

ABSTRACTS*

Gabriel, Oscar W. and Everhard Holtmann: „Ober sticht unter?“ The effects of federal politics on German state parliament elections: context factors, theoretical frame and models of analysis.

The empirical research of elections in Germany has normally neglected voting on the state level. For decades, state parliament elections have been “overshadowed” by federal topics, making it difficult to determine the specific degree of context that cooperative federalism and entangled policies affect individual voters’ decisions in the Länder. Are there any consequences that result from these outcomes? If yes: Do context factors or situational moments play a predominant role? Here, the scientific “blueprint” of the following series of studies presenting empirical analyses of state parliament elections in nine German states is explained. For the first time, data that was not only aggregated, but also from state focused survey data, has been taken as a basis for analyzing voters’ behavior in state parliament elections. While the results do not show a uniform line, there is no doubt that federal topics do matter. It is likely that effects of them on state parliament elections exist if (1) federal and state elections are held on the same day, (2) there is a significant lack of long-lasting party identification, (3) the same parties are governing on both levels, (4) there is no clear party competition in the state, and (5) the candidates of both the governing party and the opposition party are ranked on the same place by the voters. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 445 ff.]

Schnapp, Kai-Uwe: State parliament elections and federal politics: still an open question? New answers based on comparisons between the German states using aggregate data.

The question whether state parliament elections are to be regarded as dominated by the federal level, or rather, as independent from it, does not yet seem to be answered. So far, research in this field has solely focused on the differences in outcome of adjacent elections. However, this obscures long-term differences in the levels of electoral support for the various parties. More closely, analysis of these level differences reveals there is supporting evidence for the idea that state parliament elections have grown more independent of federal influence in the more recent past. Another hypothesis is that parts of the German electorate show moderate voting behavior at the Land level (i.e. voters deliberately try to elect a majority in the Bundesrat that is in opposition to the ruling majority in the Bundestag). Nonetheless, the results demonstrate this is likely not to be the case. If anything, it is a clear pattern of assigning responsibility (easy if the state and federal governments consist of the same parties, and difficult if not) that makes voters choose in favor or against the parties of the reigning federal government. The analysis is based on the electoral results of federal and state elections, gathered at district level since 1960. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 463 ff.]

* Diese sind in deutscher Sprache zu finden auf www.zparl.de beziehungsweise www.politik.uni-halle.de/zparl.

Völkl, Kerstin: What influence do federal politics have on the decisions of voters at state parliament elections? A longitudinal analysis of individual data in comparison of the German states.

Politicians and journalists usually regard state parliament elections as test elections for the incumbent federal government. In research, it is a common assumption that federal politics have a clear influence on state elections. This is particularly relevant when the election of the state parliament is held in the middle of the election period of the federal government. Such results are based on aggregate data that do not allow any statements about the motives of individual voters. Research based on individual data arrives at a more sophisticated result. In the direct perception of citizens, federal politics play an important role for their voting decision, but are less important than state politics. Indirect measurements of the relevance of federal politics confirm the influence of the satisfaction with the federal government on voting in favor of the CDU/CSU or the SPD at state elections is rather small. The approval of the federal government can influence individual voting decisions only in exceptional situations to a degree that is similar to the effects of the factors satisfaction with the state government and the preferred prime minister candidate. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 480 ff.]

Maier, Jürgen: State parliament elections in Rhineland-Palatinate 1951 to 2001: strong influence from federal politics, great importance of party attachments.

Due to the de-alignment of long-term party attachments, the balance of power changed dramatically in Rhineland-Palatinate during the 1990s: While the state had previously been dominated by the Christian Democratic Party, the Social Democrats came in charge of the government within the decade. In literature, it is assumed that federal politics have gained an increasing impact on voting behavior in state elections. Using aggregate data, both federal and state politics seem to be important in Rhineland-Palatinate: While parties that are part of the federal government regularly loose votes in state elections there, the results of parties represented in the state government are above average. When the impact of federal and state politics is compared, the former usually turns out to be more important. Nevertheless, survey data do not confirm this pattern. On the one hand, party identification is still the most important factor explaining individual voting behavior. On the other hand, the impact of federal politics is not systematically stronger than the effect of state politics. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 495 ff.]

Schoen, Harald: State parliament elections in Bavaria 1966 to 2003: increasingly penetrated by federal politics because of the double role of the CSU.

Empirical analyses show that attitudes toward federal politics had only little effect on voting behavior at the Bavarian state parliament elections from 1966 to 2003. As compared to satisfaction with the federal government, perceptions of the federal politicians played a major role in the vote of choice. Yet, focusing on these direct impacts leads to an underestimation of the role of federal politics in state elections, as this strategy ignores indirect effects of federal politics and the intermingling of federal and state politics. The double role of the CSU – as a Bavarian party in the federal arena, and as governing party of state – works in favor of an intermingling of federal and state politics, and of direct and indirect

federal politics influence. Thus, Bavarian state elections might be unique since federal politics play a much larger role than in other German state parliament elections. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 503 ff.]

Bytzek, Evelyn and Susumu Shikano: State parliament elections in Lower Saxony 1970 to 2003: state politics as important influence.

At German state parliament elections, voters are confronted with a more complex decision than, for example, at German federal elections. Both federal- and state-level politics can be relevant in the former. In Lower Saxony, state politics play a vital role for the voters' decision at state elections. Federal politics can influence voters if there are no clear criteria at hand on state level – for example grand coalitions or candidates whose popularity is similar. To put it differently: If there are a government coalition of parties with similar political aims (i.e. no grand coalition) at state level and a strong candidate with good ratings among voters, state politics are more important for the outcome of Lower Saxony elections. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that voters rate federal level related-candidates for the office of prime minister positively to a surprisingly high degree. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 513 ff.]

Abold, Roland: Hamburg's state parliament elections 1978 to 2004: following wind or low of the public mood through influence from federal politics?

During the past 30 years, state parliament elections in Hamburg have often received massive attention from the German public. Spectacular political incidents (e.g. the sudden rise and fall of the "Schill-Partei") can be regarded as affects to a more general trend in voting behavior, specifically in Hamburg. It has been argued that the importance of German federal politics for the voting behavior of citizens living in the city-state has changed dramatically over time. The data show the relevance of state issues and candidates has grown since 1978, while long-term party attachments have lost importance. Federal politics have also become less relevant for Hamburg's state parliament elections. However, party attachments still manage to filter the influence of federal politics: If the preferred political party is part of the federal government, federal politics will play a role for the voters in Hamburg. Therefore, it is more likely that there is a following wind from the federal level than a negative influence on the public mood from there. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 521 ff.]

Gschwend, Thomas: Berlin's state parliament elections 1979 to 2001: no test elections for the federal level.

Voters can use sub-national elections to punish or reward the federal government. This can be analyzed by looking at their evaluation of the federal government. Here, it is argued that it is easier for voters to assign responsibility if the same parties hold office on both the federal and state level. It is more difficult to assign responsibility if these governments are composed of different parties. Based on survey data for state elections in Berlin (1979 to 2001), it can be shown that the federal arena only influences the sub-national arena if the same parties hold both governments. However, the size of this effect is small when contrasted to other individual vote-choice determinates like party and candidate preferences at the state level. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 531 ff.]

Obr, Dieter and Markus Klein: State parliament elections in North-Rhine Westphalia 1990 to 2005: no dominance of the federal level.

It is controversial in how far German federal politics are able to influence voters' decisions at state (Länder) parliament elections. According to one perspective, there is a strong impact of the federal level; according to the opposite perspective, there has occurred a "regionalization" of state elections. The empirical analyses of state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia from 1990 to 2005 show that at each election, the voters' decisions have been clearly influenced by considerations concerning the German federal level. However, this does not imply that voters' concerns directly related to the state level only play a minor role. On the contrary, the ratings of both the state-level parties, and the candidates to the office of the prime minister, always turn out to be important explanatory factors. At the state elections in 2000 and 2005, the explanatory power of the state-level considerations was even noticeably higher than those of the federal level. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 541 ff.]

Steinbrecher, Markus and Eva Wenzel: State parliament elections in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania 1990 to 2002: the specific influence of concurrent Bundestag elections.

Federal politics highly impact state parliament elections in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, when these elections are held on the same day as the Bundestag polls, like in the years 1994, 1998, and 2002. In these cases, the voters similarly rated parties and candidates of both the federal and state level. The campaigns were also dominated by federal topics. For voters of the CDU and the SPD, federal politics played a larger role in their vote decisions than with state politics. PDS voters were more likely to be led by state political factors. In 2006, when the state parliament election was conducted a year after the Bundestag poll, federal politics played a less important role. This proves the strong influence of federal politics within the three previous elections, where each had been predisposed to the issues of the concurrent federal election. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 549 ff.]

Rudi, Tatjana: State parliament elections in Hesse 1991 to 2003: influence from federal politics mostly among independent voters.

It is often assumed that voting behavior at Hessian state parliament elections is primarily influenced by federal politics. Based on the socio-psychological model, two federal political factors – satisfaction with the federal government, and attitudes towards federal politicians – are differentiated from Hessian state factors, and from the level-independent party identification. Federal politics affected voting behavior in the Hessian state parliament elections from 1991 to 2003. However, this influence is of minor importance when compared to party identification, and Hessian state factors. Federal politics are particularly relevant for the group of independent voters. Against the background of the general processes of de-alignment, federal political factors are likely to become more important. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 559 ff.]

Mays, Anja: State parliament elections in Saxony 1994 to 2004: stronger state than federal influence.

In the three state parliament elections in Saxony during 1994, 1999 and 2004, federal politics showed an independent, but weak effect on the voters' decisions. Voters of the SPD, followed by voters of the CDU, showed higher interest in being led by federal politics factors. Federal politics influenced PDS voters by the lowest degree. They – as well as CDU voters – were more influenced by state than federal issues. For voters of the aforementioned parties, state political factors – satisfaction with the state government, and the parties at state level – were more important than federal factors during each of the three elections. Nevertheless, the long-term party identification was found to be the most crucial factor in all analyzed groups. The effect of party identification was particularly strong in the case of the PDS voters. This observation can be explained by strong group identification in the traditional 'PDS milieu'. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 567 ff.]

Strohmeier, Gerd: A plea for the “moderate majority vote system”: optimal electoral system for Germany, good model for Austria and other democracies.

The article pleads for (the introduction of) the majority vote system, including an additional proportional list, and at the same time, against proportional representation. It is argued that the latter either leads to ungovernability or at least a “never ending grand coalition”, or to a small coalition and with that to a “conception of electoral fairness without consequence”. A specific kind of electoral reform called “moderate majority vote system” is suggested, which can be seen as an optimal electoral system for Germany. It would also serve as a good model for other democracies, for example Austria. The new system, combining majority voting and an additional proportional list, would have the advantage of a single-party government. Despite that, it would still allow the possibility of representation of small parties in parliament. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 578 ff.]

Franke, Heiko and Andreas Grimmel: Elections with system? Reform considerations on the personalized voting system of proportional representation.

The present personalized voting system of proportional representation in Germany causes deficits in regard to participation and use of expertise. With this assumption, it is recommended to change electoral procedures. Acknowledging proven parts of the present system, changes are only suggested within the limits of the constitutional law, and with respect to the principle of representation in Germany's parliamentary democracy. The approach brings together different proposals of the recent reform discussion, such as demands for a more flexible party membership, greater influence in candidate selection, and an easier access to political positions. They are combined to a new electoral system called “persons-proportion-electoral system”, which includes three votes for a candidate, and three votes for parties. Cumulating and split voting would be possible. This system would lead to a more efficient use of professional resources than before, and would cause both a higher degree of democratic input and output legitimating. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 591 ff.]

Sitsen, Michael: Incentive for citizens, relieve for politicians? On combining election dates.

There is a recurrent discussion whether federal and state parliament elections should get a combined election date. As a result of current tendencies in the states to align their legislative periods to five years, and similar considerations of extending the four years lasting period of the federal parliament, the German Bundestag, this proposition seems to be practicable. Constitutional law does not stand against this concept, and there are several reasons for it: The functionality of parliamentary work would be improved, and the voter participation could increase. These effects of combining election dates are statistically firm. The realization would need to resolve the difficulty of the dissolution of a single parliament. This is not an unsolvable problem, since the reintegration of the relevant state back into the election cycle can take place in a steady resynchronization, avoiding too short intervening periods, and allowing a re-entry for the second next term. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 602 ff.]

Gieseler, Julia: Weighted suffrage: a tool for restructuring and adequate representation within the federal state?

Beside universal, direct, and secret suffrage, equal suffrage is not only a vital element of political participation, but also of importance for the design of electoral systems. In particular, the size and drawing of constituency boundaries are very important for equal suffrage. In some European countries, these borders are drawn to favor the population in sparsely populated areas. Thus, the principle of equal suffrage is knowingly violated, both for political reasons, and to guarantee the population's political representation. In Germany, a violation of the principle of equal suffrage is not legally possible. Nonetheless, forming constituencies that assure a better representation of sparsely populated areas would be wise in states (Länder), where population and economic development are not evenly spread. The failed fusion of Berlin and Brandenburg in the 1996 referendum demonstrates the population's keen sense for such differences. The prospect of a stronger representation of sparsely populated areas (in form of a weighted suffrage) might have increased the population's consent into merging the two Länder then. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 617 ff.]

Feldkamp, Michael F.: The parliamentary "summer recess" in the Reichstag and the German Bundestag.

The parliamentary "summer recess" has been part of the parliamentary culture in Germany for years. The question is when parliamentary vacations were first introduced in Germany. The Reichstag of the period of empire was adjourned by decree of the German emperor, mainly because of a lack of subjects under discussion. The Weimar constituent assembly, along with the Reichstag of the Weimar Republic, created the parliamentary "summer recess". Both parliaments had the right to self-determination at their disposal. This was the first time they gave a reason for the recess: the parliamentarians' need for a break period. The German Bundestag also knows of the "summer recess". However, in certain circumstances, so-called special meetings are necessary, and therefore, summoned during the summer months. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 630 ff.]

Schäfer, Armin: The reform of the welfare state and the German party system: farewell to the popular parties?

Germany's two main parties are facing a crisis. While this seems obvious with regard to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), it also holds true for the Christian Democrats (CDU). Reforming the welfare state proves to be a highly contentious endeavor for either party, mainly due to large segments of the population supporting its preservation. Recent election results mirror the broad opposition to welfare retrenchment: CDU and SPD – once the architects of the German welfare state, but now perceived to dismantle it – have done poorly, whereas smaller parties scored well. Based on all state (Länder) and federal elections since 1990, the development of the German party system and coalition building on both levels are being examined. It can be shown that Social Democrats – in spite of currently low public support – have moved to the center of the German party system. Currently, with five parliamentary parties in the Bundestag, the SPD is strategically better placed than Christian Democrats, due to a higher number of conceivable coalition partners. Moreover, opinion polls indicate that a majority of voters favor remodeling the German welfare state according to the Scandinavian model to further cuts. [ZParl, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 648 ff.]