

UNIT 02 / 10 · LEARN & TRY

Elections and representation: votes into seats

Name: _____ Date: _____

Goal: Compare electoral rules and interpret vote-seat differences.

Learn

Elections translate citizens' choices into representation through rules that affect outcomes. In a first-past-the-post constituency, the candidate with the largest number of votes wins, even without more than half the valid votes. A proportional system aims to link seat shares more closely to vote shares, though designs differ in thresholds, lists and constituencies. No electoral rule eliminates every trade-off between representation, local connection and stable government. Votes and seats are distinct measures: geographically concentrated support can produce a different seat outcome from the same total support spread widely. Credible elections also require fair access, reliable administration, opportunities for competition and confidence in counting. Universal adult franchise recognises equal political membership, while effective participation depends on removing practical barriers. Analyse a rule with a small clearly labelled dataset before generalising. Compare systems using the same criteria and distinguish the voting rule from whether the wider electoral process is fair.

Worked example

Original fictional constituency: A receives 42 votes, B 36 and C 22. A wins under first-past-the-post with 42% of 100 valid votes; A has a plurality but not an absolute majority.

1. Original fictional constituency: A 42, B 36 and C 22 votes. Identify the winner under FPTP and whether the winner has an absolute majority. [2 marks]