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STRUCTURE OF GENERATIONS IN AUSTRIAN PARLIAMENTS

1919 - 1979

Dieter Stiefel[†]

This article is part of a collective biography of the 1053 Members of the Austrian Parliament from 1919 to 1979. We took generation as a basis proceeding on the hypothesis, that members of social organizations are not in a state of continuous change, but proceed rather in generations. This can be identified by our assumption, that within a generation block at least 3/4 of all MPs of each period should belong to that generation. Thereby we distinguish the following generations in Austrian Parliament: 1919 - 1934, the generation between the two wars, 1945 - 1966, the generation of coalition government, 1966 - up to the present, the generation of one party government. The generation approach is the basis for our study and a method of interpretation of developments which otherwise appear purely accidental.

If a collective biography is done in the context of economic and social history, the purpose of the study will differ slightly from that of ordinary parliamentary studies. What we tried, was to make an analysis of a social group over a long time period. This group of people should then be compared with other elite groups like high rank state officials or top management groups. To begin with, we started with the members of the Austrian Parliament (MPs) simply because the most accurate data was available in this field. Thus our study of the Austrian Parliament is not so much a study of political recruitment but a biography of a group over a period of 60 years. We are not so much interested in a static picture but in the process of change and continuity. The case of a parliament is conducive for such a study because the system of successive elections demonstrates a change every few years, which in this case gives us a sequence of sixteen pictures (i.e. periods) which span 60 years. Therefore, one of the main problems in the study of other elite groups, the time element, does not occur here.

In our opinion, the difference of our work to other studies lies in the socio-economic approach. The study covers the whole period of the Republic of Austria and the 1053 MPs who have served in Parliament during this time (1919 - 1979). It was our aim to analyse not just a sample, but the total number of MPs over this period, thereby taking into account the time element.

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Analysing the social composition of the Austrian Parliament by such variables as age, education, occupation, local political experience etc., we directed our main attention towards the analysis and interpretation of change. Some changes, like the rising education level for instance, were more or less continuous, and can be identified to a certain degree as a trend. But about other changes, for example the average age of MPs, we cannot be certain. There were periods where it rose and where it fell. Was there no definite direction in change? Is the age structure of the parliament determined by accident, or by specific historical events? Or does a structure and development exist which we have simply not yet learnt to read?

In our case, we finally conceived an approach which took "generation" as its basis, proceeding on the assumption that members of social organizations are not in a state of continuous change, but proceed rather in generations. This assumption has already been proved in business history as well as in the history of other social organizations, such as universities.

To identify the generations, we started by looking at the distribution of MPs in different periods (Table 1). The underlined figures in the table show the total number of MPs in each period. These figures vary because of the 165 seats in parliament (183 since 1972) and there are some occupied by two successive members during one period. The other figures show the number of MPs in a period, who had previously served in parliament or who were to continue for further terms of office. For instance, of the 185 MPs in period 10, 122 had served in the period before, and 131 were to serve in the following period, etc.. At first sight, the distribution table hardly suggests a generation structure. We therefore needed a historical reference point; 1945 was the obvious choice. Of all the 409 MPs who served in parliament between the two wars, only 21 were to sit in parliament again in 1945.

Political persecution, Nationalsocialism and World War II resulted in a break of the political and personal continuity of the Austrian Parliament unique in our history.

Thus it is not too much a problem to identify the MPs of the inter-war period as a generation, because from 1945 onwards they were barely present. The 11 years of no parliament activity between 1934 and 1945 can therefore be thought of as the turning point from one generation to another and 1945 as the beginning of a new generation of MPs in the Austrian Parliament. Because of these historical events it was quite easy to define the first change of generation, but to identify this change in normal times we have to define in statistical terms what a generation is.

Our first hypothesis is that a generation in Austrian Parliament lasts until the number of MPs of the first period of the generation diminishes to less than 10 % in one of the succeeding periods.

Our second and even more important hypothesis says that within a generation block at least three quarters of all MPs of each period should belong to that generation. Or, the other way round, no more than 25 %

Generations in Austrian Parliament
 Distrubtion of MPs by periods

Table 1

1919/20	0	<u>191</u>	139	105	84	59	5	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1920/23	1	139	<u>203</u>	135	103	72	5	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1923/27	2	105	135	<u>179</u>	128	90	7	4	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
1927/30	3	84	103	128	<u>175</u>	122	13	8	5	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
1930/34	4	59	72	90	122	<u>198</u>	21	14	11	7	3	1	-	-	-	-	-
1945/49	5	5	5	7	13	21	<u>180</u>	113	86	70	51	32	16	8	2	1	-
1949/53	6	3	3	4	8	14	113	<u>173</u>	124	101	77	43	23	12	5	2	-
1953/56	7	-	-	1	5	11	86	124	<u>179</u>	140	107	66	33	18	9	5	1
1956/59	8	-	-	1	2	7	70	101	140	<u>179</u>	134	86	50	27	17	9	3
1959/62	9	-	-	1	2	3	51	77	107	134	<u>180</u>	122	74	39	27	16	6
1962/66	10	-	-	-	1	1	32	43	66	86	122	<u>185</u>	131	90	75	42	25
1966/70	11	-	-	-	-	-	16	23	33	50	74	131	<u>181</u>	126	108	70	44
1970/71	12	-	-	-	-	-	8	12	18	27	39	90	126	<u>174</u>	153	107	71
1971/75	13	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	9	17	27	75	108	153	<u>207</u>	152	109
1975/79	14	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	5	9	16	42	70	107	152	<u>198</u>	150
ab 1979	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	6	25	44	71	109	150	<u>188</u>
Period	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	

of MPs of each period should stand outside the generation.

If we consider our hypothesis "of 10 %" the first postwar generation lasts from 1945 - 1970 (Table 1).

If we consider the second hypothesis, the following generation starts in 1962 and is still going on in 1979. There is a transitional period (1962 - 1970), which can be regarded as normal for the change of generations in social organizations. Such a change does not occur overnight, but takes years, and of course there are some MPs who fall "between generations", belonging neither to the old nor to the new one.

But otherwise, using our two hypotheses, we can distinguish the following blocks of generations within the Austrian Parliament:

1. 1919 - 1934
The generation between the two wars.
2. 1945 - 1966
The generation of coalition government.
The two leading political parties governed the country together in a kind of national government.
3. 1966 - up to the present
The generation of one-party governments and strong opposition.
Our data shows that we are witnessing a change in generation in the first half of the 1980s.

It seems that our two hypotheses lead to historically acceptable findings. But it remains to be seen how other developments within the Austrian Parliament fit in with our conception of generations. First of all, we have the fact that on average an MP serves the equivalent of three periods, that is about 10 years, in parliament, whereas a generation lasts for 15 - 20 years. Therefore there must be a hard core of long serving MPs in each generation:

e.g. the 70 MPs of the 1945 parliament who still held their political position in 1956, - or, the 71 MPs of 1979 who were already in parliament 1970.

The development of two other variables also support the generation idea: the average age and experience grow within each generation (Table 2). By experience, we mean the number of periods a MP has already served in parliament. The application of our generation concept proves that the development of age and experience is not continuous, but grows within each generation and diminishes during the periods of change. The first and last periods of the inter-war years do not fit exactly into this system, likewise three other periods of the intermediate time between the first and second post-war generation. Apart from these exceptions the phenomenon of an increasing average age and increasing experience was evidently strong in the inter-war generation and in the first post-war generation.

Table 2

Experience and Age in Austrian Parliament

Period/year	Experience	Age
0 1919/20	1,29	47,4
1 1920/23	1,91	46,3
2 1923/27	2,34	48,3
3 1927/30	2,95	49,9
4 1930/34	2,80	48,0
5 1945/49	1,28	49,5
6 1949/53	1,84	50,7
7 1953/56	2,27	51,4
8 1956/59	2,79	52,5
9 1959/62	3,08	53,0
10 1962/66	2,90	51,1
11 1966/70	2,81	50,5
12 1970/71	2,84	50,4
13 1971/75	2,91	48,7
14 1975/79	3,01	49,3
15 1979	3,18	50,8

Experience - number of periods an MP has already served in Parliament.

Age - average age of all MPs in the period

This is easily explicable by the special political conditions, which existed after the First and the Second World war. After the two wars 70 % to 80 % of all MPs were new to parliament, relatively young and having no parliamentary experience. It is worth while looking a little closer at these two important breaks in Austrian parliamentary life. It was in some ways astonishing that with the foundation of the Austrian Republic after the First World War there was not a completely new parliament. There was no start from zero but continuing strong political connections to the period before the war. 29 % of the Austrian MPs of 1919 had already been members of the parliament of the Austrian Monarchy. Some of these pre-war veterans sat in parliament even after 1945. What a different situation after World War II! This time the break was stronger. Now, only 12 % of MPs had pre-war parliamentary experience. Once more, this is a proof that the connections of the First Republic to the Monarchy were much stronger than those of the Second Republic to the First.

In normal times (i.e. excluding the parliaments which immediately preceded the two wars) the average service in parliament lasts about three periods, which indicates statistically, that one third of MPs change every period. In other words, at least two thirds of all MPs are reelected in a succeeding period. It is a proven fact that MPs stand a good chance of being reelected to parliament, if there are no real reasons for them to leave (for example old age, ill health, or a move to another political position). But our data shows that the replacement of MPs is not a steady process of 33 % each period, but rather that high personal stability and extensive renewal alternate each other.

The 1950s, and especially the late 1950s, were a period of high stability. The 1960s, and the first years of the 1970s were a period of extensive personnel change; since then, we have once again been witnessing high personnel stability (Table 3). Each new election means a coming and going of MPs, but the extent of the change varies in intensity according to the state of the generation.

It might be possible to argue that the whole development in the Austrian Parliament was determined solely by the consequences of the wars. If we take change in age and experience of MPs as being simply a result of these events, we would be now moving towards a normal situation, i.e. an average experience of about three periods and an average age of about 52 years.

Of course, the inter-war generation and the first post-war generation were to a high degree determined by the two wars. The validity of our "generation approach" depends therefore on the proof of the change from the first to the second post-war generation as this was the only normal generation change. In this transitional period we can find

Table 3

Change and continuity in the Austrian Parliament

Period/year	Change			Continuity
	1	2	3	
0 1919/20	191	136	71 %	29 %
1 1920/23	203	64	31 %	69 %
2 1923/27	179	44	25 %	75 %
3 1927/30	175	47	27 %	73 %
4 1930/34	198	76	38 %	62 %
5 1945/49	180	159	88 %	12 % +
6 1949/53	173	60	35 %	65 %
7 1953/56	179	55	31 %	69 %
8 1956/59	179	39	22 %	78 %
9 1959/62	180	46	26 %	74 %
10 1962/66	185	63	34 %	66 %
11 1966/70	181	50	28 %	72 %
12 1970/71	174	48	26 %	72 %
13 1971/75	207	54	26 %	74 %
14 1975/79	198	46	23 %	77 %
15 ab 1979	188	38	20 %	80 %

1 - total number of MPs in the period

2 - number of new MPs in the period

3 - number of new MPs in % of the total number of MPs

Continuity - % of MPs who have already served in the preceding period

+ - the period of 1949/53 compared with the period of 1930/34

all the important elements of our generation idea:

- The personnel instability of the 1960s and the change to the stability of the 1970s
- The rise in the average age of MPs from 1971 onwards
- The growth of experience from 1966 onwards.

Moreover, experience is not growing at the same rate as in previous generations, its growth pattern is clear and continuous (Table 2).

The "generation approach" explains many developments, which could otherwise not be explained. The rise and fall in the average age of MPs can only be seen as a consequence of changing generations. The generation system is confirmed by most of the other variables. For example, the proportion of academics among MPs mainly rises by generations; in each generation there is a characteristic structure of occupational backgrounds. Whereas in the inter-war period, pre-industrial bodies such as farmers and the clergy were strongly represented, the first post-war generation shows the important influence of small business, and the second a clear predominance of white-collar workers.

The proof of the validity and the applicability of the "generation approach" can be used for all other variables, such as local political influence, political functions, etc. For this, I refer to our detailed study of the Austrian Members of Parliament which will be published shortly. The generation approach is confirmed in all these tests, although one must point out that the generation structure is very often obscured, due to complicated relationships with other developments. But even the consequences of specific historical events as well as long term trends are discernable in parliament generation by generation; e.g. the disturbance of the Second World War was reflected in the first post-war generation and each generation since 1919 has seen an abrupt increase in the proportion of white-collar workers in parliament. The generation approach - at least for the purposes of the study of the Austrian MPs 1919 - 1979 - was a method of interpretation of changing developments which would otherwise appear purely accidental.

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