

ABSTRACTS*

Hünermund, Sebastian: Minor questions and their functions in the 17th German Bundestag.

Minor questions can be seen as one of the oldest and the most important tools for oversight by the opposition parties in the German Bundestag. The parliamentary statistics at the end of each legislative term give evidence how frequently they are applied. However, their legal status in the rules of procedure of the German Bundestag offers a certain leeway concerning the specific use of these questions by the MPs. There is reason to believe that they can fulfil other functions as well. The content analysis of 147 minor questions supports this assumption. Besides control, the minor questions contribute to fulfilling the function of representation. Moreover, they can serve as a tool for agenda-control. On the one hand, they provide a good opportunity for communicating district concerns to the government and to the ministerial bureaucracy. On the other hand, they can be used by oppositional parties to set the agenda and publicly confront the government with controversial issues. Furthermore, the content analysis revealed concrete items of parliamentary oversight and allows conclusions regarding MPs' specialization in their respective parliamentary groups. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 455 – 476]

Carstensen, Franziska: The use of interpellations (Große Anfragen) in the Bundestag and the German Land parliaments: Why are they so different?

The numbers of interpellations differ between the Bundestag and the German Land parliaments. These differences can be attributed to the setting of a deadline and the actual length of time that is used by governments for answering the questions. Interpellations are submitted more often when parliaments can expect to receive answers rather quickly. In addition, in some parliaments answers are discussed in detail (like debating them in a plenary session or in a committee) but not in all of them. The results show that quantity does not allow to draw conclusions on quality. Furthermore, interpellations seem to fulfil different functions in different parliaments: In some information and oversight are dominant, in others the public dimension is at least of equal importance. The party dimension in government and opposition, however, does not appear to have an impact on the number of interpellations. They are, though, not exclusively a tool of parliamentary opposition party groups in certain Land parliaments as could be expected. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 477 – 497]

Kwaschniuk, Gerrit: The Landesgruppen of SPD and CDU in the German Bundestag. Their significance in negotiations and decision-making processes inside the parliamentary parties.

Landesgruppen are groups consisting of MPs from the same German state in a parliamentary party. Their meetings, committee and parliamentary group meetings are firmly anchored in the work routine of the Bundestag. Political science literature, however, has neglected the Landesgruppen almost entirely. Do the Landesgruppen influence negotiations and decision-making processes in their parliamentary party? In order to close this research

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and knowledge gap an explorative study with interviews of the chairpersons of eleven Landesgruppen was conducted. In this study, the Landesgruppen presented themselves as transmission belts, providing a permanent exchange between leadership and members in their respective parliamentary party. Furthermore, they boost decision and negotiation processes, especially in the arenas of staff and issue policies. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 498 – 511]

Wenzelburger, Georg and Sabrina Fehrenz: The CDU/CSU and the bill of same-sex marriage. Analyzing the voting behavior of their members in the German Bundestag.

The study of legislative behavior, party cohesion, and discipline is an important body of research in the study of parliaments. The present article adds to this literature by zooming in on a specific case – the voting patterns of the members of parliament of the CDU/CSU in the German Bundestag on the bill of same-sex marriage. The parliamentary party had decided not to find agreement on that issue but leave the decision on this conscience issue to each MP. Hence, the vote on this bill allowed us to discover patterns of legislative behavior that are usually masked by the effect of party discipline. Including MPs' individual demographics, for instance age or gender, as well as features of their electoral district, such as their voters' church attendance, we find that older and married CDU/CSU-MPs from more religious and catholic electoral districts with a somewhat lower level of education were more likely to vote against the bill in question. These results show that MPs' parliamentary voting behavior is driven by personal traits – at least when party discipline plays a less important role. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 512 – 530]

Träger, Hendrik and Marc S. Jacob: (How) Can the German electoral system be reformed? Model calculations of the 2017 federal election and a plea for a “de-personalized” representative electoral formula.

The German Bundestag election in 2017 lead to the largest parliament since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, namely to comprising 709 deputies. Since the last reform of the electoral law in 2013, the parliament's extensive “swelling” caused by surplus and compensation seats has been frequently criticized and inspired political scientists to propose electoral reforms. Tying in to this debate, we carry out model calculations to estimate the impact of different electoral systems on the election results. Subsequently, we suggest to implement a “de-personalized” list proportional representation with a five-percent-threshold and complementary votes that would allow to keep seat numbers stable whilst not impeding coalition formations. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 531 – 551]

Graeb, Frederic and Angelika Vetter: Spare vote instead of mixed-member proportional system: The possible effects on German federal elections.

The results of the recent German federal election show a general increase in votes for small parties and consequently a growing number of non-represented votes in the German Bundestag. In order to solve this issue, the concept of a spare vote occasionally is discussed among political scientists, according to which the first and second vote are combined into the main vote. The spare vote is counted if the party or candidate receiving the main vote does not gather enough main votes to enter parliament. Based on an online poll, the effects of a potential electoral reform on the outcome of the German federal election were analyzed. The results show a larger share of votes for small parties when voted via main vote

compared to the second vote. Furthermore, a significant decrease in non-represented votes can be observed once the spare vote is taken into account. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 552 – 563]

Lorenz, Jan: How options to cumulate votes marginalize vote-splitting and polarizes personal campaigning: The example of Bremen.

Proportional voting systems with open lists differ in the number of votes, the options to split and cumulate votes, and in additional mechanism like an allocation of list seats or electoral thresholds for candidates. The example of the elections in the German federal state Bremen 2011 and 2015 empirically show that personal votes are increasingly used with more competence. At the same time, the proportion of voters who cumulate all their votes instead of splitting them is also increasing. As a result, more representatives, especially male ones, receive their votes from comparably few voters, who strongly cumulate votes. Candidates have disadvantages when they try to convince vote-splitting voters. The block of list seats as part of the electoral system of Bremen also creates incentives for candidates to avoid personal votes. A more sensible reform would be to restrict the options to cumulate votes and to remove the block of list seats. With these changes the idea of voting for a team is not marginalized and candidates could run their personal campaign in a more cooperative manner. All candidates would then have incentives to canvass voters personally. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 564 – 585]

Kersting, Norbert and Max Mehl: Echo chambers in the German 2017 federal election online-campaign. The ambivalent role of celebrities on the Internet.

Political homophily and the confirmation bias lead to the development of echo chambers and information bubbles spurned by online participation. To a certain extent, this contradicts other empirical results, which detected a high level of conflict and a low level of discourse quality in Internet communication. Were there echo chambers in the 2017 German online election campaign? Diverse context settings in the realm of social media lead to different forms of expressive demonstrative participation. In this context, celebrities and celebrity endorsements play an ambivalent role. Corpus linguistic content analysis of political party websites during the 2017 German campaign for the national election did not reveal any echo chambers, in particular not as a reaction to Facebook posts endorsed by celebrities. The results do, however, point to the problem of hate speech, flaming, and a low level of discourse quality ensued by celebrity endorsements. The findings gathered through our network analysis of Twitter posts showed that echo chambers existed. Especially supporters of the right wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) in comparison with supporters from the Green party and the CDU showed a high level of political homophily. Nevertheless, certain knots do exist – mostly accounts from prominent sports teams as well as famous actors – which can be used to bridge networks and to mitigate the problem of echo chambers. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 586 – 602]

Fitzpatrick, Jasmin: Tweeting for votes. Parties' tweeting tactics during the German election campaign 2017.

How did political parties apply Twitter during the 2017 German election campaign? Can we find similarities and differences in their communication tactics? These questions guide this study, which focuses on parties' goals (vote seeking, office seeking, policy seeking) and

campaign tactics (negative campaigning, acclaiming, mobilization). While other studies focus on candidates' Twitter accounts, here a closer look is taken at official party accounts in order to learn more about their official tactics. Therefore, the most frequently used hashtags were evaluated. All parties that won seats during the election used Twitter for their campaigns. The CDU and the SPD pushed their candidates on Twitter, while the FDP, the Left, and the Greens used the mobilizing hashtag #btw17 to refer to the election in general. The AfD mostly referred to themselves using the hashtag #afd. A closer look reveals strengths and weaknesses of parties campaigning on Twitter. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 603 – 617]

Muble, Florian, Robert Ackland and Timothy Graham: Social bots in political online conversations. An (overestimated) danger for democratic deliberation on the Internet?

The manipulative use of so-called social bots on the Internet is increasingly regarded as a problem and danger to the public and to democracy. At the same time, however, research regarding the political use of social bots is nascent. Up to now, only few empirical studies on the topic exist, which primarily make use of automated big data analyses to identify social bots and their political agenda. In this article we argue that existing research on the role of social bots in the 2016 US presidential election campaign has significant shortcomings, which may limit the validity of results on the influence of social bots in political conversations on Twitter. While existing research suggests that social bots (identified using automated methods) were able to influence online conversations on Twitter and demonstrated bias towards the Republican presidential candidate *Donald Trump*, we contend that these findings were in large part the result of methodological choices that are inherent to conducting empirical research at scale using big data. In this paper, using Twitter data collected during the 2016 first US presidential debate, we combine network analysis methods with qualitative sociological approaches and find in fact that social bots tweeted rather negatively about *Trump* and did not exert significant influence on online conversations. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 618 – 638]

Decker, Frank: Direct democracy at state and federal level in Germany. Which plebiscitary instruments are appropriate?

While the right-wing populist AfD has become the primary proponent of plebiscitary measures in Germany, parties of the left are now approaching direct democracy with increasing skepticism. One reason can be found in the sobering experiences that have been made at the municipal and state levels, where the instrument has seen a universal integration into the legislative process since the 1990s. Those experiences can be traced back to the preferences of the constitutional authors for the citizens' initiative, an approach that conflicts with the parliamentary form of government. To escape this constitutional impasse, states could devise a middle way regarding their implementation of "popular legislation" which they cannot repeal outright. Such measures should not be introduced at the federal level at all where the use of plebiscitary instruments ought to be limited to obligatory referendums or referendums called by the federal government. Compared to "popular legislation" these are held in much lower regard but can be integrated far better into the existing institutional structure. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 639 – 657]

Lechner, Julian: The paradigmatic antagonism of realistic and normative democratic theories regarding intra-party democracy.

From a democratic-theoretical perspective, research on direct intra-party democracy has received only little attention. The case of SPD's decision to once again have its members decide on whether to enter another Grand Coalition after the 2016 federal election is a case in point as it seems that plebiscitary internal party procedures have been established as a viable option in forming a new government. Attempts for an exact democratic-theoretical definition or even the development of a cohesive theory of intra-party democracy have hardly been undertaken so far. Nonetheless, various perceptions regarding the normative evaluation or the concrete design of intra-party democracy can be identified in different democratic-theoretical traditions. Unlike *Habermas'* deliberative theory of democracy, which was also influential in the context of party-research, *Fraenkel's* neo-pluralism proves to be a suitable concept for appropriately conceiving the phenomenon of intra-party democracy and to overcome the deficit character of the antithetical classical paradigms of party research ("realistic" vs. "normative" tradition). Based on this, the limits and potentials of direct member participation can be demonstrated. [ZParl, vol. 49 (2018), no. 3, pp. 658 – 677]