

The impact of formal and informal institutions on voter behavior

Towards a General Spatial Theory of Voting

Christian H.C.A. Henning*, Michael Herrmann[†] and Susumu Shikano[‡]

August 2006

*Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association,
Philadelphia, Aug. 31th - Sept. 3rd 2006*

Abstract

This paper derives a general spatial theory of voting based on Down's concept of a pure policy-oriented rational voter. Incorporating voters' perceptions of postelection bargaining into their policy preferences results in a unified model of voting comprised of a proximity and directional component. Main theoretical implication of our model are: (i) The relative weight of the directional component varies significantly across the institutional environment of legislative bargaining. (ii) It is also determined by party characteristics, e.g. party size, discipline and extremism. Using election data from five parliamentary systems that vary in their institutional design we test our theory and show how the constitutional context affects voter behavior.

Keywords: spatial voter theory, unified model of voting, Downsian theory of democracy

*Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Kiel, Germany,
Corresponding author, chenning@ae.uni-kiel.de

[†]Department of Political Science, University of Mannheim, Germany

[‡]Department of Political Science, University of Mannheim, Germany.