

Topic 2:

Power and decision-making at national and European level

Learning Outcomes

- 2.1 The making of national policy
- 2.2 How the executive branch of government is selected
- 2.3 Social class and gender as important social categories
- 2.4 Arguments concerning representation
- 2.5 Evidence about the effectiveness of representation
- 2.6 Traditional and new media in democracy

See specification for full detail of Learning Outcomes

Topic 2: Power and decision-making at national and European level

Possible Learning Activities

LO 2.1 The making of national policy

- Adapt the quiz '*Who rules*' to get students thinking about different forms of government.
- Watch the TED video and ask students to come up with a definition or image that conveys their understanding of 'democracy'.
- **Ranking activity** - Adapt the Democracy and Dictatorships card game to get students to consider which ideas they agree with and why from a range of political perspectives.
- Discuss what is meant by 'national policy' and name the national policies that are relevant to the lives of young people in Ireland today (prompt students to think beyond policies specifically targeting young people).
- Brainstorm all the different groups that have power and influence over decisions that affect young people in Ireland.
- Create a visual representation to show the role of different stakeholders in decision-making at national level.
- Choose a current policy that affects the lives of young people and research how different groups have influence in the process of decision-making on this issue. (See bullets in LO 2.1) e.g. lowering the voting age, extending free GP care to under 12s, the Gender Recognition Act, 2015, local leisure facilities, etc
Sample discussion questions:
 - Why not extend free GP care to over 12s or the vote to over 16s?
 - Why not extend gender recognition to over 16s?
 - Who decides? Who has power?

Possible links to Topic 5: Human rights and responsibilities in Ireland

LO 2.2 How the executive branch of the government is selected

- Set up a **Jigsaw learning activity** whereby different groups work together to become expert on a topic and then peer teach each other. Topics to include:
 - How the Taoiseach and government are selected and their roles
 - How the N Ireland Executive is selected and the ministers' roles
 - How the European Commission and the European Parliament are selected and how the Council of the Ministers is constituted and their respective roles
 - How the Executive branch of government is put in place in a non-democratic country, such as China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc.

Useful resources

[Who rules?](#) Lesson plan looking at range of different types of government with examples

[Democracy – a short introduction](#) (TED Ed lesson 3 minutes)

[Democracy and Dictatorships](#) Card ranking game which prompts students to consider different perspectives on the role of government)

Ranking methodology – *Building key skills through Politics and Society*

Houses of the Oireachtas Education site

[The Open Government Toolkit](#) (2015) provides information on how government and public decision-making work and how people can have a voice.

[The Democracy Cookbook](#) has lots of learning activities related to the themes of politics and democracy. Here is one idea showing a *Democracy Tree* which students might adapt to map out Irish political structures

The process which led to the government passing the Gender Recognition Act is set out here.

Jigsaw methodology - *Building key skills through Politics and Society*

[How the Houses of the Oireachtas work](#) – 2 minute video

[Department of the Taoiseach website](#)

[Houses of the Oireachtas education site](#)

[Live transmission of Oireachtas](#)

[NI executive](#)

[NI Assembly explained](#)

[European political structures explained](#)

- Set students to work in groups to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these four approaches for selecting an executive.
- Set up a an **academic controversy** on a topic such as : *The EU has too much power or the EU is not democratic.*
- Discuss possible reasons for the British vote to leave the European Union.
- Map out what some of the big political philosophers might say about the role of EU – e.g. what would Thomas Hobbs have to say?
- Use a **placemat learning activity** to facilitate students in considering reasons why the judiciary needs to be independent from government. (**Big idea**– separation of powers)
- Form research groups to find out how governments are put in place in a range of different countries – both democratic and non-democratic and then compare their findings.
- Investigate and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the American system of government.
- Having considered different ways that governments can be formed, evaluate the merits of different systems. How does this inform your thinking about democracy in schools? (link to topic 1)
- Provide students with a reflection template to review how they developed their skills in listening and communicating (**LO 4.2**) and worked through differences ((**LO 4.3**) when working on this topic. The template should also facilitate reflection on how they can further build on these skills in the future.

LO 2.3 Social class and gender as important social categories

- Short videos can be used to introduce some of the key concepts to be discussed in this topic and to examine some of the stereotypes that exist in relation to social class and gender.
- Set up a learning experience that demonstrates how social class and privilege operate through an activity such as those listed opposite.
- Facilitate a problem based learning activity on the question of how people in Ireland fit into social class categories. Are these categories relevant in Ireland today? If so, how do we go about defining social classes? And what is the impact of this?

[Teaching resources about the EU](#)

[EU Teachers Corner](#)

[The EU political systems explained](#) (video)

[European Commission selection](#)

[Council of European Union](#)

[European parliament](#)

[European Parliament TV](#)

TED talk, *Why Brexit happened ?*

Is the EU undemocratic? Guardian newspaper, June 13th 2016

[Decision-making processes in the EU](#) (video)

How top EU officials come to power?

Academic controversy - Building key skills through Politics and Society

Placemat methodology - Building key skills through Politics and Society

Thinking about Thinkers

Compare [Thomas Hobbes's](#) view on the role of government with that of [John Locke](#), [Jean Jacque Rousseau](#) or [Robert Nozick](#).

[Tools for reflecting on learning: Building key skills through Politics and Society](#)

A comic sketch with John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett that satirises class structures in Britain.

BBC report that details how people identify class structures.

PBS video: Social class systems in America

Use a simulation game to introduce this topic, such as:

[Baby egg activity](#) (Simulation activity on 'social classes')

Or adapt [this activity](#) on class and race

Or [this](#) activity on privilege awareness

- Facilitate discussion (similar to above) on the influence of gender on people's life chances.
- Examine the way in which school text books are gendered. Interrogate the representation of girls and women in certain texts, such as History books.
Are women and their role fairly represented?
Does the representation of women in history/literature and/or media reinforce or challenge patriarchy? Find evidence to support your views.

Problem Based Learning activity on social class

CSO – summary of population in Ireland by social class

Through the looking glass – A guide to empowering young people to become advocates for gender equality (classroom friendly resources)

Possible link to LO 7.1 - representations of national identity made available to young people

- Examine the evidence of the relationship between gender and social class and voting preferences.
- Set students the task of analysing the findings in the Executive summary report from the Irish Sports Council on sport and social disadvantage. Follow up by asking students to find additional data that provides further evidence on this question or to research data which looks at the access to sports from a gender perspective.
- In pairs/small groups, discuss specific strategies and initiatives at local, national and global levels which aim to address gender or social class inequalities and their effectiveness. (e.g. gender quotas, third level access programmes, implementation of CEDAW or Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals etc)
- Set up **peer teaching** groups on the following:
 - Karl Marx and Max Weber's theories of social class and how they differ
 - Sylvia Walby's or Kate Millet's feminist theories
- Conduct a week long media watch to gather examples of articles that could be classified as related to gender or social class. Then, in pairs, take a current news story and consider how it relates to social class theory and/or feminist theory. Decide: What are the questions a feminist perspective brings to bear when examining an issue/story? What are the questions a social class perspective brings to bear when examining an issue/story?
- Set up an **academic controversy** on the question – Is modern Irish society a patriarchy? Ask students to investigate the question looking at: Sports, Politics, Business, Arts, Religion, the Media.

Irish Times poll which shows voting patterns according to gender and social class

Irish Sports Council research on the link between sport and social disadvantage

Thinking about Thinkers

Discuss the contribution of **Kathleen Lynch** to our understanding of how social class and/or gender differences relate to structural inequalities in society.

Peer teaching - *Building key skills through Politics and Society*

A brief introduction to Marx (video)

Academic controversy methodology - *Building key skills through Politics and Society*

- Evaluate what is the greatest barrier to achieving power and equality – is it class or gender? Is it easier to achieve power if you are poor or a woman? Encourage students to collect and examine data and use it to support their judgement.

Reflecting on the learning in this topic ask students to review how well they succeeded in seeking out and evaluating ideas and information from different sources – See LO 4.4 bullets

Possible link to LO 5.3 and 8.2

Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study of Post-School Transitions. ERSI Research Series No. 36. pp. 41-62:

CSO (2012) *What we know* (Profile 9)

Oxfam 3 minute video – *Even it up*
Facts on social class inequalities & health

Unicef: *Gender Equality* (very classroom friendly resource)

TASC research on the differing effects of austerity on men and women

The social class of school - a key factor in third level attendance, Irish Times, 2014

The State of the Nation's Children (DCYA, 2014)

Research by Barnardos on educational outcomes for children living in disadvantaged areas

Research Papers published by the HEA on access to higher education in Ireland

Irish Times article examining social class and its links to health outcomes.

Impacts of health inequalities in Ireland by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland

LO 2.4 Arguments concerning representation

- Review arguments concerning the process of decision-making in schools (1.2 and 1.3) and discuss how these ideas might also apply in the context of governments.
- Set student to work in groups to come up with evidence and examples to support different arguments in both the Irish context and wider world.

LO 2.5 Evidence about the effectiveness of representation

- Conduct a **simulation exercise** in which some students get to vote on a decision that will affect them and others don't or where some students get cards entering class allowing them to speak and others don't. Discuss the impact of this from different perspectives.
- Examine the websites of political parties to see who are the representatives of the different parties, the percentages that are male/female, from different age groups, from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, lesbian/gay/transgender.
- Research how many sitting TDs are male and how many female. Compare these figures with other countries.

Photo, name, political party of all TDs:

European Commission database of all national governments' gender balance in decision-making

Women for election (NGO working to get women into political office)

Why do we have so few women in politics?, Irish Independent, 20/04/13

Scroll down [this page](#) to find CSO data on women and men in decision-making

Society is rigged to reflect the perspective of men, Irish Times, 11/11/15

Jobs for the boys (article on male dominated business in Ireland with data)

It's still boardroom jobs for the boys, women tell survey, Irish Independent,

- Create a **problem tree** to depict the reasons why women are poorly represented in government.
- Discuss the pros and cons related to gender quotas.
- Examine the latest census figures to find out what % of the population are male, female, over 65, under 25, Traveller, etc. Then find out how many TDs currently belong to each group and work out what number would reflect true representation.
- Discuss whether the Irish system of elections leads to effective representation. Why/not? Why not? Do politicians represent the will of the Irish people? Encourage students to back up their viewpoints with evidence.
- Work in groups to read the Irish Times article 'No party is a young person's party' and then agree some changes that might ensure that the Irish system of government better represents the will of young people.

Problem tree methodology - Building key skills through Politics and Society

Census data - population by age and sex

DCYA (2011) Children and young people's participation in decision-making

Giving young people a voice (pp. 26-32 & 53-60 – PR activity)

Young people in politics

Fianna Fáil proposal to boost youth involvement in politics

Irish Times article, 'No party is a young person's party' Feb 2016

LO 2.6 Traditional and new media in a democracy

- Display information regarding media use in Ireland on the board. In each case, ask students to work in pairs to note the key data and to decide on the facts they find most interesting or surprising. Take feedback, noting responses.
- Design and conduct a survey to find out the different types of media used by young people in the year group and for what purposes they are used.
- Divide the class into pairs. Distribute copies of the executive summary of the 2015 Reuters report on digital news in Ireland. Invite pairs to engage in a **read and explain** activity and to identify the key findings. Discuss, using questions such as:
 - What are the key facts from the data?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology? (note the Foreword)
 - How might the data be useful in informing policy or practice?
- Divide the class into groups. Allocate each group a type of contemporary media (TV, radio, print, internet) and ask students to research and create a table on the characteristics of their specific media using these headings:
 - Reach, Audience, Accessibility, Strengths, Weaknesses

CSO survey on young people and social media

Survey on radio listening in Ireland, Feb 2016

Survey on the use of media in Ireland, July 2016

Students can compare media use in Ireland with other countries using this report *Media use in the European Union*.

'Twiplomacy' is a study of the use of Twitter by world leaders, conducted by a major public relations and communications firm

Read and explain methodology – *Developing Key Skills: Ideas for the Politics and Society classroom*

Reuters (2015) *International Report on Digital News – Ireland*. Students will find the tables and the executive summary, p 10-13 particularly useful

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

This Irish website offers a critical perspectives on media related issues

European parliament research website with lots of relevant research

Dr Roderic Flynn, DCU '*Media ownership concentrated and under-regulated*'
Harry Browne, DCU, *Statement to committee of inquiry into the banking crisis*

- Pose the question – Does it matter who owns and controls the media? Take initial responses and then circulate a copy of the article by Dr Roderic Flynn or Harry Brown, or similar, and organise **reciprocal reading**
- Investigate the role of social media through a case study of one of the following:
 - a social justice movement
 - a political election or referendum
 - an environmental movement
- How did the media influence the Brexit campaign?
- How has the origination of media content changed? Discuss the dangers and opportunities of 'citizen journalism'
- Ask students to evaluate the data in the reports (opposite) Using these questions: Identify the key facts from the data. What recommendations might arise from this data for policy makers? Would you consider the data solid and reliable?
- Organise **a placemat activity** on the question – Why freedom of the press needs to be balanced by social responsibility of the press and accountability. First agree what is meant by each of these terms.

Reciprocal reading – *Developing Key Skills: Ideas for the Politics and Society classroom*

Irish Times article on the role of social media in same sex referendum

'A Generation Apart'. (A report with useful and interesting data)

Guardian newspaper, *Now anyone can be a journalist*

RTE Report - Concentration of Ireland's media ownership 'high risk' links to this report on Ireland, published April 2016 (Important data that students can analyse). This report on British media ownership can provide comparative data.

Placemat methodology – *Developing Key Skills: Ideas for the Politics and Society classroom*

How will students show evidence of their learning?

Examples of ongoing assessment related to Topic 2

- Imagine you are presenting to an Oireachtas committee and must provide arguments why and how the Irish system of elections might be changed to make it more representative. Prepare a three minute presentation.

Or

- Imagine you they are communicating with a political representative about an issue that concerns you arising from your learning in this topic. Set out your points of concern and back them up with evidence.
- Present a comparative analysis of the processes of electing a government in Ireland and one other country, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each system and commenting on the impact on the lives of young people.
- Read section 1 of '*The Communist Manifesto*' or '*A communist confession of faith*' by Karl Mark and imagine if Marx were to update his Manifesto or Confession today, what might he say?

Free download of both documents here

- Analyse data on <http://www.socialjustice.ie/> and/or the data in Oxfam's report on global inequalities '*Wealth: Having it all and wanting more*' (2015)
 - What are the key messages and claims the website(s) presents?
 - What evidence is used to support the main arguments or central claim(s)?
 - How valid and convincing is the evidence cited?
- Examine Oxfam's report '*An Economy for the 1%*' and discuss how this report might support Marx's theory that unbridled capitalism leads to greater and greater inequalities and conflict.

What am I looking for? (Sample criteria for success)

- Ability to use the language of reasoning and to make points clearly and succinctly
- Ability to relate ideas from political theory and research evidence to the student's personal experience/context
- Ability to recognise the role of emotion as well as logic in swaying people's judgements
- Ability to come to a personal conclusion backed up with research evidence
- Ability to describe different systems, showing the similarities/ differences
- Ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both
- Ability to relate the discussion to their own context/life
- Ability to identify the main ideas in a document and show an understanding of these ideas by summarizing them in clear and simple language
- Ability to relate ideas from political theory to the student's contemporary experience/world.
- Ability to examine information in detail, in order to identify key messages and possible bias
- Ability to critique texts and judge the credibility of information/data presented
- Ability to recognise the stand-point of different sources of information along the left-wing - right-wing spectrum
- Similar criteria as above

Further examples of ongoing assessment related to Topic 2 cont.

- Use the data in '*The State of the Nation's Children*' (DCYA, 2014) to create a summary poster or powerpoint presentation, showing how social class effects children's lives and rights in Ireland
- Give your view on whether Britain's vote to leave the European Union was a vote for British sovereignty? What, if any, other factors influenced the vote?

- Prepare a short presentation on one of the following topics:

- The dangers of citizen journalism
- Why freedom of the press needs to be balanced with social responsibility and accountability of the press
- Who owns the news?

OR

- Describe, using examples, what is meant by 'the freedom of the press' and 'the social responsibility of the press'. In your answer refer to the way in which these concepts are influenced by 2 or more of the following:
 - a. the ownership and control of the media
 - b. the role of advertising in media
 - c. the origination of media contentthe consumer targeting strategies adopted by the media

- Working in small groups, imagine you are a media company employed by a political party to develop a communication strategy for the next election.

Draw up advice using these prompt questions;

- How would you communicate with the voters, through what means and media?
- What sort of messages would you want to communicate?
- Would you target particular segments of the population for particular messages?
- What images would you use to present your message?

- Ability to select and summarise data
- Ability to use data to support an argument
- Ability to present data in an engaging and accessible manner

- Ability to use the language of reasoning and to make points clearly and succinctly
- Ability to draw on research evidence and/or political theory to build an argument
- Ability to come to a personal conclusion backed up with evidence/theory

- Ability to use the language of reasoning and to make points clearly and succinctly

- Ability to use research evidence to build an argument

- Ability to demonstrate an argument through examples from local and wider contexts

- Ability to come to a personal conclusion backed up with evidence

- Ability to work together effectively towards achieving a collective goal (See LO 3.4)
- Ability to creatively apply the learning from this topic to solving a real-world problem
- Ability to come to recommendations backed up with solid reasons/evidence