

Who gets heard?

The participation of academic experts in hearings
held by the Swiss Parliament's specialist committees



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Executive summary

Many researchers in Switzerland are unaware of how academic and scientific insights get heard within the legislative process at the federal level. An opportunity for access is most apparent fairly late in the process, during hearings held by the Swiss Parliament's specialist committees. Yet these hearings are normally private and thus appear as a kind of black box to outsiders. The questions of which criteria are applied when inviting academic experts to these hearings and how their input is received during the hearings were what motivated the authors to analyse this process and write this report. The aim of this analysis is to provide academics with **guidance** so they can successfully bring their knowledge and insights gained from research into the parliamentary phase of the legislative process. An analysis of the topic is rounded out with practical tips for effectively conveying information during committee hearings. These tips are aimed in particular at **young academics** who are in the process of establishing themselves in their respective fields and have little experience with the conventions of these committees.

Legislative hearings with academic experts

In general, the Federal Assembly's specialist committee hearings with academic experts are not considered a standard instrument for obtaining policy advice in Switzerland. Nevertheless, because of the Federal Assembly's limited resources and a focus on obtaining policy advice for the Federal Council and especially the administration, these hearings are **one of the few means of obtaining policy advice that is specifically aimed at the legislature**. The interviews conducted for this project show that members of Parliament use hearings with academic experts to ask follow-up questions, make new contacts, and put scientific facts within a political context. As such, specialist committee hearings can be viewed as an extension of, or a complement to, the established policy advice network in Switzerland.

Despite having very few legal provisions governing how they function, hearings held by parliamentary specialist committees with academic experts tend to follow a **relatively uniform procedure**. Hearings are not mandatory; they are held as needed and in preparation for important business. In general, hearings are conducted by a committee in the first chamber, i.e. a committee in the chamber

that first debates the corresponding item of business. Academic experts are invited to committee hearings much less often than representatives of the cantons and advocacy groups, even by the more science-related specialist committees such as the ESPEC (Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committees), the SECC (Science, Education and Culture Committees), and the SSHC (Social Security and Health Committees).

The hearing process: From invitations to post-hearing follow-up

Like all other guests at hearings, academic experts are normally **invited** to a hearing by the committee's presiding college and its secretariat. When deciding whom to invite, the aspect of political balance is taken into consideration, for example by giving all committee members the opportunity to recommend guests for a hearing. According to those interviewed for this project, the most important informal criteria for selecting hearing guests are their **expertise in the subject matter** and their **language skills**. As with the rest of these committees' work, guests' presentations during hearings are conducted almost exclusively in Switzerland's official national languages. In addition to having a good command of either German or French, guests are expected to be at a minimum passively proficient in at least one additional national language. Since 2013, the Parliament Act has stipulated the following in Article 46, paragraph 3: "Persons in the service of the Confederation must normally provide written documents and visual presentations for the committees in two official languages. External experts and representatives of cantons and interest groups shall be notified in the invitation to the committee meeting that they should, if possible, take account of committee being multilingual." For this reason, and because specialist committees highly regard the quality of Switzerland's academic community, academic experts from abroad are rarely invited to the hearings. If a committee (i.e. its presiding college and secretariat) does not extend an invitation to one of the academic experts already known to the committee, it will normally contact a suitable institute or department at an institution of higher education to fill the role.

A hearing is normally organised into **topic-based blocks**, and the committee hears from several guests at a time within each block. Each guest is allotted between five and seven minutes to speak. How guests' contributions are received hinges on the quality of their presentations and how well they respond during the question time at the end of each block. Interviewees sometimes described the hearings as a process of consulting with different interest groups in order

to obtain their views on certain topics. In practice, however, these hearings are useful beyond simply compiling different viewpoints. Because contact between academia and Parliament is rather weak in Switzerland, committee meetings sometimes represent the first opportunity for members of Parliament to hear directly from academic experts.

Credibility and effectiveness of academic experts in the parliamentary process

When asked about assessing the **credibility** of guests at hearings, interviewees gave similar answers. One of the main criteria used in this assessment is the extent to which an academic expert's remarks can be logically followed and understood. Interviewees also considered it important that academics make the basis for their conclusions clear when they relay information. According to those interviewed, an individual's affiliation to a specific research institution is a secondary consideration during guest selection; it certainly does, however, influence the interviewees' assessments of a guest's credibility. Affiliation with a university or a university of applied sciences, for example, is considered a basic selection requirement. At the same time, certain interviews also made evident that the term "academic" can be used very broadly, with its scope dependent on the need for information and the person being interviewed. For instance, academics who are not affiliated with an institution can be viewed as the equal of individuals who are part of a think tank or an advocacy group and are thus seen as interchangeable with them. Finally, interviewees also mentioned that the political relevance of an academic guest's remarks is a deciding factor when assessing their credibility. This means that academic experts should explain scientific insights in terms of the key questions being asked by policymakers and clarify how these insights relate to relevant political considerations.

Academics who are invited to parliamentary hearings can best convey their knowledge by **familiarising themselves with the format and conventions of committee hearings and carefully preparing themselves for the specific topic to be addressed**. They must first summarise the current state of knowledge. Out of this summary, different courses of action emerge that can then serve as a basis for decisions made in the political process. Academics must effectively **present a summary that is both understandable and politically relevant** yet always leaves the members of Parliament room to manoeuvre and does not dictate any political actions (i.e. no policy prescriptions). Their ability to place information

and scientific findings into the current scientific and societal **context** and to make comparisons as well as present a **range** of possible courses of action makes academics' contributions to the political process all the more important, and it distinguishes them from other experts. Academic experts thus add value by contextualising a topic and providing a meta-analytic summary of what is currently known and what is not known on the subject. When synthesising information at hearings, academic experts should avoid viewing topics in isolation and instead present information within a framework that members of Parliament themselves use when making decisions: namely, they should provide a **cost-benefit analysis** of potential effects on society when outlining possible courses of action.

Academics who wish to become involved in political processes beyond the hearings are advised to proactively develop political contacts. When building up their political network, they should not underestimate the importance of informal, one-to-one relationships.

Obstacles and challenges within academia

From the perspective of researchers, and especially young researchers, the obstacles to participating in the legislative process effectively and constructively can be relatively high. This report represents a first step towards removing these obstacles. The background information on and practical insights into the legislative process at the parliamentary level provided in the report are intended to facilitate the participation of (young) researchers in this process. To help researchers apply the findings in this report, a list of practical tips for participating in parliamentary hearings and becoming more familiar with hearing conventions is included after the executive summary. However, it is clear that this report and the information it contains are alone not sufficient to ensure a mutually beneficial interaction between academia and politics. Especially from an academic perspective, it is crucial that providing academic and scientific advice for policymaking is valued within academia and sufficient resources are made available to researchers so they can obtain the relevant skills to do so. This includes, in particular, expanding the education and training opportunities in this area as well as recognising, in appointment and application processes, applicants' experience in providing academic and scientific advice for policymaking, provided it is logically related to a specific job profile and area of research.

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Tips for successfully participating in hearings held by Parliament's committees

Members of Parliament seek insights from academia. At the same time, academics aim to bring their insights and knowledge into society. In order to improve this exchange between politics and academia, the Swiss Young Academy initiated “Who gets heard?”, a project that interviewed individuals from both groups to gather information about what they expect from and want out of effective communication within parliamentary hearings.

Pre-hearing preparation: Knowledge of Parliament and its procedures, making contact

- In general, those invited to a hearing are provided with a list of all invited guests in advance. Hearing guests are grouped in topic-based blocks. If several academic experts are invited, they are often heard together.
- Each guest is allotted approximately five to seven minutes to present information relevant to the issue being discussed in the hearing, the current state of knowledge, and the guest's own assessment of the situation. A time for questions follows the presentations. Due to a hearing's tight time schedule, guests are advised to coordinate their presentations with each other in advance in order to minimise overlapping content.
- Guests should note that the federal administration follows specific guidelines for using gender-neutral language in its documents and communications (available in [→ French](#), [→ German](#), and [→ Italian](#)).
- Guests can benefit from gathering information about committee members prior to the hearing. This enables them to tailor their presentation and the ensuing discussion to the target audience.
- As there may be delays due to a large number of guests, committee guests should be prepared to wait. It is much appreciated if guests stay to answer any additional questions during the break following the hearing. That said, these informal exchanges may not always occur.

- If guests use slides or any graphic elements in their presentations, these should be given to Parliamentary Services for distribution prior to the hearing so that members of Parliament can write notes on them.

The hearing itself: Conventions and expectations in Parliament

Those in the committees listening to presentations expect the following formal parliamentary conventions and polite forms of address to be observed:

- At the beginning of a presentation, those present are greeted with their titles and in the following order:
 - “Mr/Ms President of the Committee”,
 - “honourable members of the National Council/Council of States”,
 - “ladies and gentlemen”.
- If a Federal Councillor is present, he or she is added as the second addressee in the list and greeted as “Mr/Ms Federal Councillor”.
- Presentations should be held in German or French. Ideally, presentation slides should be shown in both languages or, alternatively, in the language not used by the presenter. Handouts should be made in these two national languages and submitted to Parliamentary Services in advance so the members of Parliament can understand and follow the content as well as possible.
- English is not an accepted language for presentations and discussions. However, if needed, additional documents (e.g. publications) that are submitted together with hearing documents may be in English.
- Members of Parliament expect to be able to ask their questions in either of the national languages mentioned above. Individuals being addressed may answer in their own language (that is, in German or French); however, they should be able to understand questions posed in the other national language.

- It is appreciated if speakers provide a concise, rhetorically elegant recapitulation of particularly important statements in another national language.
- Participants should communicate as equals, respecting one another's roles and competencies.
- The quality of a presentation, and especially the extent to which listeners can logically follow and understand it, determine its impact and credibility. What are the most important facts and considerations that politicians should be aware of in order to reach a conclusion on a particular issue? What is the current state of knowledge and how much uncertainty exists regarding an issue?
- Metaphors and analogies can often be helpful when presenting complex issues. Fitting examples can illustrate the most important dynamics of a complex problem, often allowing listeners to remember them more easily. However, metaphors and analogies are no substitute for placing academic and scientific insights into their proper context.
- Scientific graphics should be contextualised but not simplified.
- Hearing attendees appreciate it if speakers make clear, precise statements and have the courage to offer a conclusive analysis of an issue.
- In their presentations, academic experts may present relevant aspects of an issue and outline reasons that speak for its general regulation. When doing this, however, presenters should not prescribe the policy decisions to be made.
- Members of Parliament generally find the time for questions following presentations, when they themselves can directly gather information, to be especially useful. These Q & A sessions allow for more flexibility than the presentations themselves, and members of Parliament are free to address their questions to a specific guest or to all guests present. Depending on the topic, questions may be asked to hone a political argument held within the committee.

Post-hearing follow-up: Hearing documents, keeping in contact

- The political process of detailed consideration of the issues addressed in a hearing does not always take place on the same day as the hearing itself. Because committee members may therefore need to consult their hard copies of presentation slides and handouts at a later point in time, these documents play an important role in the decision-making process of members of Parliament.
- Important comments and references to other documents should be included on presentation slides.
- Many members of Parliament attach a relatively high importance to having direct contact with academic experts. Academics who wish to become more involved in the political process should make themselves available for any additional questions and private conversations that may take place before or after a hearing and should proactively contact members of Parliament directly if warranted by the matter at hand.

1. Introduction

How is academia given a voice in the parliamentary phase of Switzerland's federal legislative process? Who is consulted? And who actually gets heard? How do parliamentary specialist committees¹ select academic experts to present at their hearings? How can the latter best convey their knowledge to policy-makers? This report examines these questions with the aim of helping researchers **successfully contribute their knowledge during the parliamentary phase of the legislative process**. As part of this project, practical tips for successfully presenting at specialist committee hearings were collected, and they can be found after the executive summary. These tips are aimed in particular at **young academics** who are in the process of establishing themselves in their respective fields and are unfamiliar with the conventions of these committees.

For the project “Who gets heard?”, a project group from the Swiss Young Academy interviewed **members of different parliamentary specialist committees and members of Parliamentary Services**² to learn about their experience with hearings involving academic experts. In addition, the group spoke with **researchers** who have themselves taken part in such hearings or who have otherwise been involved in the exchange between politics and academia. This report synthesises and organises comments made in these various interviews. The statements and recommendations made by those interviewed are not to be understood as statements by the Swiss Young Academy.

This study focuses on the **transfer of academic knowledge to the legislature and specifically to parliamentary specialist committees**. During the parliamentary phase of the legislative process, the current state of scientific knowledge on the topics being addressed is typically summarised so that members of Parliament may have a better understanding of important facets of and considerations related to the topics. The purpose of academic experts' involvement in this process is not to devise regulations or give advice on policy solutions. Instead, members of Parliament want and expect experts to explain as objectively as possible the current status of research on a topic (Ammann, 2020). Academic experts are also

1 Specialist committees are often referred to as legislative committees. Unlike supervisory committees or the Immunity Committee of the National Council, each specialist committee focuses on a specific topic, for example foreign affairs. Each chamber has nine permanent specialist committees (Bundesversammlung: Sachbereichskommissionen, n.d.).

2 Parliamentary Services are the general administrative office of the Federal Assembly. They support the Federal Assembly, especially with administrative and organisational matters related to it fulfilling its duties. (Bundesversammlung: Parlamentsdienste, n.d.).

expected, if necessary, to be able to comment on possible reasons for taking legislative action in a specific area or intervening with other measures. They may also be asked to comment on the effects of taking (or not taking) legislative action.

A clear distinction is to be made between this form of transmitting academic knowledge to the legislature and, on the one hand, the **knowledge transfer to the Federal Council and the administration** (e.g. in the context of consultation procedures and extra-parliamentary commissions³) and, on the other hand, **academic policy advice provided to the Federal Council and the administration** with the aim of actively developing solutions. Having academic experts participate in hearings held by parliamentary committees also differs from the administration or legislature commissioning **scientific studies or expert reports**, for example in reaction to a procedural request that has been adopted or in a crisis situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hirschi et al., 2022).

In the **federal government's ordinary legislative process**, most preliminary drafts of legislative bills are either prepared by the Federal Council or have been prepared in advance by the department in the federal administration concerned with the matter. The Federal Council then initiates the consultation procedure. Based on the result of the consultation procedure, the preliminary draft is revised and then submitted to Parliament. First, the specialist committees in Parliament responsible for the issue discuss the proposed bill. These discussions are confidential. During this phase, hearings are conducted as needed with representatives of the cantons, the business community, and other relevant interest groups including academia. These hearings are the focus of this study. Subsequently, the bill and any proposals made by the committees are discussed publicly in each of the chambers (National Council and Council of States).

Literature on this topic proposes **three guiding principles** for transferring academic knowledge to policymakers. First of all, statements made should be policy relevant but not policy prescriptive (Edenhofer & Kowarsch, 2015; Shaw & Robinson, 2004). This means that aspects relevant to the decision-making process should be explained, but policymakers should be left to draw their own conclusions. Secondly, academic experts should view themselves as “honest

3 There are different types of extra-parliamentary commissions: administrative commissions (with an advisory function) and executive commissions (with the authority to make decisions). They share the following features: they are connected with the federal administration, consist mostly of external individuals, and generally have permanent status. Extra-parliamentary commissions serve primarily to support the federal administration. Administrative commissions are much more common, which is why it can be assumed that when interviewees mention “extra-parliamentary commissions”, they are typically referring to administrative commissions. See Germann, 2002.

brokers” (Pielke, 2007), remaining as impartial and independent as possible when providing information about a topic and discussing relevant considerations. Thirdly, academic experts and policymakers should communicate as equals, respecting one another’s roles and competencies (Messerli et al., 2015).

And yet how, exactly, should these principles be **applied** in practice? For example, how can different courses of action be presented without moving too far into the realm of making recommendations? How can academic insights be presented appropriately in the context of policymaking?

This study has two main **aims**. Firstly, it aims to convey a basic understanding of the hearing process in the parliamentary phase of the legislative process. Secondly, it aims to determine how academics can best bring their insights into this process.

As previously mentioned, this study focuses on the **hearings held by the specialist committees in Parliament**. There are many reasons for this focus. Firstly, understanding how these hearings function is difficult due to their confidential nature. Although public hearings are possible, they are extremely rare (Ammann, 2021a). Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the process enacted within these specialist committees in order to help promote a better understanding of how policymaking and academia interact. These insights are directed at researchers in particular, so that they may learn which forms of academic and scientific input are suitable for committee hearings. Secondly, parliamentary hearings take place on a regular basis. They therefore provide the most significant opportunity for interaction in the parliamentary process during which academic expertise may be incorporated. Thirdly, these committee hearings represent the final consultative phase before a proposed bill is considered in both chambers’ open plenum discussions. After a hearing, committee members take the opinions they have formed on the topic of the hearing back to their various parliamentary groups. In their roles as specialists familiar with the topic addressed, they make recommendations to their respective groups. The significance of these committee hearings, as well as the work done by the committees in general, should therefore not be underestimated.

The underlying data for this study were collected using **semi-structured, qualitative interviews**. An advisory council, which included **Prof. Marcel Tanner, Dr Peter Bieri, and Prof. Barbara Haering**, supported this project. All members of the advisory council have many years of practical experience in the communication of academic insights and in their incorporation into the legislative

process. Prof. Marcel Tanner is President of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+) and Director Emeritus of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute. Dr Peter Bieri is President of TA-SWISS (Foundation for Technology Assessment) and Vice President of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+). In addition, he was a member of the Council of States from 1995 to 2015. Prof. Barbara Haering is currently President of the Strategic Orientation Council at the University of Geneva and Vice President of the ETH Board. From 1990 to 2007 she served as a member of the National Council, and from 2015 to 2022 she was Chair of the Executive Board of econcept AG.

This report is based on **25 interviews conducted with members of the federal Parliament, staff from Parliamentary Services at the Parliament Building, and researchers who work in Switzerland**. Of these 25 interviews, 24 were conducted between April and July 2021. An additional interview was held in July 2022 to ensure a higher degree of diversity with regard to the interviewees' political views. Quantitatively, focus was placed on members of Parliament who were members of a specialist committee (19 of the 25 interviewees). Interviewees from the National Council and the Council of States included members of all the parliamentary groups (SVP, SP, FDP, The Centre, Green Party, and GLP). At the time of the interviews, almost all of the interviewees from the political arena were active members of Parliament. In addition, two representatives of Parliamentary Services and four representatives of academia were interviewed. The interviews with staff members of Parliamentary Services and with researchers were conducted in order to include additional perspectives from individuals who do not represent the views of a political party but were nonetheless involved in hearings with academic experts, either as (potential or actual) guests at hearings (for researchers) or as staff of a committee's secretariat (for staff members of Parliamentary Services). Of the 25 individuals interviewed, 20 came from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The other five interviewees, four of whom were members of Parliament, came from the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Of the 25 individuals interviewed, 15 were men and 10 were women. When inviting individuals to participate in interviews, care was taken to achieve diversity in terms of their political party, professional background, gender, and national language spoken. However, the response rate among the groups varied, so the comments included in this report represent snapshots and not a representative survey.

This report is **structured** as follows: First, the role of academic expertise in Switzerland's political process is discussed in general (Chapter 2), followed by the study's findings (Chapters 3–5). An explanation of how hearings held by Parlia-

ment's specialist committees are organised (Chapter 3) is followed by interviewees' subjective assessments of the role that academia plays in politics (Chapter 4). A discussion on how to improve the dialogue between academia and Parliament (Chapter 5) finally leads to the conclusion (Chapter 6), which presents a summary of the most important study findings. Examples of existing opportunities for informal interaction are listed in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 contains additional information concerning literature on this topic, methodology, and the authors' disclosures of relevant interests as well as an anonymised list of interviewees. In the section preceding this introduction, practical tips are provided for successfully participating in specialist committee hearings.

2. How academic expertise is incorporated into Switzerland's political process

2.1 Characteristics of Switzerland's political system

Switzerland's political system is organised according to the principles of **federalism** and **(semi-)direct democracy**. As set out in the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, cantons have a relatively large amount of leeway regarding their political actions and decision-making (see especially Article 3 of the Federal Constitution, which states that cantons are sovereign insofar as they have not vested their competencies in the Confederation). Citizens may use initiatives and referendums to exercise their direct democratic rights. Cantons also play a role in initiatives and referendums: in order to be adopted, federal popular initiatives and mandatory referendums require both a popular majority and a majority of the cantons (a popular majority suffices for optional referendums).

Switzerland is a **consociational democracy**, a political system characterised by compromise and consensus. This is due to, among other things, its instruments of direct democracy. The positions of groups with the authority to initiate a referendum are sought out early on in the process of drafting federal legislation. Specifically, citizens, cantons, and political parties as well as advocacy groups and individuals who do not have political rights at the federal level all have the opportunity to comment on the preliminary draft of a proposed bill during the consultation procedure. Moreover, the Federal Council, whose members represent the largest political parties, is a collegial body (Vatter, 2020).

Himmelsbach (2014; 2019) points out that these defining characteristics of Switzerland's political system affect both how current insights are conveyed from the academic sphere to the political sphere and how much impact they have (see also Sager & Rissi, 2011). Indeed, the **consultation procedures and hearings** conducted by the executive and legislative branches are directly related to these characteristics: the most important political stakeholders are consulted early on in the process of drafting political proposals in order to minimise their risk of being rejected by Parliament or by a popular vote (e.g. by means of a referendum).

2.2 The legislative process and system for obtaining policy advice

At the federal level, the legislative process is divided into **four phases**: (a) the phase of initiating the legislative process (also referred to as the “trigger” or “initiation” phase), (b) the drafting phase (also referred to as the “preliminary phase” or “pre-parliamentary phase”, (c) the parliamentary phase (also referred to as the “parliamentary evaluation and decision phase”), and (d) the direct-democratic post-decision phase (also referred to as the “entry-into-force phase” or “post-parliamentary phase”) (Bühler & Prêtre, 2011; Bundesversammlung: Gesetzgebung, n.d.; Krumm, 2013; Vatter, 2020).

Points of influence during the ordinary legislative process

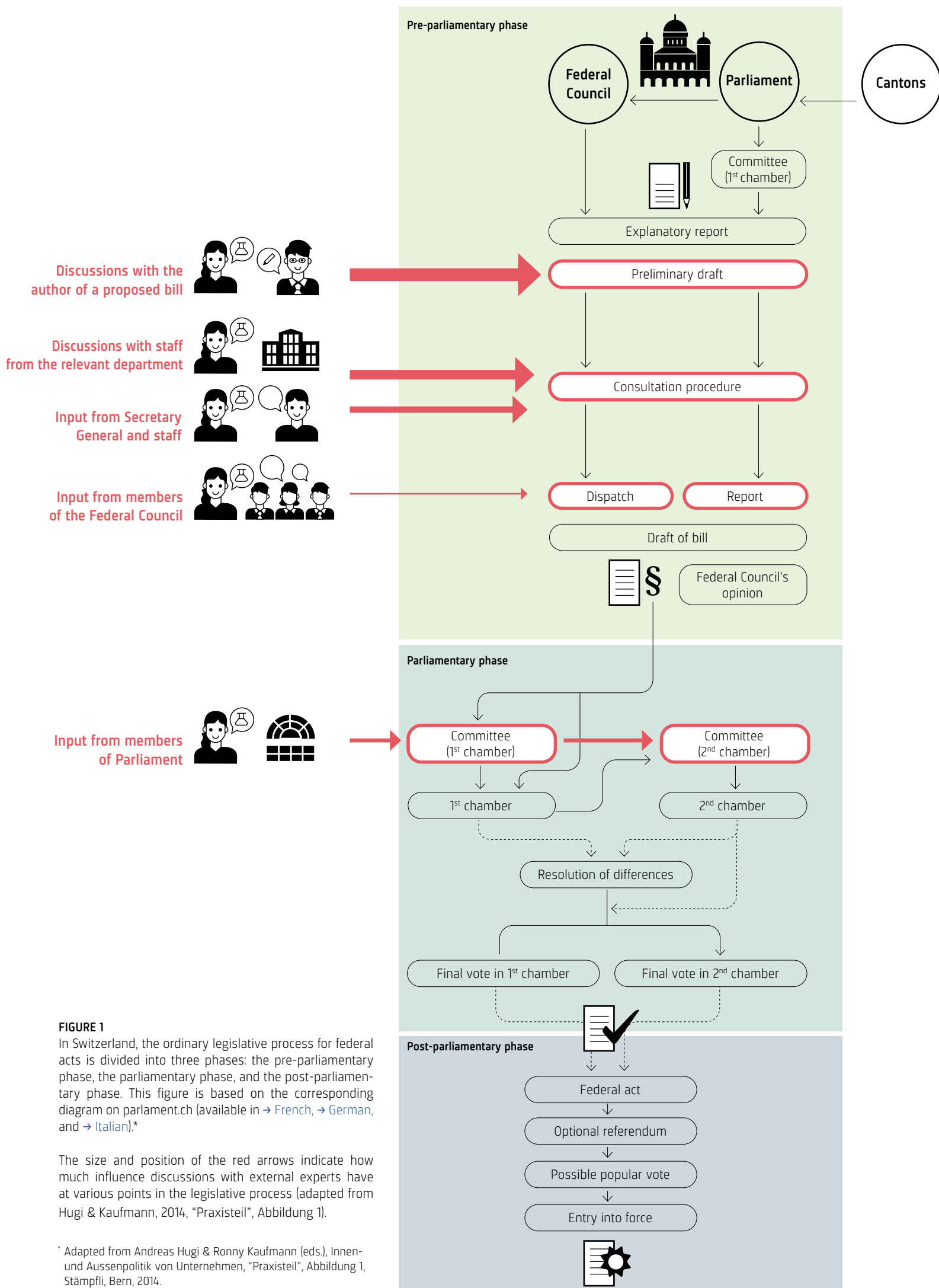


FIGURE 1
 In Switzerland, the ordinary legislative process for federal acts is divided into three phases: the pre-parliamentary phase, the parliamentary phase, and the post-parliamentary phase. This figure is based on the corresponding diagram on parlament.ch (available in → French, → German, and → Italian).*

The size and position of the red arrows indicate how much influence discussions with external experts have at various points in the legislative process (adapted from Hugi & Kaufmann, 2014, "Praxisteil", Abbildung 1).

* Adapted from Andreas Hugi & Ronny Kaufmann (eds.), Innen- und Aussenpolitik von Unternehmen, "Praxisteil", Abbildung 1, Stämpfli, Bern, 2014.

There are many different ways to **initiate** the process of drafting a federal act. In general, the impulse comes from the Federal Council and the departments responsible for a particular issue. Occasionally, though, Parliament itself initiates the process. Although parliamentary initiatives⁴ were rarely used in the 1990s, they have become an increasingly important tool in recent times (Vatter, 2020). It is also possible for any canton to launch a cantonal initiative commissioning the preparation of a bill by a parliamentary committee (Bundesversammlung: Standesinitiative, n.d.). Cantonal initiatives, however, remain exceptions. And when they are submitted, cantonal initiatives have a relatively high failure rate: for example, only 2 of the 102 cantonal initiatives considered during the 50th legislative period reached the phase when a bill is drafted; both of these bills subsequently died (Bundesversammlung: Standesinitiativen, n.d.). Finally, Swiss citizens themselves may initiate the process of drafting a piece of legislation. Although popular initiatives propose changes to the Federal Constitution and not to existing legislation, they usually affect legislation as well. Thus, the Federal Assembly sometimes rejects an initiative only to later take up its concerns partially or completely in a legislative bill (as an indirect counter-proposal).

In the second phase, it is typically the government office responsible for the policy area concerned that **makes a preliminary draft** of the legislative bill. The Federal Council then initiates the consultation procedure. The positions held by the most important political stakeholders inform this preliminary draft, which is then sent to Parliament together with a dispatch from the Federal Council.

Now the third phase, which is the focus of this report, begins: the **parliamentary phase**. Following discussion in the committees, the proposed draft of the bill is sent to both chambers (National Council and Council of States). After the chambers consider the bill and resolve their differences, a final vote is held in each chamber.

The final phase is the **direct-democratic post-decision phase**, during which it is possible to oppose a federal act by calling a referendum and collecting 50,000 signatures to initiate a popular vote. If a referendum is not called before the set deadline, the act enters into force on the date proposed by the Federal Council or Parliament (Vatter, 2020).

⁴ A parliamentary initiative refers to a draft bill submitted by a member of the Federal Assembly, a committee, or a parliamentary group. Following its submission, a parliamentary committee assumes responsibility for performing the legislative work on the bill (Bundesversammlung: Parlamentarische Initiative, n.d.).

Switzerland's system for obtaining policy advice relies primarily on five institutions, according to Himmelsbach (2019). Similar to the systems in other countries (such as the United Kingdom or Germany), most advisory institutions in Switzerland interact directly with the executive branch because, in general, it is the branch that drafts legislation (Kevenhörster, 2021; Rudloff, 2004). When performing **policy research**, the administration and its individual departments are able to collaborate with federally funded institutions to evaluate and prepare dossiers on various topics. These institutions include both of the federal institutes of higher education (ETH and EPFL) as well as the cantonal institutions of higher education and private research institutes. In addition, the administration issues smaller, short-term **mandates for policy advice** that, according to Himmelsbach, are becoming increasingly important and are indicative of the trend towards the professionalisation of policy advice in Switzerland. Policy advice is also provided to the administration by **extra-parliamentary commissions** (a majority of whose members are not employed by the administration, e.g. are representatives of interest groups, individuals involved in regional politics, and researchers), which function as a sort of semi-professional “militia administration” (Germann, 2002; Himmelsbach, 2019). And finally, the federal government invests in national **research programmes**, which are implemented by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The federal government also grants a mandate to the **Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (+a)**, which are especially active in the field of science policy. Outside of the academic community, **think tanks, associations, and private research institutes** play a role in providing policy advice, although the distinction between academic and non-academic research is not clear cut in all subject areas.

Compared to other countries, Switzerland's part-time (or semi-professional) Parliament has limited **resources** (see Z'graggen, 2009). Parliamentary Services (which are the “administrative services of the Federal Assembly and its bodies” according to Article 1, paragraph 1 of the rules governing Parliamentary Services) work with modest staff and material resources. And in general, members of Parliament have hardly any access to personal staff members (for more details, see Ammann, 2021a). As a result of these limited resources, committee hearings represent a particularly valuable source of information for members of Parliament.

2.3 Hearings and consultation procedures

This report focuses on the **hearings conducted by the parliamentary specialist committees in the National Council and Council of States**. In general, hearings are conducted by a committee in the first chamber, i.e. a committee in the chamber that first debates the corresponding item of business.⁵ These hearing are considered part of the ordinary legislative process. The corresponding commission in the second chamber may also conduct hearings if they are considered necessary or useful. However, according to those interviewed, this situation is typically an exception because the committee in the second chamber always receives the documents from the hearing held by the committee in the first chamber. If the committee in the second chamber has any remaining questions after the hearing in its sister committee (i.e. the committee in the other chamber that handles the same subject matter), more hearings may be scheduled.

These hearings should not be mistaken for (principally written) **consultation procedures**, which are part of the preliminary legislative process. Consultation procedures are governed by specific legal provisions and, as a general rule, must be carried out for popular initiatives, federal acts, and ordinances.

Between 2005 and 2015, the term “hearing” was also used for **other procedures initiated by the federal administration** aimed at seeking the opinions of various political stakeholders. Because there was disagreement as to whether the distinction between “consultation procedures” and “hearings” was a useful one, this differentiation was abandoned in 2015 (Amarelle et al., 2013; Andereggen, 2012; Parlamentarische Verwaltungskontrolle, 2011).

Hearings held by Parliament’s specialist committees – and which are considered part of the legislative process – should also not be mistaken for **other types of hearings** that are not (or not directly) part of **Parliament’s legislative activities** (and are therefore not addressed in this report). Consequently, this study does not examine hearings concerned with determining the immunity of members of Parliament. Similarly, it does not consider hearings held by parliamentary groups of their own accord, which can differ in terms of how often they take place and how they are conducted, depending on the group holding them and its requirements.

⁵ For other matters, such as popular initiatives or matters the Federal Council submits for consideration, the presidents of both chambers decide which chamber will handle a matter first (Bundesversammlung: Erstat, n.d.).

3. Key question 1: How are Parliament's specialist committee hearings organised?

The first part of the interviews focused mainly on the organisation of hearings held by Parliament's specialist committees. Who is invited to a hearing and why? Which criteria influence how guests are selected and evaluated? What is the sequence of events during a hearing?

3.1 Selection of guests for hearings

Interviewees had difficulty answering with any certainty the question of **how many hearings** take place in total because this number varies depending on the specialist committees involved and issues addressed. Representatives from the **cantons** and various other **interested parties** are invited to these hearings, resulting in a selection of guests similar to those invited to consultation procedures. Thus, when asked for examples of invited guests, those interviewed invariably first mentioned representatives from the cantons or large advocacy groups such as the employers' association, unions, WWF, and Pro Natura, even though the focus of the interviews for this study was on hearings involving academic experts.

Similarly, interviewees had difficulty estimating the **proportion of academic experts** at hearings. One reason for this could be the fact that those interviewed had different interpretations of what constituted "academic expertise". While some interviewees (primarily members of Parliament) also included representatives from advocacy groups and the administration in the category "hearings with academia", others did so only with members of academic research institutions. Therefore, interviewees' estimates of the proportion of hearing guests considered to be academic experts varied, ranging from one tenth to one quarter (though the latter estimate was an outlier). And their estimates of the proportion of academic experts was considerably higher for hearings on topics clearly related to science and academia, such as prenatal diagnostic testing and higher education policy, than for other subjects. One of the members of Parliament interviewed attributed the generally modest number of academic experts at hearings to how the legislative process functions. The interviewee pointed out that academic expertise most often informs the initial stage of preparing a bill when content is being considered, and is thus included prior to the parliamentary hearings. As a result, the academic community is most heavily involved in the

preliminary phase of the legislative process. Another interviewee added that a department could consult a group of experts, for example when drafting a bill on behalf of the Federal Council. When Parliament itself initiates a bill, the committees are supported by the administration when they subsequently draft it.

According to those interviewed, a committee's presiding college or **members of the committee** work together with the **committee's secretariat** from Parliamentary Services and recommend which guests to invite to a hearing. The presiding college, led by members of Parliament, and the committee's secretariat are also responsible for extending invitations and organising the hearing. Interviewees said that, in general, no objections are made to the guest list. Instead, it is common practice for the organisers to strive for political balance and for the list not to reflect the political orientation of the presiding college. It was also said that invitations are usually accepted, ensuring that there are rarely ever problems **recruiting guests**.

Interviewees stated that the most important criterion for selecting guests is **how relevant their expertise is** to the hearing's subject matter, irrespective of their institutional affiliation. Normally, though, experts from universities and universities of applied sciences are selected rather than researchers without an affiliation to an institution. When an open invitation is extended to a department or an institute, some of the interviewees expected them to send a head of the institute or a professor to the hearing. Other interviewees were open to hearing from early career researchers and staff researchers who do not hold a professorship, as long as their presentations rise to the expected level of quality and the guests have the required expertise.

Another important selection criterion mentioned is the **language region** from which guests originate. Although some members of Parliament consider the balance of **genders** when inviting academic experts to hearings, this was mentioned rather seldomly compared to the criteria of guests' expertise in the relevant subject matter and their region of origin.

When selecting guests, interviewees said the reputation of a guest's research institution was less important than the **quality of a guest's presentation** (see more in Section 4.2). To what extent quality can be assessed before a presentation has even been given remained unclear. It is possible that this assessment is influenced by statements researchers have previously made in the media. And according to several interviewees, those academic experts who **appear often in public and in the media** have an increased probability of being invited to hear-

ings. Other interviewees made the opposite argument: it is unnecessary to invite academic experts who are especially active in the media because their positions on an issue are already known. Overall, there was no clear consensus about the extent to which the media presence and prominence of potential hearing guests affect their selection.

3.2 National languages in hearings

Interviewees stated that **both French-speaking and German-speaking academic experts** are invited to hearings in order to ensure that members of Parliament from all three of Switzerland's language regions can understand the proceedings. Moreover, guests are directed to provide the materials for their presentations in both French and German, or to at least provide their presentation slides in the language that is not used for their oral presentation. According to those interviewed, up to now almost all guests at hearings have been affiliated with a Swiss institution. Various explanations for this were given. One reason was to make optimal use of what the Swiss academic community has to offer. Other reasons given were related to assumptions regarding language skills and to the lack of an institutional framework for hearings in English.

According to one of the interviewees from Parliamentary Services, it would certainly be possible for committees to invite **guests from abroad** to hearings. In particular, holding **online hearings via Zoom** (a practice first introduced in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic) would allow for this. However, there continues to be strong interest in in-person hearings due to concerns about security and the quality of interactions. Several members of Parliament also emphasised the value of **indirect interactions** and remarked that digital hearings offer no room for informal conversations and fewer opportunities for personal contact.

3.3 The order of events in hearings

According to those interviewed, committee hearings have a specific structure. In general, guests are heard on one item of business **within a single day**. The time allocated for presentations is set in advance and often amounts to only 5–7 minutes, but may run up to 10–15 minutes maximum. A hearing is normally organised into topic-based blocks, and guests with a similar background are

heard together, resulting in academic experts often being grouped in the same block. Following their presentations, all guests from the same block stay for a Q & A session. Members of Parliament ask questions in their own national language and guests answer in German or French. According to the Parliament Act, Italian is also an accepted language for hearings; however, interviewees said that French and German are the dominant languages spoken. Guests are absent during the political decision-making process that takes place in the committees after a hearing is finished.

Interviewees stated that hearings are always structured in a similar manner regardless of the committee holding them. Nevertheless, differences may exist, especially between the committees in the National Council and those in the Council of States, due to **differing conventions**. On the one hand, the Council of States is considered more formal regarding, for example, its dress code (see Article 33 of the Standing Orders of the Council of States, which state that “all persons present in the chamber shall wear appropriate attire”). On the other hand, the committees in the Council of States are smaller and more intimate, with each consisting of 13 members, while the committees in the National Council each consist of 25 members. One of the individuals interviewed recommended that academic guests consider these differences when preparing for a hearing.

4. Key question 2: What is the importance of academia in politics?

The second part of the interviews focused on the importance interviewees placed on academia's involvement in politics in general and in the parliamentary process in particular. Interviewees were asked three questions related to this topic:

1. **Why** is academia included in Parliament's work?
2. What lends academic experts **credibility**?
3. How do politicians view academics who **become involved in political discussions**?

When asking these rather normative questions, care was taken at all times to limit the discussion to **academic experts** who conduct research at a university or other type of research institute. This is in contrast to representatives of interest groups and politicians with an academic background (although in practice, these roles may overlap). However, due to the proximity of academia to expertise in the political advisory process, it is possible that a **broader understanding** of academia underlies some comments made by the interviewees. In other words, some individuals who have an academic educational background may be considered representatives of academia even if they do not work in research. Since none of those interviewed fundamentally opposed including academia in policymaking, this aspect of the topic will no longer be discussed in this report.

4.1 Why is academia included in Parliament's work?

The most common reason given for consulting academics during the parliamentary process was their **expertise** in a particular subject matter. Members of Parliament were described as generalists who address a broad range of topics in their everyday work and who need input from academic experts to quickly answer specific questions that arise. One member of Parliament noted that members require fundamental scientific knowledge in order to understand in sufficient depth the Federal Council's "compact and very formal" dispatches. This was said to be especially important for controversial matters and for motions (i.e.

when Parliament instructs the Federal Council to prepare a bill or to take a certain measure), which involve parsing the Federal Council's generally succinct argumentation style.

The second most commonly mentioned reason for including academia in the legislative process was its **neutrality**. Interviewees maintained that fact-based information must underpin Parliament's legislative work. Moreover, they said that when members of Parliament base their arguments on academic and scientific information, this enhances the credibility of the arguments and also helps a federal act survive the direct-democratic post-decision phase. In some cases, politicians explicitly highlighted their personal connection to academia or the importance of academic work to their own political activities.

“For me, science is important. It grapples with the foundations of society and in the process remains relatively independent. Science is committed to the pursuit of knowledge.” (Member of Parliament)

“As National Councillors, we are such generalists that it's impossible for us to understand facts to this degree of depth. I am dependent on having access to established facts so I can make a political assessment of a matter. Personally, I find this very important.”
(Member of Parliament)

A further reason discussed, though to a lesser degree, was the role academia plays in **preparing society for future challenges**. Unlike politics, which primarily addresses current problems and topics that make it onto the political agenda, academia is apparently considered by the political sphere to be capable of venturing a look into the future (for the problematic nature of this viewpoint, see e.g. Grüniger, 2020). This viewpoint maintains that academia can indicate which future challenges society should prepare itself for.

“Laws cannot remain effective forever, and they need science in order to create some sort of framework.” (Member of Parliament)

4.2 What lends academic experts credibility?

From the perspective of the interviewees, in order for academic insights in general and presentations made by the invited academic experts in particular to be considered credible, it must be **possible to logically follow and understand** them. As already mentioned in the discussion about selection criteria for guests (see Section 3.1), the success of guests' appearances before the committees is particularly important. Key elements for credibility were said to be the quality of a guest's presentation and how a guest handles politicians' questions at the hearing. According to those interviewed, it is not only the clarity with which an academic expert communicates that is taken into account but also the extent to which the expert makes his or her **assumptions** clear and clearly names the **research findings** upon which the statements in his or her presentation are based. Also considered important when assessing the credibility of an academic expert is his or her affiliation with a specific institution and, in some cases, that institution's reputation. However, the reputation of a specific institution does not directly determine whether researchers from that institution are invited to hearings (see Section 3.1). More importance seems to be placed on this factor when assessing the credibility of a presentation.

Along with the two main criteria of understandability and affiliation with a research institution, a third criterion for credibility was mentioned: the **relevance of an expert's statements to the (current) political discourse**. Interviewees' general standpoint was that during hearings, academic experts should maintain an open-minded approach to their research topic that takes into consideration issues relevant to society. Academic insights should not be presented in a vacuum; rather, they must be communicated in such a way that political questions and possible courses of action can be discussed and answered in the context of the current state of knowledge. When discussing this in the interviews, the terms "transparency", "objectivity", and "neutrality" were also used, and interviewees appreciated that insights from academia serve to counterbalance the partisan expertise provided by associations. Moreover, transparency, objectivity, and neutrality were considered essential for the credibility of academic experts. Thus, interviewees recommended that guests at hearings make it clear when science and academia do not have an answer to a question, an approach that was said to provide transparency and thereby enhance credibility.

4.3 How do politicians view academics who become involved in political discussions?

A large majority of those interviewed do **not** consider it inherently **problematic** when academic experts become involved in political discussions. They argued that academics, like all citizens, are entitled to freely express their opinions, a right that also extends to opinions related to their work in research (see also Ammann, 2021b). Moreover, almost all of those interviewed deemed it appropriate for academic experts to make recommendations during hearings – for some interviewees this was considered particularly true when dealing with urgent matters and those considered (relatively) uncontroversial within the academic community – for example topics related to climate change. When commenting on the legitimacy of recommendations made during hearings, some of the interviewees drew a distinction between academics with much experience and those with little.

At the same time, interviewees said academic experts should not be too one-sided when speaking at a hearing. Opinions differed considerably, however, as to what **one-sidedness** means and which academic **fields** are most often associated with it. Interviewees mentioned fields such as climate change, genetic engineering, and law as negative examples. One of the interviewees, for example, remarked that experts on climate research are too closely connected with certain political parties. Another interviewee made the point that there are too many competing opinions on the topic of genetic engineering. Similar concerns were expressed about the fields of law, economics, and the social sciences, which were criticised for their normative character. It was observed that different conclusions can be reached depending on the underlying assumptions being made, and it is possible to find someone who represents practically any political viewpoint.

All of those interviewed collectively agreed that academic experts are **not to prescribe** to policymakers which political decisions they should take. Academic experts are called upon to present facts and to synthesise their arguments – normative conclusions should be left to policymakers. Interviewees drew the line at any involvement of academia in determining political action. In summary, those interviewed view academia as having an informational function; they apparently find the involvement of academic experts in defining courses of action and providing normative arguments to justify them less desirable.

5. Key question 3: What are some ideal scenarios and suggestions for future hearings?

Interviewees **rarely criticised the basic framework** of the current system. Instead, they gave specific **suggestions for improvement**, for example regarding how academic experts could make the most of their participation in hearings (Section 5.1; see also the tips at the beginning of this publication for successfully participating in hearings) and what factors should receive greater consideration when extending invitations (Section 5.2). In addition, suggestions were made for alternative and additional forms of collaboration between members of Parliament and academics (Section 5.3).

5.1 Presenting in a hearing: Keeping it brief while providing context

Even though certain members of Parliament would sometimes appreciate the opportunity for in-depth discussion, the time available for each guest is generally very short due to the large number of guests at hearings. One interviewee suggested that guests invited to participate in the same block of a hearing therefore **coordinate** their presentations in advance. And since the political decision-making process normally takes places at a later point in time than the hearing, it was strongly recommended that guests bring hard copies of their hearing materials or submit their presentation slides – ideally in two languages – to Parliamentary Services.

Interviewees were asked whether it was better for academic experts to present summaries or to give comprehensive explanations at hearings. It was pointed out, on the one hand, there is limited time available at hearings and, on the other, there is time for discussion after the presentations, which some members of Parliament consider more important than the presentations themselves. Therefore, it was recommended that academic experts keep their comments **brief** while still **outlining** any significant **differences of opinion** that exist within the academic community. They should not, however, relativise research findings out of principle when the existing evidence overwhelmingly speaks for a particular research finding. While members of Parliament hoped that academic experts would describe and contextualise the quality of the current state of knowledge for a particular issue, they also called on academics to have the courage to synthesise this information.

5.2 Extending invitations: Increasing consideration of young, foreign, and female researchers

In general, the principle of “**more is more**” applies to committee hearings: if concerns are raised regarding a hearing’s balance of content, additional guests are invited in order to restore it. Due to this principle and to the fact that individual members of Parliament may request specific guests be invited to a hearing, interviewees made few suggestions for improving the process of selecting guests for and inviting them to hearings. However, one of the interviewees from academia wished for greater representation of **younger researchers** in hearings since they are more likely to examine “new topics”. Another interviewee hoped that more **guests from abroad** would be invited to hearings now that they are increasingly held online. This would allow for better international comparisons to be made, and it could expand the scope of hearings beyond the Swiss landscape already familiar to members of Parliament. A third interviewee would like to have more **women** participate in hearings (and in the public discourse in general). This was deemed necessary not only to counteract the widely held perception that experts are primarily men but also to give female academics the opportunity to serve as role models in a public setting.

5.3 Strengthening alternative forms of collaboration and developing informal contacts

Various approaches were also suggested for potentially using additional institutions and alternative forms of collaboration between academic experts and members of Parliament. Some of those interviewed highlighted the value of **personal contact** with academic experts. Consulting trusted academic experts is part of the process some members of Parliament use when putting together a dossier on a political topic. Therefore, interviewees warned against underestimating the difference between in-person and online hearings: **in-person hearings** provide a better setting for developing contacts and for discussing potential follow-up questions. One member of Parliament took the matter a step further and said that academics who wish to better bring their work into the political process should not hesitate to contact members of Parliament directly. Not only the academic

interviewees but also some of the members of Parliament interviewed encouraged academic experts to take a **proactive, communicative approach** to participating in committee hearings.

“Researchers should reach out and engage with the people, and politicians are [...] the people.” (Member of Parliament)

Another indication of the value placed on informal and personal contact was that a majority of those interviewed considered the **time for discussion** during hearings to be too short. Nonetheless, nobody mentioned that they wanted hearings as a whole to last longer; they were aware that hearings are already quite long and that not all members of Parliament wish to talk to the same experts.

Instead of changing the duration of hearings, some interviewees recommended using **alternative formats**. Along with the lack of time, they criticised the lack of institutionalised forms for obtaining academic policy advice. For this reason, various interviewees expressed the desire to create permanent structures, at least for certain topics, that would allow academia to take on a more constant (and in-depth) role in the political process. A past example mentioned was the 2019 climate summit initiated by the Green Party. Other interviewees, though, also criticised the variety of formats. For example, they cited panel discussions organised in addition to those events already scheduled within the institutional framework. These interviewees would prefer fixed academic institutions; one interviewee suggested an academy of science that focuses on science for policy-making rather than on research or higher education policy.

When asked whether Switzerland should institutionalise the involvement of academia in policymaking in the form of a **single person** or a new **department** (as is the case, for example, in the United Kingdom), opinions differed. The most common argument against this idea was that such institutional structures already exist, namely extra-parliamentary commissions and the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+). One member of Parliament added that having this type of academic body within the Federal Chancellery would be like having one sort of ivory tower within another ivory tower. Another argument given against concentrating the function of providing academic policy advice on a particular individual, which is the case with the science advisor to the president in the United States, is that this practice does not fit into Switzerland’s political and societal system, which tends to be critical of placing such a strong focus on individuals. It was feared that academia could be co-opted by politics, which is contrary to the academic nature of transferring insights and knowledge. It

should be noted that even though most of the interviews were conducted with members of Parliament, nearly all of the institutions and examples mentioned were related to advising the administration or the Federal Council. This in turn highlights the importance of the executive branch in obtaining policy advice (see also Section 2.2).

One of the interviewees from Parliamentary Services added that politicians represent first and foremost the **interests of their constituents** and the promises in their **campaign platforms**. This means, for instance, that a politician who “was elected because he or she argued that global warming can be solved using technical means” cannot easily change this position later on, even when scientific evidence may suggest a different way to solve the problem. On the other hand, the interviewee said that having a facilitator in Bern (e.g. a science advisor) could possibly shorten the process and that such an individual or institution would be more familiar with political processes in general. A further point made was that although the federal administration’s expertise may be available to politicians, academic competencies should not reside solely within the administration. Another interviewee pointed out that a scientific task force could serve as a counterbalance to the administration, which is currently responsible for obtaining a substantial amount of academic policy advice for Parliament yet cannot be considered completely neutral since it is under the authority of the Federal Council.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to improve the basic understanding of the hearing process in parliamentary specialist committees and to answer the question of how academics can best bring their insights into this process. What conclusions can be drawn? This chapter addresses **four distinct challenges** identified by the study: removing obstacles that exist for (young) researchers (Section 6.1), increasing the resources available to Parliament for obtaining academic policy advice (Section 6.2), increasing incentives within academia for providing policy advice (Section 6.3), and finally expanding training and networking opportunities (Section 6.4).

6.1 Removing obstacles for (young) researchers

This study clearly shows that, although many of the hearings held by specialist committees follow a **similar procedure**, there is **no obvious pattern as to how guests are selected**. During an interview, one member of Parliament acknowledged, “I, too, am sometimes surprised that there is not a more systematic approach to inviting guests [to hearings].” Throughout the interviews, the selection criterion considered most important was an academic guest’s level of expertise in a particular subject matter. Beyond that, a balanced guest list and guests’ language skills emerged as key criteria. An additional, noteworthy fact was that some interviewees included representatives from advocacy groups in the category of “academic experts” unless the interviewer explicitly limited the discussion to researchers.

Because the Swiss Young Academy serves as the voice of **young researchers** in Switzerland, it is especially interested in questions related to this group. Generally speaking, the current system **tends to make it difficult** to include young researchers in the process of transferring insights from academia to Parliament. The collaboration between the academic and political spheres in general is extremely multifaceted and should therefore be understood as a complex network (see also Ammon et al., 2022; Himmelsbach, 2019; Hofmänner, 2021; Messerli et al., 2015; Thurnherr, 2022). Furthermore, although the process used by parliamentary specialist committees to select hearing guests reflects a fundamentally balanced approach, it is **not particularly transparent** due to the absence of clearly defined selection criteria. Moreover, the strict **language criteria** pose an obstacle for (young) foreign researchers that should not be underestimated.

Particularly within the natural sciences, but also to an increasing degree within the social sciences, and even within certain areas of the humanities, English is cementing its place as the dominant working language. Thus, while placing a focus on Switzerland's national languages is supported by solid political and resource-related arguments, this focus runs contrary to the increasingly international landscape of Switzerland's institutions of higher education (see also Rossier & Bühlmann, 2018).

According to some of those interviewed, academic experts are not expected to undergo training in politics and communication in order to successfully participate in committee hearings; however, it is essential that they acquire **an in-depth understanding of parliamentary processes**, not least because of the particular characteristics of Switzerland's system for obtaining policy advice as described in this report (see also Hirschi et al., 2022; Zahn et al., 2022). And indeed, the needs of members of Parliament and their level of interest in the material presented may vary according to the type of business at hand. A greater need for information may exist for a parliamentary initiative proposed by a committee or for a motion than for a draft of a bill from the Federal Council. This is because a bill has already been worked on extensively by the administration and because the dispatch that accompanies a bill provides a comprehensive, written overview of the existing knowledge relevant to that particular bill.

During informal interviews (not analysed in this report), representatives from academia mentioned that, in some cases, hearings can take on a very **political** and thus at times "heated" tone. This observation was confirmed during interviews with members of Parliament who mentioned that partisan politics certainly motivate some of the questions posed during hearings' discussion sessions. These partisan aspects of the hearings, the language criteria, the detailed background knowledge required, and the at times politicised debate culture during discussions can all be obstacles for (young) researchers, at least when they are unprepared for them. Furthermore, barely any incentives or programmes exist within academia that improve the skills needed for providing policy advice (see also Zahn et al., 2022, as well as Sections 6.3. und 6.4).

6.2 Increasing the resources available to Parliament for obtaining academic policy advice

A significant insight gained from the interviews is that hearings held by specialist committees represent only a **small portion of the exchange between the academic and political spheres**. It was pointed out that the administration and academia also work together outside of the hearings, especially since there are administration staff members who have acquired a substantial amount of knowledge in specific subject areas. This statement is not surprising from a procedural perspective given that the administration generally has a significant role in drafting legislative bills (see also Section 2.2). However, particularly in this context, the question remains: Who, exactly, is responsible for what?

Even though Himmelsbach (2019) describes the hearings held by specialist committees as consultation procedures and not as policy advice, they still represent one of the **few formats in which academic experts and members of Parliament meet together in an institutional setting**. It is much more common for the federal administration to answer questions from members of Parliament of an academic nature. Because, however, the administration is under the authority of the Federal Council and thus the executive branch, the question arises as to how much this weakens Parliament as a legislative institution. It can be argued from a theoretical, democratic standpoint that members of Parliament should be as well informed as possible (and thus require access to academia) and that they should be able to keep the administration in check, which is more difficult when knowledge is conveyed mainly via the executive branch.

Furthermore, in contrast to members of national parliaments in other countries, members of Switzerland's Parliament carry out their parliamentary duties on a part-time basis and only have **modest staff and material resources** available to them (see also Ammann, 2021a). They can thus only partially compensate their information deficit by other means. Consequently, committee hearings serve the additional function of making up for the structural information advantage the federal administration has over Switzerland's part-time Parliament. This debate over resources is not new. Similar discussions take place most notably in the literature on the professionalisation of Switzerland's Parliament (see, for example, Bernauer & Witzig, 2018; Bundi, Eberli & Bütikofer, 2018; Z'graggen, 2009).

Suggestions on how to enhance the exchange of information between the academic and political spheres are currently being discussed at different levels of politics (see, for example, Ammon et al., 2022; Bundesrat, 2022; Hirschi et al., 2022; Hofmänner, 2021; Zahn et al., 2022; Tanner, 2023). Of course, it is clear that already today, collaboration between the political and academic spheres – or, in the context of this report, between members of Parliament and academic experts – is not limited to hearings held by parliamentary specialist committees. Examples of this collaboration mentioned by interviewees included **one-to-one interactions, hearings held by parliamentary groups**, the work done by the **Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+)** (especially in the role they play in the areas of research and higher education policy), and that of the extra-parliamentary commissions. It should be noted, however, that **extra-parliamentary commissions**, which were frequently mentioned in the interviews, are coordinated by the administration and therefore by the executive branch. As previously noted, the administration thus functions as a type of gatekeeper of academic information and, above all, communication.

The importance that members of Parliament place on informal interactions and the fact that they attribute great importance to the question-and-answer portion of hearings indicate that members of Parliament make deliberate use of the (few) resources available to them in order to **independently examine scientific facts**. These facts serve primarily to strengthen one's own political arguments, according to several interviewees (see also Grüninger, 2021). One member of Parliament, for example, mentioned that information provided during hearings is also important in the event of a later popular vote. Another interviewee explained the importance of recording the questions posed to academic experts and their answers in the minutes of a committee meeting, so they may be used later as support in a motion or in another parliamentary procedural request. In addition, one interviewee emphasised that for controversial items of business, committee hearings become particularly important. The academic community, and potential hearing guests within it, are advised to take the possibility of such dynamics into consideration when preparing to participate in a hearing.

6.3 Increasing incentives within academia for providing policy advice

In order for researchers to become more deeply involved in advising Parliament, it is necessary for them to have at their disposal the appropriate **skills and resources**. However, few incentives currently exist in the academic system for such involvement. Young researchers and established academics alike complain that bringing their academic expertise into the political process tends to hinder their academic careers (see Zahn et al., 2022). When academic positions are awarded, experience in providing academic policy advice is often disregarded, even if it is of the highest quality. Consequently, it is often not until later in their careers that researchers become involved in the process of providing advice to policymakers; in earlier years, they must first develop the requisite skills needed for participation in this process.

In order to remedy this problem, we recommend **adjusting the incentive structures for researchers in academia so that experience providing excellent academic policy advice is taken into account when research positions and funding are awarded**. When doing this, it is important to define clear criteria and adapt these criteria to the requirements of individual fields of research.

6.4 Expanding training and networking opportunities

In Switzerland, few continuing education and training opportunities exist that furnish researchers the fundamentals for providing responsible policy advice to Parliament. The opportunities that exist include the following:

- → [the Master in Science, Technology and Policy](#) programme at ETH Zurich;
- the → [PhD Program in Science & Policy](#) at the University of Zurich, the University of Basel, and ETH Zurich;
- → [Swiss Learning Health System's](#) course programme at the University of Lucerne;

- → [Franxini Boot Camps](#) and the Franxini Innovation Hub run by the Reatch! Research. Think. Change. think tank for researchers;
- → [politics courses for researchers](#) run by the Swiss National Science Foundation and Reatch.

The **opportunities in this area should be expanded and better linked together** to allow researchers at all stages of their careers the possibility to improve their skills in providing policy advice while also conducting their research. In addition, further research should be conducted to explore what characterises good policy advice in the first place. The findings from this research could be used to incorporate policy advice and political consulting into the core curriculum and early training for researchers.

This report has also shown that **additional opportunities for informal interaction are needed** in order to bring national academic experts and politicians together. A few such opportunities already exist and are listed in Appendix 1.

It would be beneficial to foster close collaboration and a regular exchange of information between the various stakeholders on a regular basis, especially in Switzerland with its small geographical size. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that, from a societal perspective, the primary task of academic research is to generate new knowledge. The transfer of this knowledge into the political sphere should be viewed as an additional task that requires sufficient time and human resources in order to be done successfully. It is therefore important to **strengthen existing structures** and gear them toward recurrent interactions with policymakers. At the same time, it is necessary to reduce redundant efforts and optimise the coordination between existing stakeholders involved in providing academic policy advice. In addition, **specific positions whose function is to coordinate and provide support** should be created where necessary. All of these efforts should pursue the larger aim of **spreading out the task of providing academic policy advice** in order to lighten the load for researchers when it comes to making high-quality content available and to making the transfer from research to policy advice as smooth as possible.

Appendix 1: Examples of existing opportunities for informal interaction aimed at bringing national academic experts and politicians together

- → [Science et Politique à table!](#): A new discussion format hosted by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+)
- [Science and Policy Commission](#): Run by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+)
- → [Geneva Science-Policy Interface](#): Backed by numerous institutions of higher education and research institutions
- → [Franxini Hive](#): Run by the Reatch! Research. Think. Change. think tank for researchers
- → [Think Tank Hub](#): An initiative led by the foraus think tank

In addition, the internationally oriented → [Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator](#), which is funded by the Canton of Geneva, the City of Geneva, and the Swiss Confederation, focuses on international policymaking and research collaborations that address future global issues and promotes the interaction of science with policymaking and diplomacy.

Appendix 2: References, methodology, anonymised list of interviewees, and disclosure of authors' relevant interests

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2.2 Methodology

Requests to participate in this project were sent via email and included a letter in support of the project from **Prof. Marcel Tanner**, President of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+) and Director Emeritus of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute; **Dr Peter Bieri**, a former member of the Council of States (1995–2015), President of the TA-SWISS foundation, and Vice President of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (a+); and **Prof. Barbara Haering**, Chair of the Executive Board of econcept AG, President of the Strategic Orientation Council at the University of Geneva, Vice President of the ETH Board, and a former member of the National Council (1990–2007).

Members of Parliament serving on the following parliamentary specialist committees (of the National Council and of the Council of States) were invited to participate: Science, Education and Culture (SECC), Social Security and Health (SSHC), and Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy (ESPEC). The criterion used to select these committees was that they must address complex topics that are currently subject to profound societal changes (e.g. biodiversity/climate, digitalisation, and demographic changes). Another consideration was that the committees handle topics for which both political and academic aspects are important. In addition to interviews with members of Parliament, **researchers** were interviewed who have taken part in such hearings or have otherwise been involved in the exchange between Swiss politics and academia. **Parliamentary Services staff members** were also interviewed because, due to the nature of their work, they are familiar with how committee hearings are organised.

This report is based on **25 interviews conducted with members of the federal Parliament, staff from Parliamentary Services at the Parliament Building, and researchers who work in Switzerland**. Of these 25 interviews, 24 were conducted between April and July 2021. An additional interview was held in July 2022 to ensure a higher degree of diversity with regard to the interviewees' political views. Quantitatively, focus was placed on members of Parliament who were members of a specialist committee (19 of the 25 interviewees). Both the National Council and the Council of States as well as all parliamentary groups (SVP, SP, FDP, The Centre, Green Party, and GLP) were represented. Nonetheless, it was not possible to exactly mirror the political make-up of Parliament in the group of politicians who were interviewed for this project. Therefore, it should be noted that the opinions expressed in the context of this study are not necessarily representative of Parliament as a whole. At the time of the interviews, almost all of

the interviewees from the political arena were active members of Parliament. In addition, two representatives of Parliamentary Services and four representatives of academia were interviewed. The interviews with staff members of Parliamentary Services and with researchers were conducted in order to include additional perspectives from individuals who do not represent the views of a political party but were nonetheless involved in hearings with academic experts, either as (potential or actual) guests at hearings (for researchers) or as staff of a committee's secretariat (for staff members of Parliamentary Services). Of the 25 individuals interviewed, 20 came from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The other five interviewees, four of whom were members of Parliament, came from the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

Of all those who were sent requests to participate in the study, approximately **13 percent** agreed to be interviewed. The **length** and **format** of each interview was tailored to each individual interviewee, and the interviews took place either in person or online, depending on the circumstances (COVID-19 pandemic). In general, each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and most of them took place online. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the topic to be discussed but not the individual questions. All interviews were semi-structured, consisting mostly of pre-determined questions; however, they were led with a fair degree of flexibility in order to yield as many insights as possible. There was also flexibility in terms of the order in which questions were asked. In addition, interviewers used the opportunities presented to ask targeted follow-up questions in order to go into more depth on certain aspects of the interviewees' responses. Participants could end an interview at any time or decline to answer a question. Moreover, they were informed that all of their statements would be anonymised. In order to preserve interviewees' anonymity and improve readability, some of the direct quotations included were edited slightly.

2.3 Anonymised list of interviewees

Note: The following table does not include any details about which specialist committees interviewees belong to so that no conclusions can be drawn about their identities.

Function	Language	Party
Member of Parliament	German	Green Party
Member of Parliament	French	Green Party
Member of Parliament	French	Green Party
Member of Parliament	German	SP
Member of Parliament	German	SP
Member of Parliament	German	SP
Member of Parliament	German	SP
Member of Parliament	German	SP
Member of Parliament	German	GLP
Member of Parliament	French	GLP
Member of Parliament	German	The Centre
Member of Parliament	German	The Centre
Member of Parliament	German	The Centre
Member of Parliament	German	The Centre
Member of Parliament	German	The Centre
Member of Parliament	French	FDP
Member of Parliament	German	FDP
Member of Parliament	German	FDP
Member of Parliament	German	SVP
Researcher	German	n/a
Researcher	German	n/a
Researcher	German	n/a
Researcher	German	n/a
Parliamentary Services staff member	French	n/a
Parliamentary Services staff member	German	n/a

2.4 Disclosure of authors' relevant interests



Reja Wyss is pursuing her doctorate in political sociology at the University of Oxford and is a member of Reatch. She was actively involved in the youth section of Switzerland's Green Party until 2019 and remains listed as a passive member.



Silvia Maier received her doctorate in neuroeconomics at the University of Zurich and works as a product manager at Sensirion Connected Solutions Ltd. She is a member of the Advisory Team for Reatch's Franxini Project. Silvia Maier shares with Odile Ammann the speaker position for the working group that wrote this report.



Odile Ammann is an associate professor of law at the University of Lausanne's Centre of Public Law and is currently completing a comparative law monograph on the constitutional foundations of legislative lobbying. She is a member of the Advisory Team for Reatch's Franxini Project. Odile Ammann shares with Silvia Maier the speaker position for the working group that wrote this report.



Servan L. Grüninger is the president of the Reatch think tank for researchers, which was launched by the Franxini Project. He is also a passive member of The Centre party. For a complete list of his interests and activities, visit <https://www.servangrueninger.ch/offen-ehrlich>.



Darius Farman is the co-director of the non-partisan think tank foraus and is a member of the Advisory Team for Reatch's Franxini Project. In the past, he served on the Swiss Young Academy's Executive Board (2022/2023) and was a member of Switzerland's Green Liberal Party. For additional interests and activities, visit <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dariusfarman>.

