

The parliamentary staff of Austrian National Council Members

– a study on their background, job profile and recruitment



Livia C. Wurzer, Alexander M. Arndt
University of Vienna, Department of Political Science

livia.wurzer@gmx.at

Introduction

Background: The parliamentary staff (PaMis) was introduced in 1992 to support Austrian National Council Members (MPs) with their parliamentary activities. PaMis play a significant role for their MPs by, among a variety of tasks, assisting with public relations and organizational work, carrying out research and preparing information for them.

State of research: little research available; only a handful of papers (1997, 2000, 2007).

Motivation & aim: update previous studies, gain more knowledge for the political science community and the public sphere; personal experience as a PaMi (2018-2019).

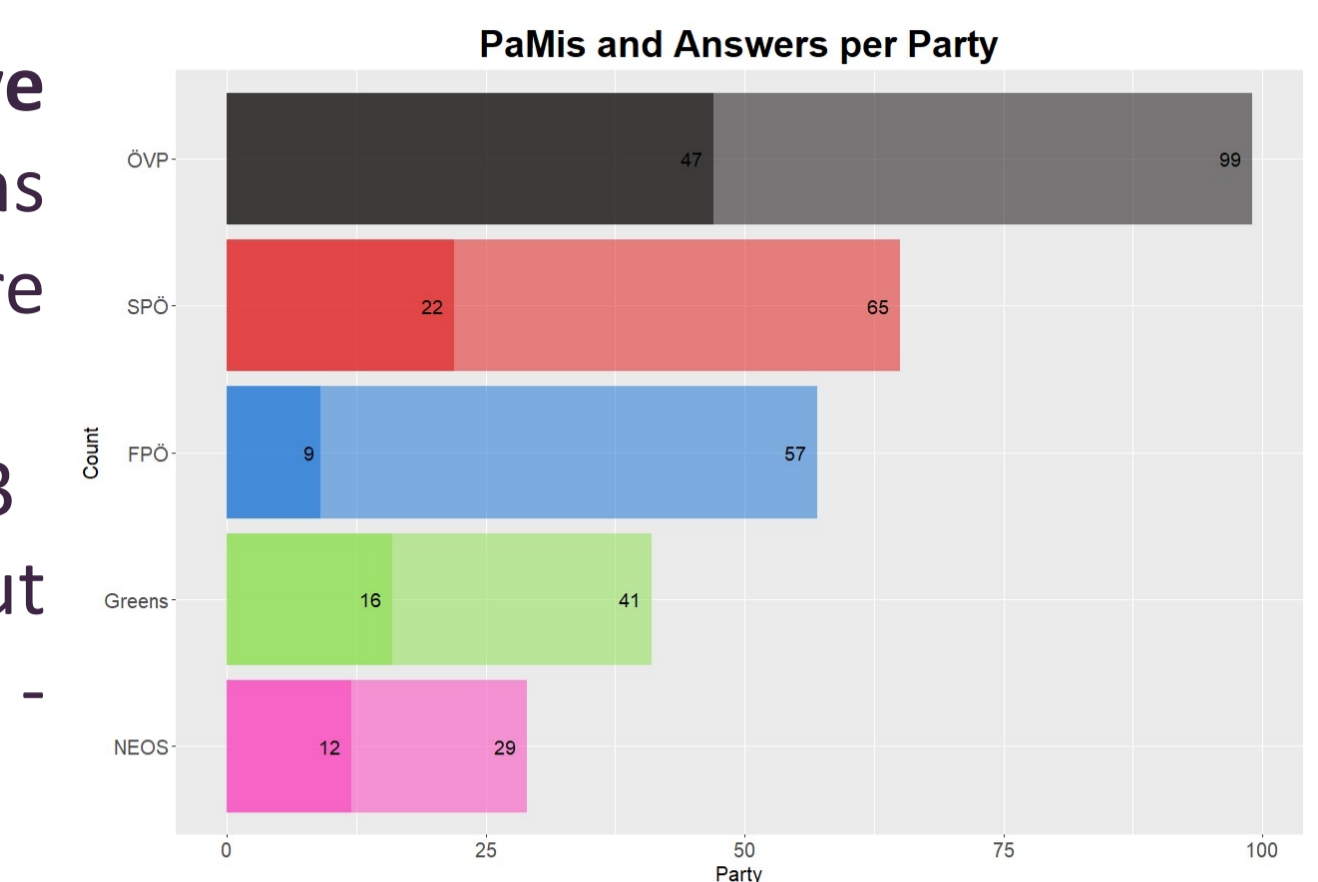
→ a study was conducted in a recently completed thesis → **who are those PaMis?**

Method

Quantitative & qualitative data was collected by means of an online questionnaire among current PaMis.

Sample period: 16.1.-6.2.2023

Response rate: 36,3% (106 out of 292 employees); 15,8% - 47,5% per each party.



Results

Personal and professional background

Age: 19 – 75 years; average: 32,1; median: 29

Gender: 54% female ♀, 46% male ♂

Level of education: 51% university graduates, 2,8% other high educational degree, 37,4% high school graduation or similar, 4,7% vocational middle school, 3,7% apprenticeship

Fields of study: quite diverse (landscape planning, architecture, agriculture, educational science etc.); most common: law and political science (21 mentions each)

Perceived qualifications

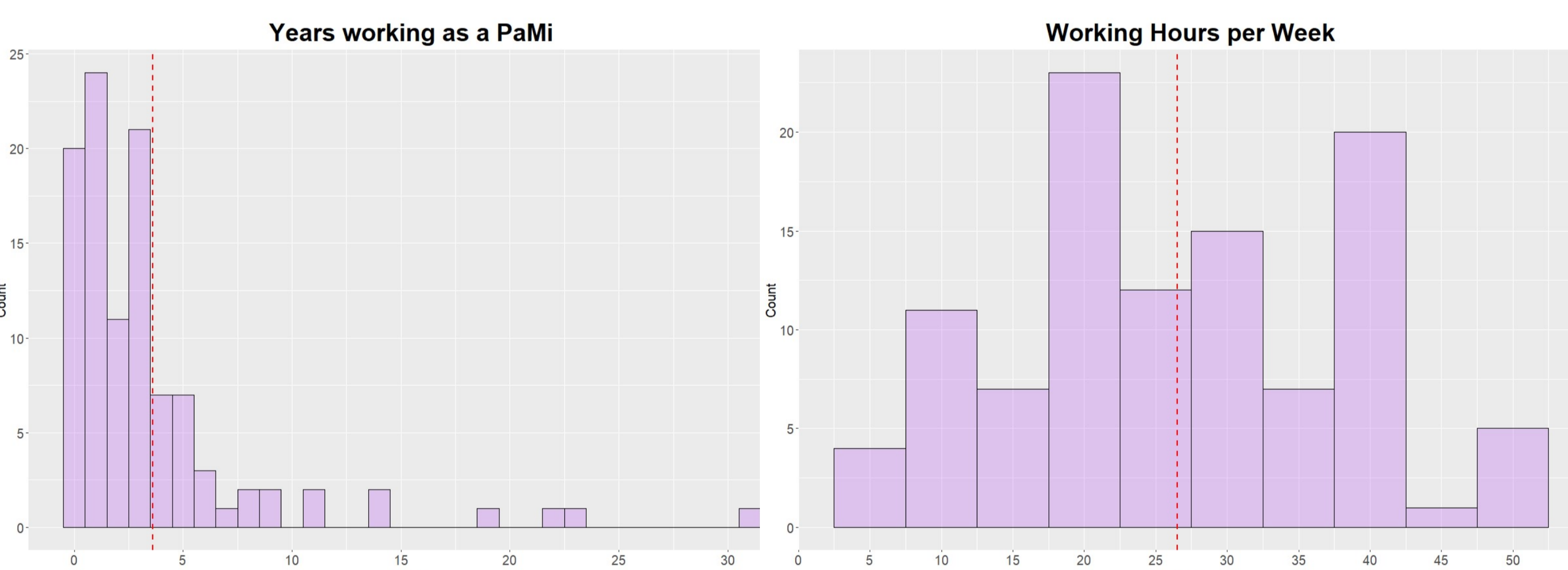
General skills: social media skills (67,3%), previous work in political sector (65,4%), previous work in communication sector (57%), parliamentarian knowledge (55,1%), political soft skills and organizational skills (10,1%), no skills (5,6%)

Specific skills: university studies (39,3%), previous work experience (34,6%), previous club experience (34,6%), no specific skills (29%)

Type and scope of employment

Contract type and number of employment relationship: 99,1% employment contracts, 0,9% service contracts; 79% are directly employed by one MP, whereas the **green** MPs (as well as a few MPs from **FPÖ** and **ÖVP**) only hire in working groups ("Abgeordnetenpool"), which serves to prevent dependency from the MPs.

322 contracts for 292 employees; 83% PaMis work for one MP, 9,3% for two MPs, 7,5% for three MPs; **ÖVP** has the highest number of multiple hires (14).



Political values and party affiliation

66% are party members of the same party as their MPs, 90% most closely identify with the party of their MP(s); **ÖVP**, **SPÖ** and **FPÖ** have significant (>80%) higher rates of party members than **Grüne** and **NEOS** (<20%).

MP's and parties' hiring processes

The majority became aware of the job through MPs (43,1%) or their own network (27,2%); 54,4% knew the MP(s) in advance -> vast differences between parties. Only **NEOS** and the **Grüne** advertise open positions publicly (through official websites, newsletter and personal social media channels); additionally, some MPs from **SPÖ** & **ÖVP** through their personal social media channels.

Party of MP	Knew personally via				Knew via Media	Did not know MP	Total
	Party	Friends/Acquaintances	Other Organisations	Previous Work			
ÖVP	40.0%	13.0%	11.0%	2.1%	8.5%	26.0%	100.0%
SPÖ	36.0%	9.1%	9.1%	4.5%	4.5%	36.0%	100.0%
FPÖ	44.0%	22.0%	11.0%	0.0%	11.0%	11.0%	100.0%
Greens	25.0%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%	56.0%	100.0%
NEOS	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	42.0%	100.0%
Total	34.0%	10.0%	7.5%	1.9%	13.0%	33.0%	100.0%

Electoral district

Over 50% have a connection to the constituency of their MP(s) and just under 30% are also politically active in it.

Career prospects

Time horizon: 52,3% want to switch jobs by the end of the recent legislative period. 17,3% want to continue past the current period; 10,3% are undecided, 2,8% depending on university studies; 15,9% did not answer the question.

Future work areas: politics least mentioned response (14%) of the options provided; public service (43,4%) and private sector (40,6%) preferred; 64,1% other areas.

Working conditions / advantages and disadvantages of the job



Conclusion

The study gives a comprehensive overview of the group of people as well as the employment situation and provides first insights into the staffing processes

- ❖ There is a **broad range within the sociodemographic background** of PaMis, while a clear majority has a **high level of education** and a **large percentage of them are students below the age of 30**.
- ❖ There is **no concrete skill profile** provided by the PaMis; **specific skills connected to the MPs field of work are less common than general skills** (ratio 1:2); **social media skills were most mentioned** which leads to the assumption that it might be a central element of the job.
- ❖ There are **vastly different employment arrangements** regarding form & number of contracts & MPs
- ❖ Employment duration, working hours as well as future career prospects indicate that the job might be **rather unsuitable for a longer full-time employment** ⇒ does this impact the quality of the staff?
- ❖ Jobs are **hardly ever advertised on the public labor market**, whereas **personal and political contacts play a significant role in filling positions** ⇒ fair or public access?
- ❖ **Working conditions, tasks and payment might differ between parties and MPs** ⇒ are more regulations needed (within the party or by law)?
- ❖ **Significant differences between parties** were found in those areas:
 - Party memberships, recruiting and workplace (**ÖVP**, **SPÖ**, **FPÖ** versus **Grüne** & **NEOS**).
 - **NEOS** and **Grüne** are also the only parties who advertise their jobs publicly via club websites.
 - The **Grünen** stand out concerning working conditions (35h full-time; working groups; payment due to qualification and work council regulations are applied to their PaMis).

Future Research Areas

While the present study offers a first step towards a comprehensive evaluation of the PaMis and their work, **more research is still recommended**. Since the last study was performed more than 20 years ago the remuneration entitlement of MPs has increased in 2014 and with the NEOS a new party has entered the National Council. Also, as the results point out, the tasks and the job profile may have changed since the introduction of the position (e.g. the need for a higher social media presence of the MPs). Therefore, the involvement of the parliamentary management as well as interviews with the MPs themselves might be needed.

This work is intended to serve as a **guide for future research**. It has identified issues in the **following areas**:

Qualifications, fields of duties, labor regulations and salary, reasons for differences between parties concerning party memberships and public tenders, post-employment career paths, detailed international comparisons, influence of the parliamentary work on the MPs and the institution itself.