

## OUTLINE.

1. We vote. The right to vote.
2. What is an electoral system?
3. The Spanish electoral system.
4. The American electoral system.
5. Project:

### 1. We vote. The right to vote.

If we realize that everyone has dignity, we must also recognize that everyone is free to decide how he or she wants to design his life. We all have authority and autonomy to design our lives. So the best system that we know of for society is **democracy**: the social organization where we are all equal and we express our freedom through participation and suffrage.

In democracy, people find a common solution to the problems they share through cooperation and collaboration. Democratic systems have proved that they are more able to solve the problems between individuals' interests and the needs of the community than other systems.

Democracy is based on the principle of **popular sovereignty**. The first part of our *Constitution* (Título preliminar) describes the form of our political system and its main principles:

**artículo 1.** 1. España se constituye en un estado social y democrático de derecho, que propugna como valores superiores de su ordenamiento jurídico la libertad, la justicia, la igualdad y el pluralismo político. 2. La soberanía nacional reside en el pueblo español, del que emanan los poderes del estado. 3. La forma política del estado español es la monarquía parlamentaria.

- **ACTIVITY:** What is the difference between a monarchy and a republic? Do you know if Spain has always been a monarchy?

Spain is a **unitary state** because sovereignty resides in the state itself. The regions (sub-national governments) are not sovereign; they are subordinated to the state. On the contrary, a **federal state** has a central structure (institutions of the federal government) and states. Sovereignty is divided between the centre and the constituent regions. Its levels are: national or federal: President, Congress (Senate, House of Representatives); presidential system of government (executive/legislature); state (governor, state legislature), and local (counties and cities).

- **Activity:** In March we are holding elections in Andalucía. What kind of elections are they? You have to go to a polling station where you live and collect ballot papers from the different parties. Find out how many men and women are on each ballot and in which positions.

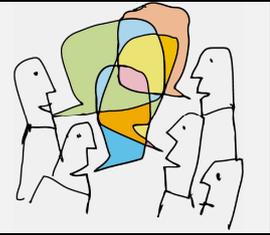
People exercise their power and their sovereignty through voting (suffrage). When a community is small (like our class), citizens debate about their problems and vote on their government, or make decisions directly. This system is called **direct democracy**. But our societies are usually bigger and more complex so we choose people who vote



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and decide in our name. We speak then of **representative democracy**. Its main problem is that these representatives do not do what we want them to do.

The vote has to be **free, universal, secret and equal**. So it is defended in the 23rd article of our ground law:

**CE / 78, artículo 23.** 1. Los ciudadanos tienen el derecho a participar en los asuntos públicos, directamente o por medio de sus representantes, libremente elegidos en elecciones periódicas por sufragio universal.

2. Asimismo, tienen derecho a acceder en condiciones de igualdad a las funciones y cargos públicos, con los requisitos que señalan las leyes.

### ACTIVITIES:

1. Have women always had the same right to vote as men?
2. Do you agree with the Spanish decision that people can vote only when they are at least 18 years old?
3. Do you think that voting should be a right only for people who know about politics or that everybody is able to vote?

It is usually said that in democracy the decisions that count are the decisions of the **majority**. It is true that the majority of the vote gives power to one party or another. But this fact does not mean that the majority is always right. A real democratic decision must take into account the best for all people, so the winner as the **minority**. On the other hand, it is impossible to solve every problem by voting. There are questions about which we have to debate and to try to come to an agreement. We can always defend our own ideas, but only with words!

- **Activity:** Write down at least five questions that we **cannot** solve voting.

## 2. What is an electoral system?

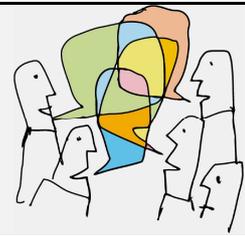
A country's electoral system is the method used to calculate the number of elected positions in government that individuals and parties are awarded after elections. In other words, it is the way that votes are translated into seats in parliament or in other areas of government (such as the presidency or city councils). There are many different types of electoral systems in use around the world, which can be divided into three general types:

- **Plurality electoral systems**, also called *first-past-the-post* or *winner-takes-all* systems. Plurality systems simply award a seat to the individual candidate who receives the most votes in an election. Such an electoral system does not represent the interests of all (or even most) voters
- **Majority electoral systems** attempt to provide for a greater degree of representativeness by requiring that candidates achieve a majority of votes in order to win. Majority is normally defined as 50%-plus-one vote. If no candidate gets a majority of votes, then a second round of voting is held.
- **Proportional representation** is the general name for a class of voting systems that attempt to make the percentage of offices awarded to candidates reflect as closely as possible the percentage of votes that they received in the election. It is the most widely used in the world, and its variants can be found at some level of government in almost every country (including some city councils in the US). The easiest version of proportional representation is simply to award a party the same



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percentage of seats in parliament as it gets votes at the polls. We use d'Hont formula in Spanish electoral system.



### 3. The Spanish electoral system.

Spain has a **parliamentary system** because we have a chief of state – whose power is only symbolic and representative of the nation- and a chief of government, who make the most important decisions for our country. Both roles are clearly different. As our country is a monarchy, we do not

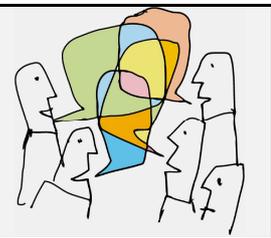


democratically elect the chief of the state (it is a hereditary function). The chief of the government is elected through an indirect democratic system: citizens elect the members of the Congress and our representatives elect the president of the government.

Our political system is bicameral with Congress (or “cámara baja”) and the Senate (or “cámara alta”). The Congress proposes the laws and discusses them and the problems and needs of our country, as well as foreign policies, etc.

The Spanish electoral system is proportional because the percentage of the representation depends on the percentage of the votes that the party has obtained.

Spain is divided into circumscriptions that coincide with our *provincias* and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Every circumscription is attributed to a number of representatives by law and an extra number depending on its inhabitants. We vote for the representatives of each circumscription, but not for the president of the government.



The lists for Congress represent political parties and are closed (candidates are set by their party). The lists for the Senate are open and we vote for candidates, not for parties. The set of representatives in each circumscription follows the D'Hont formula.

In May we are holding **local elections** in order to choose our councillors, our representatives in the Town Council. These councillors will elect the Mayor; the citizens do not elect the Mayor directly but through the councillors. The party that obtains a higher percentage of votes will have a better chance that its candidate will become the Mayor. Another possibility is that two or more parties make a coalition if no candidate has enough councillors to win the vote.

- **Activity:** Find out how many parties are preparing their campaigns for the local elections and who the candidates for Mayor are.

**WORKING WITH MATHS.**

The Spanish electoral system looks for a proportional representation. Under all party list systems we need some method for allocating seats to individual parties. One commonly used method is named after the nineteenth-century Belgian mathematician Victor d'Hondt, and is normally referred to as a highest average method using the d'Hondt formula.

**EXAMPLE.** We have an election with 1.000 total voters in which five parties (A, B, C, D, E) have gained 100 (10%), 150 (15%), 300 (30%), 400 (40%) and 50 (5%) respectively. There are 3 seats up for election in our electoral constituency. All votes cast are valid, and the electoral system has a 7% vote threshold (that is, parties must get at least 7% of the total valid votes cast in order to participate in the distribution of seats).

- Party E would be eliminated from competition
- The d'Hondt method of seat allocation then proceeds in the following steps:

1. Place the total number of votes garnered by the competing parties in a row  
100 150 300 4000

2. Divide each figure in the row by 1, 2, 3...n (the more seats you have to allocate, the more you have to divide. Here 3 or 4 divisions should do the trick).

	party A / 100	party B / 150	party C / 300	party D / 400
div. by 1	100	150	<b>300</b>	<b>400</b>
div. by 2	50	75	150	<b>200</b>
div. by 3	33	50	100	133
div. by 4	25	33,5	75	100

3. Pick the highest quotient in the list (including the quotients obtained by dividing the votes by 1). Pick the next highest quotient in the list....

We have successfully filled all the seats available:

- Party C, one seat (or 33% of the total available seats)
- Party D, two seats (or 66% of the total available seats)

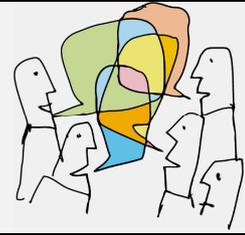
**Why we call this system proportional representation:** under a plurality system, Party D would have received 100% of the seats because that party received a plurality (40%) of the vote –even though 60% of voters voted against party D by choosing other parties. Under proportional representation, however, we are able to represent some of the interests of the other voters. Party's D representation in parliament is reduced to 66% of seats, while party C's is increased to 33% of seats. The system yields a result that is



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clearly not perfectly proportional. But the distribution more closely approximates the actual percentage of votes that each party received than would a plurality or majority system.

#### 4. The American electoral system.

- The Electoral College and the popular vote.
- A two-party system.
- President and Vice-president.
- Primaries elections.



#### 5. Your project.

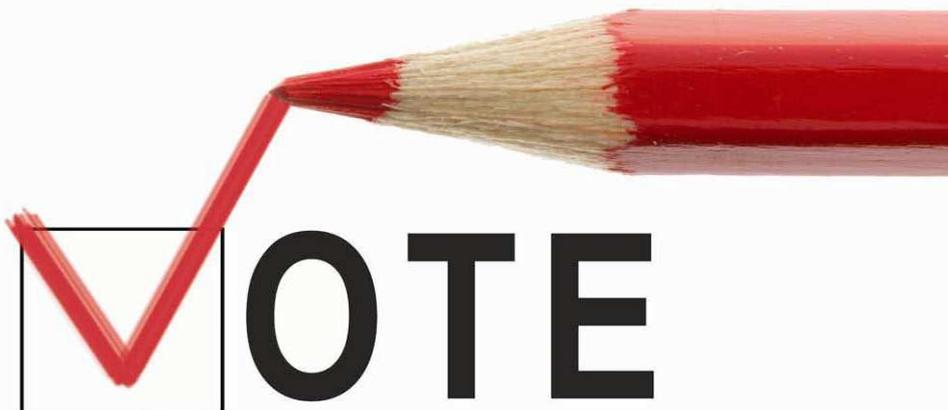
**Writing and speaking.** Firstly, your group has become a party that wants to win the local elections. You have to create a name for this party that expresses your interests, your aims and your ideas. Secondly, you have to order the members of the group in a list: the first person will be the Mayor and the rest of the group will be the different councilors with different responsibilities. Finally, your party has to elaborate a proposal for Priego and has to persuade the rest of the class that it is the best option to vote for.

**Maths.** After you have listened to the different proposals for Priego, you have to vote for the best candidates and the best party. Calculate the representation with d'Hont formula (we have 21 councilors in our Town Council).

**Technology.** Working with a polling station and a ballot box.

**History.** The different politic system that Spain has known the time along.

**Biology.** What can do our Town Council in order to promote health and welfare?

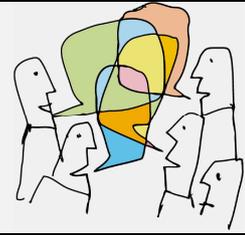




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## VOCABULARY

AUTHORITY, n. *autoridad*

AUTONOMY, n. *autonomía*

BALLOT, n. *papeleta, voto*

CANDIDATE, n. *candidato*

TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT, v. *llegar a un acuerdo*

CONGRESS, n. *Congreso*

DEMOCRACY, direct / representative democracy, n. *democracia (directa o representativa)*

ELECTIONS (TO), n. *elecciones*

ELECTIONS DAY, n. *día de las elecciones*

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, n. *gobierno federal*

LEGISLATURE, n. *legislatura*

MAIL BALLOT, n. *voto por correo*

POLICY, n. *política*

POLLING STATION, n. *colegio electoral*

POWER, n. *poder*

REPRESENTATIVE, n. *representante*

RIGHT TO, n. *derecho a*

SENATE, n. *Senado*

TO SHARE, n. *compartir*

SOVEREIGNTY, n. *soberanía*

STATE (federal or unitary), n. *estado (federal o unitario / central)*

SUFFRAGE, n. *sufragio*

ELECTORAL SYSTEM, n. *sistema electoral*

TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT, n. *tener en cuenta, tomar en consideración*

VOTE, n. *voto*

TO VOTE (ON, FOR), v. *votar*