

## ABSTRACTS\*

**Krumm, Thomas: Consociational democracy under competitive pressure. The parliamentary elections in Switzerland of October 21, 2007.**

Due to the impressive rise of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) on the one end as well as the Greens and Social Democrats on the other end of the political spectrum since the 1990s (bi-polarization), considerable pressure has built up on the established instruments of Switzerland's consociational (concordance) democracy, at least on a symbolical and rhetorical level. After the penultimate election in 2003, this pressure could still have been alleviated by changing the "magic formula" in favor of the SVP. However, the question of a green representation in government remains. In 2007, the discussion reached new levels with both the departure of the controversial federal councilor (Bundesrat) *Christoph Blocher*, which was enforced by parliament, and the announcement by the SVP of a "walk into opposition". Despite this, the political forms practiced up to now have proven surprisingly adaptable. Nevertheless, Switzerland will still have to position herself for the challenge of a more majoritarian democracy in the future. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 683 ff.]

**Kropp, Sabine, Benedikt Giesbers, Nicole Höhmann, Laura Möllers and Matthias Ruschke: The quality of democracies at the discretion of research. The Vanhanen index in the laboratory of the German Länder and the Swiss cantons.**

Based on annual measurements, the quality of democracy in the Swiss cantons and the German Länder in the period from 1990 to 2006 is assessed according to the *Vanhanen* index, which is solely based on statistical figures. The results are amazing at first glance: while the index invariably identifies the German Länder as democracies, it suggests that autocratic enclaves exist in Switzerland. Whereas the Swiss cantons are consociational democracies in which instruments of direct democracy are frequently used, the German Länder are majoritarian democracies, which mainly feature representative institutions. Comparing them reveals that the *Vanhanen* index is highly sensitive to how political scientists classify political systems and to which definitions they use. By shifting parameters slightly, researchers are able to turn democracies into autocracies and vice versa. The findings do not only enforce existing skepticism vis-à-vis the *Vanhanen* index but also suggest that other indices measuring democracy should be tested in the laboratory of sub-national comparison as well. This way, their explanatory power can be assessed more precisely. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 702 ff.]

\* Diese sind in deutscher Sprache zu finden auf [www.zparl.de](http://www.zparl.de) beziehungsweise [www.politik.uni-halle.de/zparl](http://www.politik.uni-halle.de/zparl).

***Beyrl, Maria, Peter Filzmaier and Floob Perlot: Information-seeking behavior in Austria at the election of the Nationalrat 2006.***

It is rather undisputed that mass media are the key source of information when it comes to politics. The public gets most of its information and ideas about politics from television, newspapers, the radio and the Internet. But both terms – the mass media and the public – are fairly abstract and unclear. Mass media sums up a bunch of different actors who transport their content by different means and through different communication channels. The public can also be broken down into different groups of age, income, education and so on. Looking mainly at the public's usage of mass media in Austria around the year 2006, no difference can be detected between usage within election campaign periods and without. According to socio-demographic factors, the Internet proves to be a medium of the younger generation whereas television is more used by older ones. However, altogether, TV remains the most used information source in all groups, followed – after a considerable gap – by newspapers and the radio. The question whether further consequences will arise from the fact that TV has recently lost some credibility among its users remains open. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 727 ff.]

***Köpl, Stefan: An expected victory – but also with some surprise. The Italian parliamentary elections of April 13/14, 2008.***

The breakdown of the *Romano Prodi* government, due to internal struggles, led to elections after a legislative period of only two years. In the run-up to the elections, the Democratic Party's decision to run alone suspended the well-known race for the largest catch-all electoral alliance. Thus, in contrast with the previous trend towards bipolarity, the voters faced five main electoral alliances. The elections resulted in an unprecedented reduction of party fragmentation in parliament, possibly opening the door to a new era in Italy's party system. The new centre-right cabinet, once again under *Silvio Berlusconi*, now finds the most favorable preconditions for effective government ever to exist in post-war Italy. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 740 ff.]

***Münch, Holger: Landslide as surface phenomenon. The parliamentary elections in Poland of October 21, 2007.***

The parliamentary elections in Poland in autumn 2007 continued the phenomenon of alternation, which has dominated since the first fully free elections after the democratic transition in 1991. The ultra-catholic and populist parties were swept from both chambers of the parliament and the quite unpopular (in particular abroad) government of the *Kaczyński* brothers suffered a severe defeat. Their successors' coalition, consisting of rather heterogeneous partners, particularly concerning questions of economic policies, has been under high pressure ever since from the permanent inter-institutional conflict caused by cohabitation with a president from the defeated camp. Against this background, the task of implementing the long-delayed and necessary reforms seems almost insurmountable. Therefore, the hope and euphoria voters have focused on the change in government are likely to deflate and turn into a renewed wave of demobilization of large parts of the electorate – a circumstance from which mainly the *Kaczyńskis* would benefit. Contrary to initial impressions, their support (counted in voter turnout) grew stronger in 2007, which means that

the brothers' party still represents one of the few – if not the only – stable forces in a political landscape dominated by high fluctuation and low stability. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 756 ff.]

***Stykov, Petra: The transformation of the Russian party system: Regime stabilization through personalized institutionalization.***

The Russian party system of the 1990s was floating, highly fragmented and polarized. During *Vladimir Putin's* presidency, the transformation into a stable, concentrated system with a dominant or even hegemonic “state-party” took place. While *Boris Yeltsin* relied on machine politics, *Putin* focused on the institutionalization of an electoral, parliamentary and membership party – “United Russia”. Its dominant position allowed reforms of the party and of electoral law. Without being genuinely non-democratic, these reforms helped to curtail political competition. The dynamics of the party system is part of a broader authoritarian trend in the political system, characterized as “competitive authoritarianism”. The endogenous stabilization of this regime type seems possible under the condition that the incumbent elites are able to contain the intra-elite competition and to secure sufficient support from the electorate. *Putin's* reform program comprised different projects of formal institutionalization, thus revealing that non-democratic regime consolidation must not necessarily or exclusively rely on informal-clientelist practices or openly repressive means. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 772 ff.]

***Thieme, Tom: Change of party systems in East Central Europe: Stability and effectiveness through concentration effects?***

The party systems in East Central Europe have gone through various processes of change in the past two decades. On the one hand, this is due to profound political, economic and cultural changes during the transformation. On the other hand, it is due to the shortened democratization phase during which the party systems changed themselves clearly faster and more dynamically than in Western Europe. One of the central changes lies in the constantly increasing party concentration, connected with a continuously diminishing fragmentation. As causes, three factor bundles can be identified: (1) basic institutional conditions, (2) social cleavages and (3) individual forms of organization and behavior of the political participants. The effects of the party concentration generally led to higher government stability and greater alliance ability. This can be undermined by individual (wrong) behaviors of the political elite. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 795 ff.]

***Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand, Henrike Schultze, Philipp Harfst and Katja Fettelschoff: Party governments in Central and Eastern Europe: Empirical findings in cross-national comparison 1990 to 2008.***

A systematic comparative overview of party governments in eleven Central and Eastern European parliamentary democracies from 1990 to 2008 is presented. The cross-national data show that coalition governments with parliamentary majorities are the dominant type of party government, whereas one-party majority governments are more stable than multi-party majority governments. All in all, the party governments in Central and Eastern

Europe are similar to the ones in Western Europe, which indicates an adaptation of party governments in Europe. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 810 ff.]

**Platter, Julia and Barış Çalıřkan: The Turkish constitutional court on its way to a new role as “guardian of the constitution”.**

The Turkish parliamentary system was severely tested during the election of the former foreign minister *Abdullah Gül* as president of the state in 2007. The opposition parties successfully delayed the election by an application to the Turkish constitutional court based on article 150 of the Turkish constitution. This lawsuit was part of the conflict between the national-kemalistic camp on the one hand and religious-oriented conservative groups on the other. Analyzing article 150 of the Turkish constitution and its procedural conditions and comparing them with procedural rules for the German constitutional court reveals that the Turkish constitutional court interpreted its constitutional authorities as extensive. However, the court has made use of rational and well-known reasons and arguments, which have also been brought up by German constitutional courts in comparable decisions. It is remarkable that in this political crisis, not the armed forces but the court was given the role of an arbitrator. Perhaps, this decision will lead to a new attitude of accepting the constitutional court as a conflict manager between the political forces. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 832 ff.]

**Kimmel, Adolf: Consolidation of hyper-presidentialism or emancipation of the parliament? The French constitutional amendment of July 23, 2008.**

On July 21, 2008 the congress voted in favor of the most comprehensive reform of the French constitution of 1958. The reform originates from the request of president *Nicolas Sarkozy* to modernize the constitution of the Fifth Republic on the one hand and to maintain its essential structure on the other. On the basis of the report of a commission appointed by the president, the government submitted a draft on April 23, 2008, which was then substantially changed in the parliamentary consulting process. Although it realized several long-standing demands, the parliamentarians of the left-wing parties rejected the revision because essential proposals made by the Socialist Party did not receive satisfactory consideration. The key element of the constitutional reform lies in a strengthening of parliament, which receives new competences and whose working conditions are improved. Some restrictive regulations of the “rationalized parliamentarism” are loosened but the government keeps sufficient options for disciplining members of parliament. The position of the opposition is only slightly improved. Regarding the president, the most spectacular innovation is his right to make a statement about his politics before congress. All in all, the Fifth Republic retains its basic character as a parliamentary system under a still stronger presidential leadership. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 849 ff.]

**Heer, Sebastian: Accident, design, evolution? Explaining New Zealand’s 1993 electoral reform.**

In 1993, New Zealand’s voters raised a political shockwave: In a binding referendum, a majority decided to replace the first-past-the-post electoral system (FPTP) and to introduce

a mixed-member-proportional system (MMP), as used in Germany, instead. Bearing in mind the traditionally stable character of electoral systems, the question arises whether the New Zealand electoral reform can be best explained as accident, product of constitutional design or the result of a long-term evolutionary process. Of these three, the evolutionary model offers a wide range of plausible reasons for this reform. It best explains this exceptional process of institutional learning and maintains plausibility in other cases as well. Nevertheless, the New Zealand example also makes clear that electoral reforms often prove to be a combination of the elements of accident, design and evolution. [ZParl, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 867 ff.]