

ABSTRACTS*

Jesse, Eckhard: The election of the Saxonian state parliament on August 31, 2014: caesura for the party system after the second non-grand „grand coalition“?

The outcome of the sixth election to the Saxonian Landtag led, like in 2004, to a coalition of strong Christian Democrats with weak Social Democrats and with *Stanislaw Tillich* as Prime Minister of Saxony, making him the longest-serving Premier of a federal state in Germany. An arithmetically feasible black-green coalition failed because of the Greens. The electorate showed a lack of interest in a change, however, the CDU, the larger coalition party, was seen more favourably than the liberal party (FDP), the smaller coalition party. During the campaign all parties focused heavily on issues related to the state of Saxony. While the Alternative for Germany (AfD) campaigned for the first time and was elected straight into Parliament, neither the FDP nor the NPD, after having been part of the state parliament for more than a decade, won enough votes to continue their parliamentary work. It is therefore possible that this election on the Land level might prove to be a decisive caesura. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 3 – 20]

Niedermayer, Oskar: The election of the Brandenburg state parliament on September 14, 2014: the Left Party was punished by the voters but remained governing party.

The election campaign became ‘cuddly’ since neither the Left Party nor the CDU confronted the SPD, a desired coalition partner for both parties, head-on. Furthermore the government had settled potentially controversial topics before the campaigning began. This contributed considerably to the very low turnout of 47.9 per cent. The SPD won the election, because their front-runner *Dietmar Woidke* left behind his competitors in all relevant policy issues and because the party was seen as being most competent regarding the significant topics at hand. The CDU advanced to second place and the Left party dropped to third. The new party AfD managed to gain more than twelve per cent, the Greens remained in the state parliament, the BVB/Free Voters won three seats and the FDP failed to overcome the five percent hurdle. The SPD held serious exploratory talks with the CDU but then decided to continue the coalition with the Left Party. *Dietmar Woidke* was elected as head of government, the SPD now holds six, the Left Party three ministries. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 21 – 38]

Oppelland, Torsten: The election of the Thuringian state parliament on September 14, 2014: start of a red-red-green experiment under the leadership of The Left.

After 24 years in power, the CDU was replaced by a new coalition composed of The Left, the SPD and the Greens and led by Prime Minister *Bodo Ramelow*, a member of The Left party. This constellation is entirely new in Germany. Although the CDU remained the strongest party (33.5 percent) for several reasons (a non-polarized campaign, issues that had

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been reduced in salience, and a decline of the state Prime Minister *Christiane Lieberknecht's* reputation) the party failed to win the votes necessary to come into a position where no politically viable coalition could be formed without it. The Left's strategy of personalization, on the other hand, proved successful to moderately improve its good result of 2009. The SPD had made the wrong strategic decision of keeping all coalition options open before the election and thus experienced not only another debacle but, with 12.4 percent, an all time low. Yet, after the election the SPD found itself in a pivotal position and could decide which coalition would form the next government. In the face of electoral defeat it settled for the new coalition with The Left and the Greens who barely managed to pass the five-percent threshold. The SPD-party members voted to approve this choice. That the FDP failed to surmount the five-percent threshold can be attributed to Germany-wide trends [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 39 – 56]

Träger, Hendrik: Elections in unified Germany from 1990 to 2014: differences and similarities between East and West.

Since 2014, the Prime Minister of Thuringia is a member of The Left, a socialist party with roots in the former GDR. However, in the Western part of Germany The Left is hardly present in regional parliaments; a phenomenon that suggests important differences in voting behaviour in East and West. Looking at the voter turnout, the results of all relevant parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Die Linke/PDS, Die Republikaner, DVU, NPD) and the volatility for all elections to the Bundestag, the European Parliament and the parliaments of German Länder since 1990, a number of findings are surprising: the voter turnout is not essentially lower in the East than in the West and the volatility is not higher. Altogether there are both regional differences and similarities between East and West. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 57 – 81]

Best, Volker: Complex coalitions, perplexed voters, perforated party profiles. A critical review of recent findings from German coalition democracy and a proposal for reform.

Due to the pluralization of the party system, government formation in Germany is moving away from coalitions within the established political camps and towards grand coalitions or other, sometimes complex coalitions between parties from different camps. As it seems, this development is not regarded as problematic by most scholars of German coalition politics. The author disagrees for three reasons: First, the bigger part of the electorate still prefers a coalition within a political camp. For that reason, secondly, electoral campaigns mostly revolve around the respective pre-electoral coalitions. This, however, is less and less reflected in the ultimate government formation, causing a problem from the point of view of democracy theory. Third, party profiles risk to be blurred in "coalitions of the unwilling". Parties tend to be punished at the polls for participating in them – in grand coalitions, it usually hits the junior partner. Revitalizing the established coalitions seems desirable, as they allow parties to better preserve their brand core and provide the voters with clear alternatives to choose from. Therefore the introduction of a majority bonus based on the Italian model is suggested. This would be a milder and at the same time more effective reform than a British-style majority or a parallel voting system, and would correspond to the parties' respective interests. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 82 – 99]

Ley, Richard: Prime ministers without a parliamentary mandate – thoughts on amending article 52 paragraph 1 of the North Rhine-Westphalian constitution.

Although it has apparently not led to any problems in North Rhine-Westphalia that prime ministerial candidates must be elected members of parliament its state parliament has been discussing the possibility of deleting that constitutional provision. This is plausible since future problematic situations need to be considered by constitutional law. Documented cases of other German states prove that it might be in the North Rhine-Westphalian parliament's interest to delete the present restriction, thereby enlarging the circle of possible prime ministerial candidates. This consideration becomes even more obvious if it is kept in mind that a constitution should allow for a maximum of political scope to ensure the political flexibility needed. This is especially true if such restrictions do not represent fundamental constitutional rationales such as the constitutional state and / or democracy. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 100 – 116]

Reutter, Werner: Constitutional politics in Brandenburg.

Decision-making in matters of constitutional change seems hardly to comply with the rules associated with a parliamentary form of government. Constitutional changes require – at least – a two third majority in parliament. Thus, normally at least one party in opposition has to support bills aiming at amending the constitution. Due to these formal requirements the standard approach explaining law-making in parliamentary governments seems inappropriate to explain the essential aspects of constitutional politics. However, constitutional politics in the state of Brandenburg between 1992 and 2013 show many features of majoritarian decision-making in parliamentary systems. In addition, in the Landtag of Brandenburg constitutional amendments are dealt with in the same way as “normal” bills. Overall, in Brandenburg constitutional politics is similar to the one in the Bundestag regardless of some specifics. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 116 – 135]

Häsing, Jens and Aron Buzogány: Europeanisation of the Landtage? The role of parliamentary administrations.

The Lisbon Treaty established the Early-warning-system (EWS) for the scrutiny of subsidiarity which provides parliaments of the member states with the opportunity to influence law-making at the European level. In the case of Germany, this provision affects not only the Bundestag but also the Bundesrat, the second chamber. While the Bundesrat is an executive body, state parliaments can also make use of the new subsidiarity instruments. Nevertheless, there are wide differences whether and how they use these instruments. This article highlights the role played in this process by one under-researched parliamentary actor: the parliamentary staff. Usually, parliamentary staff is assumed to be apolitical. However, the low politicization of European issues at the subnational level and the limited expertise of politicians in this field can potentially turn politically neutral administrative staff members into influential players. Hence, the described EU-related professionalization of the state parliaments, including the horizontal and vertical cooperation, is very important for their functioning. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 136 – 150]

Geißel, Brigitte, Martina Neunecker and Alma Kolleck: Dialogue-oriented procedures of citizen-involvement: useful or useless innovations? The example of participatory budgeting.

The search for effective and legitimate will-formation and decision-making is one of the main topics of political science. Currently dialogue-oriented procedures of citizen-involvement are often regarded as hope for the future – or as useless ‘window-dressing’. The example ‘participatory budgeting in Germany’ studied here proves that dialogue-oriented citizen-involvement can be regarded both as useful and as useless – depending on the criteria. From the perspective of democratic theory as well as from the views of different actors involved in the practice of participatory budgeting a preliminary framework for analysis is discussed. The aim is not to provide a conclusive evaluation of such procedures, but to provide a clarification, refinement and advancement of a set of criteria. Such an advanced, multidimensional set of criteria will enable future research to create a ‘big picture evaluation’ by means of combining the currently very fragmented evaluations with their inconsistent criteria. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 151 – 165]

Winkelmann, Thorsten and Jost F. Noller: Only few changes: the outcome of South-Africa’s national elections on May 7, 2014.

The fifth democratic election in South Africa was clearly won by the African National Congress. It received 62.15 per cent of the votes and thus won a comfortable majority in the National Assembly. The liberal and pro-business Democratic Alliance could raise its percentage of votes considerably. Its main topics in the election campaign had been the existing economic and social problems as well as the endemic corruption in the country. The newly formed Economic Freedom Fighters obtained 6.35 per cent of the votes. This party advocates the nationalisation of certain branches of industry the way *Hugo Chavez* did in Venezuela as well as a comprehensive land reform of the kind that led to disastrous consequences in neighbouring Zimbabwe. The election campaign was not only strongly polarised by these extreme demands, but also by a poor political performance of the government especially in the fields of fighting poverty and crime. Furthermore, the South African society is still strongly divided. These social and economic disparities refer to a certain extent to the still vivid past of racial segregation under the former apartheid regime. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 166 – 182]

Gefßler, Sebastian: Autonomy and institutional leeways of regional minority parties in Catalonia, Quebec and Scotland in comparative perspective.

Institutional factors have considerable impact on the success of regional minority parties. This can be seen clearly in the cases of Catalonia, Quebec, and Scotland and their minority parties; the PQ, the CiU and the SNP. The combination of party systems and electoral systems as well as the degree of regional autonomy has played an important role for their ability to govern and their capability to act on the regional level. After having been elected into government, regional minority parties need to play the game of politics in which actors, driven by their respective interests, have to compete and govern within a specific institutional context. From a neo-institutional perspective, regional minority parties influence these institutions over the long, but they are also constrained by the institutional context.

Governance means here the reciprocal interaction between societal and political/institutional factors. These processes can contribute to the disintegration and integration of a multi-level government system. This is connected to a specific leeway of societal mobilization, in which generations are socialized politically in such a way that they become a so-called “Unabhängigkeitsgeneration” (a generation of people seeking independence). Those generations can then put pressure on the institutional system in different degrees. [ZParl, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 183 – 204]