

## *Chapter 6*

# Methods of Electing Legislators

Legislators are ordinarily chosen through elections in voting districts. The election methods vary greatly among districts. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss various rules for choosing these legislators. The members of a collective must make two basic decisions: (1) how many legislators to have and (2) how to elect them. We say little about the number of legislators. It is perhaps enough to note that there does not appear to be any magic optimum, but there are limits. At one extreme, members of a collective would want to elect enough representatives to discourage conspiracies by the elected legislators that might increase the risk of power abuse. At the other extreme, a large number of legislators would be costly to maintain. Within these limits there is a lot of room for choice.

The main concern of this chapter is the different methods that members of a collective may use to elect representatives. We shall explore three characteristics of such methods. The first, which is discussed in part one, is the number of representatives to be elected. The second concerns eligibility rules for becoming a candidate for the legislature. Should everyone be eligible or should candidates be required to meet some minimum qualifications in order to get on the ballot? Part two deals with these questions. The third characteristic concerns how to account for voter preferences in the actual tabulation of votes. Should each person be allowed only one vote or more than one? And if he is allowed more than

one, how should his votes be prioritized? What weights should be assigned? We discuss these issues in part three.

The choice of election methods should take account of the potential waste of resources. Part four discusses the potential waste due to strategies adopted by political parties to give them an advantage over their rivals. We discuss two sources of waste: gerrymandering and strategic action by political parties in multi-representative district elections.

Among the democracies of the modern world, there are many variations in the number of legislative bodies. We have noted that although most democracies have a single legislature, the U.S. has two legislative houses. In addition, there may be a number of state, or provincial, legislatures as well as county, city and other local ones. In order to understand the problems of choosing a system of representation at the most elementary level, we must begin with a simple case. So we assume that the framers of the constitution have decided on only one house of the legislature. Furthermore, we disregard provincial, state, city, and local legislatures. Thus, we narrow our analysis to a national legislature with a single house. We further assume that the members of the collective have already decided on the total number of representatives they want in the legislature.