STRANGE BEDFELLOWS — FORMING COALITION GOVERNMENTS: LESSONS FROM GERMANY

Presentation at Curtin’s Corner
February 23rd, 2018
NO, I WOULDN'T CALL HIM MY "PARTNER" EXACTLY...
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2. Erosion of the two big „people‘s parties“ CDU/CSU and SPD

Federal elections 1990 - 2017

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Federal elections and governments 1990 - 2017

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<td>participation rate</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU/SPD</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
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3. The Bundesrat: influence of the Länder governments on federal legislation

(1) Germany’s executive federalism

Federation (Bund) and States (Länder) constitute independent levels of government with full quality of state (institutions of legislation, execution and judiciary)

special type of federalism: ‘executive’ federalism with centralized legislation (Bund) and decentralized execution/administration of federal laws at the level of the Länder

Bundesrat (Second Chamber of Federal Legislative): members of state governments!

For a majority of regulations, the approval of the Bundesrat is necessary!

Number of votes: 6 for the big states (NW, Bav, BW, LS) down to 3 for the small states (HB, Saar, MWP, HH)

Minister presidents of the States are part of the party delegations for federal coalition negotiations because

many issues of the coalition treaty need the approval of the Bundesrat when they come to legislation

they are influential members of the party boards and potential candidates for chancellorship!
(2) The composition of the Bundesrat 2006 and 2017

2006

- Bayern (6 CSU)
- Hamburg (3 CDU)
- Hessen (5 CDU)
- Saarland (3 CDU)
- Thüringen (4 CDU)
- Baden-Württemberg (6 CDU/FDP)
- Niedersachsen (6 CDU/FDP)
- Nordrhein-Westfalen (6 CDU/FDP)
- Sachsen-Anhalt (4 CDU/SPD)
- Sachsen (4 CDU/SPD)
- Schleswig-Holstein (4 CDU/SPD)
- Brandenburg (4 SPD/CDU)
- Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (3 SPD/CDU)
- Bremen (3 SPD/Grüne)
- Rheinland-Pfalz (4 SPD)
- Berlin (4 SPD/Linke)
2018

- SPD + CDU: 9
- CDU + SPD: 7
- GRÜNE + CDU: 6
- CSU: 6
- CDU + FDP: 6
- SPD + GRÜNE: 6
- CDU + GRÜNE: 5
- SPD + FDP + GRÜNE: 4
- CDU + SPD + GRÜNE: 4
- SPD + LINKE: 4
- SPD + LINKE + GRÜNE: 4
- LINKE + SPD + GRÜNE: 4
- CDU + GRÜNE + FDP: 4
Composition of the Bundesrat

2018

total of votes: 69
absolute majority: 35 votes
(3) Difficult compromises …

… across all parties in favour of necessary majorities for federal legislation

›› Each state government can only vote unanimously in the Bundesrat.
›› In case of coalition governments, coalition treaties determine that if the partners do not agree on an issue the state must abstain in the vote.
›› The smaller parties, which were in a total minority position in the Bundestag since 2013 (‘grand coalition’), have tried to influence majorities in the Bundesrat in favour of their federal political positions, e.g.
   › to hinder a sharpening of the asylum regulations in the refugee crisis
   › to influence climate change policies, …
›› All parties have to balance the preference of their ‘right’ and ‘left’ wing members.
›› In the past, there was a clear majority: black or black-yellow against red or red-green trying to block federal legislation in case of an opposite majority!
›› Actually, there is often no clear majority in the Bundesrat which causes negotiations across all parties necessary for a majority.
›› The Federation tends to ‘buy’ votes with special financial ‘privileges’.
4. Most recent developments

▷ The rise of the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland)
▷ The failure of negotiations for a „Jamaica“ coalition for federal government
▷ SPD: discussion on minority government or a „third way agreement“ vs. „grand coalition“
▷ Difficult coalition negotiations of CDU, CSU and SPD
▷ The chaos of the SPD leaders and the referendum of SPD members on the coalition treaty
▷ The decline or the end of Merkel‘s power?
5. Some conclusions

The German party system is again under change.

All try to cover a median voter program without regarding the traditional position of the respective party in the past.

The other wing of the party member remains ‘under control’ as long as the party participates in government, but are discontent and ‘mumble’; many abandon their membership (sharp decline of members since the 1980’s)

Number of switching voters has been increasing

Experience from the most recent state and federal elections: a convincing and trustable personality of the leading candidate is more important than an ideological party program

The extremely right wing party ‘Alternative für Deutschland’ will win seats in Parliaments as long as parties present front-runners who even don’t convince their party members.
5. Some conclusions