

ABSTRACTS*

Kolkmann, Michael: A thorough Republican victory? The Congressional election on November 4, 2014.

In the 2014 Congressional election the Republican party was able to expand its majority in the House of Representatives while winning back the majority in the Senate, resulting in a “divided government” in the 114th U.S. Congress. It became clear that political parties in the USA increasingly have to deal with the phenomenon of a “dual electorate”, with the consequence that electorates in Congressional elections (“midterms”) differ from presidential elections. In addition, Democrats had to deal with an immensely unpopular President *Barack Obama*, even though he was not on the ballot. Moreover, they could not benefit from a recovering economy. Several recent developments in U.S. elections also need discussion, particularly gerrymandering and sorting as well as the lately increased political polarization and the future of filibusters. It remains to be seen whether Democrats and Republicans can find a more cooperative approach for the remaining time of President *Obama*’s term. The 2016 presidential election already casts a long shadow. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 459 – 475]

Sturm, Roland: A divided UK and a country on the brink of a Brexit? The British general election on March 7, 2015.

The result of the British general election surprised the pollsters. They had expected a neck and neck race of the two big parties. They did not predict a clear majority for either of them but a new coalition government. The election produced, however, a clear winner: *David Cameron*, the leader of the Conservative Party. This election furthermore generated a number of spectacular results. Both the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, the coalition partner of the Conservatives in the outgoing coalition, had to cope with heavy losses. The Liberal Democrats could not defend their strongholds in the English South-West and Scotland. Their total number of seats in the House of Commons was reduced from 57 to eight. In Scotland, the Labour Party lost 40 constituencies to the Scottish National Party (SNP). The Scottish Labour Party won, just as all the other unionist parties, only one seat in Scotland. The SNP celebrated a resounding victory. It conquered 56 of the 59 Scottish seats. This result deepens the gulf between Scottish politics and London – with unpredictable consequences. It is also difficult to forecast the future of the UK in the EU. A referendum on the country’s membership in the EU will be held by 2017 – most likely even sooner. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 475 – 493]

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

Jochem, Sven: The Swedish general election on September 14, 2014: change and crisis of government.

The results of the 2014 election to the Swedish Riksdag led to a change as well as to a severe crisis of government. The strengthened Sverigedemokraterna disrupted the delicate balance of power in Sweden's negotiation democracy with its minority governments and its bloc-logic of party competition. The red-green government is challenged to find viable strategies that will enable parliamentary majorities for reform politics and will ensure a stable government. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 494 – 504]

Köllner, Patrick: Party system, government formation, and parliamentary representation in New Zealand under the mixed-member proportional electoral system.

In September 2014, New Zealand's voters elected a new parliament. This was already the seventh election under a mixed-member proportional system (MMP) similar to the one used in Germany. Particular features of MMP in New Zealand include special electoral districts for the indigenous Māori population and the full translation of votes into seats for parties with at least one directly elected Member of Parliament. For around 80 years, the party system in New Zealand has been centered on the Labour Party and the National Party, which have been able to retain their status as 'people's parties' under MMP. The New Zealand variant of MMP has, however, made it easier for small parties to enter parliament. Smaller parties have regularly participated in government formation in the MMP era, either by joining a coalition government or by providing support for the governing party. The share of women in parliament in New Zealand has increased to around 30 percent under MMP and ethnic minorities, especially the Māori, now enjoy a much stronger representation in parliament. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 505 – 517]

Horst, Patrick: The election of the Hamburg state parliament on February 15, 2015: a red-green coalition for a referendum on the Olympic Games and for improving the parliament's stand in procedures of direct democracy.

After having governed successfully for four years and being led by widely respected Mayor *Olaf Scholz*, the SPD was the clear favorite when going into the election of the Hamburg state parliament on February 15, 2015. There was no doubt that the Social Democrats would continue to be the governing party. The only question was whether they would need a coalition partner. In the end, the SPD narrowly fell short of the absolute majority and formed a coalition with the Greens, whose aim in the election campaign was to become a partner in an SPD-led government. The new red-green coalition pledged to steer the course of the SPD's most important and successful governing projects. It also promised to foster a pragmatic, down-to-earth governing style like the previous government. To the Social-democratic theme of "good governance", the Greens added their desire for a better citizen participation. Hamburg's application for the Olympic Games 2024 will be decided in a legislative referendum. This new procedure of direct democracy was introduced into the Hamburg state constitution by the new coalition with the approval of the opposing Christian Democrats. Overall, the legislative referendum is intended to strengthen the Hanseatic "afterwork democracy" ("Feierabenddemokratie") with its expanded rights of citizen participation in procedures of direct democracy. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 518 – 538]

Probst, Lothar: The state elections in Bremen on May 10, 2015: Social Democrats and Greens – despite losses, majority barely defended.

Prior to the state elections in Bremen, it looked like the governing coalition of SPD and Greens would score a comfortable victory despite predicted losses for the Greens and growing public discontent with the coalition's rigid policy of cutbacks. However, the election ended in a completely unexpected result. Not only the Greens but also the Social Democrats and their popular prime candidate lost a great deal of voter support. Due to the opposition's weakness, the red-green coalition could, nevertheless, maintain a narrow majority and build a government again. For the Christian Democrats the result of 22.4 percent of the votes and an increase of only two percentage points were disappointing. Next to the Left party, the Free Democrats, the Alternative for Germany, and a local voters' association ained strength and secured mandates. Against this background the fragmentation of the party system increased. What attracted national attention and was one of the most significant outcomes of the election was the low turnout of only 50.2 percent. Particularly in residential areas with a high number of unemployed people and welfare recipients the voter participation was extremely low. However, the reason was not only the distinctive social divide in Bremen but also a rather lethargic pre-election mood as well as an election campaign with nearly no polarization between the parties. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 539 – 560]

Schröder, Valentin: The paradox of the “personal vote”: negative voting weights in the Landtag election laws of Bremen and Hamburg.

The 2011 reforms of the laws guiding the elections to the state parliaments in Bremen and Hamburg introduced systems of combined open and closed list proportional representation: Each voter can now cast five votes for party lists (list vote) and/or specific candidates (candidate vote). Seats are assigned as “list” or “candidate” mandates according to quotas derived from the list vote and candidate vote totals. This system can result in a paradox situation in which contenders can miss a seat due to having won too many candidate votes; twice this has happened in the four post-reform elections. Ensuing negative weights of their candidate votes implies a breach of the principle of electoral equality. Moreover, since voters pondering whether to cast candidate votes or not cannot gauge whether their decision will lead to negative weights, the electoral system is not transparent. The problem could be solved by introducing a mechanism that corrects for negative voting weights candidate-wise. But this would make the electoral system more complicated. Alternatively, the quota system could be replaced by assigning candidate mandates only to contenders whose candidate vote totals surpass the natural hurdle, i.e. the minimum number of votes needed to win a seat. This would reduce both the number of candidate mandates allotted and the electoral system's complexity. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 561 – 577]

Tiefenbach, Paul: Critics of the electoral system in the federal state of Bremen.

On May 10, 2015 the federal state of Bremen applied an electoral system with five votes and the possibility of accumulating and cross-voting for the second time. The participation rate declined to 50.2 percent, the lowest level ever. Contrary to the assumption that the complicated electoral system is responsible for this, it seems that voters appreciate the op-

tions the new system offers: Slightly more than one third of them votes in the traditional way and gives all five votes to the list of candidates of one party only. Overall the number of votes given for the list of candidates decreased, but the number of personal votes for particular candidates remained stable even though the participation rate fell. Parties, especially the Social Democrats, criticize the voting system since many candidates from lower ranks receive a seat through personal votes, which complicates working in the parliamentary group. Moreover, the gender quota of the list of candidates is messed up, and the number of candidates under the age of 25 has dropped. Therefore Social Democrats and Left Party are trying to lower the influence of the personal votes. On the other hand: the personal votes bring election campaigns closer to the citizens. The number of deputies from immigration families rises; the median age of the deputies decreases. Contrary to this criticism, “Mehr Demokratie”, a non-governmental organization that initiated the current voting system, tends to give more importance to the personal votes. Maybe the electoral issue will have to be decided by a referendum. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 578 – 588]

Behnke, Joachim: The impact of knowledge of the electoral system on voting behavior: because they do not know what they are doing, does this mean that they do what they do not want to do?

About half of German voters have a correct understanding of the German electoral system. The other half incorrectly believes that either the first vote or that the first and second vote together are decisive for the distribution of seats. As a consequence of this ignorance concerning the mode of operation of the German electoral system, part of the electorate casts their vote in a manner inconsistent with their intentions. Some observed cases of strategic voting, i.e. when voters deviate from their “true” preference with their first or second vote, can obviously be traced back to this ignorance of the electoral system. In this sense in the Federal election of 2013, a non-negligible part of the supporters of the CDU/CSU voted with their second vote for the FDP under the wrong assumption that this vote was not important for the distribution of seats. At any rate this behavior has caused the CDU/CSU to suffer a loss of seats, possibly it is even responsible for the loss of the absolute majority of seats. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 588 – 607]

Raabe, Johannes and Eric Linhart: Electoral system effects and the role of different political levels for German elections.

In Germany’s political system elections are held on different political levels with electoral systems that differ across time and levels. Making use of this variance and analyzing local, state, federal, and European elections since 1990, our contribution investigates how vote shares of differently sized parties are affected by the interplay of the effects of political levels and electoral systems. The empirical analysis highlights that – controlling for time trends and regional differences – both differences in political levels as well as in electoral systems substantially affect the vote shares of parties of different sizes. Notably, both these factors are of similar importance. Furthermore, there is a systematic difference between small parties on the one hand and medium-sized and large parties on the other hand. First, small parties gain higher vote shares if elections are held on the local, state or European level. And second, they benefit, as expected, from the absence of a legal threshold. However, sys-

tematic differences between medium-sized and large parties cannot be found. In sum, it is important to take into account the effects of different political levels as well as electoral system effects, especially when potential electoral reforms are evaluated. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 608 – 621]

Böller, Florian: More than a “constitutionally created potted plant”? U.S. Congress and the democratic control of military interventions.

Previous studies have characterized the U.S. Congress as uniformly weak in carrying out its constitutional responsibility in the politics of military interventions vis-à-vis the president. The picture, however, has more nuances when not only legislative activism prior to the use of force but also the efforts of Congress to control and provide oversight to ongoing military interventions is evaluated. This differentiated perspective on the various tools of democratic control is applied to a structured-focused comparison of U.S. military interventions between 1973 and 2013. Indeed, there is a considerable variance in executive-legislative relations concerning the war powers question, which contradicts the traditional finding of a consistently weak Congress. While in some cases Congress is indeed deferential towards the executive, there is also evidence of legislative assertiveness, when members of the legislative branch perceive a military intervention as not serving U.S. national security interests. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 3, pp. 622 – 644]

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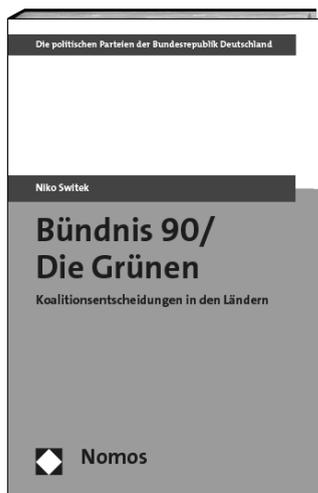
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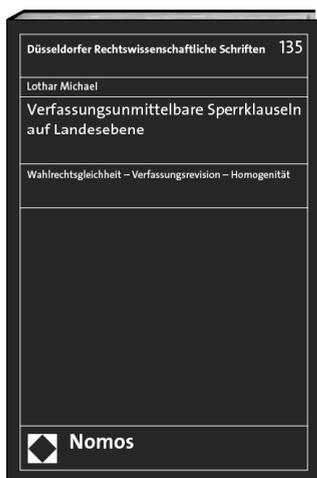
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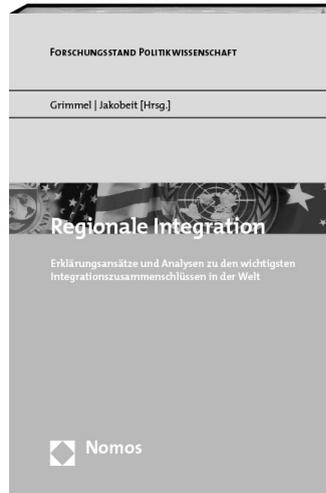
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