A Unified Theory of Voting
Directional and Proximity Spatial Models

This book addresses the questions: How do voters use their own issue positions and those of candidates to decide how to vote? How do candidates choose policy positions in response to the behavior of voters? Does a voter tend to choose the candidate who most nearly shares the views of the voter or rather a candidate who holds more extreme or intense views but in the same direction as the voter, perhaps because voters discount candidates’ abilities to implement the policies they advocate? The authors develop a unified model that incorporates these and other voter motivations and, using conditional logit and other statistical methods, assess its empirical predictions – for both voter choice and candidate strategy – in the United States, Norway, and France. The analyses show that a combination of motivations involving proximity, direction, discounting, and party identification is compatible with the choices made by voters and with the mildly but not extremely divergent policies that are characteristic responses to these choices in both two-party and multiparty electorates. All of these motivations are necessary to understand the linkage between candidate issue positions and voter preferences.

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A Unified Theory of Voting

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Acknowledgments

No work stands on its own. We draw heavily from the basic Downsian proximity voting framework and the huge literature extending Downs's work, particularly that of Enelow, Hinich, and Munger. We were directly inspired by the directional voting ideas of Matthews (1979), which, in turn, can be linked to ideas in social choice in Schofield (1983, 1985); and by the work of Rabinowitz, Macdonald, and their co-authors (e.g., Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989) and the literature their work has inspired.

1 Recent important works focusing on proximity spatial models of electoral competition include Enelow and Hinich's The Spatial Theory of Voting (1984); Ordeshook's Game Theory and Political Theory (1986); Mueller's Public Choice II (1989); and Hinich and Munger's Ideology and the Theory of Political Choice (1994). Enelow and Hinich's second book (Advances in the Spatial Theory of Voting, 1990) treats multi-candidate electoral competition and the effect of policy preferences on the part of candidates, among other topics. While the principal focus of Coughlin's Probabilistic Voting Theory (1992) is the proximity model, he also derives equilibrium results for candidate strategy under assumptions based on directionality and for a fixed-sum constraint on the available resources to be redistributed to voters. Pierce's Choosing the Chief: Presidential Elections in France and the United States (1995a), van der Eijk and Franklin's Choosing Europe? (1996), and Hinich and Munger's recent book, Analytical Politics (1997) include comparison of the Rabinowitz–Macdonald directional model and the proximity model as one among many topics. However, no previous book has systematically compared directional spatial models with the traditional proximity models or investigated the implications of a unified approach for candidate strategy and equilibrium as we do here.

2 Our bibliography lists 35 papers since 1989 dealing with the Rabinowitz-Macdonald directional model, of which at least 29 have already appeared in print at the time of this writing. There is also a direct link between the 1970s work of the mathematical psychologist Douglas Carroll and the Rabinowitz–Macdonald directional model. The Matthews directional model, on the other hand, has received much less attention in the recent literature on candidate and political party competition and to our knowledge has not been the subject of any empirical analysis prior to the publication of four of our own papers on directional models in the 1990s.
We particularly thank James Adams, Jay Dow, Steven Brams, Richard Potthoff, and Robert Tuttle for reading portions of the manuscript and for helpful comments and discussions of it. We also thank them – as well as Scott Feld, Gary King, Nicholas Miller, George Rabinowitz, and Anders Westholm – for general discussions or for correspondence about related topics over the years that helped lay the groundwork for the present work. James Adams kindly gave his permission to include a summary of joint work in progress with one of the authors and made numerous and helpful comments about many aspects of the manuscript. At Cambridge University Press, we thank Alex Holzman, Holly Johnson, and Genevieve Scandone. For library assistance, we thank Dorothy Green and Clover Behrend.

The data sets used in the study were made available by the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) and the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and are acknowledged with appreciation. We thank Ola Listhaug and Atle Alvheim for facilitating our use of the NSD data. Bernt Aardal and Henry Valen were the Principal Investigators of the Norwegian Election Studies and the Norwegian Bureau of Statistics collected the data. Roy Pierce was the Principal Investigator of the 1988 French Presidential Election Survey.

A portion of the research for this book was done while the first author was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Biostatistics at the University of Washington. The contributions of the second author to the completion of this manuscript were supported by National Science Foundation Grant No. SBR 446740-21167, Program in Methodology, Measurement, and Statistics (to Bernard Grofman and Anthony Marley). Neither the NSF, the ICPSR, the NSD, the Norwegian Bureau of Statistics, nor the principal investigators of either of the U.S., Norwegian, or French national election studies are responsible for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

Chapters 2, 3, and 5 are based in part on ideas in Merrill and Grofman (1997a, b), while Chapter 8 draws on the work of Schofield (1978, 1985), Matthews (1979), Cohen and Matthews (1980), and Merrill, Grofman, and Feld (1999) and Chapter 9 is drawn from Merrill and Grofman (1998b). Chapters 10 and 11 are based in part
on the work of Adams (forthcoming a, 1997a, 1999), Merrill (1993), Adams and Merrill (forthcoming a), and related ideas in Feld and Grofman (1991). Figures 3.3, 8.1, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6, and 10.2 and Tables 4.2 and 11.1 are reprinted or adapted with permission from Kluwer Academic Publishers.