

Student handout 7.1

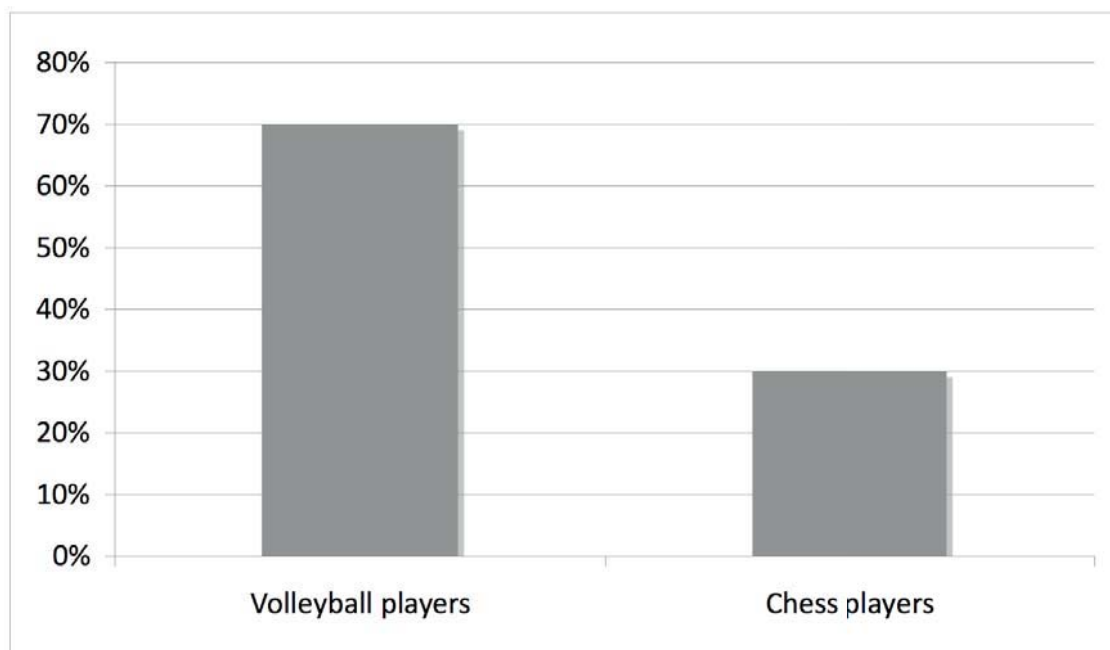
Is majority rule unfair to the minority? A case story

A sports club has a large number of keen volleyball players and a smaller number of equally keen chess players. Both groups take part in championship contests, and have succeeded in attracting new members. Each member pays the same sum as an annual contribution to the club. Once a year, a meeting is held in which all the members decide by majority vote how to spend the money. The volleyball players have a long list of requests, including a regular supply of new balls, new gear for their team, and an upgrading of the volleyball pitch. The chess players need training materials for beginners, some books and magazines, and they also need a bigger room and more sets of chess games, tables and chairs for their increasing number of members.

The volleyball and chess players' speakers state their cases. Then a decision is made by majority vote. Every year, the chess group are outvoted by the volleyball players. All the money goes into the volleyball projects, and the chess players have to put up with what they have.

Now the chess players are getting frustrated and impatient. After all, their contributions are also being spent on the volleyball projects. They feel as though they are second-class members, and some chess players have already aired some thoughts about splitting into two separate clubs.

Most volleyball players shake their heads. The majority rules – that's democracy. And if you're outvoted – that's part of the game. But some of the volleyball players feel that this view is a bit too simple, and fair play means that the chess players' interests must be catered for as well. But how?



The membership structure in the sports club – a simple example of pluralism. Pluralist societies have the same kind of structure, but of course it is more complex. Different groups have different interests that may compete with each other. The more complex a society is, the more potential there is for conflicting interests. Democracy and human rights offer tools to solve these conflicts fairly, and that means peacefully.

Case story adapted from: David Miller, *Political philosophy. A very short introduction*. Oxford, 2003, p. 5.