

Chapter 8

Democracy

In this chapter you will . . .

- Learn about democracy: the concept, its history and its different forms
- Be inspired to take action and get involved in the democratic process
- Explore interesting case studies from Ireland and around the world
- Learn about the Irish political system, the EU and other forms of government
- Think about how women and young people are represented in a democracy
- Take part in interviews, debates and a mock election
- Play your part as an active citizen and keep informed about representatives in Ireland and the EU
- Develop each of the 8 key skills of Junior Cycle (see below)

This chapter and the 8 key skills



Learning outcomes:

1.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4,
3.5, 3.13

What is Democracy?

Democracy is when power is given to people so that they can make decisions and have their say on issues that affect them.

In democratic countries, the citizens of a country elect their government. Each adult has a vote, and the person or political parties with the most votes wins the election. It then forms a government and represents the people. This idea is best summed up by one of the early American presidents, Abraham Lincoln, who said that democracy is 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'.

Democracy is the type of government we have in Ireland. It is the Irish people who make decisions about the future of Ireland and the values of our society. All Irish citizens over 18 can vote in elections for politicians to represent them in the Oireachtas (parliament). They also have the right to vote in a referendum, which is a vote to change the Constitution.

Irish adults have the right to vote in European elections. As a member of the European Union, Irish citizens have the right to decide on issues that affect life in Europe. They can also vote in local elections, which decide who represents them in local government.

Many citizens have their first experience of democracy at school, where they vote for a student council to represent their views.

Questions

1. Abraham Lincoln said that democracy meant 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. What do you understand by this phrase?
2. Have you ever voted for anything? Describe how this vote took place.
3. What is a referendum?
4. Apart from the national Irish parliament (Dáil), name two other places Irish citizens can elect representatives to.

History of democracy

The ways democracies operate has changed over time, with many different nations advancing the system.

Athens

Democracy has its roots in Ancient Athens. All male citizens had the right to vote, the right to free speech and the right to take part in political life. Men from the city of Athens directly controlled the political system. The parliament (assembly) met at least once a month. Any male could speak at the assembly and vote on decisions, simply by raising his hand. Women, slaves and foreign citizens did not have any of these rights; they were excluded from the political process.

The United States of America

The United States inspired many modern nations to adopt democracy. In particular, the American Constitution was much admired. Published in 1787 it explained how the president, parliament and the judiciary (judges) should always be kept separate. This meant that no one part of government could get too powerful.

A **constitution** is a document that sets out the principles and values of a nation. It may only be changed by the people in a vote called a **referendum**.

France

The French Revolution saw King Louis XVI removed and executed; France became a democracy. This was important as it inspired other countries to move towards democracy. People started to question the right of kings to rule.

New Zealand

In 1893, New Zealand became the first country to give women the right to vote. This helped to inspire women around the world to demand their full rights as democratic citizens.

Questions

1. Where does democracy originally come from?
2. What rights did male citizens have in Athens?
3. Which groups did not have these rights?
4. How did democracy in the United States inspire other countries?
5. Why was the French Revolution so important to the story of democracy?
6. What important development in New Zealand helped to advance democracy?

Types of democracy

Democracy takes two main forms:

- Direct democracy
- Representative democracy

Originally, in Ancient Athens, direct democracy was used. Citizens voted directly for laws and acted as judges. However, as the city grew this form of democracy became impossible to organise. Instead, a new system was invented where individuals would be elected to represent citizens. These people had to speak on behalf of citizens. This is representative democracy.

In Ireland today we have a combination of direct and representative democracy. We vote directly for changes to our constitution. However, we also vote for politicians to represent us in the Oireachtas (Dáil and Seanad).

DISCUSSION

In pairs or groups:

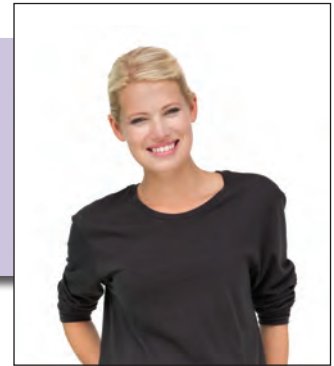
Read the quotes below from people in Ireland.

- Decide whether they are talking about **direct** democracy or **representative** democracy.
- Report back to the class.
- Listen to your classmates.



I thought the General Election in 2016 was great fun. Myself and my wife were tuned to the radio all day to see who would get elected in our area.
– Brian, Cork.

My neighbours and I were always talking about ways to improve our area. So we got together and formed a Residents' Association. We keep the place tidy and safe, and welcome new people to the community. Last week we held a vote to see if we would enter the Tidy Towns competition: looks like we're going ahead!
– Maureen, Mayo.



My sister is trying to get elected to the county council. She does so much for the area, and would be great at putting forward peoples' views.
– Anna, Carlow.

The first time I voted was in the Marriage Equality Referendum. It felt great to have a say in how the country is run.
– Alex, Dublin



I'm hoping to get on the student council next year. I think it would be great to speak up for people in my school. – Cristina, Donegal

Young People and Democracy

There are over 1 million people in Ireland under the age of 18; it is therefore vital that their views on issues are listened to.

Young people can get involved in democracy at a school level through their school council. Alternatively, there are youth councils (Comhairle na nÓg) all over Ireland who represent young people at a national level.



DISCUSSION

In small groups, make a list of five issues that you feel most affect young people.

- Explain how they affect young people.
- Write down two changes that you would like to see made (in school or in Ireland) that would help young people.
- Listen as other groups report back to the class.



Student councils


Student councils are an important feature of many Irish schools. They allow students to have a voice that is heard by school managers and can affect the policies of the school.

Under the Education Act, 1998, schools must encourage and give students the opportunity to set up a student council. This is because it is recognised that young people have a voice that matters and that they should be allowed to participate in decision-making.



Watch

Watch this informative description of how student councils work and why they are so important.

To watch this video, click  or go to mentorbooks.ie/resources and then select Junior Cycle CSPE/Chapter 8 Resources/Student Council Video

- What issues did the students in this video deal with through their student council?
- Name three issues that you would like to see dealt with by a student council in your school.
- What reasons did the students give for joining the student council?
- *Student councils help to make schools more democratic and are an important part of school life.* Do you agree with this statement? Why/why not?
- Would you be interested in joining a student council in your school? Why/why not?

PORTFOLIO

Election poster: Imagine you are seeking election to the student council. Draw a poster encouraging your classmates to vote for you. (Activity 2, page 80)

Election speech: Write the speech you would give to your class as you ask them to elect you to the student council. (Activity 3, page 81)

Young people and democracy outside of school

Student councils give children a voice in school. However, young people can get involved in democracy in the wider community and at a national level.

Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Council) is an organisation that gives young people the chance to be involved in the development of local services and government policies. Comhairle na nÓg has youth councils in the 31 local authorities of Ireland.



Get online

Learn more about student and youth councils by visiting the websites of the following organisations. Maybe you too will get involved!

The Irish Second-Level Students' Union: www.issu.ie

Comhairle na nÓg: www.comhairlenanog.ie



Make your voice heard

The speech below was made at a demonstration by young people which called on the government to increase the funding given to the education sector.

6 A cháirde,

My name is Jane Hayes Nally. I am a 17-year-old student in St Mary's High School. I am in 5th year at the minute and I am also President of the Irish Second-Level Students' Union.

We represent the second-level students in Ireland and we believe in an education system without barriers. I want to study science when I finish school. I want to go to college and I want to make my contribution to the social, cultural and economic growth of the Irish society. I want a future. I want the chance to stay in Ireland and to study in Ireland. I, and many of my fellow students, are marching on this day because we need to be heard.

We are telling this country that we need properly funded education in order for us to have this opportunity. We need properly funded education so that we get a chance to study, to better ourselves and to become qualified. However, we are not alone and we are not just students marching here today. We are among our parents, our teachers and our future lecturers. We are with members of national unions, organisations and charities. We are among people that believe in the same right to education as we do.

Education is a human right and education is my right.

Education is my opportunity to create, to succeed, to achieve.

Education is the essential exchange of information from teacher to classroom, lecturer to laboratory, author to readership, and speaker to the world.

Education is the remembrance of history to prevent its disasters repeating itself. It's the comprehension of science in order to react with our environment peacefully, and to further discover our universe.

Education is the art of the world's languages, the successful communication between two people, and the appreciation of the way words can change the world.

Education is the promotion of mathematics and logic, the engine behind advancements in technology and computers, and the reason why we are edging closer to a world where 6.8 billion people could all be connected online.

Education is debate, discussion, dispute. It is an opportunity to open one's mind, to consider ideas you could not have imagined.

There is no justification for a society which limits access of Irish people to education. There is no justification for burdening our students with debts when we are in a position to fund these opportunities. Let us not make education only available to the students who can afford it, and force others to take out loans to pay for education. Let us open education up to all, make it equal, inclusive, and accessible.

Today we're saying: 'Listen to us!' And listen loud and clear, because we're saying 'No' to student debt. We are saying 'No' to an unequal education system. We are saying 'No' to limiting access to education. We are saying 'No' to denying us our future! To depriving me of the opportunity to enter third-level education, me and many of my fellow students.

It comes down to a choice. We have a choice of what kind of Ireland will exist in the future. By improving Irish education today, we can improve the Ireland of tomorrow. 9

An abridged version of the original speech

Questions

1. What is the speaker, Jane Hayes Nally, calling on the government to do?
2. Do you think she does a good job highlighting how important education is?
3. Describe the tone used in this speech. Is it effective?
4. If you could speak directly to the government today, what advice would you give on how to improve life for young people in Ireland?

Talking Point:

“ Young people are not listened to in society today ”

- In small groups, discuss the talking point above.
- Do you agree with the statement? Why/why not? List your reasons.
- Listen as groups report their views back to the class.
- Explore this talking point as a class.

The Struggle for Democracy

In many countries, the struggle for democracy has been long and difficult. In recent times, people in North Africa and the Middle East have taken to the streets demanding a greater say in how their countries are run. Further in the past, countries like South Africa have been successful in their struggle for democracy.

South Africa

In 1990s South Africa, one of the great battles for democracy ended with everyone in the country being able to vote in free elections. The story of Nelson Mandela and the struggle for democracy in South Africa is one that gives hope to people living in non-democratic countries all over the world.

1948

The National Party wins the general election after promising to begin a system of apartheid in South Africa.

Apartheid is a system that separates people according to their race or ethnicity. In South Africa, this meant a ban on inter-racial marriages and separate education systems for people of different skin colours. Black people had to observe a curfew and could not use ‘white’ or ‘European’ bus-stops. Most importantly, black people had no right to vote.



1964

Nelson Mandela is sentenced to life in prison for treason.

At the time, Mandela is a leader of the African National Congress (ANC), a political party which had tried to stop apartheid from taking hold across South Africa. He tells the court: 'During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.'

**1976**

High school students in Soweto protest against their unequal education system.

The army and police shoot at the protesters, and 600 people are killed. It is one of dozens of such events that took place in South Africa's struggle for democracy.

1989

F.W. de Klerk (left) is sworn in as President of South Africa.

He helps to end apartheid by freeing Nelson Mandela from prison. He also ends the ban on the African National Congress. He later wins the Nobel Peace Prize along with Mandela.

**1990**

Nelson Mandela is freed from prison after 27 years.

In 1993, he wins the Nobel Peace Prize along with de Klerk. In 1994 he becomes President of South Africa in the first elections that allowed all people to vote. Mandela is a symbol of hope for people struggling for democracy all over the world.

**Get online**

Learn more about the life of Nelson Mandela at www.nelsonmandela.org

PORTFOLIO

Mandela, free at last: Write a news article as a journalist in South Africa on the day that Nelson Mandela was released from prison. (Activity 4, page 82)



Nelson Mandela's prison cell

LISTEN...

Workers at an Irish supermarket tried to help the people of South Africa by refusing to handle South African oranges during apartheid. One of them, Karen Gearon, tells her story.

To listen to this podcast, click  or go to mentorbooks.ie/resources and then select Junior Cycle CSPE/Chapter 8 Resources/Karen Gearon

In pairs or in groups

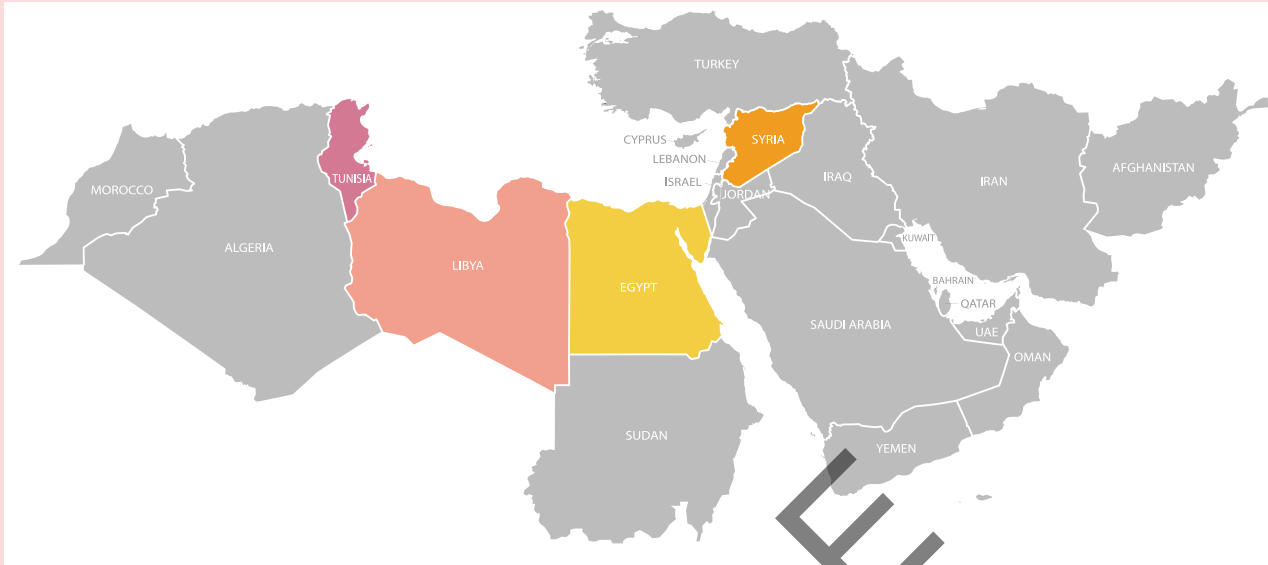
- Listen to the podcast.
- Write down what the workers did.
- Decide: would you do what Karen Gearon and her colleagues did? Explain why/why not.
- Report back to the class.



A statue of Nelson Mandela which overlooks the city of Bloemfontein, the birthplace of the ANC

Case Study

The Arab Spring



In 2010, a number of revolts began in countries across Northern Africa and the Middle East. Protesters were frustrated with corrupt leaders, police violence, high unemployment and censorship in the media. They called for democracy to be adopted in their countries. These protests became known as the Arab Spring. Their impact can be felt to the present day.

Starting in Tunisia, the idea of people taking back control from governments quickly spread to places including Egypt, Libya and Syria. The presidents of these countries were viewed as dictators, as all of them had been in power for at least 10 years, and none of them wanted to have open elections. Protesters wanted to get rid of them and elect new leaders. However, this proved to be very difficult, as the leaders did not want to give up power.

Tunisia

'Tunisia is showing that a real and sustainable democracy is possible in the Arab world'
– Anis Smaali, election observer in Tunisia

The Arab Spring began in late 2010 when Mohammed Bousazi, a fruit seller in central

Tunisia, set himself on fire because police had stopped him from selling vegetables without a permit. Around 300 people were killed in the protests that followed. The leader of the country, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, resigned after 23 years in power. He went into exile in Saudi Arabia and the country held its first democratic elections. It is now a stable democracy.

Egypt

'Our country's condition was getting worse and worse. There was corruption, torture, injustice, inequality and no freedom. Someone had to stand up and say "enough is enough"'
– Ahmed Raafat Amin, protester in Egypt

Inspired by the events in Tunisia, people in Egypt also started a revolution two months later. Following 18 days of violent protests, in which nearly 1000 people were killed, Hosni Mubarak resigned. He had been in power for 29 years. However, the newly elected president, Mohammed Morsi, was accused of being unfair and corrupt. The military forced him from office after just over one year. It is still under the rule of the military. The struggle for democracy continues.

Libya

'It's freedom. There's no Gaddafi, unbelievable. I feel the freedom. I smell the freedom' – Lamin el-Bijou, Banghazi, Libyan resident

Around the same time as Egypt's protests began, protests started in Libya. A civil war broke out. Helped with bombing support from NATO, the protesters forced the leader, Muammar Gaddafi, from office after 40 years in power. However, the change has not been a very successful one. People face many challenges, from corruption to terrorism, on a daily basis. Libya now has rival governments in the eastern and western halves of the country.

Syria

'The Tunisians had already been freed. The Egyptians were on their way to be free. We thought it was our turn to be free too' – Amer Matar, organiser of the first major protest in Syria

Protests demanding more freedom and an end to corruption started in March 2011. President Bashar al-Assad, leader since 2000 (and the son of the previous leader), sent his tanks to shoot the protesters. This caused more people to come onto the streets demanding that al-Assad resign but he refused to do so. Instead, the country was torn apart by a brutal civil

war that has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, and forced millions to flee their homes. The refugee crisis, covered in Chapter 2 on pages 26–30, was caused in large part by people escaping this terrible conflict.

Social media and the Arab Spring

Social media played a very important role in the Arab Spring. All four countries are places where the police had a lot of power. This is one reason why the dictators had ruled for so long; the police, army and other security services made sure that nobody made their presidents look bad. Phone calls were monitored, arrests could happen without any reason and many people were jailed for their political views.

However, social media changed all of that. It meant people could organise protests quickly and before the police could react. Protesters could share videos and messages about violence in other areas so their story could be spread easily and without anyone censoring it. People across the four countries were inspired by the stories they read online and took to the streets so they could get their freedom. However, for many of these people the struggle for democracy continues.


Questions

1. What was the Arab Spring?
2. Why did protests begin in Tunisia?
3. **Egypt:**
 - (a) How was President Mubarak removed from power in Egypt?
 - (b) How was Mohammed Morsi removed?
4. **Libya:**
 - (a) How many years had Muammar Gaddafi been in power?
 - (b) What happened in Libya after he was removed?
5. **Syria:** How did President Bashar al-Assad react to the protesters?
6. Out of the four countries profiled, which one is now a democracy?
7. Which country is most closely connected with the European refugee crisis?
8. List three reasons why social media was so important in the Arab Spring.



Watch

The Arab Spring started with great hopes but for many people it has ended in tragedy. The story of Abouad and his son Ibrahim is one touched with beauty and sadness.

To watch this video, click  or go to mentorbooks.ie/resources and then select Junior Cycle CSPE/Chapter 8 Resources/The Tale of the Flower-Seller

In pairs or in groups

- Watch the video *The Tale of the Flower-Seller*.
- Describe why you think Abouad's work is important or not.
- Write down some things you would like to say to Ibrahim.
- Talk to your partner/group about how it made you feel.
- Report back to the class.

PORTFOLIO

Arab Spring tweets: Describe the events in each country in a tweet. (Activity 5, page 83)

Democracy in Ireland

All democracies allow people to vote in free elections. They also have fair systems of law and justice. They allow the media to report on public life without any restrictions. For a country to be a democracy, it is crucial that all of these systems are independent.

As you will see in Chapter 9, the court system in Ireland is designed to offer citizens a fair trial. In Chapter 10 you will learn how the media in Ireland is allowed to express all sorts of views and opinions. These things, along with our parliament, make Ireland a democracy.

The democratic system

Irish democracy is based on a parliamentary system. It is made up of the President, the Dáil and the Seanad. The President and members of the Dáil are elected directly by the Irish people, known as the **electorate**. Members of the Seanad are elected in a different way (see page 173). All elected representatives must stick to the rules and rights set out in the Constitution. This makes Ireland a constitutional democracy.

The Constitution of Ireland/Bunreacht na hÉireann

Bunreacht na hÉireann is the official name of the Irish Constitution. *Bunreacht* is an Irish word that means 'basic law'. It was accepted by the Irish people on 1 July 1937. The Constitution is made up of 50 articles which set out Ireland's:

- Laws
- Values
- Rights

The Constitution can only be changed by a vote known as a **referendum**. Changes to the Constitution are known as amendments. A referendum is different to an election because people are asked to vote either 'yes' or 'no' to a proposal, rather than pick someone to represent them.

For example, in May 2015 two changes to the Constitution were put to the Irish people. The Marriage

Equality referendum got a majority of 'yes' votes, so it was said to have passed, and the Constitution was changed. A second referendum, held on the same day, proposed to lower the age a person must be to stand for president from 35 to 21. It was rejected by the Irish people, so no change was made to the Constitution.

In total there have been 35 proposals to amend the Constitution of Ireland; 11 were rejected by the Irish people.

The President

The President is the head of the Irish State. The main duty of the President is to protect the rights set out in the Irish Constitution. He/she can do this by making sure that any new laws that are proposed do not interfere with those rights. When the President is happy that a new law respects the rights of the Constitution, he/she signs off on the law. However, if the President thinks that a new law is against the Constitution, he/she has the power to send the law to the Supreme Court for judgment. This is a crucial power as it helps to protect the constitutional rights of the Irish people. As such, the President is an essential part of Irish democracy.

Other duties of the president:

- Represents the people of Ireland on official visits to other countries
- Welcomes presidents, prime ministers and other officials to Ireland
- Is the commander-in-chief of the Irish defence forces
- Can dissolve the Dáil to allow a general election to take place

The President is elected by the people and serves a maximum of two terms in office (each term lasts seven years). A person who wants to be president must be nominated by at least 20 members of the Dáil and the Seanad, or by at least four local authorities (often known as county councils).

A president can nominate themselves if they have only served one term in office. The official residence of the president is Áras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park in Dublin.

Michael D. Higgins became the eighth president of Ireland in 2011.



Get online

Find out who the other presidents of Ireland were at www.president.ie

Questions

1. What is the main duty of the Irish president?
2. What can the President do if he/she thinks that a new law is against the constitution?
3. Name three other duties that the Irish president has.
4. What age does a person have to be to stand for President of Ireland?
5. How long can a person be the president for?
6. What is the name of the official residence of the President?
7. How many Irish presidents have there been?
8. *The President plays a crucial role in Irish democracy.* Do you agree/disagree? Give a reason for your answer.

PORTFOLIO

Know your presidents: Create a timeline of Irish presidents. (Activity 6, page 84)

The Dáil

Dáil Éireann is the name of the main house of the Irish parliament. People elected by the citizens sit in the Dáil and make decisions on how to run the country. It is made up of 160 TDs (Teachta Dála, an Irish term which means, 'Deputy to the Dáil'). In other countries, such as Britain, they are often known as MPs (Members of Parliament). The Dáil meets in Leinster House in Dublin.

Ireland is divided into 39 areas (constituencies), each of which is represented by three, four or five TDs, depending on the size of its population. There is one TD for every 30,000 people in Ireland. Most TDs come from political parties, which have different views on how the country should be run.

There are also a number of independent TDs who do not belong to any party. Elections to the Dáil must be held at least every five years.

If one party has an overall majority of TDs (i.e. 80 or more) it can form the government. However, if no one party wins a majority, then there are three options:

1. Two or more parties can join together and form a 'coalition' government.
2. The party with the most seats can get the support of another party to form a 'minority' government. In this case the parties agree on major issues, like which new laws to pass, but only one party has members in the government.
3. A new election can be called.

The parties which do not make up the government are known as the 'opposition'. These TDs have a number of powers, even though they are not the majority. They can hold the government to account by asking questions in the Dáil, debate new laws and put forward their own ideas for how to run the country.

The Ceann Comhairle (chairman) plays a very important role in the Dáil. Her/his job is to make sure the business of the Dáil runs smoothly. Crucially, the Ceann Comhairle is



Figures and maps apply to elections from 2018 onwards.



Get online

Find out more about the Dáil at www.oireachtas.ie

automatically re-elected to the Dáil. This means that one seat in the parliament is always kept for the Ceann Comhairle, and so cannot be won by anyone else. As a result, even though there are 160 seats in the Dáil, a government needs to win 80 seats to have a majority.

All TDs are a link between the citizens and the lawmakers. A typical week for all TDs includes:

- Meeting constituents at their 'clinics' to listen to their advice and give them information
- Attending the Dáil to discuss national and local matters
- Putting across the views of their constituents
- Going to official functions
- Working on committees to suggest new laws or changes to old ones

Questions

1. How many TDs sit in the Dáil?
2. (a) How many constituencies are there in Ireland?
(b) How many of these are in Dublin?
3. How many TDs should a constituency with (a) 90,000 and
(b) 150,000 people have?
4. How many TDs are needed to form a majority in the Dáil?
5. Explain the term 'coalition government' in your own words.
6. Give two reasons why the opposition is important in a democracy.
7. What does the Ceann Comhairle do?

PORTFOLIO

Know your local TDs: Who are your local TDs? (Activity 7, page 85)

The Seanad

The Seanad (senate) is the name of the second house of the Irish parliament. Members of the Seanad are called senators. The Seanad is not as powerful as the Dáil. Its main function is to discuss and suggest amendments to bills which the government wants to pass into law.

There are 60 senators in Seanad Éireann but they are not elected in the same way as TDs. Instead, senators are elected as follows:

- 11 are nominated by the Taoiseach and two of these can also serve in the government.
- 6 are elected by graduates of universities.
- 43 are elected by panels made up of outgoing senators, incoming TDs and local county councils. The panels also include people with knowledge and experience of: culture and education, agriculture, labour, industry and commerce, and administration.

Local authorities

Local government is an essential part of any democracy. In Ireland, local authorities (known as city or county councils) help to keep communities pleasant places to live and work. Your local library, recycling centre and public park are maintained by the local authority.


In total, there are 31 local authorities in Ireland. There are 26 county councils. Dublin has three county councils: Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council. Limerick and Waterford have city and county councils, while Cork, Dublin and Galway also have city councils. Councils elect a chairperson or mayor to run their meetings. Each council has a chief executive, previously known as city or county manager, who is the manager of the local authority.

Elections for the local authority are held every five years. They are normally held on the same day as European elections. The number of councillors an area has depends on the population of the area. For example, Cork City Council has 55 members while Carlow County Council has just 18.



Watch

Local authorities cover a wide range of services in our communities. Watch this video to learn more about the work of local government.

To watch this video, click  or go to mentorbooks.ie/resources and then select Junior Cycle CSPE/Chapter 8 Resources/Local Authorities: providing services for our everyday lives

In pairs or in groups

- Watch the video 'Local Authorities: providing services for our everyday lives'.
- Make a list of all the things that your local authority does.
- Report back to the class.



Get online

Find out about your local authority at:
www.lgcsb.ie

Voting in Ireland

It is very important to understand how the democratic process works in Ireland. All active citizens should appreciate how laws are made, and how politicians are elected. It is also vital to recognise why voting is so important.

Why?

From time to time, you may hear people say 'How can my one vote make a difference?' However, every vote counts. Every voter has an equal say in how the country is run. All adult citizens have a right and a responsibility to vote because the laws and government of a country affect everybody who lives there.

Who?

Only those aged 18 and over may vote. The **register of electors** lists all of those who are allowed to vote. You can apply to your local authority to be listed on the register of electors.

Different groups of people living in Ireland have different voting rights. These are as follows:

- Irish citizens may vote in every election and referendum
- British citizens may vote at general elections, European elections and local elections
- Other European Union citizens may vote at European and local elections
- Non-EU citizens may vote at local elections only

How?

Before a general election or referendum, everybody on the register of electors is sent a **polling card**. This lists your name and your **polling station**. A polling station is the place where you vote; it is often a local primary school.

At the polling station you are given a **ballot paper**. This is what you use to cast your vote. Your name does not appear on the ballot paper because it is a secret ballot. When you have cast your vote, the ballot paper is placed in a locked box called a **ballot box**. This will only be opened when the votes are being counted.

When?

Voting in Ireland happens during the following times:

- **General elections** happen when we elect our 160 TDs. This must happen at least every five years.
- **Local elections** take place when we elect local councillors to the local authority.
- **By-elections** occur following the resignation or death of a TD; a by-election is held to fill the seat that is now empty.
- **Presidential elections** happen at least every seven years when the President is elected by Irish citizens.
- **European elections** are when the 11 Irish members of the European parliament are elected at least every five years.
- **Referendums** happen when a change to the Constitution has been proposed. This change can only be made with approval from Irish citizens during a referendum.
- **Seanad elections** follow shortly after a general election. Only certain citizens and groups may cast their vote in a Seanad election (see page 173).

TAKE ACTION

■ Speech

Write a speech making the case that everyone who can vote, should vote. Appeal to your audience's sense of responsibility as citizens. You may wish to get information about voter turnout (number of people who come out to vote) in Ireland by visiting the Central Statistics Office's website www.cso.ie.

Proportional representation

Different democracies use different systems for deciding their political leaders. Ireland's system of voting is called **Proportional Representation (PR)**. This system tends to allow smaller parties to be represented in parliament alongside larger parties.

Under the PR system, the voting itself is simple. Voters number their candidates, starting with '1' for their favourite candidate and moving down in order of preference. Voters may number some or all of the candidates. When the ballot boxes are opened, the counting begins.

Here is how the PR system works as the votes are counted:

1. The quota is established. The quota is the minimum number of votes a candidate needs to be elected.
2. First preference votes are counted.
3. The candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated.
4. The eliminated candidates' votes are redistributed according to the next preferences.
5. Steps 1–4 are continued until a candidate reaches the quota.
6. At any point, once a candidate reaches the quota, he/she is elected.
7. After a candidate is elected, his/her surplus votes (number of votes over the quota) are redistributed to the other candidates
8. Once all the seats have been filled, the election is over.

How is the quota calculated?

A simple formula is used to calculate the quota:

$$\text{Quota} = \left(\frac{\text{Number of valid votes}}{\text{Number of seats} + 1} \right) + 1$$

For example, in a constituency with 4 seats where there are 50,000 valid votes, the quota would be 10,001:

$$10,001 = \frac{50,000}{4+1} + 1$$

10,001 is the minimum number of votes a candidate would need to be elected in this 4 seater constituency. Importantly, it would be impossible for 5 candidates to receive 10,001 votes in this scenario.



Calculate the quotas for the following scenarios:

- (a) Number of seats: 3 Valid votes: 39,600
 (b) Number of seats: 4 Valid votes: 24,000
 (c) Number of seats: 3 Valid votes: 37,200

TAKE ACTION

- Run a mock election in your class.
- Decide who the candidates are.
- Create ballot papers and a ballot box.
- Use the PR system to count the votes.
- Decide what extra powers and responsibilities the successful candidates should be given.

PORTFOLIO

Democracy crossword: Revise the key terms and ideas above by completing this crossword. (Activity 8, page 87)

WALKING DEBATE

“ *Those who don't vote should be fined* ”

- At opposite ends of the classroom, place signs saying ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’.
- When your teacher reads the statement ‘*Those who don't vote should be fined*’ move to the area of the room that best represents your opinion.
- The closer you are to a sign, the more it reflects your opinion.
- You may place yourself in the middle of the room if you are unsure.
- Explain to the class why you are standing where you are. Listen as others do the same.
- You may move position if your viewpoint changes.
- Choose a member of your class to summarise the main points on the board.

Government in Ireland

The government of Ireland is a group of TDs who have positions of responsibility. These TDs are called **ministers** and together they form the **cabinet**. The government make decisions about new laws and plans for changes in how Ireland is run.

The Taoiseach (known in other countries as the prime minister) is the head of government. The Taoiseach is one of the most powerful people in Irish democracy. He/she is nominated by the Dáil. It is usually the party or coalition with the most TDs that decides who will be Taoiseach. The Taoiseach then selects the rest of his/her cabinet and gives them jobs looking after areas such Agriculture, Education, Finance, Health and Justice.

The Taoiseach is the public face of the government and answers questions in the Dáil, as well as in the media, on a regular basis. The Taoiseach also plays a very important role internationally. He/she must work with the other heads of government in the European Union to make decisions about what is best for Europe. The Taoiseach also visits other countries during the year to promote the interests of Ireland.

The Tánaiste is the deputy Taoiseach. He/she takes the place of the Taoiseach if the Taoiseach is away in another country or unwell.

PORTFOLIO

The Government of today: Compile a list of the current Government ministers. (Activity 9, page 88).



Leinster House, Dublin (Merrion Square entrance)

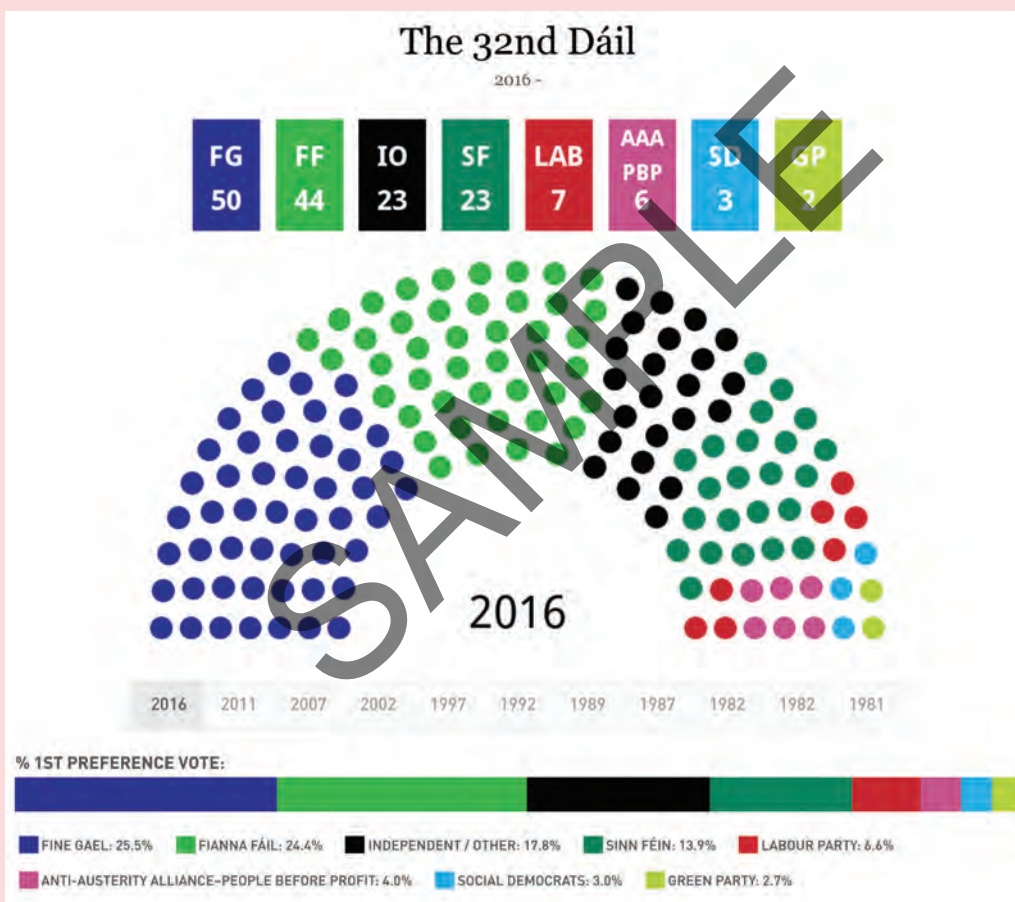
Case Study

Election 2016

Seven political parties won seats in the Irish general election in 2016. Along with these, a large number of independent candidates won seats. The result of the election left Ireland without a government, however. This is because no one party won a majority of seats. Instead, the political parties had talks about forming a coalition.

In the end, the parties chose to have a minority government. Fine Gael won the largest number of seats and formed a government with a number of independents. They made an agreement with Fianna Fail for a Fine Gael Taoiseach.

Results 2016 General Election



Source: The Irish Times

Questions

1. Which party won the most seats in the 2016 election?
2. Which party won the fewest seats?
3. How many seats did independent candidates win?
4. How many more seats would Fianna Fail need to have a majority?
5. In 2016, a party needed to have 79 seats to have a majority. Make a list of all the combinations of parties that could reach that number and form a government.



Get online

Go to www.oireachtas.ie for a full list of the TDs in the Dáil.

Life as a Politician in Ireland

There were 158 TDs elected to the Dáil in 2016. It is interesting to think about what motivates, inspires and challenges them.

Bríd Smith is a TD for the People Before Profit Alliance in the Dublin South Central constituency. She has spent her life in politics working for the rights of workers, women and vulnerable people.



Michael Healy-Rae is an independent TD for Kerry. Most of his life has been spent working in local politics. His brother Danny is also a TD for Kerry. Their father, Jackie Healy-Rae, was a TD for Kerry South.

Éamon Ó Cuív is a TD for Fianna Fáil for Galway West. He was first elected to the Dáil in 1992 and has been part of the government on five occasions. He is the grandson of former Taoiseach and President Éamon de Valera.



Bríd Smith	Michael Healy-Rae	Éamon Ó Cuív
What sparked your interest in politics?		
In the late 1960s, there was a big international wave of protests for civil rights. I used to watch the news and see thousands of young black people across the USA marching for their civil rights and thousands of people in Northern Ireland marching for civil rights in this country. Then there were the big marches against the Vietnam War. These events inspired an interest in politics for me. My political inspiration was Bernadette Devlin (later McAliskey) who as a young woman led the Civil Rights Movement in the North and then at the age of 21 was elected to represent that movement in Westminster.	I always had a genuine interest in helping people, that in turn got me interested in politics. My late father was a great political inspiration and role model.	I was brought up in a family where current affairs, politics, culture and all human affairs were debated in detail. Neither of my parents was active in a political party but they had a great knowledge and interest in it. Of course, while I was growing up, my grandfather was Taoiseach (Éamon de Valera) and subsequently President. In my case knowing Éamon de Valera well personally was certainly a great privilege. Contrary to the image portrayed of him nowadays, he was a kindly, approachable and caring person who deeply believed in the people of Ireland and their welfare.

Bríd Smith	Michael Healy-Rae	Éamon Ó Cuív
Please outline some of your core political beliefs.		
My core political beliefs are for full equality for all regardless of their race, colour, gender or creed; and for a basic human right for everyone on the planet to a safe home, to an education, to a health service and to a clean environment.	Adequate health care should be readily available to everyone in the country at all times; adequate housing should be available to all people at all times; proper education to all, regardless of their backgrounds.	Politics is about improving the lives of people in every way you can, particularly the less well off in society, isolated communities and vulnerable groups. It is about ensuring a fair distribution of the nation's resources. Peace in our island and the eventual unity of it, by consent, has been a lifetime's mission and something I have worked on behind the scenes for many years with all communities both North and South.
What is the greatest challenge of being a politician in Ireland?		
The greatest challenge of being a politician in Ireland is facing a system that is old, entrenched, sometimes corrupt and very difficult to change.	The challenge that I have is representing a very large area, which can sometimes involve travelling 600 km in one day without leaving the county.	Too many things and causes to work on and not enough time to do them.
What advice would you give to a teenager with an interest in politics?		
To anyone interested in politics I would say this: always listen carefully and ask questions, read when you can, use your head and use your vote but most importantly do something, however small, to try to change the world around you.	If they have a genuine interest, follow it and work hard.	Get a good education, be involved in activities such as sport, drama, music etc.; work for a while in the world outside of politics to get an understanding of the realities of life and then if you are still interested stand for election.
What advice would you give to a teenager with no interest in politics?		
To anyone not interested in politics I would say this: it might appear to be always boring and self-serving but politics affects everything in our lives, it affects our schools, our jobs, our environment, our children, our future, our health and we have to take ownership of politics for all the right reasons, to make a better world for all.	I believe you cannot make a racehorse out of a donkey. If a person is not interested in politics, they should follow whatever their interest is and leave the politics to others.	An interest in elected politics only interests a minority. However, I would encourage all young people to get involved in activities outside of work and study, to care for others in society as <i>is scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine</i> (we all live in each other's shadow). If everybody did this, we would have a great society.

VOTE AND DISCUSS

- Basing your answers on what you have read here, think about which politician you would be most likely to vote for.
- Write down the name of the politician you (individually) would vote for.
- Hand it to your teacher/nominated student.
- Count all the votes and write a tally on the board.
- Discuss the results as a class.

PORTFOLIO

Interview a local politician: Contact a local TD, local authority councillor or your MEP and ask them the questions that appear in the interviews above. (Activity 10, page 89)

Women and Democracy

Democracy is about empowering the people so that, together, they can decide the future of their country. For this reason, it is vital that both men and women are equally involved in the democratic process.

However, there are many societies, today and in the past, where men have a greater say in the running of their country, and women's voices are not heard. In Ancient Athens, only adult male citizens, who had completed their military training, could vote. In Ireland and Britain, women only won the right to vote in 1918.

In modern Ireland, women have the same voting rights as men. However, women only make up a small proportion of the politicians elected to the Dáil. In this section, you will learn about the struggle to extend voting rights to women and the efforts to make politics more gender balanced.

The suffragettes

In the late 19th century, women did not have the right to vote. Many people in Britain and Ireland felt that this was unfair. They argued that if women were expected to obey the law, they should have a say in how those laws are made.

Suffrage means the right to vote, and women fighting for the right to vote were therefore known as **suffragettes**. They called for **universal suffrage**, which is the right for all adults to vote. Voting rights are central to the idea of democracy.

Some argued that women were not intelligent enough to vote or that they would simply vote the same way as their husbands. However, these arguments clearly discriminated against women's rights to have control over their lives and a voice in society.

The suffragettes' campaign did not bring instant success. Many women became frustrated with the slow progress and turned to more direct action: chaining themselves to railings, smashing windows and even setting buildings on fire. Many suffragettes were imprisoned and went on hunger strike to draw attention to their cause. Sometimes these women were force-fed by prison authorities. However eventually, in 1918,

IT'S A FACT!

In 1893, New Zealand became the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote.



A police officer tries to remove a woman from railings during a suffragette protest, Buckingham Palace, London

women in Britain and Ireland secured voting rights. At first, only women aged 30 or over could vote (men were allowed to vote at 21). Equal voting rights were finally given in Ireland in 1922, when women could vote at the age of 21.

Diary of a suffragette

We can understand the suffragettes and how they protested from diaries and letters of the time. The extract below is from the diary of Constance Lytton, a well-known suffragette, who describes the horrible process of being force-fed while in prison.



Get online

There are many famous Irish women who fought for universal suffrage. Go online and research the lives of two important Irish suffragettes: Anna Haslam and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington.



Tuesday, 18 January, Walton Gaol

I was visited again by the Senior Medical Officer, who asked me how long I had been without food. 'I shall have to feed you, I must feed you at once.' Two of the wardresses took hold of my arms, one held my head and one my feet. One wardress helped to pour the food. The doctor leant on my knees as he stooped over my chest to get at my mouth. I shut my mouth and clenched my teeth. The sense of being overpowered by more force than I could possibly resist was complete, but I resisted nothing except with my mouth. He seemed annoyed at my resistance and he broke into a temper as he plied my teeth with the steel implement. He dug his instrument down. He said if I resisted so much with my teeth, he would have to feed me through the nose.

The pain of it was intense and at last, I must have given way for he got the gag between my teeth, when he proceeded to turn it much more than necessary until my jaws were fastened wide apart, far more than they could go naturally. Then he put down my throat a tube which seemed to me much too wide and was something like four feet in length. The irritation of the tube was excessive. I choked the moment it touched my throat until it had got down. Then the food was poured in quickly; it made me sick a few seconds after it was down and the action of the sickness made my body and legs double up, but the wardresses instantly pressed back my head and the doctor leant on my knees.

The horror of it was more than I can describe. I was sick over the doctor and wardresses, and it seemed a long time before they took the tube out. As the doctor left, he gave me a slap on the cheek.

When the doctor had gone out of the cell, I lay quite helpless. Before long, I heard the sounds of the forced feeding in the next cell to mine. It was almost more than I could bear, it was Elsie; I was sure. When the ghastly process was over and all quiet, I tapped on the wall and called out at the top of my voice, which wasn't much just then, 'No surrender,' and there came the answer past any doubt in Elsie's voice, 'No surrender.'

Adapted from **Prison and Prisoners** by Constance Lytton

Questions

1. What is your view about the way Constance Lytton was treated?
2. From what you have read of her diary, do you admire Constance Lytton? Why/why not?
3. Do you think that this horrible experience took away Constance Lytton's determination to fight for universal suffrage? Explain your answer.

DISCUSSION

- In small groups, think about other groups of people around the world who had to struggle to get the right to vote.
- Make a list of these groups.
- Listen as other groups report what they discussed.

Women and democracy in modern Ireland

The vast majority of Irish politicians have always been men. Although Ireland had one of the first female cabinet ministers in the world (Countess Constance Markievicz), the percentage of women in the Dáil and the Seanad has remained low. Many see this as a weakness of modern Irish democracy.

Below is a summary of the number of women elected to the Dáil. This is also shown as a percentage of the total number Dáil members.

Election year	Number of women elected	Percentage of Dáil who are women
1918	1	0.9%
1921	6	4.7%
1922	2	1.5%
1923	5	3.3%
1927 (June)	4	2.0%
1927 (Sep)	1	0.6%
1932	2	1.3%
1933	3	1.9%
1937	2	1.4%
1938	3	2.2%
1943	3	2.2%
1944	4	2.9%
1948	5	3.4%
1951	5	3.4%
1954	5	3.4%
1957	4	2.7%
1961	3	2.1%
1965	5	3.5%
1969	3	2.1%
1973	4	2.7%
1977	6	4%

Election year	Number of women elected	Percentage of Dáil who are women
1981	11	6.6%
1982 (Feb)	14	4.8%
1982 (Nov)	14	8.4%
1987	14	8.4%
1989	13	7.8%
1992	20	12%
1997	20	12%
2002	22	13.2%
2007	22	13.2%
2011	25	15.1%
2016	35	22.1%

Questions

1. In what year did the Dáil have the greatest number of women TDs?
2. What year was the percentage of female TDs at its lowest?
3. Do you notice a trend in the figures above? Explain your answer.
4. Are you surprised by the low numbers of women who are elected to Dáil Éireann? Explain your thoughts.
5. Do you agree that it is important for Ireland to increase the number of female TDs? Why/why not?
6. What actions could be taken to increase the number of female TDs?

Gender quotas

In 2012, a new law, the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act, was passed to increase the number of women who run for election. All political parties get funding from the state. This new law states that a political party will lose half of its funding if less than 30% of candidates are female. This is called a gender quota.

DISCUSSION

In small groups, discuss the following:

- The gender quota legislation was introduced in 2012. Look back at the table on pages 183–184. Do you think this legislation made a difference?
- Do you think the idea of a gender quota is a good or bad idea? Why?

WALKING DEBATE

“ We should introduce a law that states that 50% of all elected politicians should be women ”

- At opposite ends of the classroom, place signs saying ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’.
- When your teacher reads the statement ‘We should introduce a law that states that 50% of all elected politicians should be women’ move to the area of the room that best represents your opinion.
- The closer you are to a sign, the more it reflects your opinion.
- You may place yourself in the middle of the room if you are unsure.
- Explain to the class why you are standing where you are. Listen as others do the same.
- You may move position if your viewpoint changes.
- Choose a member of your class to summarise the main points on the board.

Women and power

The six quotations below all say something about the amount of power women have in society.

“For me, a better democracy is a democracy where women do not only have the right to vote and to elect but to be elected”

– Michelle Bachelet, head of UN Women, former President of Chile

“We cannot all succeed, when half of us are held back”

– Malala Yousafzai,
human rights campaigner

I was elected by the women of Ireland, who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system

– Mary Robinson, the first woman to be elected President of Ireland



“I myself have never able to find out precisely what a feminist is. I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat”

– Rebecca West, author

“In the future there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders”

– Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook

Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights

Hillary Clinton,
American politician

For each quotation:

- Explain what point the author/speaker is making.
- Offer a personal response: do you agree/disagree?
- State which quotation you feel is most interesting. Explain why you think so.

**Get online**

Learn more about gender and Irish politics by visiting the following websites:

Department of Justice, Gender Equality Division: www.genderequality.ie

Women for Election, campaign organisation: www.womenforelection.ie

European Commission website – search for ‘women Ireland’: www.ec.europa.eu

PORTFOLIO

Women and democracy speech:
Write a speech in which you argue that there should be more women in politics.

OR

Write a speech in which you argue that we should never think about a politician's gender. (Activity 11, page 90)

The European Union and Democracy

Irish citizens have a right and responsibility to democratically choose their leaders and to shape Ireland's laws. As well as this, Irish citizens are also citizens of the European Union. This means that Irish people have a say in how the European Union operates.

History of the European Union

World War II brought horrific death and destruction to Europe. Cities and economies were destroyed; millions had died. Many realised that only by working together could Europe avoid such a terrible war ever happening again.

1950

The French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman proposed that European countries should work together. This would benefit all people in Europe. He argued that if European countries jointly owned coal and steel production, war could be avoided. He co-wrote the **Schuman Plan** which sparked the idea of the European Union. Based on this plan, six countries (Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) manage their coal and steel industries together.

1957

The **Treaty of Rome** was signed by the six countries (see above). This treaty established the **European Economic Community** (EEC). This led to the free movement of people, services and goods across the borders.

1973

Ireland, Britain and Denmark joined the EEC.

1981

Greece joined the EEC.

1986

Spain and Portugal joined.

1993

The Maastricht Treaty was signed. This allowed for greater co-operation between countries and the EEC was renamed the **European Union (EU)**.

1995

Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU.

2002

Euro notes and coins came into circulation.

2004

Ten countries joined the EU: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

2007

Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU.

2009

The Lisbon Treaty was signed. This changed the way the EU operated.

2013

Croatia joined the EU.

2016

Britain voted to leave the EU. This event was referred to as 'Brexit' (**Britain's exit** from the EU).

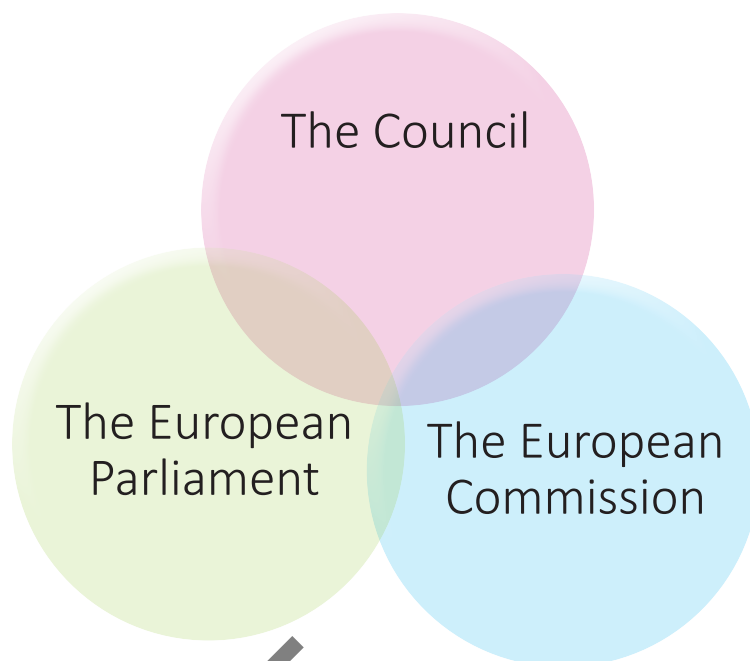
PORTFOLIO

Expansion of the EU: Colour the map in your Portfolio to indicate when countries joined the EEC and the EU. (Activity 12, page 92)

Europe Day is celebrated every year on 9 May, because Robert Schuman declared his ideas in a speech on this day in 1950.

How does the EU work?

510 million people live in the European Union. Making laws that are fair for all of these people, in so many different countries, is a difficult task. There are three main institutions that ensure that the EU is just and democratic. They are: the **Council** (**European Council** and **Council of the EU**), the **European Parliament** and the **European Commission**.



The Council (European Council and Council of the EU)

The European Council

The European Council is when all of the heads of state (Presidents, Prime Ministers, Chancellors and Taoiseach) meet together. They discuss the general strategy of the EU, broad policies and treaties.

The Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union is a meeting of ministers from each EU state. For example, if agriculture is being discussed, then all of the ministers for agriculture meet. The Council of the EU negotiates and adopts EU laws, co-ordinates the policies of each country and oversees the budget with the European Parliament.

The European Parliament

The European Parliament directly represents the people of Europe. There are 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who are elected by the citizens of the member states. These elections take place every five years and give citizens the chance to have their say in the running of the EU.

The Parliament decides on new laws (along with the Council of the EU)

Each country elects a different number of MEPs. This is related to population size. The table on the right shows how many MEPs each country can elect.

BELGIUM	21
BULGARIA	17
CZECH REPUBLIC	21
DENMARK	13
GERMANY	96
ESTONIA	6
IRELAND	11
GREECE	21
SPAIN	54
FRANCE	74
CROATIA	11
ITALY	73
CYPRUS	6
LATVIA	8
LITHUANIA	11
LUXEMBOURG	6
HUNGARY	21
MALTA	6
NETHERLANDS	26
AUSTRIA	18
POLAND	51
PORTUGAL	21
ROMANIA	32
SLOVENIA	8
SLOVAKIA	13
FINLAND	13
SWEDEN	20
UNITED KINGDOM	73

The European Commission

The European Commission is made up of 28 Commissioners, one from each member state. Each Commissioner is nominated by the government of his/her country. The Commissioners' job is to think about what would be best for the EU as a whole. They propose laws and make sure that the EU treaties are respected.

Other European institutions

There are a number of other EU institutions. Two important bodies are:

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) interprets EU law to make sure it is applied fairly to all EU countries, and settles legal disputes between countries and EU institutions.

The European Central Bank (ECB) manages the euro and looks after the EU's monetary policy. Its main aim is to keep prices stable, and allow the economies of European countries to grow.

PORTFOLIO

Who's who in the EU?: Go online and find out the names of various political figures in the EU. (Activity 13, page 93)

What the EU means to citizens

There are 510 million people living in the EU. All of these citizens have different goals in life and different viewpoints. The EU aims to create laws and systems to benefit all of its citizens. However, not all citizens agree about how the EU operates.



I am in my last year in school and I'm really excited about travelling. Being an EU citizen means that I can travel and work anywhere in the EU.

– Alekski, Finland

I'm a farmer. The EU has done a good job protecting the farming industry from cheaper products that could be imported from other parts of the world. I am glad that I can continue to work and earn a fair living from my work.

– Enzo, France





My family have been making cheese for generations. At one point, we were worried that we wouldn't have enough buyers for our product. However, after Croatia joined the EU, there are lots more buyers out there for us.

– Josip, Croatia

I am a bit worried about security. Being in the EU means that our borders are more open.

– Jakub, Poland

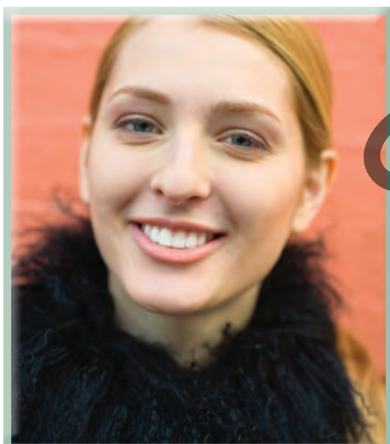


I am young but I have to look towards my future. I am glad that the European Central Bank will help to keep the EU economy stable so that my future will be safe.

– Hanna, Hungary

Sometimes I feel that the EU is so huge that I have little power or influence over the decisions that are made.

– Aneta, Bulgaria



Every time I drive on the new bypass I remember the terrible old road that I used to take. I am grateful that the EU made funds available to improve our road infrastructure.

– Claire, Ireland

I feel that we are losing our identity. What does it mean to be a Dutch woman if I am also a European woman?

– Lotte, the Netherlands



The EU makes me feel safe. All the member states share information about serious criminals and work together to combat terrorism.

– Maria, Portugal

Questions

1. Which of the comments on the previous pages reflect your opinion? Explain how.
2. Do you disagree with any of the comments? Explain your answer.
3. What is the most important aspect of the European Union for you?

Talking Point:

“ I feel more European than Irish ”

- In small groups, discuss the talking point above.
- Do you agree with the statement? Why/why not? List your reasons.
- Listen as groups report their views back to the class.
- Explore this talking point as a class.

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

European democracy also plays an important role in protecting human rights. In chapters 3 and 4, you learned about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (page 41) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (pages 62–63). The European Convention on Human Rights lists the rights that it sees as important in Europe. The Convention came into force in 1953.

All EU member states and many other European countries have signed the ECHR. These countries, on behalf of their citizens, have made a commitment to human rights in Europe. The ECHR further underlines how valued rights are in Europe. It places an emphasis on the right to life, freedom from torture, the importance of liberty, the right to privacy and the right to a fair trial.



Get online

Search the ECHR online and learn more about how democracy has helped to strengthen human rights in Europe.

Other Systems of Government

Around the world, there are many different types of government. Each one runs its own country: it usually passes laws, deals with its people and has a relationship with governments in other countries. However, some systems mean that people have less say in how their country is run. This can lead to frustration, protests and rebellion.

Take a look at other systems that are sometimes used in other countries.

Autocracy

In an autocracy, one person has all the power. There are two main types: monarchy and dictatorship.

Monarchy

In a monarchy a king or queen rules a country. This person is known as the monarch. They normally come to power because of their family: the eldest son or daughter of the king or queen becomes the next king or queen.



In the past, monarchs often held all of the power. There are still powerful monarchs today in places like Oman. However, in most cases the king or queen usually shares power with other parts of government. The king or queen must follow the laws voted for by the people. Constitutional monarchies can be found today in the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium.

Dictatorship

Countries that are run as dictatorships give all the power to one leader. This person makes all decisions for the citizens of the country. Sometimes, dictatorships have elections, a parliament and a constitution. However, they do not mean anything as the final decision on all matters lies in the hands of the dictator. All modern day dictators are men. There are around 50 in the world, including in Belarus, Uzbekistan and Angola.

In a military dictatorship, a country is run by the army and no elections take place. In North Korea, Kim Jong-un is in charge of a country where citizens can be arrested without any reason, torture camps are common and people who try to organise political parties are severely punished.

Theocracy

In a theocracy the state is run according to religious guidance or laws. Saudi Arabia is run as a theocracy under King Abdullah. This means that all of its laws are based on Islamic, or Sharia, law. People can often vote for their leaders in a theocracy. For example, the Islamic Republic of Iran recognises Islamic law but citizens can still vote for who they want to represent them.



Oligarchy

In an oligarchy, a small group of people has all the power and controls the country. In some cases, this means that only one group has political rights, such as one political party, social class or race. This can be seen today in the People's Republic of China which is ruled by the Communist Party of China. An oligarchy can also mean that a small group of people, usually military officers, rule the country after taking it by force. This is known as a junta and can be seen today in Egypt.

Anarchy

Anarchy is when there is no form of authority in a country. This means that there is no government and no laws. In the modern world there are no truly anarchic societies. However, sometimes a city or a country will be described as being in a state of anarchy. This often happens after a natural disaster, or when the people rebel against their leaders.



PORTFOLIO

Name the system of government: Identify the form of government from the description of the country. (Activity 14, page 94)

Case Study

China's Political System

Many countries around the world are not democracies. In other words, people are not free to vote in elections, have a fair trial, give their opinions in public or run for election. China is an example of a country that is not a democracy.

Parliament

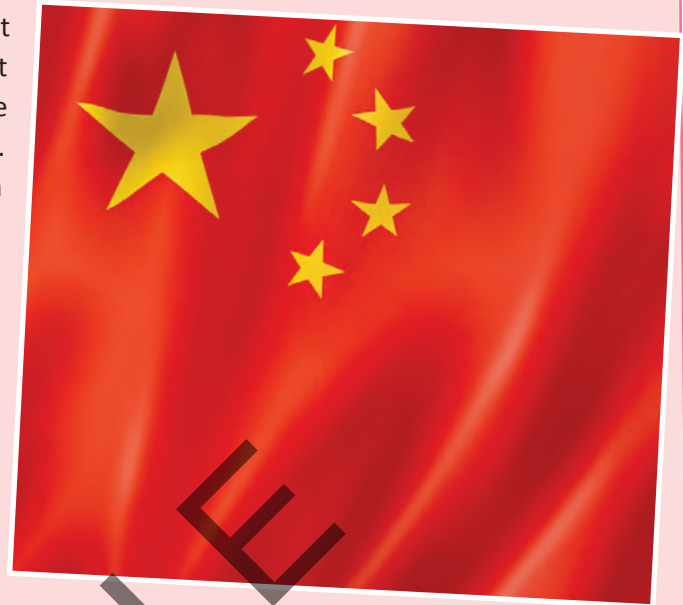
The Communist Party of China (CCP) controls the parliament in China. The leader of the party is the official president of the country. The government has just seven people who form a committee. The parliament has 3,000 members but it is mainly just symbolic. It meets for just two weeks each year, to pass laws without any real debate.

Political parties

The CCP does not allow any opposition parties in China. Citizens who attempt to form parties or speak out against human right abuses are jailed. Human rights groups believe that tens of thousands of people are in jail for political reasons. Supporters of political change, or members of minority groups like Tibetans, are regularly targeted. Liu Xiabao, a human rights activist, was sent to jail for promoting democracy in China. In 2010, he won the Nobel Peace Prize while in prison, but sadly he died behind bars. His wife, Liu Xia, was put under house arrest (not allowed to leave her home) when her husband won the Peace Prize.

Media

All Chinese radio, television and print news outlets are controlled by the CCP. News is censored, so stories that are unfavourable to the CCP are not allowed. Any media organisation that goes against these laws is likely to be shut down and its journalists imprisoned. In 2015, a journalist working for a business newspaper was arrested for writing bad news about the stock market. Wang Xialou was forced to go on television and say that what he had written was not true. In 2015, at least 49 journalists were in jail. Many more people have been locked up for writing about their views on the internet. In China, there is no right to free speech.



Social media

The internet in China looks very different to the internet in a democracy like Ireland. As with news media, the internet is controlled by the CCP. Access to foreign newspaper websites is regularly blocked so it is hard for people to get news and information that is not censored. Social networks like Twitter and Facebook, as well as WhatsApp, are very heavily restricted and often do not work. Google is censored, too, so that people cannot find out about events that the CCP does not want people to learn about.

The best example is the Tiananmen Square Massacre, 1989, when students protested looking for democracy and free speech. Instead, the army open fire on them, killing hundreds. A search for the term 'Tiananmen Square' in China will receive only a message to tell the internet user that the law prevents them from looking up this event. As a result, this famous massacre, and the photograph that captures it, is unknown among the majority of Chinese youth today.



A man known as 'Tank Man' stands in front of Chinese Army tanks as they move towards Tiananmen Square, 1989

Law

The CCP controls the legal system in China and so it has a say in all verdicts and sentences. The conviction rate in criminal trials is 98 per cent. These trials are often held in private. Lawyers, such as Ni Yulan who featured in Chapter 3 (page 44), are often targeted, beaten and prevented from seeing their clients. The police are allowed to use torture to get information from suspects. Forced televised 'confessions' by journalists, business people and those suspected of corruption are common. In 2014 2,400 were killed by the death penalty. This is a reduction from the high of 12,000 people in 2002.



Questions

1. Name one way that China's parliament is different to Ireland's.
2. (a) What happens to people who look for political changes in China?
(b) Describe one time when this happened.
3. Why is it difficult to be a journalist in China?
4. (a) Name three social media sites that are restricted in China.
(b) Describe one example of the effect this has on people learning about history.
5. *The conviction rate in criminal trials is 98 per cent.* Do you find this surprising? Explain why/why not.
6. Give three reasons why China is not a democracy.
7. Look back at page 41 about the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Make a list of human rights that people in China do not have, explaining each.



SAMPLE