

# Abstracts

Thorsten Hüller

## Are FCC Judges ‚Rational Fools‘?

In previous years two influential analyses of the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) from the camp of empirical rational choice have launched two strong theses: Judges are influenced by their political preferences (Hönnige) and act opportunistically in alignment with public opinion (Vanberg). Both theoretical models are in important parts inconsistent. In the first case the empirical support is also weak, in the second the data can be explained in a more convincing way.

Skadi Krause and Harald Bluhm

## Between institutionalised social science and Citizen-Enlightenment. Tocqueville's new political science

Tocqueville's scientific-political intervention *De la Démocratie en Amérique* aims to provide a proper understanding of democracy to both, its critics and friends, particularly so in France. In his magnum opus he conceptualizes democracy not only as a form of government, but also as a specific form of society which comprises the whole social structure (customs/habits, couples/family, social classes, peoples/nations), including the self-conceptions of actors. He is therefore critical of the contemporary political sciences which either describe political and social processes from the perspective of the state or from that of government. This is particularly evident in theoretical disputes of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, where Tocqueville had been a member since 1838. In contrast to François Guizot, who considered social processes only in terms of their relevance to the executive and strived to develop a science of governmental consulting, Tocqueville calls for *a new political science* in order to describe the interaction of social institutions and democracy from both the perspective of the state and society. Tocqueville does not primarily aim at scientific consultancy for governmental action. Rather, he is concerned with politics as a reciprocal relation of structures and actors and to assess their interconnections with the basic values of society. His study intends to facilitate the autonomous judgment of social actors and to specify the standards against which the democratization of a society can be measured.

*Sven Leunig and Hendrik Träger*

### **Interests of the Laender, Partisan Politics, Party Pressure – the Bundesrat in the focus of diverging interests**

For decades a debate has raged in political science, the media and in politics, namely, whether partisan politics have superseded the genuine interests of the Laender in the German Bundesrat. This article first deals with the question which methodological approach or which research design is likely to offer an answer to the problem. We suggest a sequential use of, first, quantitative methods, and second, qualitative case studies which amend the results of the former. We used this approach for those cases in which the conference committee between Bundestag and Bundesrat was invoked between 1990 and 2005, as well as for selected law making processes during that time frame. Our results support the thesis that the Laender interests were marginalized by partisan politics only in rare instances.

*Matthias Keil*

### **Constructing a foreign policy antagonist. The image of China in the 2012 US presidential election**

Hardly any strategic question is discussed as intensely by experts, media and politicians in the United States as the “rise” of China and its repercussions on the relationship between the two countries. In this debate, China is often presented as a threat. From the perspective of post-structuralist discourse theories, however, such debates are not a mere exchange of arguments decoupled from the sphere of action but yield truly political consequences: These discourses constitute the meaning of China for US foreign policy and thus render specific courses of action possible and legitimate.

However, such narratives can only influence a democracy's foreign policy in the long run, if they are deeply rooted in the population as well. Electoral campaigns are an especially salient example of such processes of knowledge and identity production. Therefore, by using Grounded Theory methodology, the article aims at reconstructing the “image of China” that Barack Obama and Mitt Romney discursively produced in the 2012 presidential campaign. Both candidates systematically presented China as a threatening challenge and as an antagonist of the US.

This finding points to the importance of studying the functioning of interpretive patterns in international politics and furthermore emphasizes their significance for the analysis of contemporary US-China relations.

*Martin Gross*

### **The Formation of Coalitions in large German cities: Empirical Evidence from North Rhine-Westphalia**

There exist a number of studies on local coalition formation in Western European countries showing the application of coalition theories to the local level. However, such an empirical analysis is missing for the German case. Therefore, the article deals with the determinants of local coalition formation in Germany in general, and with the formation of coalitions in local councils in large German cities in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in particular, by applying ‘classical’ theories of coalition formation as well as institutional and contextual factors.

The results show that local political actors are both office- and policy-seekers. Furthermore, the directly elected mayor plays a decisive role in local coalition formation processes.