

Voter behavior, government capture and accountability in African States: A comparative analysis based on cross-country estimations of spatial voting models

Laura Seide¹, Christian Henning¹ and Svetlana Petri¹

¹University of Kiel, Department of Agricultural Economics, Kiel, Germany

lseide@ae.uni-kiel.de

In political theory electoral competition is understood as a fundamental democratic mechanism to guarantee that governmental policies reflect society's interests. In reality, however, electoral competition is often restricted and hence, leads to biased policy outcomes. Basically, policy biases result from two major mechanisms: government capture and a lack of governmental accountability. The latter corresponds to the fact that elected politicians have not sufficient electoral incentives to implement policies benefiting socio-economic groups they are representing, but rather serve their self-interests, while the former corresponds to the fact that electoral competition is biased in favor of specific interests. Micropolitical foundation of both phenomena is inherent in voter behavior. Accordingly, we estimate a probabilistic voter model, where voters have mixed motivations to vote. On the one hand voters are interested in policy outcomes, i.e. vote policy-oriented, while on the other hand voters vote expressively, i.e. vote according to their ideological preferences for various parties not related to party platforms. The higher the weight for expressive voting in a society the lower is the governmental accountability. Moreover, the more the importance of expressive voting varies across socio-economic groups the higher is government capture. To deal with heterogeneity we estimate a probabilistic voting model using a mixed logit and a latent class approach based on national election survey data for 17 African countries. Based on estimation results we calculate group-specific relative weights of voting motives for each country implying national levels of government accountability and capture. Based on estimation results of the latent class model we are able to identify personal characteristics like age, gender or education as well as institutional factors such as membership in stakeholder organizations determining the relative importance of the two motives for observed voter behavior. To explain cross-national variances in voter motives we regress estimated average national weights on specific national macro-institutional and macro-sociological characteristics. The former includes characteristics of the national party system or age and quality of democracy, while the latter includes ethnic segmentation, income distribution and per-capita income.