

ABSTRACTS*

Leininger, Arndt: Scientific election forecasting – alternative or supplement to opinion polls?

In the run up to the German federal election of 2013, forecasts about who would win attracted considerable attention. Leaving casual punditry aside, the more serious forecasts were predominantly based on opinion polls. Polls offer a good snapshot in time, but when the election is distant, they predict outcomes less well – a point stressed by pollsters themselves but often ignored by the media and the wider public. However, the 2013 election also saw an unprecedented number of scientific forecasting models that explicitly aimed at forecasting the election result, in some cases months in advance. This overview of scientific election forecasting in Germany focuses on so called structural models. These utilize theory and empirics of electoral research for their predictions. Furthermore, survey aggregation methods as well as synthetic models that combine these with structural models are covered and the performance of such approaches is discussed in the context of the German general election in 2013 and address the question what, if anything, scientific election forecasting can contribute to electoral research. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 675 – 691]

Faas, Thorsten: Citizens' perception and credibility of opinion polls: testing two necessary conditions for poll effects.

As an inherent part of today's political communication, opinion polls supposedly also have a considerable impact on voters (and in turn on election results). However, research in this field should analyze the necessary conditions for poll effects in more detail in order to understand these postulated impacts. Opinion polls can only affect voters if voters consciously take notice of them and if they are perceived as being credible. The results from examining two opinion polls from the election years 2009 and 2013 show that in 2009, but especially in 2013, opinion polls were consciously registered by many, yet not all, people in Germany. In terms of credibility, however, opinions were more diverse. Political interest was identified as having the strongest impact on whether people consciously took notice of opinion polls or not. Moreover, the consumption of public television news as well as a higher level of formal education has a positive influence. The election year 2013 also shows some party political effects. Trying to identify perceived credibility was less successful. Only supporters of the CDU and CSU found the poll results more credible in both years. In addition, personality traits show effects for 2009. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 692 – 707]

Hoffmann, Hanna: Polls and the voters' decision-making process in the run up to the German parliamentary election 2013.

In order to establish whether published polls influenced the voters' decision-making processes in the run up to the German parliamentary election 2013 the cognitive effects on the

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development of voters' expectations regarding election results and the impact of polls on the formation of voting intentions are analyzed. Furthermore, strategic voting is examined, particularly the intentions of voting for the FDP due to their low poll numbers. The results reveal cognitive effects on the expectations regarding government formation as well as on the likelihood of small parties passing the election threshold. Missing variations in poll ratings account for these inconclusive findings. The same holds true for providing empirical evidence for the impact of polls on the formation of voting intentions. However, it can be assumed that the stable high approval ratings of the CDU/CSU led voters to lean towards this majority opinion which in turn increased the support for the Christian Democrats shortly before election day. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 708 – 729]

Zerback, Thomas and Carsten Reinemann: Is it all a question of polls? Origins of coalition expectations during the 2013 German national election campaign.

In order to investigate how five possible coalitions were evaluated by the mass media and how citizens formed their coalition expectations a content analysis and a telephone survey were conducted during the campaigning of the 2013 German national election. The media favored the coalition between CDU/CSU and SPD and also depicted it as the most likely election outcome. The same applied to the interviewees. Their coalition expectations were influenced by soft as well as hard indicators of public opinion: Perceived media slant, opinions in their social environment and within the broader population served as cues to the perceived likelihood of possible coalitions. Remembered poll results, however, as well as expectations regarding the likelihood of the smaller coalition partner to pass the election threshold were only relevant for particular scenarios, e.g. if the smaller party (i.e. the FDP) was close to the five-percent-threshold or if the summed poll share of the whole coalition was close to not being sufficient for forming a government. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 730 – 745]

Faas, Thorsten and Sascha Huber: Did pollsters expel the FDP from the German Bundestag? Results of an experimental study.

Pre-election polls in the run up to the 2013 general election saw the liberal party FDP consistently over five percent. At the end of election night, however, the party failed to surpass the five-percent electoral threshold and consequently – for the first time ever – failed to enter the German parliament. In order to find out whether the pollsters had an impact on the FDP's failure two hypotheses are derived from the extant literature: According to the wasted-vote hypothesis, poll figures below five percent would be harmful for the Liberals as these numbers signal that a vote for this party might be wasted. The diametrically opposed coalition-insurance hypothesis postulates that values below five percent would be beneficial for the FDP because such figures send a signal to supporters of the Christian Democrats that they have to support their desired coalition partner. These conflicting hypotheses are tested by means of an experimental study and clear evidence is found for the validity of the second hypothesis. Given the actual poll numbers in the run up to the 2013 federal election, this might very well mean that these poll figures may have sent a false signal to the voters, namely that lending votes in favor of the FDP was not necessary. Had the pollsters, however, published numbers lower than five percent for the Liber-

als, their party's entry into the Bundestag would have been more likely. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 746 – 759]

Petersen, Thomas: State regulation and the freedom of survey research in the world.

A free profession of survey research – just as a free press – serves as a corrective to a democratic government. A free survey research poses a threat to authoritarian regimes. That is why most authoritarian regimes try to gain control over research institutes just as they try to gain control over mass media. But also in many democracies, which guarantee freedom of press, survey researchers' work is impeded by state authorities. The results of a 2012 survey conducted by the World Association for Public Opinion Research show that in almost half of the European democracies, the law obstructs the publication of certain survey results. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 760 – 777]

Beichelt, Timm: On the way to a European system of shared powers: The German Bundestag during the Eurozone crisis.

Reacting to the Eurozone crisis the German Bundestag has changed its role in European policy. Indeed, this crisis served as a catalyst for the Bundestag to use its participation powers both more extensively and more effectively. Legal gaps that impeded full parliamentary participation during the Euro Rescue Fund legislation were closed. The Eurozone crisis has also shown that the Bundestag needs to be seen as a heterogeneous actor in European policy. This is true for institutional divisions like the one between government and opposition parties in parliament as well as for different ideational concepts of German European policy that persist within the ranks of the Bundestag. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 778 – 794]

Feb Widmer, Antoinette and Adrian Vatter: Institutional rules or political culture? Features explaining parliamentary membership fluctuation in Switzerland.

The question whether it is institutional rules or political-cultural features that explain fluctuations in parliaments is examined for the sub-national level in Switzerland for all 26 cantonal legislatures between 1960 and 2012. The findings clearly show that both institutional frameworks and cultural features play significant roles in explaining the cantonal differences of parliament fluctuation. While measures such as reducing the number of seats in parliament and limiting terms of office have a direct and strong influence on the fluctuation rate, the amount of financial remuneration and institutional regulations to strengthen parliament vis-à-vis the executive have no sustained impact. At the same time, long-term political-cultural features such as belonging to a language area prove at least as important to the central phenomenon as individual institutional arrangements. Finally, socio-economic and demographic factors, with the exception of the degree of urbanisation, prove relatively insignificant in explaining the cantonal differences in the level of parliamentary membership fluctuation. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 795 – 809]

Smets, Christoph: When singers speak – Was Wolf Biermann allowed to speak in the German Bundestag, although he was only meant to sing?

On November 7, 2014 to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall, the singer/songwriter and GDR-dissident *Wolf Biermann* was supposed to perform a well-known song of the resistance movement in the course of a parliamentary session. Although he had only been invited to sing, he used the opportunity to speak for several minutes, harshly criticising the parliamentary party Die Linke by calling them remnants of the former dictatorship. He did that despite the fact that after his first words, the Speaker of the House reminded him that he had been invited “to sing”. Grounds on which it was possible for the Speaker to utter a ban on speaking for *Biermann* as a non-member of parliament, can be found in the provision of article 40 (2) 1 Basic Law. This article empowered the Speaker to ban *Biermann* from speaking, and by disregarding the warning, *Biermann* violated that ban. Nevertheless, considering the specific circumstances of the case, i.e. the person speaking, the occasion and the setting – especially the intended addressees – of the speech, the conclusion is reached that *Biermann*’s freedom of speech as per article 5 (1) Basic Law superseded the Speaker’s powers. Under the circumstances, the latter’s duty to uphold the dignity of parliament was even better served by not enforcing the ban. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 810 – 819]

Kleib, Björn-Christian and Christine Rex: The time-limited committee of enquiry.

At two recent occasions the State Parliament of Baden-Württemberg used the instrument of time-limited committees of enquiry. After analyzing the lawfulness of such time-limitations the conclusion is reached that they are legal. Installing time-limited committees of enquiry can be enforced by a minority’s motion, if the enquiry shall provide a basis for legislation. Nevertheless, the question of lawfulness loses relevance in the face of the fact that a time limitation can be interpreted by the political opponents as a lack of motivation to go into the merits of the case. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 820 – 829]

Niedermayer, Oskar: Half time: the development of the German party system after the 2013 federal election.

The 2013 federal election has changed all of the relevant party system properties. The analysis of these changes and of the party system’s development in the first half of the election period shows that in the main aspects not the 2013 but the 2009 election was the exceptional case: With the 2013 election, the party system was reverted to the traditional two-party dominance and this has not changed during the first half of the election period. In addition, the asymmetry between the two main parties in favor of the CDU/CSU persisted. With respect to the smaller parties, the FDP will never again reach its exceptional success of 2009, but the party has the chance to return to the Bundestag in 2017. The Greens and the Left Party are still struggling for the leading position among the smaller parties. The AfD, after a period of weakness due to the internal power struggle and splitting off of the Alfa, has regained strength due to the refugee crisis. The overall changes that this crisis and its dramatic development caused have rendered alternatives to the grand coalition after the next federal election 2017 more unlikely. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 830 – 851]

Horst, Patrick: The management of the third Grand Coalition in Germany 2013 to 2015: unchallenged predominance of the three party chairs.

In fundamental aspects the management of the third Grand Coalition does not differ from the conflict handling in other coalitions. The importance of coalition agreements as an instrument of conflict reduction has grown, although it tends to decrease over time. Coalition bargaining follows the same pattern as ever but it takes longer. In 2013, it took almost three months due to the fact that the Social Democrats made use of an intraparty membership vote on the coalition treaty for the first time in history. The third Grand Coalition respected basic cooperative norms of coalition management as well. Specific characteristics in the management of grand coalitions result from the fact that the two main competitors of the party system work together. This leads to a heightened conflict intensity, which demands special efforts of explaining the day-to-day decision-making. In the practice of the third Grand Coalition this has led to a centralization of the decision-making processes. Whereas the coalition committee is of subordinate significance as an instrument of conflict resolution, the coalition summits of the three party chairs are dominating the internal decision-making processes. Finally, grand coalitions work with the precognition that they will last only until the end of the election period. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 852 – 873]

Münch, Ingo von: Notes on coalition democracies and a plea for overcoming the ideology of blocks.

Coalition governments are often a normal condition in the political life of democracies. Thus, in Germany some combinations – like the “black-yellow”, the “red-green” or also the “grand” coalition – are very common. With new parties arising over time (e.g. the Greens, the Left Party, the Pirate Party or the Alternative for Germany), the number of potential coalition options on the different political levels has grown, but in practice not all parties are able to form coalitions in the same way. For exploratory talks and coalition negotiations between two or more parties there are no written rules and it often needs a lot of time until a coalition agreement is signed. In addition to the fact that it is not always clear who is responsible for governmental action, the long duration of the negotiations is a further disadvantage of coalition governments. But there are also advantages: The creation of governability, the distribution of power (like the system of checks and balances), the constant need of searching for compromises, a wider range of political leaders as well as reflecting the plurality of the voters. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 4, pp. 874 – 886]

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