Step 1: My Democracy

Political decision-making

OBJECTIVES

- Experiment with different ways to make group decisions
- Think about decision-making methods, their advantages and disadvantages.

DESCRIPTION

During this activity, participants will experiment with different ways to make a decision: random draw, referendum, consensus, election by universal suffrage, election by male census suffrage, authoritarian decision, qualified majority voting, and double majority (qualified majority as implemented at EU level).
Secondly, they will be able to compare these different methods, their advantages and disadvantages.

MAJOR SKILLS AQUIRED

- Knowing different methods of group decision-making
- Using critical judgement

CORE COMPETENCY AREAS

Area 3: Personal and civic growth
Thinking critically

Area 5: Representations of the world and of human activity
Space and time

DURATION

50' (or 2h lesson if using variant)

RESOURCES

- Inspiration for this activity was drawn from the animated film "Democracy, who are you?" created during an educational camp the organisations Militinérêves, Lafi Bala Underconstruction and Starting Block.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Sheets of paper
- A copy of the summary table for each group (see attached PDF at the end of the sheet) to draw up your results and weigh the for and against for each decision method.
- A container that can be used as a ballot box on each table.
- One calculator per group.
- Envelopes each containing an explanation of one decision mode (see Exercise - explanatory documents).
    - The envelope for the census suffrage must contain the Men or Women labels (one per participant) and Rich or Poor labels (one per participant).
    - The envelope for the double majority voting must contain the 'Country' labels (one per participant) indicating the (made up) percentage of the EU population contained in this country. Warning: as stated on the label, when added, the percentages must total 100%.

Method

BEFORE YOU BEGIN (5') :

We suggest that you adapt the number of decision-making methods that you will test out depending on the size of your group, of the time available, and of your goals. In the sequence shown below, we suggest you make three groups, and that each group experiments with different decision-making methods.

At the start of the session, explain to the participants that they will participate in a fictional situation wherein they will have to make a decision. Announce the situation:

"You are going to a desert island and you can only take a single object from the choices here with you, for the whole group. The choices are: a box of matches to light a fire, a knife to make tools or to hunt, or fishing equipment. In order to decide on which object the group takes, you should experiment with different decision-making methods."

Group the participants into three groups and distribute materials.

- Each group receives two envelopes and a summary grid.

- Each group appoints a secretary to read the rules and present to the class:
    - The decisions made
    - The group's analysis

STEP 1 (25') :

Testing out different decision-making methods

- Each group tests the decision-making method contained in their first envelope.
- After filling out the summary grid, the group opens the second envelope, and tries out the second decision-making method

STEP 2 (10') :

Groups summarize

- Write the methods tested on the board or on a flipchart, so that everyone can see them.
- The secretary of the group presents the main decision-making methods tested in the group, as well as the results the group obtained and their analysis.
- The teacher or class leader may, if so wished, go into some more detail about the historical explanations for each decision method.

STEP 3 (10') :

Feedback

Depending on the time remaining, start a discussion to think about how useful each of the different decision-making methods is, and how democratic the class feel they are:
- Were you aware of these different methods of decision-making?
- After seeing the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of decision-making, which you would like to use, for example in the group? What about in your school or organisation?

COMMENT :

The decision-making methods proposed here are of varying lengths and varying complexities. We suggest that you share out the envelopes between groups taking this into account. For example: avoid giving the same group the ‘Random draw’ envelopes and the ‘Authoritarian decision’ envelopes.

VARIANTS AND EXTENSIONS

If you have more time and would like to focus particularly on a European scale, you can have all the groups try out the double majority principle that it used by the European Union.
Each group receives 3 envelopes: one is common to all groups (double majority). Two other envelopes are shared among groups, each envelope containing one of the following decision-making processes: random draw, referendum, consensus, universal suffrage, census suffrage, authoritarian decision and simple qualified majority.

DISCUSSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Within the context of European Elections, we can discuss the method currently used in European decision-making: the double majority. Do you thing this method is fair?

- To contextualise decision-making and help participants feel more connected with the concept, we can ask students to research how decisions are made in their school or organisation and to discuss them.

- We can also organise a more general debate on methods of decision-making, including about how decisions are made in different contexts and what participants idea of democracy is.
Example: How big can a group be if making decisions by consensus? Is drawing lots at random a democratic way of making decisions?