

ABSTRACTS*

Koschkar, Martin and Steffen Schoon: The state election in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on September 4, 2011: Confirmation of the grand coalition with a social democratic leaning.

The turnout of 51.5 percent in the 2011 federal state election is the lowest turnout in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania since 1990. A main reason might be that the campaigning for parties in a grand coalition is less confrontational and less polarizing. The SPD and the Greens reached significant gains in the election result. This is especially true for the Greens who for the first time are represented in the Schwerin parliament. Prime Minister *Erwin Sellering* and his party consolidated their position within the party competition of the federal state. Backed by positive frame conditions the social democrats proceeded into the role of a “Landespartei”. This fact worked against the CDU, which has to cope with the worst election result since 1990. The structure of the new government symbolizes the change in the balance of power between the partners of the grand coalition. The party Die Linke stagnates at 20 percent of the votes and remains in third place. The FDP loses three-fourths of their voters and cannot re-enter the parliament. The extremist NPD losses votes but can consolidate its electoral basis, especially in Western Pomerania. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 3 – 18]

Niedermayer, Oskar: The election of the Berlin state parliament on September 18, 2011: Green was only an illusion; the reality is red and black.

One year before the election, it seemed as if the era of the SPD as the dominant political force in Berlin was over. The Greens, led by *Renate Künast*, prepared to come in first; however, during the campaign their electoral support decreased considerably. This was due to *Renate Künast*'s temper and to the problems of the “catch-all party” strategy, which the campaign management had chosen. The SPD gained ground with a strictly personalized “feel-good”-campaign, while the Left party failed to convince the voters and struggled with the negative headlines the federal party was facing. The CDU communicated a new, more liberal image to the voters, while the Berlin FDP could not contrast the negative image of its federal party with an own positive image. In the last weeks before the election, the Pirates, a new party, entered the political stage. The SPD remained the strongest party, followed by the CDU, the Greens underachieved considerably but surpassed the Left party, the FDP failed to jump the five percent hurdle and the Pirates entered the state parliament. The electoral behaviour of the social groups did not change considerably. *Klaus Wowereit* left his competitors behind in numerous relevant voter orientations, the SPD, however, did not have a lead over the other parties concerning all policy competences. After the election, the formation of a red-green coalition seemed to be a given. Yet, the SPD aborted the coalition negotiations because the party leadership argued that the Greens were not reliable

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enough to secure a stable government on the basis of a slim majority. The following coalition negotiations with the CDU went fairly smoothly and *Klaus Wowereit* was re-elected as head of the new SPD-CDU government. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 18 – 35]

Reichart-Dreyer, Ingrid: Who selects the delegates? The influence of voters and parties on the composition of the House of Representatives in Berlin from 1963 until 2011. Independent factors such as Berlin's administrative form as a city state, election laws, party statutes and rules of procedure work as a constant source of renewal in the composition of the state parliament. This is enforced by compensation and excess mandates as well as external influences. Vacancy due to age, illness, death, promotions and departures are the requirements for parties who make preliminary decisions for the nomination of candidates depending on the provisions of the electoral law and their own statutes. The rates of change of parties vary with the size of the organization, the nomination process in members or delegates meetings at the district or provincial level as well as with quotas for women, newcomers and regions. Overall, the relation between renewal of the members and continuity for efficient performance seems to be balanced at a turnover rate of 40 percent. However, it is debatable, due to the change of voting behaviour in the 21st century, how much regeneration parliaments and political parties tolerate without losing their efficiency. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 36 – 53]

Vielstädte, André: Shifting majorities in the parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia. How are democratically legitimized majorities ensured in parliamentary votes?

In the current parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia (2010-2012), shifting majorities are part of the daily reality, but in an ambiguous way. On the one hand the minority government of the SPD and the Greens needed partners from the opposition to achieve parliamentary majority decisions. On the other hand a majority decision can change within 13 minutes into a refusal through the influence of the Speaker of the House presiding the plenary meeting and his assistants. Such a situation occurred and is analyzed to show how many factors influence the parliamentary voting process. This includes parliamentary participants, techniques and methods of voting as well as everyday parliamentary practices. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 54 – 64]

Schindler, Danny: Has governing become more “difficult”? – Governing parties election victories in German federal elections 1953-2009.

Is there empirical evidence for assumptions that governing has become more “difficult”? A longitudinal analysis of election results for the German Bundestag (1953-2009) shows a complex picture. On the one hand there is a shift to losses for the coalition and in particular the chancellor's party. On the other hand this development is embedded in a challenging environment for catch-all parties in general. Indeed, being in opposition these parties did not suffer more losses during recent decades. But neither could they profit from government losses as much as in the past. Above all structural, demand-induced and supply-induced developments are responsible for the particularly difficult situation of governing catch-all parties. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 65 – 85]

Debus, Marc: Coalition preferences of voters and parties and their influence on electoral intentions for the German federal election in 2009.

The political process and patterns of legislative decision-making in Germany are strongly affected by coalition governance. Pre-electoral coalition statements play, for instance, a decisive role during election campaigns. In addition, they strongly affect the outcome of the government formation process in Germany on the state and federal level. Little is known, however, on the congruence between the coalition preferences of parties and their voters. Furthermore, we do not know why coalition preferences of voters should affect voting behaviour and if there is a causal relationship. Building on the literature on democratic responsiveness on the one side and theories of voting behaviour on the other side it can be argued that coalition preferences of voters should influence their behaviour at the polls. Data from the German election study 2009 show that coalition preferences of voters and parties are not only congruent. Moreover, they have a decisive impact on voting behaviour. These findings set incentives for theories on government formation on the one side and the coalition strategies of German parties for the next Bundestag election on the other side. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 86 – 102]

Römmel, Andrea and Sabine Einwaller: Social media and their impact on the German federal election in 2009.

By drawing on the German Longitudinal Election Study the following questions are answered: Who actually received political news/campaign information from social media during the 2009 federal election campaign? And, even more important from our theoretical point of view, who posted campaign information on his/her network? Parties still invest heavily in agencies and professional consultants when it comes to elections. With a shrinking number of party members, however, a change in election (street) campaigns towards more engagement in social media is very likely. Hence, parties are looking for ways to support engaged citizens and make them part of their election campaigns. They will be taking advantage of the heterogeneity of networks in which citizens communicate. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 103 – 113]

Tenscher, Jens: First- and second-order election campaigns in Germany and Austria.

Not only the voters and the media are less interested and engage reluctantly in European Parliamentary election campaigns, when compared to first-order national elections; this also holds true for political parties. Their reduced commitment results in lower levels in campaign professionalism – not only in Germany, but also in other EU member states. Although this assumption is widespread, it lacks empirical backing. Against this backdrop, a direct, quantitative comparison of the political parties' campaign professionalism in the last first-order and second-order elections in Germany and Austria is conducted. The analysis is based on post-election interviews with the campaigners in charge. Our findings support the notion of gradual campaign professionalism. In addition, German parties turn out to be more professionalized than their Austrian equivalents. In Austria, particularly the governing parties, SPÖ and ÖVP, "missed" the last national elections for both structural and strategic reasons. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 113 – 131]

Blumenstiel, Jan Eric and Ossip Fürnberg: Knowledge and attitudes concerning surplus seats.

In what is a rather technical discussion about reforming the electoral system in Germany, previous research has largely neglected citizens' knowledge and opinions about surplus seats. We demonstrate that voters are not totally uninformed about surplus seats attribution, but that their opinions about this feature mainly depend on their political preferences. Voters tend to view surplus seats more as a political instrument than a legitimate by-product of the type of electoral rules used in Germany. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 132 – 141]

Arndt, Christoph: The Danish parliamentary election on September 15, 2011: Defeat of a government without clear victory for the opposition.

The 2011 election to the Folketing led to a change of government as Prime Minister *Lars Løkke Rasmussen*'s centre-right minority government supported by the Danish People's Party lost its parliamentary majority. A new coalition government of Social Democrats, Socialist People's Party, and Social Liberals was formed. Having no parliamentary majority on its own, this government, however, is dependent on the support of the radical left Unity List and MPs from Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Accordingly, the new centre-left government of Prime Minister *Helle Thorning-Schmidt* finds a difficult parliamentary situation, which already became apparent during and immediately after government formation. Furthermore, the intention of a number of leading politicians to break up the political camp formation reaching back to 2001 is impeded by the election results. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 142 – 152]

Bredies, Ingmar: The „Domestication“ of legislatures in post-communist Eastern Europe: Russia and Ukraine in comparative perspective.

The institutional design of political systems has been discussed by political scientists as one of the most significant determinants in post-communist transitions. Parliamentary systems are generally supposed to exhibit a higher compliance with democratization. Correspondingly, powerful legislatures seem to indicate a successful transition to democracy whereas less powerful ones are associated with failed democratization. These findings are tested with regard to the national legislatures in Russia and Ukraine. Why did neither the Russian State Duma nor the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine decisively contribute to the democratization of these countries? Currently one can find clear evidence for the institutional subversion – or „domestication“ – of parliamentary structures and decision-making processes by authoritarian government practices. However, there are substantial differences in both scope and shape of authoritarianism in the respective countries. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 153 – 169]

Behnke, Joachim: Reflections on the causes and effects of keeping the surplus mandates in the new electoral law.

In September 2011 the new German electoral law was passed. From the very beginning the debate on the topic was fundamentally flawed, since the parties could not even agree on which problem was to be solved by the new law. While the governing coalition stuck to a rather narrow interpretation of the parliamentary mandate, limiting their ambitions to

eliminating the so called negative voting weight, a number of arguments suggest an extended interpretation of the constitutional court's judgments in the sense that surplus mandates ought to be abolished altogether. Surplus mandates cause negative voting weights, while the linking of party lists impedes this effect. The separation of lists as provided for by the new law is thus an inappropriate solution of the problem. It can be tackled more adequately by eliminating the surplus mandates altogether. Furthermore, irrespective of the constitutional review of surplus mandates, they are a serious problem for democracy. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 170 – 184]

Kleinert, Hubert: Comments on the controversy about the right to vote – One problem solved, another remains. Or: a look beyond the boarders teaches serenity.

The debate about the franchise change in Germany, made necessary by the sentence of the Federal Constitutional Court in 2008 meanwhile has led to a new electoral law against which the opposition parties have filed a lawsuit in Karlsruhe. The ruling of the Constitutional Court can be regarded as problematic as it equates consciously deployable tactics with pure mathematical proceedings for turning votes into seats, which remained unopposed for over half a century. The public debate is distorted when it comes to surplus seats. Frequently this gives the impression as if the sole purpose of a democratic right to vote were the certainly very important objective of an utmost accurate reflection of the electorate's voting behaviour in parliamentary seats. But in fact there are other goals, too and there can be some deviation from the principle of an equal value of success for every vote with any suffrage, which is not pure proportional representation. This is also proven by a comparison with other Western countries, where different democratic voting rights usually lead to greater deviations than in Germany. The "minimally invasive" solution adopted by the parliamentary majority falls short of the goal. However, the options suggested by the opposition are even less suitable. Their alternatives to remove the surplus seats would create new problems simultaneously, which in turn would be even graver. To solve the problems of the surplus seats for good, the best solution would be to replace the single constituencies by two-member constituencies. [ZParl, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 185 – 192]