Professional reintegration for federal parliamentarians

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Introduction

The Federal Assembly is composed of active parliamentarians who, as part-time public servants under the Swiss “militia” system, continue to engage in professional activity throughout their time in elected office. This feature of our political system can make combining parliamentary duties with professional life difficult. **Our study analyses, on the one hand, how former parliamentarians reconciled their professional and political commitments, and on the other, the transition between the end of their term of office and the resumption of their professional activities**.

In extending our previous studies from 2019 (Assanti et al., 2019) and 2021 (Bhatia et al., 2021), we gathered the opinions of parliamentarians ending the most recent legislature (2019-2023). With the new added data, the sample now encompasses 402 responses, and is representative in terms of gender, language and party.

Database analysis

The new data show that 43% of former members consider it difficult to combine both the professional and political activity. The difficulty is more strongly felt by women: in 2023, 64% of female former members found this conciliation difficult, as opposed to only 37% of men. We also found a clear difference between left-wing and right-wing parties, with major difficulties reported by members of the Socialist Party (54%) and the Green Party (62%).

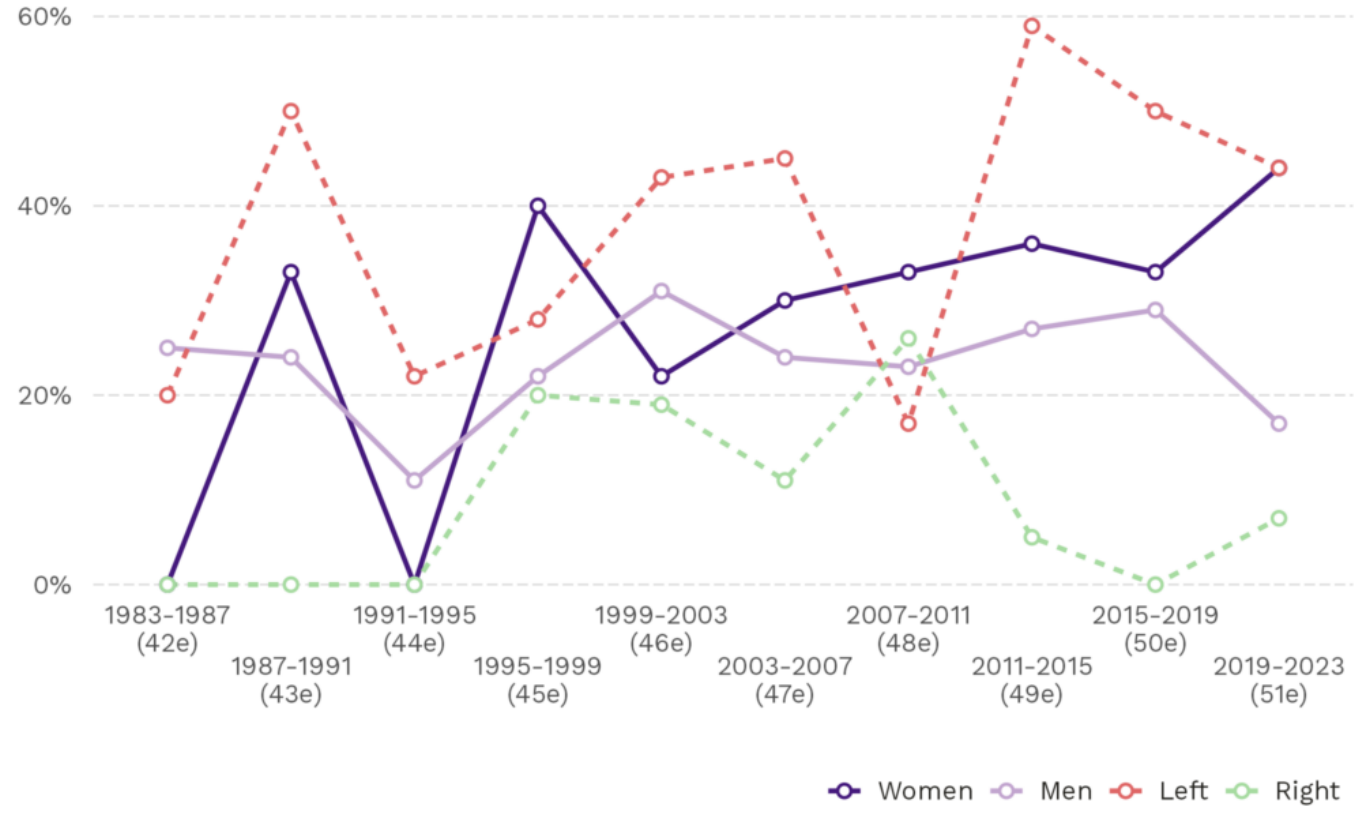
Many parliamentarians cut back their professional activity during their term of office (72%). There was no significant difference in terms of gender, but a reduction in professional activity was more marked for members of the Green Party (89%) and the Centre (82%).

The combination of parliamentary tasks and professional activities has become consistently harder over time: the number of those who consider the combination as “very difficult” today has doubled in comparison with the 42nd legislature (1983-1987), with a stronger increase for women from 1995 onwards (45th legislature).

The data collected in 2023 confirms the trend that was already apparent in 2019: a political term of office is generally seen as professionally favourable, with a notable exception for members of the Green Party, 40% of whom are of the opposite opinion. In addition, 47% of respondents consider that election to the Federal Assembly does not have a negative impact on one’s professional career, and this was especially the case for members of the FDP (centre-right).

The new data also confirm the increased difficulty perceived at the time of professional reintegration (see Figure 1). This was particularly marked for women (44%) and parliamentarians from left-wing parties (44%).

Figure 1. Percentage of persons who perceive the transition as difficult by gender and political affiliation



Graph : Alix d'Agostino, DeFacto

Conclusion and discussion

Our study shows that, in general, **combining professional activity with elected office is perceived as difficult by former parliamentarians, and more so by women and left-wing members**. In contrast, **a parliamentary term of office is generally seen as professionally favourable, and political exposure is not considered to be an obstacle when seeking employment**, except made for the members of the Green Party.

The results of our studies, confirmed by data on the 2019-2023 legislature, can be compared with the changing nature of the Federal Assembly. The number of parliamentarians aged between 18 and 30 more than doubled between 2008 and 2020. Also, women are proportionally more numerous than men in the youngest age bracket. Parliament is now younger and more representative of genders, which is likely to render the combination with professional activity more problematic. Professional reintegration at the end of a term of office in the federal parliament could therefore emerge as a major issue in the future.

References

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Picture: pexels.com

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