

ABSTRACTS*

Hough, Dan and Justin Fisher: Is everything changing? Or much ado about nothing? The Parliamentary Elections in the United Kingdom of May 6, 2010.

The 2010 UK election will be remembered for a number of reasons; the end of 13 years of Labour rule, the introduction of TV debates and the creation of Britain's first coalition government for well over a generation being just three of them. Even though Britain continues to move towards multi-partyism, we should be wary of viewing the long-standing era of Labour and Conservative dominance as coming to an end. In view of the refreshing performance of *Nick Clegg* and the general feeling of discontent and disgruntlement with both Labour and the Tories, the smaller parties – the Lib Dems included – could, and arguably should, have performed better than they did. Labour and the Conservatives are unlikely to dominate British politics in the way that they once did but, to quote *Mark Twain*, reports of their death have been greatly exaggerated. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 725 – 739]

Sturm, Roland: The reform of the electoral system, Parliament and local government: The agenda of the Conservative-Liberal coalition in Britain.

The Conservative-Liberal coalition, which has been in power in Britain since 2010, announced far-reaching reforms of the electoral system for general elections, a strengthening of the political role of Parliament and of local governments. The government has by now introduced legislation for a new voting system (alternative vote) at general elections and for the reduction of seats in the House of Commons. The power of the backbenchers was strengthened. They can now elect by secret vote the chairperson of select committees, and they have gained partial control of the parliamentary agenda with the establishment of a Backbench Business Committee. Still waiting to be transferred into legislation are the numerous reforms which aim at a stronger role of local government. These include a general power of competence, local referendums on local issues and a directly elected head of local police. At the moment all eyes are on the government's expenditure reduction plans and their spectacular consequences, but the importance of "silent" constitutional change should not be underestimated. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 739 – 749]

Ewert, Stefan, Joanna Bars and Hubertus Buchstein: The role of profession and formal education for members of state parliaments. Empirical triggers for reflecting on parliamentary representation.

In the light of the ongoing theoretical debate on the relationship between representation and democracy, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the view of deputies about parliamentary functions of representation. This can shed new light on the relevance of the socio-structural composition of parliaments. According to the findings in our survey of the members of the Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, parliamentarians ascribe a similar

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importance to their experiences and knowledge from their formal education and profession as they do to their prior political experiences. The socio-structural composition of the Landtag, which still differs from the patterns of recruitment in comparison to state parliaments in Western Germany, could be seen as an indication of peculiarities in the modes of operation and argumentation of the Landtag. In addition, the results of both our survey and our socio-structural analysis may provide an empirical link to the normative debate about a “dynamic synthesis” (*Nadia Urbinati*) in the relation between representatives and the represented. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 749 – 765]

Feist, Ursula and Hans-Jürgen Hoffmann: Analysis of the regional election in North Rhine-Westphalia on May 9, 2010: From a wait-and-see-position to a U-turn.

The election in the Bundesland North Rhine-Westphalia was the first regional ballot after the change of federal government in Berlin from a Christian Democrat-Social Democrat to a Christian Democrat-Liberal coalition. Thus the judgement of the voters about the Christian Democrat-Liberal government, having been in office in Düsseldorf for five years, was a first test for the conservative-liberal constellation in two ways.

Chancellor *Angela Merkel* and her cabinet decided to wait for North Rhine-Westphalia before necessary austere reforms should be announced, in order not to be punished by the voters for social hardships. Meanwhile – and possibly because of the standstill – internal conflicts between the coalition partners dominated the political agenda: disputes on the tax reform and the economisation of the welfare state as well as the unsuccessful delay of decisions on financial help for Greece. Under these conditions the Conservative-Liberal coalition in Düsseldorf, only five years in government, was voted out and punished for mistakes mainly caused in Berlin, some – but fewer – home made. Additionally, the image of Prime Minister *Jürgen Rüttgers* had been severely damaged by a sponsoring affair, to the benefit of the Social Democrat candidate who originally had not been quite so popular. As a result, he and his party lost the leadership in opinion polls. Instead of concentrating on pressing issues such as education, public financing, energy or environment, the campaign engaged in the question who will govern North Rhine-Westphalia for the next five years, a Conservative-Liberal or a Social Democrat-Green-Socialist coalition. Lacking real polarization on social conflicts, mood factors such as the perception of images and competence as well as disappointment and resignation contributed mainly to a high abstention rate of former Conservative-voters which eventually decided the outcome. In consequence, a Social Democrat-Green minority coalition under *Hannelore Kraft* formed the new government in Düsseldorf. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 766 – 787]

Jörg Bogumil, Stephan Grohs and Lars Holtkamp: Fragmented councils or strengthened local democracy? Why the abolition of the five-percent threshold in municipal elections in North Rhine-Westphalia was a failure.

Abolishing the 5-percent threshold clause for municipal elections in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1999 was driven by a weighting between the norms of an equality of votes and equality of chances on the one hand, the need for the councils to be able to perform on the other. The effects on the composition and working capacities of the municipal councils were considerable: The number of fractions, groupings and individual members in

the municipal parliaments of the large cities increased; in the smaller municipalities this fragmenting effect is smoothened by a “natural threshold”. The increase in the number of groupings and fractions caused a considerable negative impact on parliamentary working capacities. This manifests in longer debates, instable majorities and redundant discussions due to disturbances in the division of work between committees and the council plenum. Hence, a moderate threshold of 2.5 percent should be (re-)established which does not affect the equality of votes and chances in the smaller municipalities, but will facilitate the working conditions in the councils of larger cities. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 788 – 803]

Kulick, S. Manuela and Johannes N. Blumenberg: The beloved traitor – Oskar Lafontaine and voting behaviour at the Saarland state election of 2009.

Already prior to the Saarland state election of 2009 one of the candidates drew special media attention – the candidate of the Left Party: *Oskar Lafontaine*. Taking this media attention as a starting point for our analysis we examine the different factors influencing the voting decisions for the Left Party in Saarland and compare them to factors influencing voters of the other established political parties as well as to voters of the Left Party in other German Länder. The voting behaviour of the Left Party voters at the Saarland Land election greatly differed from voters of the other parties as well as from voters of the Left Party in other Länder. And those differences can be traced back to „the beloved traitor“ *Oskar Lafontaine*. Aside from the specific results for the Left Party in Saarland, the potential influence on voting behaviour of “the right” candidate becomes clear. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 803 – 817]

Hermann, Michael C.: Election campaigns and adolescents – only risks and side effects? Results of an international survey.

It is not correct that election campaigns do not have any effects on young people not old enough to vote. On the contrary: Election campaigns can cause a serious deterioration of important political attitudes. This finding is based on a survey among 13 to 18 year old pupils in the southern part of Germany during the election campaigns for the German Parliament in the years 1998 and 2002. They were interviewed three times: right before the start of the election campaign, shortly before the election and a few weeks after the election. In order to explore effects of political culture, interviews were also conducted with pupils from Austria, Switzerland and the Russian Federation were done to explore special effects of the political culture. One important result is that election campaigns force the split of political interests in one dimension that focus on politics and one which is primarily regarding policies. Interest in politics increases during the campaign, not so however for policies. When turning their attention to the political stage during election campaigns, adolescents are under the impression that they have a general understanding for politics. However, the expectations of young people regarding the capability for innovation of the political system are not satisfied after the election. A considerable number of them develop additional political alienation, which poses a serious problem considering the stealthy erosion of the political system’s legitimacy. Especially when keeping in mind that attitudes formed during early periods in life have to be seen as stable. Assiduous efforts should be made to communicate politics to adolescents in a more discursive and sophisticated way –

and more attention should be paid to them in the time after the election. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 818 – 838]

Niedermayer, Oskar: Conditions for the success of new parties in the German party system using the example of the German Pirate Party.

The „success“ of a new party in the party system can be operationalized by successively passing several career levels – marking qualitative changes of the party's role in the party system. Five career levels can be distinguished: participating in elections, influencing party competition, being represented in a parliament, being included in coalition considerations and being part of a government. Preconditions for the success of a new party in the party competition are all the factors which encourage or constrain the passing of these career levels. To structure the variety of these factors, they are assigned to three groups: the demand and supply side of the political competition and the general competition conditions. The German Pirate Party has passed the second career level. However, the results of a detailed analysis of the various conditions for the success of this party suggest that the passing of the third career level, i.e. parliamentary representation, is extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 838 – 854]

Bochsler, Daniel: What are the merits of electoral alliances? List apparentments among left-wing and green parties under the *d'Hondt* proportional electoral rules in the Swiss national elections, 1995-2007.

Proportional representation rules occasionally allow list apparentments between parties. This means that the electoral lists of allied parties are considered as a single unit for the first division of mandates. As votes are summed up, the alliances are larger than each single party, and this bring along substantial advantages under the *d'Hondt* seat allocation rule. Switzerland practices list apparentments both in national elections and in a number of cantons. The main winners of such apparentments are the political left and green parties. The investigation of the usage and gains from list apparentments shows that the instrument fulfilled its main goal of reducing the partisan bias of the *d'Hondt* rule. Left-wing and green parties have been the main beneficiaries of list apparentments in these elections. However, this is only the case due to the allowance of sub-apparentments in the Swiss electoral system. [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 855 – 873]

Borowy, Oliver: The ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court on the competences of the Mediation Committee. Impact on parliamentary practice and thoughts of reform.

On December 8, 2009, the Federal Constitutional Court for the first time ruled on a statute which was based on a compromise proposal by the Mediation Committee. The court not only declared the statute unconstitutional but nullified it – one of just a few cases where a procedural error led to such consequences. It had been a provision of the 2004 accompanying budget law, based on the so called *Koch / Steinbrück* paper that came under constitutional scrutiny. The provision had already been heavily disputed during the law-making procedure. The court's ruling is of importance for a range of other provisions similarly integrated in the 2004 accompanying budget law. Moreover, it constitutes a consistent

further development and clarification of the court's established jurisdiction on the Mediation Committee's competencies, which are restricted constitutionally in order to ensure federal divisions of competencies (article 76, paragraph 1 of the Basic Law), the Rights of the Members of the Bundestag (article 38, paragraph 1 sentence 2 of the Basic Law), the principle of democracy (article 20, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law) and the public nature of the parliamentary procedure (article 42, paragraph 1 sentence 1 of the Basic Law). [ZParl, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 874 – 902]