

# Politics

Politics as a process of participation

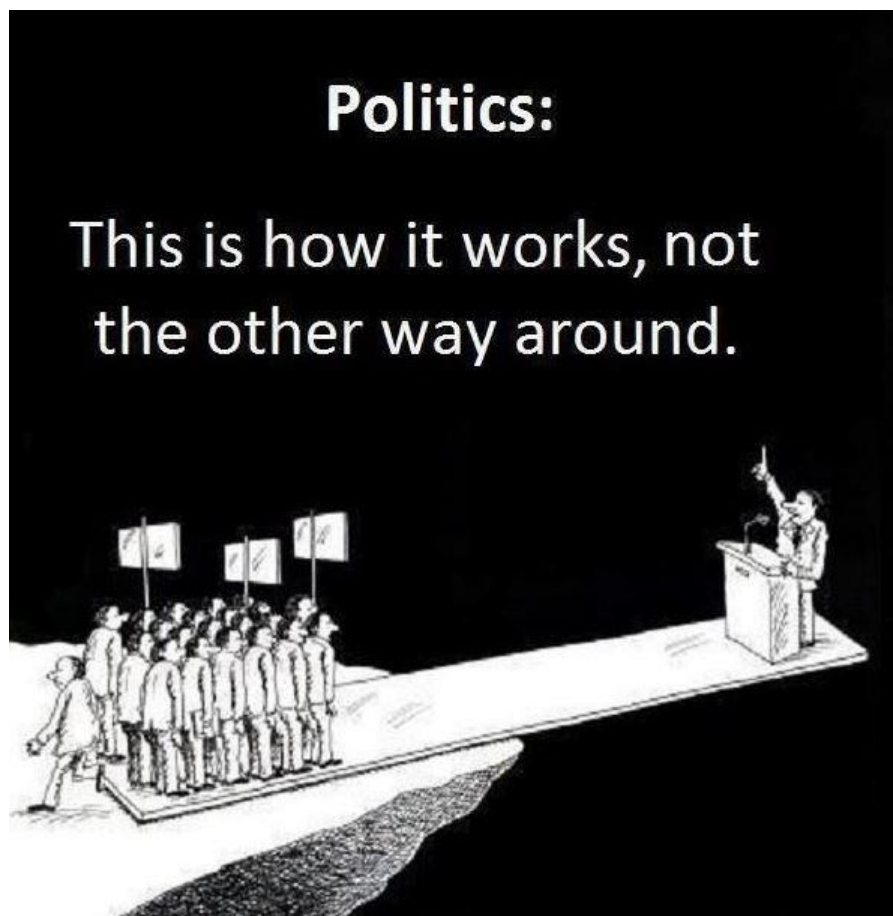
Political Parties

Pressure Groups

Parliamentary System

Local Councils

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Politics is always about **power** and **authority**. For a society to exist, there has to be a system of leadership whereby certain people will have power over others. The political game is a game for power. It is about the way people decide how to organize society. These decisions are effected by different political principles according to the politics the leader believes in.

The politics of a country depends on the type of leadership the leader of the country adopts. We can say that there are 3 types of leadership and this very often has to do with the way the government is chosen.

### 1. **Democracy** – (democratic state)

The word democracy is derived from two Greek words, “demos” which means people and “kratos” which means power. Therefore in a democracy power is given to the people.

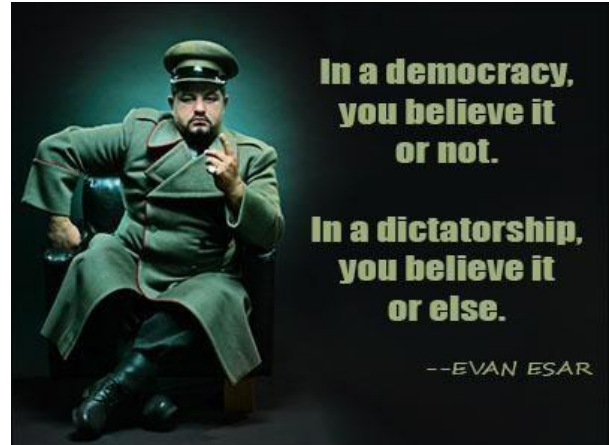


In practice this means that in a democratic state it is the people who choose their leaders. Through a process of an election where every adult has a vote, a group of people are given the authority to govern for a stipulated number of years. There is **direct democracy** such as used to be found in Ancient Greece where every citizen has a direct part to play in the running of the country.

Nowadays we often find a **representative democracy**, whereby power is granted to representatives from amongst the people so that these govern on their behalf. In this way every adult citizen will be taking part in the organization and running of the country.

## 2. **Dictatorship** (dictatorial state / totalitarian state / authoritarian state)

This is a state whereby the leader takes the country under his control through use of force. Very often this type of leader with the help of the army invades a country and through a regime of terror takes over the leadership of that particular country. This type of government leads in a dictatorial way, where power is concentrated in the hands of just one person who exercises total control on the whole country. It is a state where human rights are not respected and where fear and oppression reign.



## 3. **Monarchy** – (monarchic state)



This type of state is run by a member of a royal family. The head of state is either a king or a queen and this leadership is inherited from one generation to another.

Nowadays the most popular form of leadership is **DEMOCRATIC**. The reason is that in a democracy the citizen enjoys many rights and liberties. The characteristics of a democracy are:

**Equality** between everyone irrespective of age, sex, belief, race or disability.

Citizens enjoy 30 **fundamental rights**

**Pluralism**, meaning that more than one opinion may be expressed. This occurs through different media stations, different political parties, pressure groups as well as the practice of different religions.

**Liberty** – we find 5 fundamental liberties which are:

- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of opinion
- Freedom of belief
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom of association

Every adult citizen has the **right to vote**.

**Representation** of citizens at the highest levels of the running of the country.



## Pressure Groups

In a democratic country, which permits freedom of expression we find the existence of pressure groups.

**A pressure group is a group whose members put pressure on those responsible in order to achieve their aims. Their aim is to change or influence some political idea within the organization they work in. These try to influence both public policy as well as legislation.**

Pressure groups are a very effective form of social change brought about by the citizen's contribution. Their role is very important in a democracy because these give a voice to the people, and offers alternatives to situations under discussion.

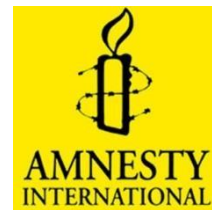
This can occur when these groups:

- hold regular meetings,
- make use of the media to pass on their message, ex: they use the internet; advertising on TV and radio; get invited to appear on TV and radio programs; billboards; etc.
- organize petitions
- hold demonstrations



Some examples of pressure groups are:

- Nature Trust (Malta)
- Birdlife (Malta)
- Moviment Graffiti
- Amnesty International
- Greenpeace
- +9
- YMCA



## Political Parties

A political party is a group of organized people who hold the same political ideology and who aim to win the power to run the country according to their beliefs. This represents the beliefs and interests of particular groups within society. The parties play a very important role in politics. It is these parties who train new leaders, form political programs and who lead electoral campaigns. Political parties are in a position to compete in electoral campaigns, and to form a Government for the country if they win the election.

It is very difficult for political candidates to be elected to parliament and to form a government without the endorsement. In totalitarian states, one party has the monopoly on political power, whilst in democratic states there is more than one party.

## The General Election

According to the Constitution a general election has to be held at least once every 5 years. When the time is right the Prime Minister dissolves parliament and calls for an election.

When the date of election is announced, the political parties which are contesting the election organize an electoral campaign, whereby they try to enforce and convince by all possible means available to them, the electorate to vote for them.

The mass meetings, pamphlets, political debates, pamphlets posted to our houses and visits to our homes by the candidates take place so that these attract the people to them. The political parties also present an electoral manifesto/program in which they explain their intentions where they to be chosen to form a government.



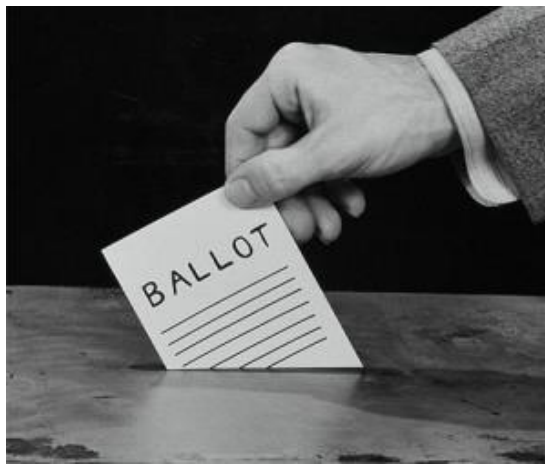
Our electoral system is one known as that of a 'single transferable vote' where a voter votes for his preferred candidates. On the same ballot sheet one can also vote for candidates from different parties. Due to this the counting of votes gets very complicated and takes a long time, because if the candidate you gave the number 1 to does not get elected, the vote is transferred to the one who got number 2 until that vote elects someone.



## Form 4 – Social Studies – Theme 5

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According to the constitution, that party whose candidates have the biggest number of number 1's (the 1<sup>st</sup> preference) wins the election. Due to the fact that in Malta the two biggest parties hardly have any difference between them in the support given them by the people, only by a few thousands, the electoral campaign gets very heated and every effort is done to get as many people to the polling booths as possible. The party to win the election is duty bound to run the state in the interest of all the people and not just in the interest of their supporters.



Nowadays the Maltese people are **voting** regularly in 4 different elections:

- a. The **General Election** which takes place every 5 years and a central Government is elected
- b. The **Local Council Election** which takes place every 4 years
- c. The **European Members of Parliament Election** which takes place every 5 years whereby 6 MEP's are chosen to represent Malta in the European Parliament.
- d. **Referendum** whereby the people vote about an idea or concept – this is called for by the present government according to the current issues ex: Malta's joining the EU / the introduction of the law in favor of divorce.

## The three institutions of power

In Malta we find **three institutions** which have the **power** to see that:

- a. new laws are passed and old laws changed when necessary
- b. that everyone is obeying the law
- c. that whoever disobeys the law is penalized according to the gravity of the crime.

These three institutions are:

1. **Legislative:** it is in **parliament** that laws are passed or changed. Members of parliament are chosen by the people through an election. In parliament we find MP who represent government as well as MP from the side of the opposition. These meet regularly to work and discuss laws and situations relevant to the country. We call these members of parliament the **representatives of the people** because they would be voicing the wishes of the citizens who voted for them.
2. **Administrative/Executive:** makes sure that the law is being put into practice. The administration is run by the **Prime Minister and the Cabinet** which is made up of a number of deputies chosen from amongst the members of government who had been elected ministers and parliamentary secretaries. Every member of the cabinet will be in charge of a particular ministry and their work would be to see to all that pertains to that ministry.

3. **Judiciary:** is the **Court** which is run by the Attorney General and includes judges and magistrates who judge whether laws are being obeyed. Even though parliament passes the laws, it is the court who decides whether these laws are being observed. We find civil courts, commercial courts and criminal courts – all there to administer justice and make sure the law is observed.

### **The Constitution of Malta**

The Constitution is the highest law of the state. In it we find entrenched 11 chapters which describe how the political system of the country should function, as well as mentioning all individual, social and political rights.

The Constitution cannot be changed very easily. This is not like other laws which are passed by a simple majority (when half the members of parliament plus one vote 50%+1). In order for changes to be made to the Constitution two thirds of members of parliament have to agree. Therefore on the occasions when some part of the Constitution was changed there had to be an agreement between government and the opposition.

## **The Role of the President of the Republic**

The President of Malta is chosen by the Prime minister for five years and has a number of roles and functions to fulfill amongst which to watch out for and protect the Constitution of Malta. No law passed by parliament can come into practice unless this is signed by the President. Apart from this the President has other roles such as welcoming and honoring foreign dignitaries and representing our country abroad, takes care of philanthropic aspects through the Community Chest Fund and in certain cases gives a presidential pardon.

### **Some important dates in the political history of Malta:**

- 1964 - Malta gained her Independence
- 1974 – Malta became a Republic
- 1979 – Malta gained freedom from the British troops
- 2004 – Malta joined the European Union
- 2008 – Malta adopted the Euro as its currency

## The Local Councils

For many years the Maltese islands had been administrated by one central government. Every important decision used to be taken by central administration and localities had nearly no say at all on final decisions.

It was in November 1993 that a number of elections were held and these would change the scene. After a number of elections spread on a number of months, we saw the rise of local councils. The local councils are made up of a mayor and a number of councilors, all of who live in the locality. Their appointment takes place through an election whereby the citizens of the locality vote every four years. In all we have 68 local councils – 54 of which are in Malta and 14 in Gozo.



In the beginning Local Councils were in charge of:

- Maintaining cleanliness in the locality,
- collecting and disposal of waste,
- as well as maintenance of public gardens.

Bit by bit their functions continued to grow and plans were formulated regarding projects dealing with:

- entertainment in the locality,
- sports centers, road names,
- maintenance of schools and old people's homes.

Their responsibilities are growing as time passes:

- they are issuing bye-laws,
- taking care of management of traffic
- and issuing permits for special activities.



The setting up of Local councils was carried out in order to reach 4 main aims:

1. **Devolution of Power:** this means that political power would not remain concentrated wholly in political representatives, ex: if there is a need to fix a pavement there is no longer any need for the citizen to go to the minister to have it seen to instead there is the council so see to these affairs.
2. **Decentralization:** the responsibility for what needs to be seen to in the country nowadays is being divided between national administration and local ones. Hence, relations are built between the local councils and other institutions such as those dealing with waste disposal, MEPA, etc.
3. **Depolarization:** political divisions and partisan strife at the level of the town or village are lessened. The local councils serve to keep political interference at bay where work at local level is concerned.
4. **Democratization:** the citizens are having more of a say in the decisions which concern them in their day to day life. Citizens are voting as well as having the possibility of contesting the elections for local councils that are in such close contact with the citizens.