expect different forms of evaluation use. Table 13.1 presents a classification of evaluation use for the parliamentary setting. In doing so, we expect differences in parliaments depending on their institutional strengths. We assume that more instrumental use for parliaments that have a stronger focus on legislation will be found. Parliaments that have more power to shape legislation will more likely use evaluations for instrumental or legitimizing use. While instrumental

Table 13.1 Classification of evaluation use in the parliament

Utilization Rationale	Legislative Power	
	Legislation	Oversight
<i>Analytical</i>	Instrumental (e.g., improving a policy)	Conceptual (e.g., understanding a policy)
<i>Political</i>	Legitimizing (e.g., supporting a policy)	Scrutinizing (e.g., jeopardizing a policy)

use focuses on how to improve a policy based on the evaluation results, legitimizing use seeks to back up a policy proposal with an evaluation finding—dependent on whether the evaluation supports the policy. In contrast, parliaments that focus on oversight will either use evaluations conceptually or to scrutinize policies. Conceptual use refers to the situation in which members of parliament aim to understand a policy better so that they can better oversee it. On the other hand, scrutinizing seeks to jeopardize a policy and parliaments often believe they already know the findings of the evaluation before it has been conducted.

To illustrate evaluation use in parliament, I present three case studies of different parliamentary systems. The United States Congress has strong powers to oversee the government and the public administration; the UK Parliament is more influential in legislation. The Swiss Federal Assembly can be seen as a parliament that is somewhere in between the two, and can be situated between a parliamentary and presidential system. The evaluative role of parliaments varies greatly by government system (especially parliamentary vs presidential). In presidential systems, members of the parliament have a strong incentive to oversee the government with evaluations, while parliamentary systems might be more open to using evaluations for legislative purposes. However, in the case of parliamentary systems, we need to distinguish more clearly between the governing majority and the opposition in parliament and the resulting difference in the role of both actors in evaluative use. Hence, oppositional parties are more likely to use evaluation to oversee the government, even though they are part of a parliamentary system (see Speer et al., 2015). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that, in addition to institutional settings, other factors are also important in explaining the evaluation function of parliaments, although there is no space here to go into these in detail. In particular, the administrative culture of the country, including the culture of transparency, evaluation and evidence in politics and administration, as well as the anchoring of scientific policy advice or the role of (scientific) advice in the policy process, have an important influence on the significance of evaluations (Jacob et al., 2015).

3.1 United States Congress

The Congress of the United States consists of two houses: the Senate is composed of representatives of the states—two senators per state regardless of its size—and the House of Representatives to which members are elected on the basis of population. Even though the two chambers are structurally separated, they have an equal role in the enactment of legislation. The President of the United States and their administration is expected to keep Congress informed of the need for new legislation, and government agencies must report periodically to the parliament. However, the President of the United States has the power to veto the new legislation proposed by the Congress, even though it can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of each chamber of Congress. Hence, the veto power gives the president some influence over

which bills Congress will consider first and which amendments are acceptable. This is particularly relevant in times of divided government. Regarding parliamentary oversight, Congress generally has the legal control over the employment of government personnel, but cannot nominate or select executive or judicial personnel. However, the US Congress has the power of impeachment. Moreover, Congress has the right to investigate any subject that affects its powers by parliamentary committees that may call witnesses and require them to provide information (Britannica, 2023). Moreover, the US Congress has a strong information support system such as congressional research agencies, like the Congressional Research Service or the Office of Technology Assessment (Thurber, 2021).

Overall, previous studies on evaluation utilization in the Congress show that members of Congress predominantly value scientific evidence and are open to using it. The majority of works show that members of parliament find systematically generated knowledge useful and also consider it relevant. Boyer and Langbein (1991) analyzed General Accounting Office studies and found all types of use occur in Congress. Yet, the Congress members' assessment of utilization varies by different factors (Whiteman, 1995). On the one hand, the division of parliamentary work due to specialization means that only a few members of parliament deal with an issue in any depth (Louwerse & Otjes, 2015). In doing so, the few Congress members dealing with issues likely face "information overload" and prefer to rely on limited information using heuristics (Weiss, 1987, 1999). Whiteman (1995) argues that members of parliament should have comparatively little direct contact with evaluation, since staff members search for and systematically process generated knowledge. However, instrumental use and learning from evaluations generally seems to be less common, and highly visible symbolic use dominates (Shulock, 1999; Weiss, 1987, 1989). One explanation might be that Congress has fewer legislative powers, which is why its members have a stronger focus on parliamentary oversight.

3.2 UK Parliament

The UK parliament is also composed of two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords, consisting of 650 and 788 members, respectively. In this way, it also plays both legislation and oversight roles. However, some parliamentarians from the governing party become government ministers with specific responsibilities in certain areas, while still being parliamentarians. Most of them are also members of parliamentary committees, which are specialized in specific topics. In addition, they debate and vote on new laws. There is some overlap between the different state institutions, which is why there is no formal separation of powers or system of checks and balances as in the United States. In general, all political power rests with the government (Prime Minister and the Cabinet), which also has the majority of seats in the parliament. As a consequence, the government dominates the legislation process, even though the parliamentarians have some instruments to propose new law. On the other hand, the oversight function of the UK Parliament has never been particularly strong compared with other countries. According to Johnson and Talbot (2007), parliamentary oversight has been challenged by increased government power and the delegation of power to supranational institutions such as the European Union until Brexit in 2020, which potentially weakens its ability to successfully control the government. To strengthen the parliament's powers of scrutiny, the committee system was reformed. Whilst committees used to be mostly general,

departmental select committees were created to shadow the work of particular government departments in 1979.

Research on evaluation use is sparse, but there are some studies that have explored the use of research in the UK Parliament. In general, these studies suggest that the parliamentarians appreciate scientific research, although it is used for many different purposes. Kenny et al. (2017) show that research findings were used for parliamentary oversight—that is, using research to hold the government to account, to scrutinize legislation (including the basis for amendments) or to inform legislative committees. In addition, information was also used to provide background knowledge—a vital part of being able to scrutinize policy and inform suggested changes to policy or legislation. Research was used to provide useful background knowledge—for example, to a parliamentary debate or select committee work. Johnson and Talbot (2007) find that the UK Parliament has been more challenged by performance reporting itself than it has challenged the government, due to its limited resources. In contrast, the government uses these reports much more. In addition, Pattyn et al. (2021) show on the basis of 85 Brexit impact appraisals, the House of Commons tends to generate information and cite sources that are congruent with their prior policy beliefs.

3.3 Switzerland: Consensual Democracy

The Swiss Federal Assembly also consists of two chambers. The National Council (lower house) comprises 200 members, whose seat distribution is based on the number of inhabitants of the 26 cantons. In contrast, the 46 members of the Council of States (upper house) represent the cantons and are elected by direct vote. The task of legislation belongs to the core of the activities of the Federal Assembly, even though Swiss voters decide on a comparatively small fraction of new legislation in referendums. Usually, the policy-making process consists of several distinct phases. The public administration is responsible for a first policy proposal, either initiated by a parliamentary motion, a popular initiative or the Federal Council (Sciarini et al., 2015). This first proposal goes into the consultation phase where public actors, interest groups and political parties can make suggestions for change. After this stage, the proposals are sent to the legislative committees, which pre-consult the issues before sending it to the plenary session. However, Schwarz et al. (2011) show that the parliament only amends a small part of the bills that have been developed by the federal administration. As a consequence, the legislative role of the Federal Assembly is rather limited. Similar, the Federal Assembly's oversight function is not only weakened by the direct democratic instruments, the consensual character of the government that includes the biggest political parties, but also by the strong position of the government. Thus, the control capacity of the Swiss Federal Assembly is rather limited compared with other countries (Schnapp & Harfst, 2005). The control committees are the most important institutions for the Swiss parliament to exercise its oversight function. In doing so, the committees can scrutinize the administration with inspections by establishing subgroups that focus on a special issue and write a report for the Federal Council (Mastronardi, 1990, pp. 139–144).

Evaluations are highly institutionalized in the Swiss Federal Assembly (Eberli & Bundi, 2017; Jacob et al., 2015). On the one hand, there have been institutions of evaluation established over the past 30 years in order to guarantee the involvement of evaluation in the parliamentary arena. For instance, the parliament has its own evaluation unit that conducts evaluations mandated by the oversight committees (Parliamentary Control of the Public

Administration—PCA). On the other hand, Article 170 of the Swiss Constitution urges the parliament to evaluate the effectiveness of the government's activities. Eberli et al. (2014) show that a majority of Swiss parliamentarians are open-minded towards evaluations. Members of parliament are aware of and appreciate evaluations, although they tend to demand rather than use them. A majority of the Swiss parliamentarians surveyed have already submitted a motion to initiate an evaluation, with aims to scrutinize the public administration. In doing so, the parliamentarians do not seek to use the evaluation in order to find a position on a political issue, but rather to already confirm their beliefs (Bundi, 2018a). In addition, Varone et al. (2020) show that parliamentarians are more likely to request evaluations in those policy domains where they have an interest group affiliation. In contrast, evaluations are arguably less used for legislation in parliaments. Although a majority of members of parliament also affirmed in a survey that they use evaluations for their parliamentary work, several studies show that evaluations rarely enter the parliamentary legislative process (Balthasar, 2009; Eberli, 2018, 2019; Frey, 2012). However, Eberli (2018) shows that they can be part of the parliamentary debate and influence the discussion in parliamentary committees.

4. CONCLUSION

Evaluations have undoubtedly found their way into the parliamentary arena. On the one hand, several evaluation institutions have been established, such as the PCA in Switzerland or the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in the United States (Jacob et al., 2015). At the same time, many parliaments have established a lively evaluation practice in most recent years. Several studies show that members of parliament across the globe are well aware of evaluations and appreciate their value, even if they use them differently than is obvious at first glance.

In this chapter, I have proposed a new classification of evaluation use within parliaments to account for the political context. In addition to instrumental and conceptual use, the parliament can also use evaluations to legitimize and jeopardize policies. Our empirical cases have shown that independently of the parliamentary system, parliaments tend to use evaluations to control the public administration. Although many parliamentarians affirm in surveys that they use evaluations for their parliamentary work, several studies show that evaluations rarely enter the parliamentary legislative process (Balthasar, 2009; Eberli, 2018, p. 146; Frey, 2012) and are mostly restricted to holding the government accountable (Bundi, 2016, 2018a; Speer et al., 2015; Van Voorst & Zwaan, 2019).

There are many reasons why parliamentarians' evaluation focus lies in its political use. First, it is only natural that political actors behave politically. Information is only one reason to make a decision, and parliaments are foremost representatives of societal interests (Weiss, 1995). Thus, they are rather interested in finding evidence for their political belief rather than seeking truth with evidence. Second, parliaments have only a limited time to read and process evaluation studies. Eberli and Bundi (2017) show that Swiss parliaments read summaries of evaluations rather than the full report. But even parliaments with more personal assistants, such as the United Congress, do not more frequently consume evaluation studies (Boyer & Langbein, 1991). Thus, it is therefore hardly surprising that parliaments initiate evaluations and delegate their execution to other institutions (Bundi, 2016). With the help of a parliamentary request, evaluations can thus be initiated quickly and with little expenditure of time to review a specific subject. Third, the institutional position of parliaments is rather weak in

comparison (Winzen, 2022). Even though some parliaments have powerful instruments such as the vote of confidence or impeachment, recent examples show that their application is difficult and parliamentarians are reluctant to use them (Trautman, 2018). In particular, the most recent COVID-19 health crisis has shown that government becomes increasingly powerful and many parliaments have no choice but to rely on ex-post control through government oversight (Griglio, 2020; Louwse et al., 2021).

These findings have an important implication. On the one hand, they show that despite the steady institutionalization of evaluation, parliaments probably still have too few resources to make systematic use of evaluations. As previous studies show, parliamentarians generally appreciate evaluations as a useful tool, but rarely use them. These findings suggest that parliamentarians probably have too little capacity to use the brainpower from evaluations and must therefore rely on their political intuition—the gut (Eberli & Bundi, 2017). Thus, the question arises as to how much evaluation the parliaments need at all. According to Bättig and Schwab (2015, p. 21), evaluations can only play a comprehensive role in parliament if they not only review state action in the context of oversight (in retrospect), but if they are also already taken into account during the legislative process. If one follows the above insight, however, this will require the strengthening of parliamentary resources and, accordingly, possible parliamentary reforms must be debated. It would probably be advisable to expand or create new institutions that systematically support the members of parliament in their main tasks—legislation and oversight—in addition to organizational activities.

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