

Abstracts

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Evaluation of potential governments or reflections of party competition? Determinants of voters' coalition preferences in the German states between 1990 and 2009

Coalition governments are the norm in the German multilevel-system. Their existence not only affects the political process and policy-making, but also increases the complexity of voting: The behaviour of voters at the polls is not only based on the evaluation of the parties, but also influenced by their opinion on the coalitions that the parties could form after the election. But we still know little about the determinants of voters' coalition preferences. In this paper, we combine theories of voting behaviour, government formation and policy learning to derive expectations regarding factors that may impact voters' coalition preferences. For example, we expect that voters prefer coalitions that are most likely to implement their policy preferences. At the same time, we assume that voters adopt the patterns of party competition and anticipate how realistic individual coalitions are – given the existing patterns of government formation. We test our hypotheses by analysing survey data from 78 election studies from the German state level. The results support our arguments: the coalition preferences of voters depend not only on the programmatic proximity of potential coalitions, the parties' coalition statements and party identification, but also on the characteristics of coalitions that were formed in the past.

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The plebiscite on the railway station project “Stuttgart 21”

An analysis of voting behaviour in local districts in Baden-Württemberg

We examine the regional variance of the votes on the railway station project “Stuttgart 21”. In addition to party partisanship, prospective regional advantages and their regionally specific relevance explain the voting behaviour in local districts. Thus, our findings contest previous journalistic and political interpretations of the voting behaviour, confirming the results of other studies on plebiscites.

As in our case the overall voting results reflect parliamentary majorities, the use of plebiscites for increasing public participation seems questionable. Moreover, plebiscites may prevent the realisation of infrastructure projects in low-population areas, as the voting results also depend on the covariance of the regional advantages with the distribution of the population. In the light of these findings, alternatives ensuring public participation need to be considered.

Mischa Hansel

India's foreign policy: The role of public opinion and elite dissent

India's influence on world politics has grown considerably during the last two decades. The country is often said to be the largest democracy on earth. But how does the democratic nature of India's political system affects its external policies? What particular role does public opinion play? In the following article I analyse whether public opinion can make a difference in regard of Indian-American relations, the Kashmir-conflict and Indian climate change policies. My basic assumption is that three factors can lead decision-makers to consider public opinion before taking foreign policy decisions: (1) unambiguous preferences of the public, (2) a substantial elite dissent and (3) highly salient issues. My analysis of public opinion surveys shows that the first criterion is met in all three cases. A significant elite dissent, however, does only exist as far as Indian-American relations are concerned. The main reason why public opinion is of only limited importance for Indian foreign policy is the low salience of foreign policy issues in the media and during electoral campaigns.