GEOGRAPHY OF ELECTIONS

P.J. Taylor and R.J. Johnston

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P.J. TAYLOR and R.J. JOHNSTON

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For Margaret and Pete,
Joyce and John.

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Preface

Most readers of this book will cast their vote for political parties and their candidates on numerous occasions during their lifetime. Competitive party voting has become an accepted part of the 'western' way of doing things. People normally cast their votes in their home area where their vote is subsequently counted to help produce a representative for them. *Geography of Elections* is about some of the implications of this geographical basis to the organization of elections.

We hope that this book will be of interest to three groups of potential readers. First, students of politics will find a small part of their subject area brought together and viewed in what may prove to be a slightly different light. Our treatment of elections is obviously not complete from a political scientist's point of view but we trust that our particular perspective, with its emphasis on spatial aspects of elections, will prove to be of some use within their wider spectrum. To a large degree we have selected parts of the politics literature and reorganized it into a geographical framework. We trust that the original authors, to whom we are greatly indebted, forgive us.

Secondly, we hope that our specific treatment of elections appeals to the layman interested in such matters. To some degree the geographical approach is a straightforward, simple view of elections on the ground. We have intended that our discussions of all the various topics with which we deal are self-contained within the book and require no previous reading, but merely an average interest in the party politics going on around the reader. Our discussions are supported by numerous maps and diagrams which

are intended to clarify arguments and to help readers see elections in their basic geographical context.

Finally, students of geography should find topics of interest in the following pages. In geography in general, the political dimension has normally been under-valued and relatively neglected. Hence, recent introductory human geography text books on the spatial organization of society deal almost solely with economic and social topics to the exclusion of political aspects of society. We hope that this book contributes a little towards rectifying this anomaly in human geography. There are numerous applications of ideas and concepts from human geography set within a new political context. Quite simply, electoral patterns reflect and help produce the overall human geography of a region or state. This book attempts to illustrate this assertion.

Although it has not been our purpose to cover all political aspects of elections, we have attempted a more comprehensive approach relating to geographical coverage. There are numerous books which deal with the elections of single states; in this book we are explicitly cross-national in our arguments. Discussion ranges from Austria to Australia as we try to provide the reader with a wide spectrum of electoral examples. We hope that all readers will profit from this aspect of this book.

Geography of Elections emanates from conversations between the authors at a conference in January 1976. The speed at which these original ideas have been translated into reality owes much to the secretarial and cartographic staffs in the Geography Departments at Newcastle and Sheffield Universities. Special mention should be made of Mrs Olive Teasdale, who drew the majority of the maps and diagrams, and Mrs Joan Dunn who typed most of the manuscript.

Finally we dedicate this book to our parents who were originally responsible for 'socializing' us politically to provide the roots out of which this book has grown.

Peter J. Taylor
R. J. Johnston

Part One

Preliminaries

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1 Geography and Electoral Studies

The study of elections has been a continuing source of inter-disciplinary conflict, largely between political scientists and sociologists: the latter are accused of taking the politics out of voting studies (Key and Munger, 1959), whereas the former are accused of insufficient attention to sociology (Sheingold, 1973). Geographers have not been involved in this conflict, and it is no intention of ours that this book should launch a triangular contest. We make no claims for any distinctive discipline of electoral geography and have no imperial ambitions; our aim is to illustrate the richness of inter-disciplinary study of voting, from a geographical bias.

Although the roots of electoral geography can be traced to the early years of this century (Siegfried, 1913; Kareil, 1916; Sauer, 1918), research by geographers into various aspects of voting has never been more than slight in its volume. With the possible exception of French work, the heritage for current workers in electoral geography consists only of a disconnected set of isolated studies, few in number and limited in purpose. More recently, geographers have developed a greater interest in the topic of elections. An initial programmatic statement suggested a limited scope for electoral geography, based on a traditional concern with maps (Prescott, 1959), but growing awareness of the value of quantitative approaches and of the richness of work in other disciplines has widened the geographer's horizons quite considerably (McPhail, 1971). A small annual volume of research is now published on electoral themes, which has led one author to claim – much more than we would – that 'Geography

is particularly important in that it can add an entirely new dimension to the study of elections' (Busteed, 1975, p. 3).

As in most disciplines, new developments in geography produce excesses, and there are some studies which, on hindsight, have produced rather obvious results. Others have explored interesting corners of the field, however, and have unearthed some fascinating findings. It is their impact which justifies our writing a *geography of elections*, despite an obvious reliance on a wide range of material from other disciplines, notably political science and sociology.

There is no set of topics which can be designated as exclusively the domain of electoral geographers, as indicated by our catholic sources in this book. The result is thus a survey of relevant material which is clearly inter-disciplinary in what we hope is the best sense of that term. Research results and hypotheses from within and beyond the usually defined boundaries of geography are integrated here in a survey of three major topics. The only criterion for inclusion has been relevance to the theme, so that although much of the research is not geographical in origin it is clearly geographical in interest; conversely, all of the works cited, whether by geographers or not, are of interest to those who would understand the full complexity of elections.

Modern human geography is often defined as having a focus on the spatial distributions of phenomena and the processes by which these are generated. In such studies, the adjective 'geographical' is used as synonymous with spatial or locational effects. To summarize, human geographers are concerned with the spatial organization of society (Morrill, 1970; Abler, Adams and Gould, 1971). This organization comprises two elements: (1) the *de facto* organization, which is the 'natural' reflection of society in spatial patterns – the continuous geographical distributions; and (2) the *de jure* organization, which is the set of spatial patterns explicitly defined for administrative purposes (Cox, 1973). The pattern of social areas or neighbourhoods in a city is an example of *de facto* organization, whereas that of parliamentary constituencies or congressional districts exemplifies that of *de jure* organization.

Given this general definition of the geographer's sphere of

influence, we can identify the many geographical elements in a typical election. Within a city, for example, voters are registered by their home addresses. Where these are depends on which parts (sectors) of the housing market they have access to; the most affluent have most choice and select the more 'desirable' areas, whereas the poorest have least choice and are usually allocated to certain prescribed areas. In some societies, other variables – such as race or religion – may combine with class to influence residential choice. The result in all cases is spatial segregation by socio-economic criteria, and perhaps by others as well. It is very often the case that these same criteria are important in shaping people's political attitudes, and hence how they vote. We might anticipate, therefore, that the spatial patterns of voting – usually for various political parties – will also indicate segregation of people with different views and will reflect the underlying socio-economic segregation. The extent of the associations between these patterns – at all spatial scales and not just within cities – is a basic feature of geographical research into elections.

Within the patterns just outlined, where a person lives may have a still subtler connection with his or her voting behaviour. The location of a home prescribes who are the occupiers' neighbours, and in many cases whom they have as friends and acquaintances. This pattern of social contacts may be a major element of the social environment within which voters make up their minds on how to vote, for different social milieux may involve different biases in terms of political discussion and advice. Further, different areas may receive different levels of attention from parties and their candidates in the attempts to win votes, thereby extending the range of the locational or geographical influences on voting decisions.

Finally, where a voter lives determines by whom he is represented, which may or may not be the candidate(s) for whom he voted. The determining factor is the set of *de jure* spatial districts – often termed constituencies – which form the organizational framework for elections and send the representatives to the parliament or similar assembly. The location of constituency

boundaries can influence the political complexion of the district, and hence the nature of its representation, and so geographers are interested in the boundary-drawing process. Further, the location of these boundaries can have major influences on the overall election result, through the translation of votes into patterns of representation, which can produce a peculiarly geographical influence on representation.

We have identified three main foci of geographical interest in electoral studies. First, there is the *geography of voting* itself; secondly, there is the set of *geographical influences on voting*; and finally, there is the *geographical influence on representation*. These three form the framework for the remainder of the book; to provide initial illustration of each so as to set the scene for the greater detail to come, we conclude the present chapter with an example of a classical study from each substantive area.

The geography of voting in Ardèche, France

Many studies of the geography of voting involve the comparison of two or more maps, thereby associating the distribution of votes – usually for a particular political party – with various other distributions. From such associations causal connections are often inferred. This cartographic approach – now somewhat superseded by statistical methods of comparing distributions – has deep roots in French geography and is often associated with the work of André Siegfried, the 'father' of electoral geography.

André Siegfried and his *géographie électorale* have not always been without their critics in political science. He is sometimes viewed as an 'environmental determinist', that is, a researcher who explains social phenomena by relating them causally to the physical environment. Geography has had its fair share of such simplistic thinkers but Siegfried is not one of them. Although he is sometimes credited with the statement that in northern France 'the granite votes for the right and the chalky soil for the left' (Dogan, 1967, p. 183), Siegfried does not imply any such direct causal relationships in his researches. There is however, 'a correspondence between nature of the soil, agrarian landscape,

type of dwelling, distribution of land ownership, degree of stratification in society, the stronger persistence of tradition, and political orientation' (Dogan, 1967, p. 183).

Dogan presents another example in which physical geography is superficially related to voting. In Italy the higher the land the greater the conservatism. This is not because land nearer to Heaven preserves more Christian ideals, but rather it is related to land ownership and the resulting stratification – 'Thus geography leads back to economy, and this to history' (Dogan, 1967, p. 183). Such explanations are based upon social factors which are themselves based in part upon the physical environment.

These relationships between the physical environment, the social environment and voting are excellently illustrated by Siegfried's study of voting in the département of Ardèche, on the west bank of the Rhône, during the period of the Third Republic (1871–1940). In this (Siegfried, 1949), he interpreted the pattern of party votes as reflecting the spatial organization of society there, which in its turn reflects variations in the physical environment. The associations which he deduced were extremely constant in election after election. Those cantons favouring parties of the left in 1871 still did so in 1936, for example. In all, Siegfried classified the 31 cantons into 17 of the left and 11 of the right, with only three which varied greatly in their support during the long period.

What factors led to the spatial polarization of cantons within Ardèche? Siegfried's conclusions on this are summarized in Figure 1.1. The main element in the physical base of the department is its geology, which is reflected by altitudinal variations in the landscape. In turn, these variations have influenced the types of productive activity – both agricultural and the incipient manufacturing industries – and in terms of human patterns are shown as variations in farm sizes and population agglomerations. Political attitudes are coloured by these different social and economic environments, and are reflected in the voting map.

Figure 1.1 and the short paragraph above are gross simplifications of a 136-page research monograph, which includes over fifty maps of voting patterns and another twenty used to help provide

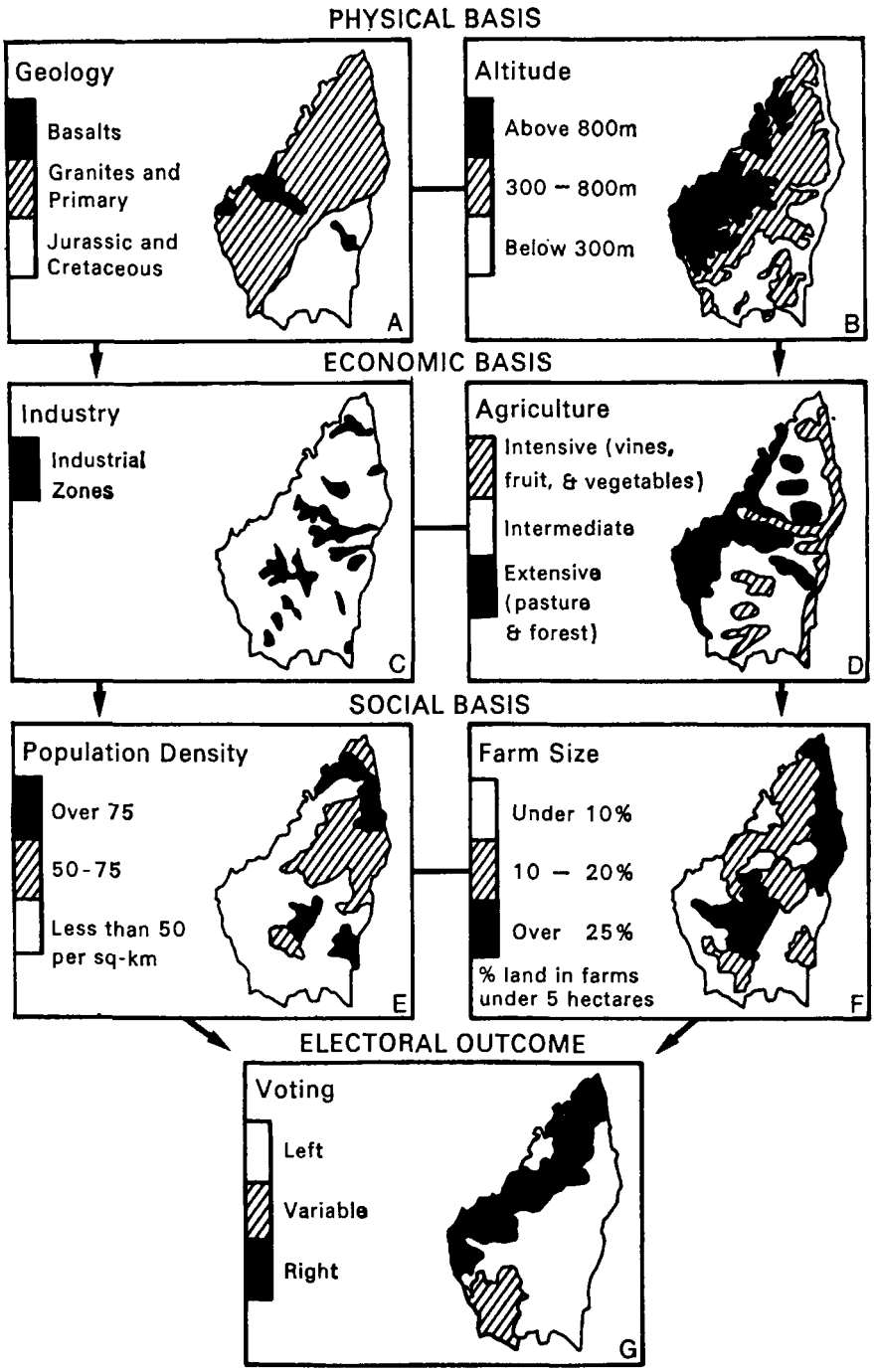

Figure 1.1 The geography of voting in Ardèche, France

an account for those patterns. The essence of Siegfried's approach is clear, however. Through careful consideration of the appeals of the parties of the left and the right, he could identify those aspects of the social and economic milieux most likely to underlie the voting decisions, and was then able to trace those aspects back to the physical environment. The argument is supported through map comparisons. Modern studies are more likely to use statistical procedures, and to stop short of tracing the associations back to the physical environment, but neither the method nor the conclusion was irrelevant to this early example from rural France, which provides a classic prototype of the geography of voting.

Geographical influences in voting in the American south

The notion of geographical influences is commonly taken to mean effects due to the physical environment, and in this way the Ardèche study may be seen as illustrating geographical influences. Most modern interpretations of the adjective 'geographical' relate to locational factors underlying behaviour, however, and this is how we will interpret the term here. We have already indicated that Siegfried, in effect, produced socio-economic explanations of voting in Ardèche in any case. Here we concentrate on geographical or locational influences on voting patterns.

No study better illustrates the geographical or locational influences on voting than the seminal work on politics in the American south by V. O. Key Jr (1949). Being the work of a political scientist, his analysis is steeped in the states' political history, and he interprets twentieth-century, southern politics as reflecting conservative and reactionary victories in the separatist and populist movements of the nineteenth century. The result is a one-party façade for national politics (i.e. supporting Democrat Party candidates) but a virtual lack of political parties within the states, where the Democrat Party primary elections, to select party candidates, are much more important in the contests for most offices than the subsequent run-off in the 'real' election, whose result is usually a formality. Key (1949, p. 16), thus des-

cribes the Democrat Party as 'purely a holding company for a congress of transient squabbling factions, most of which fail to meet the standards of permanence, cohesiveness, and responsibility that characterize the [concept of a] . . . political party'.

The lack of any coherent political groups in succeeding elections makes the criteria by which electors decide how to vote somewhat different from those used when they can match their own attitudes against those of the competing parties. Thus in Alabama, Key (1949, p. 37) found 'a tenuous and impermanent factional organization [which] confuses the voters and makes for electoral decisions based on irrelevancies'. The separate southern states have produced different reactions to this confusing situation; in Alabama, the lack of clearly recognizable differences between candidates has led to an excessive localism in voting patterns.

Key terms this localism a 'friends-and-neighbours' effect, by which voting decisions are greatly influenced by the location of the elector's residence relative to those of the candidates. Each contestant in a Democrat primary might expect to perform particularly well in his home county and its neighbours, therefore. This is illustrated by the contest in the 1946 gubernatorial primary. One of the candidates – Boozer – won only 16 per cent of the votes across the whole state, but built up a considerably greater volume of support in and around his home county (Figure 1.2); nevertheless one of his rivals – Folsom – also received a strong friends-and-neighbours vote not only around his existing home in the north of the state but also around his boyhood home in the south-east. Having two nodes of major support was crucial to his success in defeating Boozer (Folsom won 29 per cent of the votes in all), and clearly illustrates the effect of a simple geographical influence on voting behaviour.

Geographical influences on representation: the New York menagerie

In almost all elections it is very rare for a party to get an equal percentage of both the votes cast and the seats contested, and so

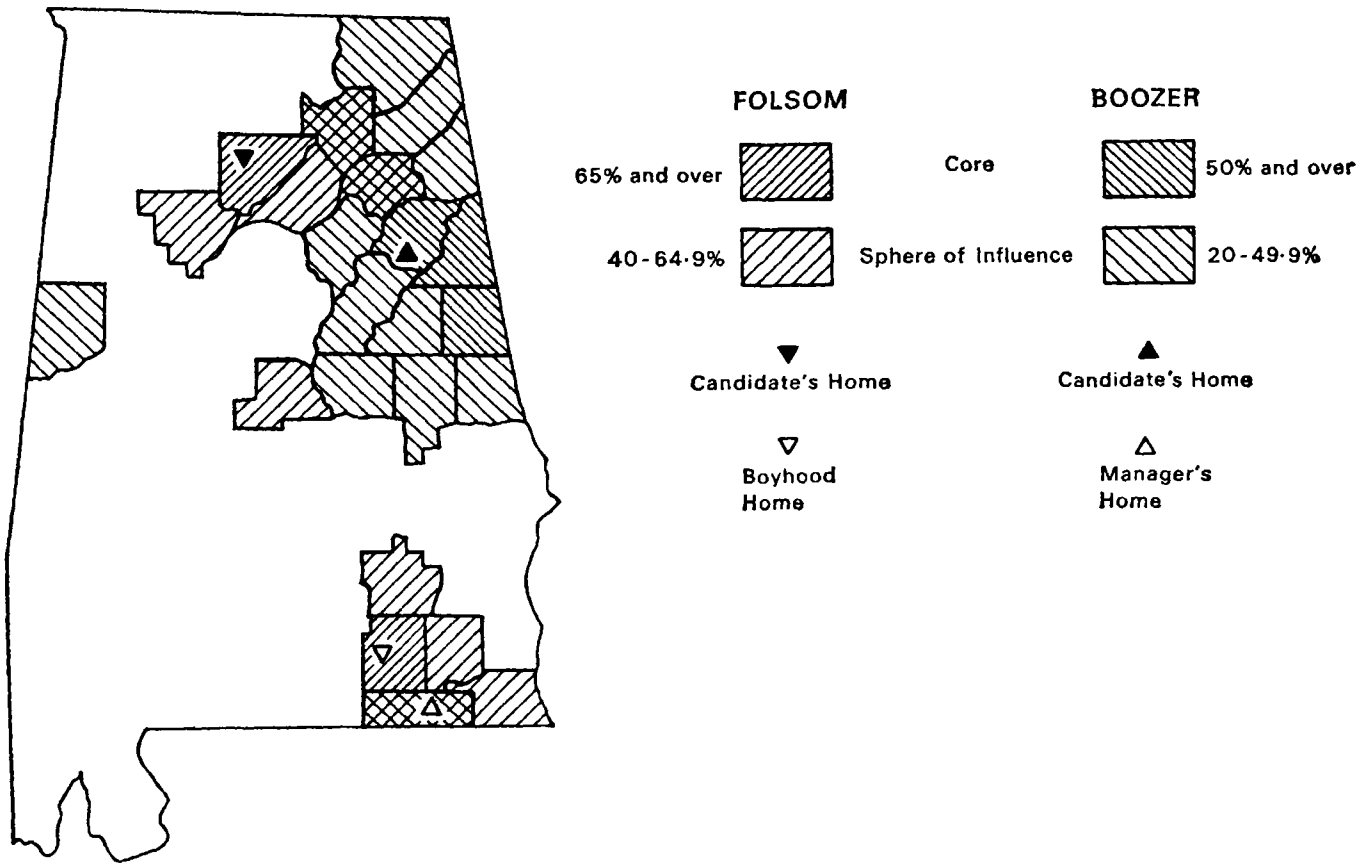

Figure 1.2 'Friends-and-neighbours' voting in the 1946 Alabama primary election

a lot of research effort has focused on the relationship between votes received and seats won. The degree of disparity between the two proportions varies considerably. At elections in Great Britain, the United States and other 'Anglo-Saxon democracies', the discrepancy is often quite large; in the systems operated in most European countries, it is generally much less pronounced.

The discrepancy between seats and votes has frequently been purposively produced in the United States by the careful location of constituency (district) boundaries relative to the distributions of voters of different political persuasions. Such geographical influences on representation were first noted in 1812 when Governor Elbridge Gerry redistricted Massachusetts for the purpose of electing the state senate. In the subsequent election, members of his party won 29 of the 49 seats although they won less votes than did their opponents. The governor's name has been immortalized as the first 'gerrymanderer' and the practice is now an accepted feature of the American political scene. As might be expected, it is the cause of much controversy, so that its investigation involves propaganda as much as academic research. To illustrate such work we use an example which is both academic and polemic – Tyler and Wells's (1961, 1962) writings on the drawing of congressional district boundaries in New York.

Tyler and Wells have dubbed New York as a 'two-party state with a one-party legislature', which refers to the fact that although the Democrats traditionally win as many votes as the Republicans, they rarely offer any serious challenge to the Republican hegemony when it comes to winning seats. The 1958 state election was a typical example; the Democrats won 50·3 per cent of all the votes cast for state senator, but in terms of seats the margin of victory was 34–24 in favour of the Republican Party. At the same time, the Democrats won 50·2 per cent of the votes for candidates to the State Assembly, but 92 of the 150 seats were won by their opponents.

The boundaries for congressional districts, used in the elections to the Federal House of Representatives, are drawn by the state legislature and those produced for New York in 1961 were conceived by the victors of 1958. The map of New York City pro-

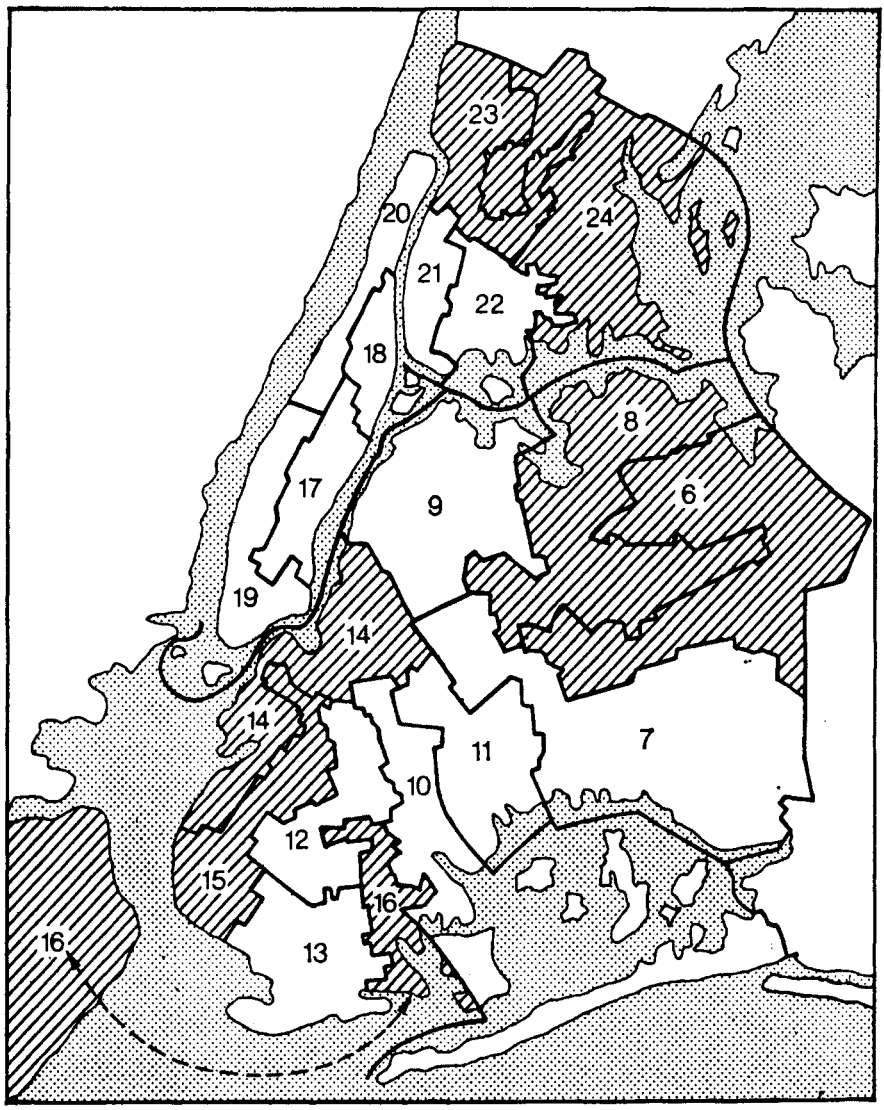

Figure 1.3 New York City Congressional Districts, 1961

duced by the Republican-controlled legislature is shown in Figure 1.3. Their problem within the city was to produce Republican districts in a traditional Democrat stronghold, and their solutions are geographically very ingenious. In Brooklyn, for example, many widely separated Republican areas were linked to produce the very irregularly shaped 15th and 16th districts, with

the latter including Staten Island. Perhaps the most irregular boundary of all is that in the Bronx which divided the 24th district from the 22nd and 23rd, the design being an attempt to keep the 24th as a Republican seat, despite an influx of Democrat supporters.

In their propaganda against this gross manipulation of boundaries to distort representation, Tyler and Wells (1961) refer to it as the 'New York menagerie'. Governor Gerry's manipulation produced a district whose shape resembled a salamander – hence the term gerrymander. In New York, Tyler and Wells 'identified': a camel biting the tail of a barking dachshund; a mechanical dinosaur with key attached; a vulture flying towards its rather large egg; a fiery dragon; a snake suffering from indigestion after swallowing a giraffe; a chicken with its head being cut off; and, finally, an upside-down pregnant crocodile! (For the less-well-versed political biologists, the above fauna are the 14th, 15th, 16th, 24th, 23rd, 6th and 8th districts respectively.)

There can be no doubt that the *de jure* spatial organization depicted in Figure 1.3 has a major influence on election results and hence on the geography of representation. Such a situation is true of several countries which have no legal prescriptions preventing such a manipulation of boundaries, but the same result can apply when such laws exist (Taylor, 1973). During the present century, each of the three main parties has won 44 per cent of the votes at a British election. With such a poll: in 1906 the Conservative Party suffered a landslide defeat; in 1910 the Liberal Party were able to form a minority government; and in 1964 the Labour Party could form a majority government. Such variations on the same figure illustrate the point that different distributions of party supporters across a set of constituencies can produce very different electoral outcomes in terms of seats won from the same overall poll.

Conclusions

The three topics which we have identified here are all of current interest, particularly since electoral reform is an important issue in a number of countries. Before treating them in detail, however,

we must consider the ways in which votes are cast, are translated into parliamentary seats, and are analysed by academics and others. This involves a discussion of electoral laws and procedures, which are the foundations of any geography of elections since they determine the types of data available for testing ideas on the geography of voting, geographical influences in voting, and geographical influences on representation. This discussion forms the bulk of the next chapter, as a backdrop to the substantive analyses of the following seven.

Following our introduction to electoral methods and electoral data in Chapter 2, the next six chapters form three groups, each dealing with one of the substantive topics identified above. Thus, Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the geography of voting, outlining, first, the spatial development of party cleavages and, secondly, the social bases to the geography of voting which reflect those cleavages. In the next group, Chapters 5 and 6 investigate the geographical influences in voting; in the first, the focus is on the influence of the candidate's home location on his pattern of support, whereas in the second it is the effect of local issues and campaigns which receives attention. Then in Chapters 7 and 8 we look at the geography of representation, at the translation of votes into seats and the biases in this process which can be produced by electoral cartography. In Chapter 7, the focus is on electoral abuses, on the manipulation of constituencies for particular ends; in Chapter 8 the topic of electoral reform is treated, highlighting the problems of avoiding bias and the myth of nonpartisan cartography.

Most of the material in this book is concerned with the interactions between political actors (parties and candidates) and voters, pointing out the geographical context within which elections take place. Such an orientation avoids one of the major topics of political science, the distribution of power. Clearly a strong geography of voting, and significant geographical influences in voting, should lead to consequential geographies of power for the elected candidates and parties. Our final chapter investigates this topic, highlighting the influence of electoral systems on the nature of representation and the allocation of electoral power.

2 Electoral Systems and Electoral Data

The concept of democracy creates a variety of images, but in defining it, most people would probably come close to the Oxford English Dictionary's description, which is 'government by the people, direct or representative'. Direct government involving every member of the society is possible only in very small communities, or in particular instances and on specific issues in larger ones, as with the use of referenda in some societies. Most government is by representatives, and in a majority of countries by elected representatives (in 1976 only one European country – Spain – had no elected body involved in the detail of its government). The initial purpose of agreed government (which is different from superimposed government, in which a powerful group imposes its rule on a weaker one), was to provide goods and services that individuals could not provide for themselves, such as defence from hostile countries. Governments were appointed, constituted, or elected for the purpose of raising taxes to provide these services, of which defence was usually the most important – it is still a major stimulus to the growth of governmental power, for instance in many countries during World War II. Increasingly, as greater proportions of national populations have been given a say in government through the electoral process, the provision of services has been handed over to governments, because of 'market failure' in the private sector of an economy (Tullock, 1976). To provide an acceptable level of living for all, governments in many countries now provide a wide range of welfare and other services. Government began as a protective institution, but its main functions are now productive, in the generation of employment and

the repair of failures in the capitalist market system (Buchanan, 1974).

Elections

Governing, then, is a major task in most societies. In the absence of imposed governments, which are usually supported by a strong military presence, government is provided by representatives elected for the task by the adult population. Elections perform several functions. They provide for popular control, ensuring that those who govern are, within the constraints of the choices offered to the voters, the most popular with the electorate, which guarantees that citizen support will be given to the government. If held regularly they also ensure that government is responsible, since the representatives are then answerable to the electorate every so often (usually between two and five years); in this role, they also provide a channel of communication between governors and governed.

Who are the members of a government? How do they achieve office? Some, like cabinet ministers in the United States, are appointees of elected representatives; most are themselves directly elected. Who then elects them, and how are they represented by them? The nature of representation has long been a vital discussion topic among political philosophers (see Birch, 1971), much of their debate stemming from the works of people such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), and from a speech by Edmund Burke in 1774 to the citizens of Bristol. Thus the representative might be considered a *delegate*, acting on instructions from those who elected him; he might be a *stereotype*, a sample representing a certain group within society, with the government as a whole comprising a set of stereotypes who in total are a mirror image in miniature of the society they represent; he might be a *symbol*, indicative of a certain decision – such as that every British Labour government should include one Welshman; or he might be a *trustee*, someone selected by a group because it is believed he will act in their, and perhaps also the whole society's, best interests. In a sense, too much may be asked of many representatives,

demanding that they combine several roles which in certain circumstances could be contradictory. Citizens expect governments to act in the national interest; trade unionists expect their executive to pursue the interests of the whole membership. But a government member or a trade union leader is also expected to favour the interests of the particular group who elected him, which may well go against the greater interest. Which then should he do? The answer depends in part on whom he represents. As the suffrage has been extended, so that in many countries all adults are now electors, and as the functions of government have become manifold, so the loyalties of the representative have become divided. In some countries (e.g. Ireland), he is still expected to act mainly as a stereotype, as the member for a certain group of people for whom he is expected to work (Chubb, 1963); in others (e.g. the United Kingdom), he is much more a delegate, elected to perform certain tasks and to pursue certain policy ends which he has undertaken, as a member of a group of representatives – a political party. The other roles must be performed in each case, but they are generally subservient to the major one.

Whatever the theory of representation which dominates the political ethos of a country, in most cases representatives are elected by a procedure which developed out of the concept of the representative as a stereotype. The constituency was and is a particular section of the population, characterized by the single criterion of where they live. The first parliaments were called together by monarchs to legitimize their rule and to validate certain actions they wished to take, such as the raising of taxes, which required the support of others. The monarchs were landowners, as were the representatives they called together; the latter were usually in some way subservient to the monarch, depending on him to legitimize their ownership of land and also of labour, which was often either to be taxed by, or enlisted into the armies of, the monarch. Parliaments obtained their power in the concessions yielded by the monarch in return for their cooperation.

With the increasing complexity of societies, parliamentary representation and power was widened as monarchs, and the permanent ruling groups (governments) supporting them, sought

assistance from a greater range of people. And so the commercial leaders of the various communities were co-opted and as these people became more numerous they were invited to send elected representatives. In each place – county or borough usually – the landowners, merchants and tradesmen met to elect their representatives, whose tasks were to protect the interests of their local peers, as well as of their own class generally. Over time, class interests came to dominate, as we shall show in the next chapters, and the range of class interests to be represented has increased as the suffrage has been extended by governments forced into obtaining wider public legitimation of their rule. And yet the place has remained the basic unit for conducting elections; government members may now largely act as class delegates (or as delegates of some other section of the population such as a religious group), but the electorate to whom they are responsible is not that class as a whole, nor even some part of it, but all the residents of a particular place. Societies continue to be organized in territorial units, local governments provide certain services for defined areas, and spatially-defined constituencies provide the representatives for national governments.

The conflict between various theories of representation sets up various contradictions. In a number of countries, some of these conflicts revolve around the concept of proportional representation and lead to calls for electoral reform. (Not all of which may point in the same direction: whilst in Britain in the mid-1970s there has been a growing demand for electoral reform based on the West German system, in West Germany there have been requests for adoption of the British system!) Our aim in this book is not to pay much more than passing attention to these conflicts (Chapter 9 is the major reference to them), but rather to focus on the electoral base to political power. Our overview of 'Western democratic' societies is that the organization and conduct of elections, and the results of these, are key elements in the distribution of political power. In the present book, we analyse – as geographers – the nature of elections.

The quantitative importance of elections

The importance of such analysis can be illustrated by a few simple figures. In the general elections closest to 1970 (those covering the period 1968–72), about 152 million votes were cast in the countries of western Europe (the nine of the present E.E.C., plus Austria, Finland, Iceland, Malta, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), and another 139 million in seven other countries whose elections are discussed in this book (Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States). And this 291 million votes is undoubtedly an underestimate; in many of the elections referred to, voters cast more than one ballot for different offices, and in most countries local government elections are held on an annual or biennial rota. National elections are held in many other countries outside Europe; in some the voter may be presented with no choice of candidates – and although this aspect of democracy is frequently removed temporarily after non-electoral changes of government, the use of elections in general is spreading (into Spain and Portugal within Europe in recent years). Clearly, the vote is an important expression of political attitudes. Prescott (1969) estimated that there were seventy-one countries in which the voting returns at national elections were suitable to geographical analysis, and another fifty-seven in which they were not; undoubtedly, this is an understatement.

Such figures are but the tip of the iceberg, referring only to national elections and to those held in the so-called 'Western democracies'. Elections are held at many levels within individual countries, as well as in countries which we do not normally associate with such democratic acts. (Russia, for example, holds elections. They may be very carefully stage-managed and the results wholly contrived, but nevertheless they do involve many millions of people giving some form of legitimation to those who rule them.) Although they may not be everyday events, therefore, elections are major events, both because they involve large numbers of people, and because of their role in the allocation of power within society.

The analysis of elections depends on how they are conducted –

the electoral laws and procedures – and on the detail with which they are reported – the electoral data. Both of these topics are clearly crucial in any analysis of the geography of elections, and so the purpose of the present chapter is to outline the sorts of system and the data on which geographical analyses are based.

Electoral laws

A very great variety of methods is used to conduct elections, ranging from the relatively informal counting of hands at the annual general meeting of a small society to the complex voting machines used in many American states. No attempt is made to list them all here, for no authoritative catalogue is available (for a useful start, see Lakeman, 1974), and in any case the purpose of the book is to analyse rather than to describe. Consequently, our review focuses on the main methods only, with particular reference to elections held at national levels and for major *de jure* spatial units within nations – states, provinces, counties, cities etc.

Two main types of election are discussed in this book, according to their function. The first are *elections of persons*, at which votes are cast for candidates, or groups of candidates, standing for some particular office; the second are *issue elections*, at which votes are cast to indicate attitudes on a particular issue, such as British membership of the E.E.C. or whether California should have stricter regulations for the operation of nuclear power plants. The former are usually elections for assemblies or parliaments of some kind (these terms are sometimes used here as synonyms for similar bodies, such as city councils), although they may be concerned with the election of individuals to a particular office – United States presidents, for example, or county dog-catchers; the issue elections are typically referenda or plebiscites at which, either because it is a constitutional requirement or because a government wishes to know public opinion on an issue, voters are invited to present a formal and unambiguous statement of their views on major issues. We shall deal with these two types of election in turn in the present section.

Electoral Systems and Electoral Data

A wide range of different electoral systems is used for the elections of persons. Three distinct characteristics can be used to categorize them: the number of votes that the elector has; the way in which votes are allocated; and the number of representatives to be elected for each constituency. Employing these characteristics, we have identified three major electoral systems – the system based on *pluralities*, that based on the expression of *several preferences*, and that based on a choice between *party lists*. In each of the first two, a further subdivision is made according to the *number of representatives per constituency*. The main features of each system, plus mixed systems which combine characteristics of two or more, are outlined in the following subsections, together with recent examples of their operation.

1. The Plurality System

Although not peculiar to Great Britain, nor even to those parts of the world once ruled from London, the plurality system is predominantly operated in English-speaking countries; elections have a long history in Britain, and have evolved in the way outlined above, whereas in many other countries they are relatively novel, replacing many centuries of imposed hegemony. A plurality is often equated with 'a majority', but the plurality system is not necessarily based on overall majorities, although it may produce them; better descriptions of the system are provided by the alternative terms frequently used in the United States – 'first past the post' and 'winner takes all'. The major feature of a plurality-based election is that the person with most votes wins. In two adjacent Welsh constituencies in the February 1974 general election the results were:

Carmarthen

Candidate	*Party*	*Votes*	*Percentage*
Jones	Labour	17,165	34·29
Evans	Plaid Cymru	17,162	34·28
Owen-Jones	Liberal	9,698	19·37
Dunn	Conservative	6,037	12·06

Llanelli

Candidate	*Party*	*Votes*	*Percentage*
Davies	Labour	28,941	57·76
Richards	Conservative	7,496	14·96
Evans	Liberal	7,140	14·25
Williams	Plaid Cymru	6,620	12·02
Hitchen	Communist	507	1·01

Both seats were won by the Labour Party candidate. In Llanelli, Davies was a clear victor, with more than half of all the votes cast and four times as many as his nearest opponent, but in Carmarthen, Jones was the favoured candidate of only just over one-third of the voters, and almost as many preferred the Plaid Cymru candidate, Evans (who got his revenge by winning at the next election, eight months later!). With only two candidates and one member to be elected, the winner is bound to have a majority of support from the electors, but the greater the number of candidates the greater the probability that the victorious candidate has the endorsement of less than half of the electorate. As we shall see in Chapter 7, this has important implications for the geography of representation, with some variations depending on the type of plurality electoral system employed.

(i) *The plurality system in single-member constituencies*

This is the system just described for the two Welsh constituencies; it is now universally applied in the United Kingdom for elections to the Westminster parliament (a history can be obtained from Butler, 1963 or Steed, 1975), although not for the various assemblies elected in the Ulster province since 1973. It is also used widely in British local government elections, although occasionally it is replaced by the multi-member system described below.

The system is a very simple one, both for the voter and for the vote counter, although some would claim that its simplicity in fact creates difficulties for the voter, who must make a single decision out of what may be a lot of conflicting influences. A list of the candidates is provided, with many countries now also giv-

ing an indication of their party affiliations, and the voter selects one, usually by marking a cross against that person's name. (Voting machines are used in many American states, with the button or lever replacing the pencil, and with automatic tallying of the votes.) Counting is then straightforward, and the candidate with most votes is declared elected.

Canada, New Zealand and South Africa are among the countries which use this system for electing the lower houses of their national parliaments (New Zealand has no upper house), using more or less the same procedures that apply in Britain. Elections for most of the congressmen in the United States House of Representatives are organized in a similar way, with each congressional district in each state returning a single member; in a few states, however, extra seats in the House, allocated to them because of population growth, have in the past been voted for by the whole state – again by a plurality system – because of reapportionment difficulties (Jewell, 1962), but this is now illegal. Some states have one representative only, of course. U.S. senators are also elected by pluralities. Each of the fifty states has two senators, each elected for a different six-year term so that the gap between senatorial elections is alternately two years and four years.

In all of these elections, as we shall illustrate later (Chapters 7 and 8), a crucial determinant of the representation that ensues is the location of the constituency boundaries. Many voters have no personal representation because they preferred a losing candidate; in our Welsh example, over half of the Llanelli voters obtained the representative that they wanted, but in Carmarthen nearly two-thirds did not. A number of Carmarthens, in each of which the Plaid Cymru candidate lost narrowly, could severely bias representation relative to voter preferences, which is why the single-member plurality system has long been under attack; it survives because of the vested interests of those who win under it.

(ii) *Multi-member plurality systems*

In some plurality systems more than one representative is to be returned from a single contest: if for example 5 are to be elected

then the winners are the top 5 in a ranking of candidates by the number of votes cast for each.

There are two major variants of this system. In the first, each elector has as many votes as there are representatives to be elected. Thus in May 1973 elections were held for the councils to govern the new English Metropolitan Districts. Most wards were to return three members, and so each elector had three votes. In this case, the election was a 'one-off'; not only were the top three to be declared elected, but it was laid down that the top candidate was to serve for three years, the second for two years and the third for one. A single-member plurality contest was thereafter to be held each year to return one representative who would serve a three-year term. Most New Zealand city and borough councils are elected in multi-member plurality contests of this kind. Wards are rare, and even where they exist, they return up to five representatives at one time. Until 1974, for example, Christchurch City Council had nineteen members, all of them elected by the city as a whole in the triennial at-large election, at which each voter had up to nineteen votes. Many did not use all nineteen; many others apparently used some odd criteria to aid their decisions, such as length of the candidate's name (Blydenburgh, 1974; Bush, 1975; Johnston, 1974a).

The other major variant of this system is where the elector has fewer votes than the number of representatives required from his constituency. The Japanese Diet comprises 511 members in its lower house, representing 124 constituencies. Up to 1976, there were 491 members from the constituencies, of which 43 returned three members each, 39 returned four, 41 sent five and only one, the Amami Islands, was a single-member constituency (Stockwin, 1975, p. 82). Whatever the number of representatives to be returned by a constituency, however, the elector has only one vote, so he must decide not only which party to support but also, if more than one candidate is fielded by it, which of that party's candidates. (Details of the campaigning that this system produces are given in Chapter 6, p. 284.) The nature of the system creates problems for the parties, regarding how many candidates to field. In a three-member constituency, a party expecting to get thirty per cent of

the votes might be better advised to field only one candidate and be virtually certain of his election, than to nominate two who might split the vote between them and both be defeated. (In the 1976 general election, the Liberal Democratic Party fielded 319 candidates for the 511 seats; the next largest party – the Socialist – fielded only 162 (*The Times*, 4 December 1976)). Each was clearly as good as the other as a predictor of success: 78 per cent of the L.D.P. candidates were elected and 75 per cent of the Socialists.)

This system, termed by Lakeman (1974, p. 86) the single non-transferable vote, was used in Great Britain from 1867 to 1884. It is very unlikely to result in proportional representation, although it is probably somewhat fairer to smaller parties than the single-member plurality system; a proposal to introduce the single-member system in Japan was dropped by the Liberal Democratic Party in 1973 in the face of opposition protest that it would have produced an even greater bias towards that party, perhaps sufficient to give them the two-thirds majority in the lower house of the Diet that would allow them to over-ride the views of the upper house. (The L.D.P. won 46·9 per cent of the votes in the 1972 general election, and 55·2 per cent of the seats (Stockwin, 1974, pp. 83–91). In 1976, the L.D.P. won 41·9 per cent of the votes and 48·7 per cent of the seats (*The Times*, 7 December 1976).)

A number of hybrids based on this system have been used in the United States, with voters getting more than one vote but fewer votes than the total number of representatives to be elected. Thus, in 1968, a new Junior College Board of Trustees was established in Los Angeles and 133 candidates were nominated for the seven positions on it. A primary was held, at which each elector was given seven votes, and the top fourteen candidates went forward to a run-off. The contest was non-partisan, and important determinants of the number of votes received by each candidate were: their position on the ballot paper; which newspaper, if any, endorsed them; whether they had a Spanish or Jewish surname; and whether they were Edmund G. Brown Jr, son of the governor who defeated Nixon in 1962 (Mueller, 1970).

Perhaps even more horrendous for the voter was the 1964 election to the Illinois House of Representatives. Because of an

inter-party impasse over re-districting the state, the House had to be elected at-large. There were 236 candidates for the 177 seats (each party was restricted to 118 nominees, two-thirds of the seats, to ensure some minority representation). Each elector had 177 votes. As machines were used only in Chicago and two other cities, many electors faced a ballot paper one foot wide and three feet long! They were allowed: (1) to make one mark signifying a vote for all 118 of one party's candidates (as in the list systems – see below), and not cast their other 59; (2) to vote a single-party ticket, plus 59 other individual selections; or (3) to make up to 177 individual selections. Large numbers were expected not to vote – the poll was on the same day as the 1964 presidential election – but 97 per cent of those voting for president also voted for the State House. 85 per cent voted for one party only, 10 per cent for one party plus some others, and only 5 per cent voted for individuals from different parties (Andrews, 1966).

(iii) *A weighted plurality system: electing the American president*

A special case of the plurality system, in which the constituencies are weighted by their populations, is used for elections of the American president, which proceeds by stages. First, a variety of procedures is used to produce a number of state delegates to each major party's national nominating convention, with the number of state delegates usually determined by the party's performance in that state at the previous presidential election. Next the nominating conventions elect the party candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency. Thirdly, the population of each state votes to send a number of electors to the electoral college. Finally, the college elects the president. (If no candidate receives a majority of electoral college votes, however, the election shifts to the House of Representatives for a fifth stage.)

The first two stages are not obligatory under the law – it is not only the two major parties who can nominate candidates – but the others are enshrined in the Constitution of 1787. Three possible methods of electing a president had been considered: by the Congress; by the people; and by the state governments (Dahl, 1956). The last alternative was that chosen. The president was to

be the choice of a majority of the population, as represented in the electoral college by the number of members of Congress – two senators plus the number of members of the House of Representatives who are allocated decennially on a population basis by the Bureau of the Census. How the members of the electoral college were to be determined was left to the state governments to decide, and only in the present century have all states adopted the plurality system, whereby the electors sent are those on the slate of the candidate who wins a plurality of the votes in the election held on the first Tuesday in November.

Primary elections are not an obligatory method for producing the state's delegation to the national nominating conventions. The first was held in Florida in 1904. In recent years, to provide for greater public participation in the process, the use of primaries has spread widely, and they were held in thirty states in 1976. Elsewhere, a variety of procedures is employed. In Colorado, for example, each party held a caucus in each of the state's 2300 precincts (polling districts), with each meeting having a number of delegates to be elected, by proportional representation, to their county or city convention. The number of delegates is a function of the number of registered party members in the precinct. The city and county conventions in turn elect delegates to the state convention, which elects the state delegation to the national convention (*The Times*, 22 May 1976).

Where primaries are held, a variety of rules may be applied (Polsby and Wildavsky, 1964). Among the more important are:

(1) They may be open or closed. In a closed primary only registered members of a party may vote. In an open primary – as in Wisconsin – electors can vote in either primary, *but in only one.* This latter system can lead to 'cross-voting'. In the 1976 primaries, for example, a Democrat Party member might have believed (a) that Carter was certain to be his party's nominee, and (b) that in the presidential election Carter had a better chance of beating Reagan than Ford. He may therefore have voted in the Republican primary for Reagan, seeing this as in Carter's best interests.

(2) The delegates may be elected because they are associated

with a certain candidate, or they may be elected in their own right, to act as trustees for the state's interests. In some states, delegates are pledged to vote for a certain candidate in the nominating convention *at the first ballot only*. This is why Reagan hoped that Ford wouldn't get more than half the delegate vote at Kansas City in August 1976, after which some of Ford's committed voters might have transferred their allegiance to him, through personal commitment to Reagan's cause.

(3) Presidential candidates may have to enter a primary formally, or they may be voted for without their consent (a 'write-in'). Some candidates prefer not to enter in some primaries – in an opponent's home state, for example – for fear that a bad showing is worse than no contest.

(4) The primary may be only to decide which presidential candidate is preferred. Often called a 'beauty contest', this may run parallel to the selection of delegates or merely to advise the state convention which elects the delegates to the national gathering.

Election of delegates can also be by a variety of procedures. In 1972, for example, in some states the Democratic primaries were organized on a winner-takes-all basis; the candidate who received most votes won the pledges of the whole delegation. In others, the delegation was allocated to each candidate in proportion to his share of the total state poll (proportional representation). In a third group, delegates were allocated to each county according to the party's strength there, and a winner-take-all plurality was operated in each (Lengle and Shafer, 1976; see Chapter 9, p. 449).

After the nominating conventions comes the presidential contest which, although it is usually presented as between two major candidates (Ford and Carter in 1976) plus a number of minor-party tickets, is in fact a series of weighted single-member plurality elections, with votes being cast for slates of delegates committed to one or other of the candidates. The winning candidate receives the support of the whole state delegation even if he obtains only a one-vote margin of success over his nearest challenger. In 1948, Truman beat Dewey by only 33,612 out of 3,984,046 votes cast in Illinois, and so won all 28 of the state's electoral college votes. He won California's 25 votes by an even

Table 2.1 Voting at two American presidential elections

	1960			1976		
State	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Electoral College*	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Electoral College*
Alabama	237,981	324,050	D–11*	495,744	644,375	D–9
Alaska	30,953	29,809	R–3	39,008	22,994	R–3
Arizona	221,241	176,781	R–4	417,413	294,668	R–6
Arkansas	184,508	215,049	D–8	266,713	495,909	D–6
California	3,259,722	3,224,099	R–32	3,837,202	3,709,815	R–45
Colorado	402,242	330,629	R–6	566,364	447,006	R–7
Connecticut	565,513	657,055	D–8	712,414	641,010	R–8
Delaware	96,373	99,590	D–3	109,926	122,610	D–3
District of Columbia†				25,184	127,562	D–3
Florida	795,476	748,700	D–10	1,375,296	1,561,383	D–17
Georgia	274,472	458,638	R–12	469,129	951,636	D–12
Hawaii	92,295	92,410	D–3	140,003	147,375	D–4
Idaho	161,597	138,853	R–4	203,874	126,175	R–4
Illinois	2,368,988	2,377,846	D–27	2,319,173	2,218,056	R–26
Indiana	1,175,120	952,358	R–13	1,166,670	1,002,936	R–13
Iowa	722,381	550,565	R–10	631,667	618,898	R–8
Kansas	561,474	363,213	R–8	501,759	429,003	R–7
Kentucky	602,607	521,855	R–10	524,171	609,410	D–9
Louisiana	230,980	407,339	D–10	606,204	683,512	D–10
Maine	240,608	181,159	R–5	234,434	231,283	R–4
Maryland	489,538	565,808	D–9	648,980	735,618	D–10
Massachusetts	976,750	1,487,174	D–16	1,004,598	1,391,201	D–14
Michigan	1,620,428	1,687,269	D–20	1,855,924	1,667,000	R–21
Minnesota	757,915	779,933	D–11	817,349	1,067,536	D–10
Mississippi	73,561	108,362	Other–8*	360,911	372,448	D–7
Missouri	962,221	972,201	D–13	916,903	984,413	D–12
Montana	141,841	134,891	R–4	169,308	146,291	R–4

Nebraska	380,553	232,542	R–6	349,736	230,152	R–5
Nevada	52,387	54,880	D–3	100,786	92,023	R–3
New Hampshire	157,989	137,772	R–4	185,472	147,168	R–4
New Jersey	1,363,324	1,385,415	D–16	1,477,858	1,420,668	R–17
New Mexico	153,733	156,027	D–4	207,718	199,225	R–4
New York	3,446,419	3,830,085	D–45	3,060,695	3,336,665	D–41
North Carolina	655,420	713,136	D–14	736,602	921,119	D–13
North Dakota	154,310	123,963	R–4	146,559	130,325	R–3
Ohio	2,217,611	1,944,248	R–25	1,992,415	2,000,001	D–25
Oklahoma	533,039	370,111	R–8*	539,948	528,761	R–8
Oregon	408,060	367,402	R–6	482,093	481,881	R–6
Pennsylvania	2,439,956	2,556,282	D–32	2,187,038	2,315,494	D–27
Rhode Island	147,502	258,032	D–4	172,138	216,991	D–4
South Carolina	188,558	198,129	D–8	342,409	443,901	D–8
South Dakota	178,417	128,070	R–4	151,619	146,153	R–4
Tennessee	556,577	481,453	R–11	632,731	821,594	D–10
Texas	1,121,310	1,167,567	D–24	1,876,316	2,031,562	D–26
Utah	205,361	169,248	R–4	335,144	180,974	R–4
Vermont	98,131	69,186	R–3	98,982	77,746	R–3
Virginia	404,521	362,327	R–12	834,542	810,636	R–12
Washington	629,273	599,298	R–9	679,631	643,333	R–9
West Virginia	395,995	441,786	D–8	311,012	430,404	D–6
Wisconsin	895,175	830,805	R–12	1,003,039	1,037,056	D–11
Wyoming	77,451	63,331	R–3	92,831	62,267	R–3
Total	34,108,157	34,226,731	R–220* D–309* Other–8*	38,413,635	40,156,213	R–241 D–297

Sources: 1960 R. M. Scammon *America Votes 9* Congressional Quarterly, Washington, 1972, p. 7.
1976 *New York Times* 4, November 1976, p. 32.

* 6 of the 11 Democrat electors in Alabama and the 8 unpledged Democrats in Mississippi voted for Senator H. F. Byrd, as did one of the Oklahoma Republican electors.

† The residents of the District of Columbia were enfranchised only in 1964.

smaller margin with a plurality of only 17,865 over Dewey out of the 4,021,538 ballots cast. The closest election overall, in recent years, however, was in 1960, when the Kennedy–Johnson ticket won by a margin of only 118,574 votes (0·17 per cent of the national total) over Nixon–Cabot Lodge, but because its successes included five of the seven states returning more than twenty members of the electoral college (Illinois' 27 were won by a margin of only 8,858: see Table 2.1) its margin in the college was 84 (276 were needed for absolute victory). In 1976, there were few very tight contests – the closest being Oregon which the Republican candidate (Ford) won by 212 votes out of 963,974. Carter's lead of about 2 percentage points in the popular vote produced a comfortable electoral college victory.

As indicated in Table 2.1, the weighted plurality system of winner-takes-the-whole-state-delegation does not ensure that electoral college membership reflects the popular vote. Consequently, it is possible, although not very likely, for a president to be elected on a minority of the votes (in 1960, if the right states had been won, this minority could have represented a plurality in only twelve states) which leads, as we shall see in Chapter 9, to persistent claims for reform of the system.

2. Preferential Systems

In plurality contests, as we have just seen, electors simply indicate the candidate they most prefer (or the candidates, if the contest is multi-membered with plural voting). But no information is given in either case of their feelings about the others, about, for example, who their second choice would be if for some reason they could not have their first, who their third choice would be, and so on. One consequence of this is that, as we saw for the Carmarthen election (p. 40), a candidate may be elected whom many more people have voted against than for. To counter this, systems have been devised to produce consensus candidates – those who are least disliked, or whom a majority of voters would prefer to certain others. There are two major variants of this procedure, differing in the number of representatives returned per constituency.

(i) *Single-member preferential systems: (a) the alternative vote*

The 'pure' form of preferential voting for a single-member constituency is the alternative vote (A.V.), in which the elector orders all the candidates in a rank, from the one most preferred to the least, although in some systems an elector does not have to express a preference for every one of them. These preferences are then used to produce a consensus representative; the one, that is, who is eventually supported by at least half (plus one) of the electors.

Operation of the system begins by counting the first preference votes; if any candidate receives more than half of these, he is declared elected, since he already meets the criterion of having the support of at least half of the electorate. If no candidate receives an absolute majority of first preference votes, the one with the smallest total is eliminated and his second preferences are distributed among the others, being added to their first preference totals. This procedure continues until one candidate reaches the 50 per cent level or, in the case of a system where electors do not have to express all their preferences, until there are no further preferences to allocate, in which case the candidate with most votes wins. As illustrations of this procedure, we have data for three divisions of the State of Victoria at the 1974 Australian general election for the House of Representatives:

Gippsland	*First preference*	Henty	*First preference*	McMillan	*First preference*
Nixon	32,484	Child	28,111	Hewson	13,650
Bowron	2,123	Farrell	2,408	Broadhurst	1,666
Condern	2,533	Fox	24,953	Dent	13,345
Oakes	17,456	Hughes	1,191	Hilton	2,273
				Murphy	24,201

In Gippsland, Nixon won nearly 60 per cent of the votes, and was declared elected without any allocation of preferences. No candidate received a majority of the votes in Henty, however (Child got 49·61 per cent), and so Hughes was eliminated and his second preferences distributed as