

# GET POLITICAL 101

## A Guide on Political and Electoral Systems, Structures and Processes



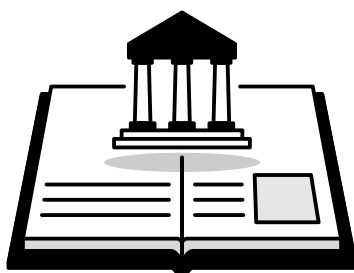
# GET POLITICAL

## Igniting Youth Active Participation in Political and Electoral Processes through Political Literacy and Knowledge

Co-editors:

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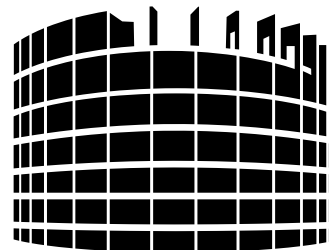
## The Electoral Systems, Process, Integrity and Ethics, and Voter Education

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# Introduction

## Get Political 101 – Your Guide to Politics and Elections

Get Political 101 is here to make sense of politics for young people across Europe. Whether you're voting for the first time, curious about how decisions are made, or active in your community, this guide breaks down everything you need to know about political systems, elections, and citizen participation. It's clear, visual, and practical, designed for quick learning and easy reference.

You will discover how politics works in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Slovenia, and Belgium, from local neighbourhood decisions to regional and national policies, and all the way up to European Union-level governance. Explore real examples, understand how citizens influence policy, and see how your voice fits into democracy across Europe.

### Why this guide matters

Politics affects everyone. Understanding how governments work, how elections happen, and how decisions are made gives you the tools to speak up, make informed choices, and influence your community, country, and European Union. From political ideologies and party systems to campaigns, voting processes, and ethics, Get Political 101 explains it all with real-life examples, case studies, and visuals you can actually relate to.

### What you'll learn?

- How politics work and why voter education is the key
- How governments and EU institutions are organized
- How political parties and ideologies can shape communication and policies



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## How to Use This Guide

You don't need to be an expert to start. Each chapter of this guide is designed to build step by step, beginning with the basics and gradually moving towards more complex topics. You can follow it from start to finish or jump directly to the sections that interest you most.

The guide explains how political systems are organised, how elections function, and how decisions are made at local, national, and European levels. Real examples, short explanations, and visual elements help make complex ideas easier to understand. Throughout the text, you will also find key terms highlighted in blue; their definitions are collected in a glossary at the end of the guide, so you can quickly clarify concepts whenever you need to.

In addition, you can access a wide range of extra resources to explore politics in greater depth, both in your own country and across Europe and the EU. Written materials can be translated using automatic translation tools, and videos can be followed by activating YouTube's automatic subtitles in your preferred language.

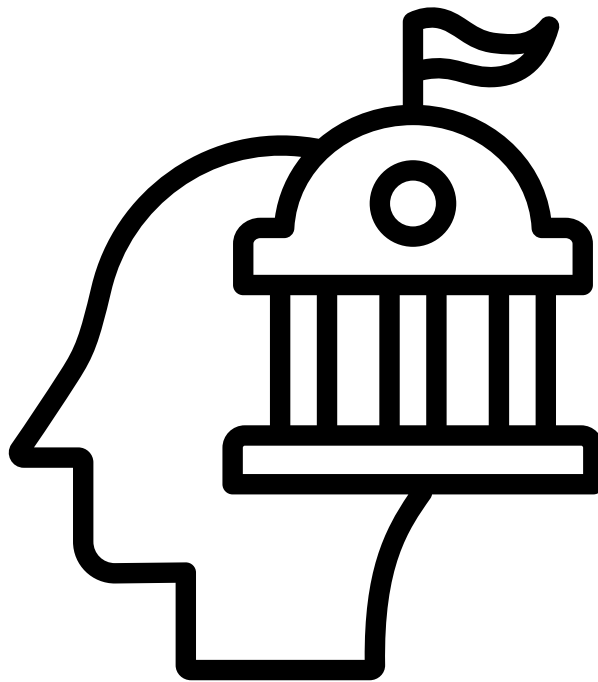
Take your time, question what you discover, and connect the information to your own experiences and surroundings. This guide is meant to be used, discussed, and revisited whenever you want to better understand politics and your role within it.

## Let's GET POLITICAL?



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# Introduction to Politics and Elections



# What is Politics?

Politics is how we make decisions together, set rules, and share resources. Basically, who gets what, when, and how. It happens everywhere: at the local level (like schools, buses, or neighbourhood projects), at the national level (laws, taxes, healthcare), and internationally (treaties, EU agreements, climate action). Every political decision shapes our daily lives and our rights.

Key ideas to know:

- **Power:** the ability to influence decisions.
- **Authority:** power recognized as legitimate, like elected officials.
- **Government:** institutions that make and enforce laws.
- **Citizenship:** being part of a political community with rights and responsibilities.
- **Public policy:** programs and rules that solve real-life problems.

In Portugal, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovenia, politics comes alive in **elections**, debates, and local councils. **Governments** decide priorities, like who gets healthcare, how schools are run, or how we fight climate change. Even small local decisions show politics in action.

Understanding politics helps you spot who holds **power**, how decisions are made, and how you can get involved, whether locally, nationally, or as part of the EU. Politics isn't just about **governments**; it's about your voice shaping the community around you.

[Click here to know more!](#)



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**Did you know?**

- Democracy began in 5th-century BCE Athens, but only a small minority of free men could take part.
- In Portugal, women only gained full and equal voting rights in 1976.

[Click here to know more!](#)



# What are Elections & Why Do They Matter?

**Elections** are how people choose leaders, influence policies, and shape their communities. They connect citizens to **government** and give political **power** legitimacy. **Elections** determine who represents you in local councils, national **parliaments**, and, at the EU level, the **European Parliament**.

Elections serve three big purposes:

- **Representation:** Leaders are expected to reflect voters' values and needs.
- **Accountability:** Citizens can reward good leadership or remove those who fail.
- **Participation:** Voting sparks debate, public discussion, and civic engagement on key issues like education, healthcare, and climate policy.

Different countries use different systems: some proportional (like Spain) and some **majoritarian**; but all involve **voter registration**, **campaigning**, casting votes, and counting results under clear rules. Democratic **elections** are free and competitive, while authoritarian **elections** often limit choice, restrict opposition, and manipulate outcomes.

At the EU level, **European Parliament elections** give citizens a voice in EU laws, policies, and the direction of European integration. They may have lower **turnout** than national **elections**, but they are crucial for representation beyond borders, allowing young Europeans to influence decisions on issues that affect the whole continent.









**Elections** are more than voting: they are your chance to choose leaders, hold them **accountable**, and make your voice heard, locally, nationally, and across Europe.

[How Do I Vote When I Don't Like either Candidate? - Click to know why?](#)




# Why Understanding Politics is Important

Ever wondered how decisions about your life are really made? Politics isn't just for politicians, it's about you, your community, and your future. Knowing how **governments** work lets you influence the issues that matter most.

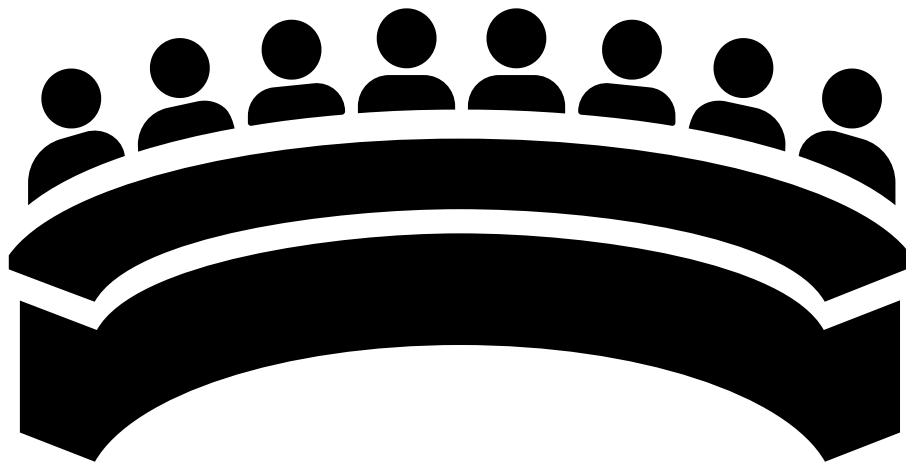
-  **Portugal:** Who decides how hospitals are funded or which neighbourhoods get better housing?
-  **Spain:** How do education reforms or **regional autonomy** debates affect you?
-  **Italy:** Who shapes labor laws, public transport, or economic recovery plans?
-  **Cyprus:** How do energy policies or EU decisions impact your island life?
-  **Greece:** Who sets pensions, protects the environment, or boosts tourism?
-  **France:** How are social welfare, labor rights, and green policies decided?
-  **Slovenia:** Who decides on local infrastructure, sustainability, and minority rights?
-  **Belgium:** How do bilingual **governance** and regional politics affect everyday life?

When you understand politics, you can question, debate, and act. You can vote, join discussions, or influence local councils. You help hold leaders **accountable** and make sure policies work for you and your community.

-  **At the EU level,** your voice matters too. Ever thought about how climate, migration, or trade policies decided in Brussels affect your country? Being informed gives you the **power** to shape Europe, not just follow it.

So ask yourself: Are you just watching politics happen, or are you ready to take part, make decisions, and create change, at home, in your country, and across Europe?

# Types of Political Systems



# What is a Political System?

## How political systems work and how citizens participate

**Political systems** define how **power** is organised and how decisions are made at local, regional, national and European levels. Across Europe, these systems are built on shared principles such as **democracy**, the **rule of law**, **separation of powers** and fundamental rights. These values are protected by national **constitutions** and by EU treaties, creating a common democratic base.

## How political systems work and how citizens participate

- **Local level:** Some countries give strong decision-making power to municipalities and promote direct **citizen participation**. This is the case in Italy, Slovenia and Portugal. Others, such as France and Greece, place more emphasis on **state oversight** to guarantee legality and **accountability**.
- **Regional level:** This is where systems differ the most. Belgium, Spain and Italy have **decentralised** models with powerful regions. Slovenia, by contrast, uses coordinated development regions rather than elected regional governments.
- **National level:** All EU member states are representative democracies, but they follow different constitutional models and political traditions.
- **European level:** The EU reinforces shared **democratic values** through its institutions and laws, while respecting subsidiarity and the constitutional identity of each country.



**Did you know?**

In Portugal, 92% of citizens voted in the 1975 Constituent Assembly elections after the 25 April Revolution. Belgium consistently sees turnout above 90% thanks to mandatory voting, and Italy hit 92% in the 1948 post-war elections.

## How citizens participate

- **Elections:** [Universal suffrage](#) at all levels is the main way citizens influence political decisions across Europe.

- **Beyond voting** - Participation does not stop at [elections](#) and varies by country:



Italy, Portugal and Spain use tools like [referendums](#), [participatory budgeting](#) and [public consultations](#).



[Belgium](#) and France rely on formal and legally structured mechanisms such as consultations and [petitions](#).



Greece and Cyprus focus mainly on electoral participation and party-based engagement.



Slovenia stands out for strong local participation through municipal [referendums](#) and civic initiatives.



**At EU level:** Citizens can participate through [European Parliament elections](#), [petitions](#), [public consultations](#) and the [European Citizens' Initiative](#). These tools complement national systems and are seen either as supportive or as direct channels of influence, [depending on the country](#).



**Example in Action**

Young people making a difference: In April 2024, six young Portuguese challenged 32 European countries over climate inaction at the European Court of Human Rights. The case was dismissed, but it sparked debate and showed how youth can push governments to protect future generations.

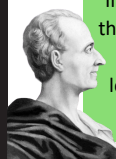
[Click here to know more!](#)



**Did you know?**

In the 18th century, Montesquieu formulated the classical theory of the separation of powers, arguing that freedom is best protected when political power is divided into legislative, executive, and judicial powers, preventing the concentration of authority in a single body.

[Click here to know more!](#)



## How power is organised across levels of governance

At national level, political power is organised around the separation of **legislative**, **executive** and **judicial** branches. While this principle is common to all EU countries, the balance between institutions differs.

### National political systems



**Parliamentary systems:** In countries such as Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Portugal and Spain, **parliaments** play a central role in overseeing the **executive**. **Governments** depend on parliamentary confidence, which strengthens legislative control.



**Stronger executive models:** France and Cyprus follow **semi-presidential** and **presidential systems**, giving the **executive** greater leadership and direct political authority.



**Judicial power:** Across all systems, **judicial independence** is a core element of the rule of law. **Constitutional** or supreme courts review legislation and protect fundamental rights.



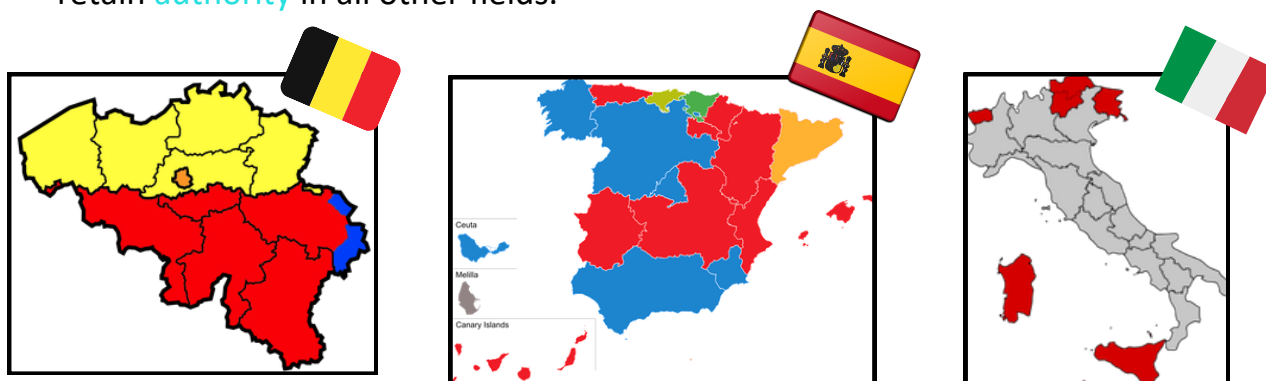
## How power is organised across levels of governance

### Territorial organisation of the state

Click to know more!



- **Federal or highly decentralised states:** Belgium and Spain grant extensive powers to regions, allowing strong territorial autonomy.
- **Unitary states:** Greece, Portugal and Slovenia concentrate authority at national level, limiting sub-national powers within a unified legal framework.
- **Intermediate models:** Italy combines strong regional autonomy with national judicial unity. Slovenia, lacking elected regional governments, compensates through strong municipal self-government.
- **Within the EU:** National sovereignty is partially shared. EU institutions legislate only in areas where competences have been transferred, while member states retain authority in all other fields.



Federal system of Belgium and autonomous regions of Spain and Italy

Click on the maps to know more!



#### Did you know?

Since 2017, an EU decision ended mobile roaming charges, changing phone bills across Europe with a single rule.

[Click here to know more!](#)



## How power is organised across levels of governance

### Who does what? Responsibilities across levels

Public responsibilities are distributed across **governance** levels according to **subsidiarity**, **territorial autonomy** and national cohesion, but the scope varies between countries.

- **Local level:** Municipalities deliver services closest to citizens, such as urban planning, social services, environmental management and local infrastructure. Their financial autonomy varies between countries.
- **Regional level:** This level shows the greatest variation. In **decentralised** systems like Belgium, Spain and Italy, regions manage key areas such as education, healthcare, transport, economic development and environmental policy. In more **unitary systems**, including Greece, Portugal and Slovenia, regions mainly coordinate or implement national policies.
- **National level:** National **governments** retain core state responsibilities that require uniform rules, including defence, foreign affairs, justice, social security and taxation.
- **European level:** EU competences are defined by treaties. The EU has exclusive **powers** in areas like trade, competition and customs, shares competences in fields such as environment, transport, energy and agriculture, and supports or coordinates national action in education, health and culture.



## EU Influence in Your Country

EU institutions ([European Commission](#), [European Parliament](#) and [European Council](#)) help shape national policies, even if their impact is more visible at some levels than others.

Locally and regionally, [EU funding programs](#) like [ERDF](#), [ESF+](#), [CAP](#) and the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) guide projects in urban development, transport, environment and digitalisation. In [decentralised](#) countries such as [Belgium](#), [Spain](#), Italy and France, the EU plays a stronger role in regional policy, while [unitary states](#) like Greece, [Portugal](#) and [Slovenia](#) focus on national coordination.

At national level, EU bodies propose, co-legislate and enforce laws on issues such as data protection, climate targets, consumer rights, digital markets and social reforms. Across Europe, EU law and funding transform local and national policies, shaping everyday life.

EU Institution	Core function	Impact on national policies	Examples
<a href="#">European Commission</a>	Legislative initiative and enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposes EU laws</li> <li>Ensures compliance through monitoring and infringement procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GDPR enforcement;</li> <li>Environmental and waste directives;</li> <li>Recovery and Resilience reforms</li> </ul>
<a href="#">European Parliament</a>	Co-legislator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes binding EU rules through amendments and approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consumer protection; digital regulation (DMA/DSA)</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Council of the EU</a>	Co-legislator representing Member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopts EU legislation jointly with Parliament</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate, energy and internal market legislation</li> </ul>
<a href="#">European Council</a>	Strategic direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets long-term policy priorities guiding EU and national action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate and energy targets (Fit for 55);</li> <li>Crisis response priorities</li> </ul>

# Types of Political Systems in Europe

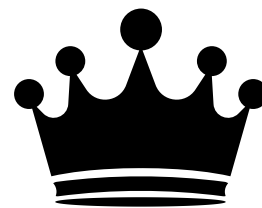
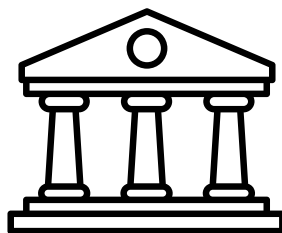
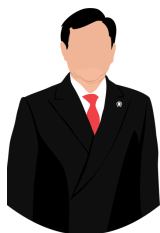
**Political systems** are frameworks for organising **power**. While countries can be classified as **democracy**, monarchy, autocracy, oligarchy, theocracy, or hybrids, modern European states are mostly democratic, with differences in structure and leadership.

## Democracy

Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Slovenia, Greece, and Cyprus are liberal democracies. **Power** comes from free, competitive **elections**, **constitutions** protect rights, and independent courts review **government** actions.

- **Parliamentary republics:** Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, Greece - Prime minister leads, president has a symbolic or moderating role.
- **Parliamentary constitutional monarchies:** Monarch in Spain and Belgium is symbolic, elected institutions hold real **power**.
- **Semi-presidential:** France directly elected president shares **power** with parliament-appointed prime minister.
- **Presidential:** Cyprus president is both head of state and **government**.

All maintain **elections**, party competition, judicial oversight, free media, and opportunities for citizen engagement beyond voting.



## 1974-1975 – Years of Major Transformations

Southern Europe saw dictatorships fall and democracies emerge, while the 1974 Cyprus conflict reshaped the island's political structure.



Click on the images to explore the past!



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## Hybrid Systems: The European Union

- The EU is a unique **hybrid system** combining **democracy** (European Parliament, Council representation) with technocratic **governance** (European Commission).
- **Authority** is treaty-based, legitimacy is indirect, and decision-making evolves gradually rather than through regime change.
- The EU represents multilevel **governance**, linking national democracies into a shared **supranational system**.

Case	Regime Type	Constitutional form	Key Note
Portugal	Democracy	Parliamentary republic	Former authoritarian dictatorship (1933–1974)
Spain	Democracy	Parliamentary constitutional monarchy	Monarchy is symbolic
France	Democracy	Semi-presidential republic	Dual executive (president + PM)
Italy	Democracy	Parliamentary republic	<u>Republic since 1946</u>
Belgium	Democracy	Federal parliamentary monarchy	Strong regional autonomy
Slovenia	Democracy	Parliamentary republic	<u>Former socialist state</u>
Greece	Democracy	Parliamentary republic	Monarchy abolished in 1974
Cyprus	Democracy	Presidential republic	Strong directly elected president
European Union	Hybrid System	Supranational union	Democratic + <u>technocratic governance</u>

# Global Trends & Challenges

## Why Populism is Rising

Over the past decade, Europe has faced overlapping crises: the financial crash, COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, energy and cost-of-living pressures, climate change, and migration flows. These challenges have shaken trust in **governments** and institutions, creating fertile ground for populist and nationalist movements. These are not temporary spikes but structural responses to prolonged uncertainty.

At the local level, crises hit first and hardest:



In rural southern France, towns like Puget-Théniers see economic fragility tied to agriculture, tourism, and climate risks, fueling distrust in national and EU authorities.





In Belgian Flanders, local debates on identity, migration, and autonomy strengthen nationalist narratives. Limited local resources make citizens feel left behind.



## Democracy Under Pressure


Regional inequalities are magnified in times of crisis:


 In Andalusia (Spain) unemployment and underdevelopment are politicised by VOX, blaming migration and central **government** failures.


 Italy's north-south divide empowers Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, blending regionalist and nationalist appeals.

These crises worsen perceptions of unfair burden-sharing and weaken trust in **governance**.

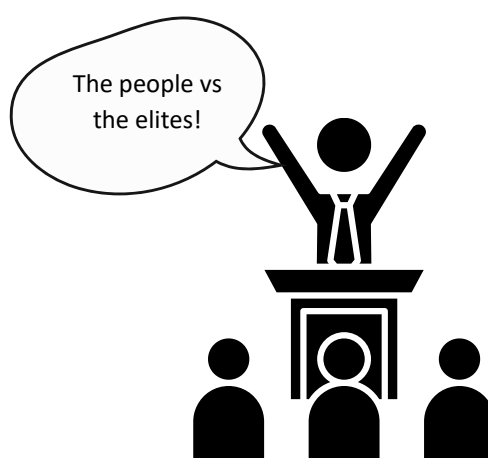
At the national level, **populism** reflects a broader crisis of representation:

 In France, the Rassemblement National gained historic support over inflation, security, and migration concerns.

 Italy's Fratelli d'Italia moved from a minor party to governing **power** through nationalist rhetoric and scepticism toward EU rules.

 In Portugal, Chega's rise mirrors public frustration with **corruption** and inequality.

- Greece and Cyprus see similar patterns, with economic strain and migration pressures eroding institutional trust.

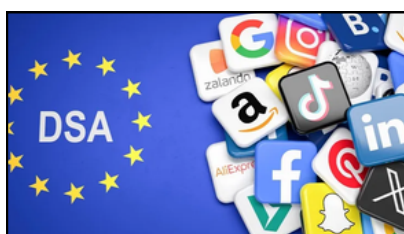


Click to know more about this discourse!

## Europe in the Spotlight

At the European level, the 2024 **European Parliament elections** showed the growing strength of populist and nationalist parties, complicating EU action on migration, climate, digital regulation, and the rule of law. EU instruments like NextGenerationEU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and civil protection mechanisms aim to address these crises, but Euroscepticism exposes tensions between national sovereignty and collective solutions.

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence adds new **governance** challenges. AI shapes **political communication**, administration, and **elections**, raising concerns about **transparency**, **accountability**, and democratic integrity. The EU has responded with the AI Act and **Digital Services Act** to reduce risks like algorithmic bias, misinformation, and data misuse.



# Government Structures



# Branches of Government

## Who Holds the Power?

In every partner country, **power** is split into three main branches: **executive**, **legislative**, and **judicial**. This separation protects **democracy**, making sure no single person or institution can dominate. How each country divides these powers varies.



Belgium shares **power** across local, regional, and national levels, with courts at the **federal** level.



Portugal balances local service management with national **executive authority**, independent courts, and a ceremonial President.



Cyprus is presidential: the President leads, **Parliament** legislates, courts **check** the **Constitution**.



France combines a powerful President with a Prime Minister and independent courts.



Greece gives local authorities some responsibilities, but national **government** and courts hold ultimate **power**.



Slovenia has no elected regions and relies on strong municipal self-**government**.



Italy combines strong local and regional **governments** with national judicial oversight.



Spain divides **power** across local, regional, and national levels, with strong regional **governments** but national courts having final **authority**.



At the EU level, **power** is shared between the Commission, Parliament, Council, and the **Court of Justice**.

Click the flags and EU to see who holds the power!

## How the EU Holds Power

The European Union isn't a country, but it has its own system that shapes all 27 member states. Decision-making is shared between three key institutions: the [European Commission](#), the [European Parliament](#), and the [European Council](#).

Together, these institutions create, apply, and enforce EU policies, meaning decisions in Brussels affect what happens in your country.



The [European Parliament](#) represents citizens. MEPs are directly elected and, together with the Council, adopt laws and the EU budget. The Parliament also supervises the Commission, keeping it [accountable](#).



The [European Commission](#) acts as the EU's [executive](#). It proposes laws and policies on the environment, trade, education, and digital development, manages programmes and funding, and ensures countries follow EU rules.



The [European Council](#) gathers heads of state or [government](#). It sets priorities and strategic goals, like climate action or economic development, but doesn't make laws directly.

Click the images to see who holds the power!





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# Checks & Balances in Governance


## How Power is Split


**Separation of powers** divides **authority** into three branches: the legislature makes laws, the **executive** enforces them, and the judiciary **checks** that laws are followed. This balance prevents abuse, protects rights, and builds trust.

 In Belgium, local councils and mayors manage daily affairs, regions legislate and govern, and independent courts ensure legality.


 Cyprus separates **powers** clearly between the President, Parliament, and Supreme Court.


 Greece limits national **power** through **Parliament**, **Government**, and independent courts, while local authorities act under supervision.

 Italy applies **separation of powers** at all levels, with assemblies, **executives**, and **constitutional courts** protecting legality.

 Spain divides **authority** between national and regional **governments**, with courts enforcing both.

 Portugal follows a similar system, with local authorities managing services, the Prime Minister and **government** holding **executive** power, and courts acting independently.

 France has a **semi-presidential system** where the President leads the **executive** branch alongside the **Government**, while being accountable to **Parliament**, with independent courts ensuring the law is followed.

 Slovenia keeps **checks** at local and national levels despite no elected regions.

 At the EU level, the **Commission**, **Parliament**, **Council**, and **Court of Justice** share **powers** to keep decisions **accountable**.

Click the flags and EU to see who holds the power!




## Multi-Level Governance: Who Decides What?

### EU Level

- **European Commission**: Proposes laws, manages funding, **checks** countries follow the rules
- **European Parliament**: Elected by citizens, co-decides laws & budget, keeps the Commission **accountable**
- **European Council**: National leaders set big priorities → shapes all EU decisions






### National Level

- **Governments** implement EU rules and coordinate policies
- Examples:
  -  Portugal: renewable energy, digital services
  -  Italy: regional transport projects
  -  France: agriculture regulations



### Regional Level

- In **decentralised** countries, regions manage EU programmes
- Examples:
  -  Andalusia (Spain): social projects
  -  Flanders (Belgium): climate initiatives
  -  Northern Italy: regional transport and development projects



### Local Level

- Municipalities put EU rules into practice, manage funded projects
- Examples: urban planning, social services, environmental projects

EU decisions flow from EU → national → regional → local, letting citizens see results close to home and keeping everyone **accountable**.

Click the flags and EU to see who holds the power!



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# Centralized vs. Decentralized Governance

## Unitary vs. Federal Systems: How Power is Shared

**Unitary systems** concentrate most authority at the national level, keeping laws consistent and the country unified.



Greece is a **unitary state**, with central **government** holding most political power, while local authorities implement services like education, healthcare, and urban planning.



Cyprus is a **unitary** presidential republic; **executive**, **legislative**, and **judicial** powers are clearly separated, with local authorities implementing policies under national supervision.



Portugal is **unitary**, but **decentralised**: municipalities handle local infrastructure, social services, and environmental policies, while the national **government** coordinates overarching law and finance.



Slovenia is **unitary** with no elected regional level, so municipalities manage local services and act as the main link between citizens and the state.



Italy is **unitary** yet strongly **decentralised**, with regions controlling areas like healthcare, transport, and economic development, while judicial oversight remains national.



France is **unitary** but features **decentralised** administrations; regions and municipalities implement policies in education, transport, and social services under national guidance.

**Federal systems** divide **power** more evenly between national and regional **governments**, giving regions substantial autonomy.



Belgium is **federal**, combining strong **regional autonomy** with a national framework; regions like Flanders and Wallonia have independent **legislative** and **executive** powers, while national courts ensure legal consistency.

Some countries blur the lines.



Spain is officially **unitary** but highly **decentralised**; Autonomous Communities manage education, health, and social policies, making regional governments central to citizens' daily life.



Implementation of EU laws relies on national, regional, and local authorities, meaning that **multi-level governance** is essential to make policies effective on the ground.

# Regions or No Regions? How Power Is Organised Below the State

Why it matters? Whether a country has regions or not changes who decides, who manages EU money, and how close politics is to citizens.

Country/Entity	State Type	Regional Level	Autonomous Regions	Real Regional Powers	Examples
Portugal	Unitary Decentralised	Yes	Azores Madeira	High in autonomous regions Low on mainland	<u>Azores &amp; Madeira manage education, healthcare, budgets; mainland municipalities manage local services.</u>
Spain	Unitary Highly decentralised	Yes	Yes	Very high	<u>Autonomous Communities like Catalonia control education, healthcare, police, and language policy.</u>
France	Unitary Decentralised	Yes	No	Medium	Regions manage transport, education planning, and economic development.
Italy	Unitary Regionalised	Yes	Yes, some regions	Variable, high in special statute regions	<u>Sicily &amp; Trentino-Alto Adige have fiscal and legislative autonomy; other regions limited.</u>
Belgium	Federal	Yes	Yes, all regions	Very high	Regions control education, police, economy, and culture.
Greece	Unitary Centralised	Yes Regional administrations	No	Low	Regions implement national policies; municipalities manage local services.
Cyprus	Unitary Highly centralised	No	No	Very low	Centralised <u>governance</u> ; municipalities handle basic services.
Slovenia	Unitary Centralised	No elected regional level	No	Low	Local municipalities manage daily administration; national <u>government</u> retains strategic powers.
EU	Supranational Hybrid	Yes, via member states	N/A	Indirect, shared	Regions and municipalities implement EU law and programmes; represented via <u>Committee of the Regions</u> .



**Did you know?**

Since 1974, Portugal has had 27 different governments in just 50 years. That's roughly one new government every 22 months!

# Case Studies Across Europe



## Portugal's Semi-Presidential System

Portugal operates a **semi-presidential system** where **power** is shared between the President, the **Government**, and **Parliament**. The President oversees key state functions, the **Government** handles day-to-day administration, and **Parliament** legislates. Together, these institutions balance **authority**, maintain democratic control, and ensure **accountable governance**.

### President of the Republic:

- Elected by the citizens
- Can veto laws
- Appoints the Prime Minister
- May dissolve **parliament**

### The **Government**:

- Led by the Prime Minister
- Runs the country
- Propose laws
- Manages public policies

### The **Parliament**:

- Make laws
- Approves budget
- Controls the **government**



[Click here to know more!](#)



[Click the images to see who holds the power!](#)



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**Did you know?**

After the 2019 election, Spain went 254 days without a formally invested government, showing how coalition politics can really slow things down!

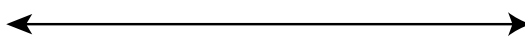


## Spain's Regional Autonomy System

Spain has a highly **decentralised** system, where **power** is shared between the central **government** and its 17 Autonomous Communities and 2 autonomous cities. Each region manages key areas such as education, healthcare, and transport, while the national **government** ensures overall unity and coordination. This system balances strong regional self-government with national cohesion, supporting representation and effective **governance**.

### National Government:

- Foreign policy
- Defence
- National economy
- Justice system
- Protects the Constitution



### Shared governance framework:

- Spanish Constitution
- Statutes of Autonomy
- National supervision if rules are broken

### Autonomous Communities:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Culture
- Regional development
- Local identity



[Click here to know more!](#)



[Click the images to see who holds the power!](#)



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**Did you know?**

Italy's 2025 security bill took over 18 months of debates between the Chamber of Deputies and Senate before passing, introducing stricter protest penalties, stronger police powers, and public order rules.

[Click here to know more!](#)



## Italy's Parliamentary Structure

Italy is a **parliamentary** republic where **power** is shared between the **Parliament**, the **Government**, and the President of the Republic. The **Government** depends on parliamentary support, while the President has a largely representative and supervisory role. This system ensures democratic **checks and balances**, political stability, and **accountability** across all institutions.

### President of the Republic:

- Elected by the Parliament
- Appoints the Prime Minister
- Signs laws
- No term limits

### The Government:

- Led by the Prime Minister
- Runs the country
- Propose laws
- Implements policies

### The Parliament:

- Consists of two chambers (Chambers of Deputies and Senate)
- Make laws
- Approve budget
- Controls the **government**



[Click here to know more!](#)



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### Did you know?

The European Parliament meets in two different cities: Brussels (Belgium) for most work and Strasbourg (France) for plenary sessions, making it the only parliament in the world to move its entire operation monthly between countries!



## The EU's Supranational Governance Model

The European Union has a **supranational governance system**, where member states share decision-making with EU institutions. This allows EU-wide decisions that apply to all countries, fostering cooperation across borders while ensuring democratic oversights.

### The European Commission:

- Proposes EU law
- Manages EU programmes & Funding
- Guardian of EU laws



### The European Council:

- Heads of state & **government** of EU Member States
- Manages EU programmes & Funding
- Setting EU political direction & priorities



### The European Parliament:

- Represents EU citizens
- Amends, adopts EU laws & budget
- Supervises the Commission

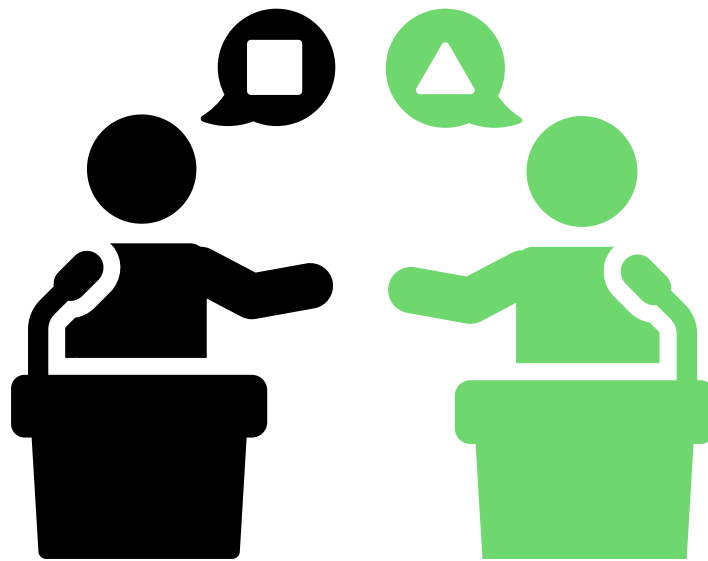


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# Political Parties and Ideologies



# The Role of Political Parties

## Connecting citizens with governments

**Political parties** are the backbone of **democracy**. They take the ideas and concerns of people, turn them into policies, and guide voters through complex political choices. Without parties, politics would be confusing and fragmented.

### How parties make your voice count

- They bring together shared ideas and opinions.
- They present **candidates** and programmes to voters.
- They help form **governments**, shape decision-making and hold those in **power accountable**.

For example, if young people care about climate change or the economy, parties can turn these concerns into laws, budgets, or even EU-level policies, giving your ideas a real impact.



**Did you know?** Left and right come from the French Revolution, where deputies sat by ideas: conservatives on the right, and the Third Estate and reformers on the left.

[Click here to know more!](#)



## Understanding the Political Spectrum: Left, Right, and Beyond

**Political parties** differ in what they believe is the best way to organise society, manage the economy, and protect citizens' rights. This creates a spectrum from left to right.

- **Left-wing parties:**

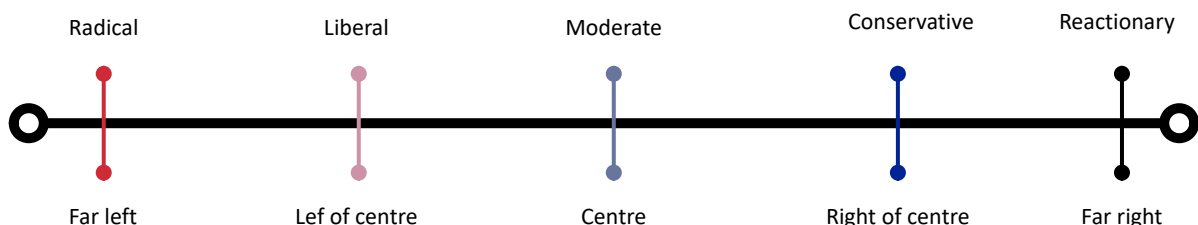
- Equality and social protection; public services, workers' rights; wealth redistribution; **government** intervention to reduce social and economic inequalities.
- Often advocate for higher taxes on the rich to fund healthcare, education, and social programs.
- 

- **Right-wing parties:**

- Individual freedom; market-driven solutions; support private enterprise, lower taxes, and limited **government** intervention in the economy.
- Often prioritise personal responsibility, entrepreneurship, and economic competition, believing that individuals and businesses should have the freedom to succeed based on their own effort.

- **Many parties sit in the centre or combine elements from both sides**, advocating a balance between social protection and economic freedom.

The spectrum helps voters understand the priorities and values of each party and how these choices influence policy-making at local, national, and EU levels.



[Click here to discover your political ideology!](#)

[Click here to know more!](#)



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## Political Parties from several countries in the EU, classified by political theory

Country	Left- Wing	Center-Left	Center-Right	Right-Wing
<b><u>Portugal</u></b>	Bloco de Esquerda (BE)	Partido Socialista (PS)	Partido Social Democrata (PSD) Iniciativa Liberal (IL)	Chega
<b><u>Spain</u></b>	Unidas Podemos	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)	Partido Popular (PP) Ciudadanos	Vox
<b><u>France</u></b>	La France Insoumise (LFI) Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV)	Le Parti Socialiste (PS)	La République En Marche! (LREM)	Les Républicains (LR)
<b><u>Italy</u></b>	Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	Partido Democratico (PD)	Forza Italia (FI)	Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) Lega
<b><u>Belgium</u></b>	Groen	PS (Parti Socialiste)	N-VA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie) Open VLD	Vlaams Belang
<b><u>Slovenia</u></b>	Levica	Gibanje Svoboda (GS) Socialni demokrati (SD)	Nova Slovenija (NSi)	Slovenska Demokratska Stranka (SDS)
<b><u>Greece</u></b>	Syriza, Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	PASOK - KINAL	Nea Demokratia (ND)	Greek Solution
<b><u>Cyprus</u></b>	Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL)	Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK)	Democratic Rally (DISY) Democratic Party (DIKO)	National Popular Front (ELAM)

[Click here to know more!](#)





# Political Ideologies Across Europe

## Why Ideologies Matter in Real Politics

Political ideologies are not abstract theories, they shape how parties govern, who they form alliances with, and how they respond to crises. Even when parties adapt their messages for **elections**, their ideological roots still influence priorities, values, and decisions. Knowing these ideologies helps citizens understand what parties are likely to do in **power** and whether their choices match their own values.

### Liberalism

Liberalism focuses on individual freedoms, civil rights, and market-based economies, usually with some regulation to protect fairness. Liberal parties often support entrepreneurship, international cooperation, and progressive social rights.

-  ◦ In France, Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance represents a centrist liberal approach, combining pro-market reforms with social investment.
-  ◦ In Belgium, Open VLD mixes economic liberalism with strong support for gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights.
- Liberal ideas also influence **governance** in Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia, especially in areas like digital policy, innovation, and EU integration.



Click on the images to find out more about what they think and do!



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## Conservatism

Conservatism in Europe takes different forms, from Christian democracy to more nationalist traditions. It often stresses stability, tradition, fiscal responsibility, and social cohesion.



In Spain, the Partido Popular promotes market reforms while defending traditional institutions.



In Greece, New Democracy combines economic liberalisation with strong emphasis on national identity.

- Christian democratic traditions have shaped politics in Belgium, Italy, and Slovenia, blending conservative social values with acceptance of welfare systems.



In Cyprus, conservative ideas strongly influence debates on identity, security, and social policy.



ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΚΟΣ  
ΣΥΝΑΓΕΡΜΟΣ






Click on the images to find out more about what they think and do!



## Socialism and Social Democracy

Socialism and social democracy prioritise social equality, public services, and state intervention to reduce inequality. These ideas shaped post-war Europe and remain influential today.

-  In Portugal, the Socialist Party has expanded healthcare access, labour protections, and education while remaining pro-EU.
-  France has a long socialist tradition linked to state planning and social protection, recently revived through left-wing coalitions.
  - In Spain, Greece, and Italy, social democratic parties continue to shape debates on wages, housing, and welfare.
-  In Slovenia, centre-left parties have played a key role in defending social protections during economic transitions.



**Le Parti  
socialiste**





**sp.a**

Click on the images to find out more about what they think and do!



## Green Politics

Green politics emerged from environmental movements and focuses on climate protection, sustainability, and the ecological limits of economic growth. Green parties often link environmental issues with **democracy**, social justice, and human rights, but their political influence varies significantly between countries.

-  In Belgium, Green parties such as Ecolo and Groen are well-established and have participated in **coalition governments** at both **federal** and regional levels, influencing policies on climate, mobility, and energy transition.
-  In France, Europe Écologie Les Verts plays a visible role in local and European **elections** and shapes public debate on environmental issues, although it rarely governs at national level.
  - In Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovenia, green parties tend to have limited electoral strength or operate within broader left-wing coalitions.

**ecolo**

Europe  
**Écologie  
les Verts**

**LIVRE** 

 **VERDES  
EQUO**


 **ΚΙΝΗΜΑ ΟΙΚΟΛΟΓΩΝ  
ΣΥΝΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΩΝ**


 **Zeleni  
Slovenije**


Click on the images to find out more about what they think and do!

## Populism

Populism is less a full ideology and more a political style that contrasts “the people” with “the elite.” It can appear on both the left and the right, though recent European populism is mostly right-wing.

 In France, the National Rally mobilises voters around identity, security, and Euroscepticism.

 In Italy, nationalist-populist rhetoric has entered government discourse.

 In Portugal, Chega reflects voter frustration with corruption and inequality.

- Similar dynamics exist in Greece, Cyprus, and Spain, where populist actors gain support during economic stress or migration debates.



**VOX**



**SNS**

**VLAAMS BELANG**

Click on the images to find out more about what they think and do!



RightChallenge

Cepage

ZOERSEL

cesie

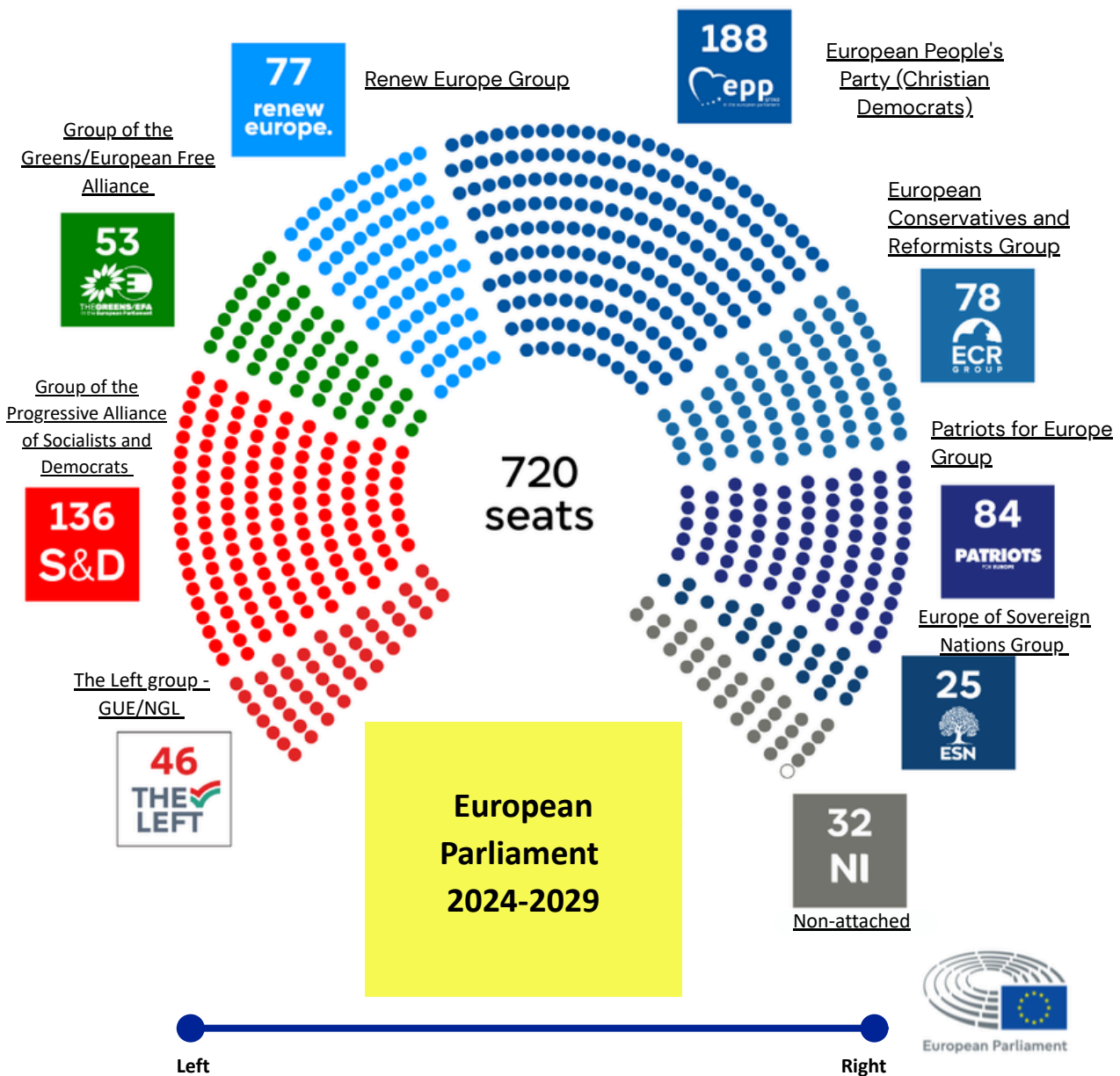
City of Economics

CARDET



## EU-level political parties and their role in the European Parliament

At EU level, national parties work together inside European **political groups** in the **European Parliament**. These groups coordinate votes and influence EU priorities.



Click here to know more!



Click on the titles to find out more about what they think and do!



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## EU-Wide and National Party Systems – How They Shape Politics

European **elections** differ from national ones. Citizens vote for national **party lists**, not European federations, creating a two-level system: parties compete domestically while linking to their European family.

Recent EU **elections** show fragmentation. Centre-left parties like Portugal’s Socialists and France’s Renaissance, and centre-right parties like Greece’s New Democracy and Italy’s Lega remain influential, while Greens lost seats and smaller liberal and populist parties gained ground. National parties test messages or express dissatisfaction, and EU federations coordinate **campaigns**, creating shifting coalitions across Europe.

European Party Family	Country	National Party
S&D	Portugal	Partido Socialista
	Spain	PSOE
	Slovenia	Socialni Demokrati
NGL/The Left	Grece	Syriza
	Cyprus	AKEL
Renew Europe	France	Renaissance
	Belgium	Open VLD
European Conservatives and Reformists	Greece	Greek Solution
	France	Identité-Libertés
Patriots for Europe	Italy	Lega

[Click here to know more!](#)



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## How Ideologies Shape the European Parliament



**Greens** – Push for strict environmental targets, renewable energy, and climate justice. They want bold action to protect the planet.



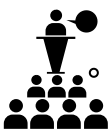
**Social Democrats & Left** – Focus on fairness, workers’ rights, social protection, and reducing inequalities. They aim to ensure that green and economic policies are socially inclusive.



**Liberals** – Support market-based solutions like carbon pricing, entrepreneurship, and innovation. They favour flexibility and economic incentives to achieve policy goals.



**Conservatives & Christian Democrats** – Balance ambition with economic stability, protect traditions, and ensure policies do not overburden national economies.



**Populists / Eurosceptics** – Often challenge EU-wide solutions, emphasising national sovereignty, strict migration control, and limits on EU intervention.

### Key Policies in Action:

- **Climate:** The European Green Deal blends targets from Greens, fairness from Social Democrats, market solutions from Liberals, and economic caution from Conservatives.
- **Migration:** Left & Liberals support asylum and integration; Conservatives & Populists prioritise border control and national identity.
- **Economy:** Southern European Socialists push for shared financial responsibility; Northern Conservatives & Liberals stress fiscal discipline. Compromises appear in measures like the Next Generation EU recovery fund.





**Did you know?** Between 2010 and 2011, Belgium went 541 days without a full-power government, a world record in a democratic system, due to the difficulty of forming a coalition across multiple parties and linguistic communities.

[Click here to know more!](#)



# How Party Systems Shape Democracy in Europe

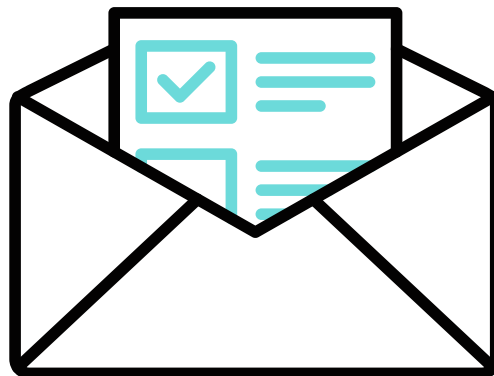
Political parties shape democracy beyond elections. The structure of each country's party system affects government formation, stability, and citizen influence. In most European countries, multi-party systems dominate, with coalitions and smaller parties often holding the balance of power.

## Multi-party vs. Two-party Dynamics

- Two-party dominance is rare, though Greece has sometimes approached it when New Democracy and SYRIZA/PASOK held most seats.
- Multi-party systems dominate Europe, allowing diverse representation but requiring coalition-building, as in Belgium, where 10+ linguistically divided parties must negotiate to form a government.

<b>Portugal</b>	Multi-party with two largest parties (PS, PSD) alongside smaller formations like Chega. Minority or single-party governments are common.
<b>Spain</b>	Fragmented system with PSOE, PP, Vox, Unidas Podemos, and influential regional parties (Catalan, Basque) shaping coalitions.
<b>France</b>	Two-round elections produce competition among left, centre, and right (Renaissance, National Rally, New Popular Front), making post-election alliances common.
<b>Italy</b>	Right-wing (Fratelli d'Italia, Lega, Forza Italia), centre-left (Democratic Party), and populist Five Star Movement dominate. Coalition governments are the rule.
<b>Belgium</b>	Two overlapping systems (Flemish, Francophone) plus German-speaking representation. Coalitions span linguistic and ideological lines.
<b>Slovenia</b>	Small parliament, several parties across left, centre, right. Coalitions of 3–4 parties are standard.
<b>Greece</b>	Fragmented since 2008 crisis; New Democracy, SYRIZA, and other parties share power in coalition governments.
<b>Cyprus</b>	Multi-party system among Greek Cypriots (DISY, AKEL, DIKO) and separate Turkish Cypriot politics. Reunification issues add a cross-cutting dimension.

# The Electoral Systems, Process, Integrity and Ethics, and Voter Education





**Did you know?** In the 2019 Spain general election, the local party Teruel Existe won 1 seat and 2 senators in Congress with only 34,000 votes nationwide (0.03% of all votes).

Click here to know more!



# Electoral Systems Across Europe

## How European Elections Work – From Votes to Seats

Most European countries use [proportional representation](#), including Belgium, Spain, [Italy](#), and [Greece](#). Parties receive seats roughly according to their share of the vote, which allows smaller parties to enter [parliament](#). This system usually results in [coalition governments](#), as no single party wins a [majority](#).

[France](#) mainly uses a [majority system](#), [electing one candidate per constituency](#), often in two rounds. This favours larger parties and usually produces single-party governments with clear winners.

Constituencies and [thresholds](#) vary. Smaller districts, like in Spain, make it harder for small parties to win seats. Some countries require a minimum percentage of votes to gain representation.

[Seat allocation](#) methods, such as the [D'Hondt method](#), can slightly favour larger parties. Some systems, like Belgium's, allow voters to choose specific [candidates](#) within [party lists](#).

These differences influence [government formation](#) and political dynamics: proportional systems encourage coalition-building and negotiation, while [majority](#) systems prioritise stability and clear outcomes.

## EU-specific electoral system: European Parliament elections?

All EU countries use [proportional representation for European Parliament elections](#), as required by EU rules. This ensures that seats reflect the share of votes each party receives, allowing diverse political voices to be represented.

Most countries, including Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, Italy, and Slovenia, use a [standard proportional system with party lists](#). Seats are distributed according to vote share, usually using the [D'Hondt method](#).

Greece also uses [proportional representation](#), but with [open lists](#) and [preferential voting, plus an electoral threshold](#). This reduces the number of very small parties entering the European Parliament.

France differs from its national system: for European [elections](#), it uses [proportional representation](#) with [closed lists](#), forming a single national [constituency](#) since 2019. Parties gain seats in proportion to their vote, but voters cannot express preferences for individual [candidates](#).

[Click here to know more!](#)



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**Did you know?** Women in Slovenia gained the right to vote in 1945, and the first woman was elected to parliament in 1946.

# The Electoral Process

## How does the election procedure work?

**Elections** follow a structured process across Europe, from announcing the vote to counting **ballots** and forming **governments**. Citizens receive clear information about when and where to vote, and on election day they cast their vote on paper or electronically. Once votes are counted, they are converted into seats. In proportional systems, like Belgium, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Greece, and Cyprus, **governments** are often formed through coalitions, while **majority** systems, like France's, usually produce faster single-party governments.

Voting rules differ by country.

- In Belgium, voting is compulsory and mainly electronic, with the option of preference votes for **candidates**.
- In Greece, voters can also cast preferential votes for party **candidates** on **open lists**.
- Most other countries, such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Slovenia, and Cyprus, use voluntary paper **ballots**.


Registration is automatic everywhere, and voters are notified in advance about their polling station and voting rights.

**Campaigns** are strictly regulated. Rules limit spending, duration, advertising, and media access, with oversight by independent bodies. TV and online political advertising are monitored, while EU-level regulations ensure **transparency**, prevent **misinformation**, and protect **elections** from **foreign interference**.

# Election Integrity and Ethics

## Keeping Elections Fair and Transparent

Elections in Europe are tightly monitored to protect **democracy**. Cheating, **bribery**, or **corruption** are crimes, punishable by fines, loss of office, or even prison. Voting is closely supervised, with official **polling stations**, identity checks, and clear procedures ensuring that every vote counts.

 Belgium: Voting is partly electronic but backed by paper **ballots**. **Audits** and checks ensure reliability.

- Spain, France, Portugal, Italy: Paper **ballots** are used and counting is public, often with **observers**.
- Greece and Cyprus: **Open lists** with **thresholds** limit small-party overrepresentation while ensuring fairness.

**Money Matters:** **Campaign finance** is strictly controlled. Parties must disclose all funding, and anonymous or foreign donations are often banned. Independent agencies, courts, and journalists act as watchdogs to prevent abuse.

### EU-Level Safeguards:

- **Elections** must be free, secret, and proportional.
- European political parties disclose funding and are monitored.
- Rules like the **Digital Services Act** fight **disinformation** and online manipulation.
- Institutions like **OLAF** and the **European Public Prosecutor** coordinate to stop cross-border fraud.

### Quick Facts:

- Voting is compulsory in Belgium, optional elsewhere.
- Preference votes are allowed in Belgium and Greece, giving citizens more choice.
- **Thresholds** vary: higher **thresholds** simplify coalition-building but reduce small-party representation.

# Voter Education and Trends

## How informed voting strengthens democracy

Informed voting strengthens **democracy**. When citizens understand what parties and **candidates** stand for, they vote based on ideas, not habits or rumours. This boosts **accountability**, improves debates, and ensures **election** results reflect society's priorities.

## Trends and Innovations

- Digital voting and voting from abroad make **elections** faster and more accessible, especially for students and expats.
- **Social media** spreads information quickly, but also **misinformation**, which can confuse voters, lower trust, and polarize opinions.
- **Transparency**, clear guidance, and **media literacy** are crucial to navigate new voting methods safely.

Click to know more!!



## The EU's Role

- Guarantees every EU citizen the right to vote or stand in **European Parliament elections** in their country of residence.
- Harmonizes rules, coordinates member states, and removes barriers to participation.
- Promotes cross-border voting and ensures **elections** remain inclusive, fair, and truly European.

# Campaigns and Political Communication



# The Purpose of Political Campaigns

**Political campaigns** transform ideas into political action by linking visions to voters. Most **campaigns** operate as a continuous cycle: political ideas are translated into clear messages, support is built to influence policy, **agenda** is brought to the forefront of public debate, and voters are mobilised to participate.

## Campaigns at Different Levels: Local, National and European

**Campaigns** look very different depending on where they take place.

Local **campaigns** focus on everyday issues that directly affect people's lives, such as public transport, housing, schools, or safety.



In Belgium, for example, local politics often relies on “pavement politics”: **door-to-door** conversations, community meetings, and neighbourhood **social media** groups.

- Similar approaches are used in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovenia, where trust and personal contact matter most at the local level.

National **campaigns** are broader and more media-driven. They often focus on party leaders, economic issues, and national identity.



In France, **campaigns** can be highly polarised. During the 2024 snap **elections**, the left-wing New Popular Front mobilised huge street demonstrations, while the National Rally successfully used TikTok to attract young voters, especially by linking national policies to local identity and rural life.



In Portugal, national **campaigns** often use emotional messages adapted to different groups, such as young urban voters versus older rural populations.



In Italy, television remains central, with parties emphasising leadership, stability, and readiness to govern.

- Across Spain, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovenia, national **campaigns** mix traditional media with digital platforms to reach younger voters.



#### Example in Action

Fidias Panayiotou, a controversial YouTuber, launched his 2024 MEP campaign in Cyprus directly through YouTube and TikTok, and was elected with nearly 20% of the vote, proving that digital fame can translate into real political power, for better or worse.



Click to know more!!



European Union **campaigns**, especially for the **European Parliament**, face special challenges. These **elections** are often seen as “second-order,” meaning people vote less and focus more on national politics than on EU policies. Many voters treat them as a way to judge their national **governments**. To respond, EU institutions promote multilingual communication and a shared European identity. However, national media still tends to frame EU **elections** through domestic concerns, which can distance young people from the European project.

**Campaigns** for the **European Parliament** aim to create a shared European debate, using tools like the Spitzenkandidaten system and **multilingual digital communication**. However, EU **elections** are often treated as “second-order”, with national media framing them through domestic politics.

To counter this, new digital tools are emerging. Apps like Palumba, created by young Europeans, match users with parties based on EU-wide issues such as climate change and migration. EU **campaigns** like Use Your Vote also promote cross-border topics, encouraging young people to see themselves not only as national voters, but as active European citizens.

Across Europe, **campaigns** shape what issues are prioritised, how voices are heard, and who participates. **Social media**, street **mobilisation**, local activism, and European-wide debates are all part of today’s political landscape.

Understanding how **campaigns** work helps people spot manipulation, engage critically, and decide how (and if) they want to participate. **Democracy** doesn’t stop at the **ballot** box, and **campaigns** are where it often begins.

# Media & Political Communication

## Traditional vs. digital media influence

Politics today lives in a **hybrid media** world: TV and radio still matter, but **social media** shapes how most young people get informed.



In Belgium, public broadcasters remain trusted, while younger users turn to WhatsApp and Facebook groups.



In France, older generations stick to radio and newspapers, but most young people rely on Instagram and TikTok.



In Greece, where trust in traditional media is low, TikTok has become a key space for politicians to speak directly to voters.

- Similar patterns can be seen in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Cyprus and Slovenia.

But digital politics comes with risks.

- Portugal and Spain are among the countries most worried about **misinformation**, as algorithms often push shocking or polarising content.



In France, political influencers reach millions online but have also helped spread unverified claims, weakening trust in political information.

- **Fact-checking** platforms like Maldita.es (Spain), and La Provence (France) help users separate facts from fake news.

To protect **democracy**, the European Union has stepped in.

- New rules like the **Digital Services Act** and stricter **transparency** on political advertising aim to make platforms safer and fairer.



In Portugal, authorities (ERC and CNPD) work with the EU to shut down **disinformation** networks.



In Belgium political ads must clearly show who is paying for them, helping young people across Europe make informed choices online.

# Innovations in Political Campaigning

## New Ways of Campaigning: AI and Data

Forget just posters and TV debates! Political **campaigns** now run on AI, big data, and **social media**.

- In Belgium, parties use analytics to send personalised messages that engage young voters online.



Similar strategies are shaping **campaigns** across Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovenia, showing how digital tools are changing the game.

- In France, the 2024 **elections** proved how powerful this can be: parties used TikTok and AI to tweak messages in real time, reaching millions of young voters. Yet in rural areas



with limited digital access, face-to-face contact and local networks still matter most, proving that traditional **campaigning** isn't going anywhere.

These smart tools come with risks.



In Portugal, voters sometimes interact with AI chatbots without knowing it.



In Spain, personal data is used to profile voters, raising privacy and ethical concerns.



Across Europe, this digital “arms race” challenges fairness and **transparency** in politics.

- At the EU level, the French case made waves. The €15 million fine against OpenAI showed the dangers of unregulated AI in politics and reinforced EU rules on **transparency**, data use, and **accountability** in **campaigns**.
- Despite these regulations, coordinating fair **campaigning** across the EU remains tough.

For young voters, understanding AI-driven **campaigns** is now essential. It's about spotting manipulation, questioning targeted messages, protecting your data, and using your voice, online and offline, to shape **democracy**.

# Glossary of Terms



**Accountability** — The duty of elected leaders and institutions to explain and justify their decisions and to face consequences (especially through elections).

**Agenda-setting (Framing Debates)** — Shaping what issues dominate political discussion and how they are interpreted.

**Audit (Election / Systems Audit)** — Formal checks of procedures and technologies (e.g., audits and backups in electronic voting contexts).

**Authority** — Power that people accept as legitimate, such as the authority of elected officials or courts.

**Ballot** — The paper or electronic form used to record a voter's choice.

**Bribery** — Offering or receiving illicit benefits to influence decisions; a form of corruption.

**Campaign (Political Campaign)** — Organised efforts to influence how people vote or to shape public policy through collective action.

**Campaign Finance** — Rules governing political donations and spending; aims to prevent undue influence and ensure transparency.

**Candidate** — A person standing for election.

**Checks and Balances** — Mechanisms that prevent any one institution from becoming too powerful (e.g., parliaments oversee governments, courts review legality).

**Citizen Participation** — Ways citizens influence public decisions, including voting, petitions, consultations, referendums, and civic initiatives (noted as stronger beyond elections in countries like Italy, Portugal, and Spain).

**Closed-list Proportional Representation (Closed Lists)** — Voters choose a party list; the party's candidate order determines who gets seats (noted for France in European Parliament elections).

**Coalition Government** — A government formed by multiple parties, common in proportional representation systems.

**Committee of the Regions** — An EU body representing regions and cities, providing input into EU decision-making (linked to subsidiarity and decentralisation).

**Constituency** — An electoral district or geographic area represented in an election; size can affect the chances of smaller parties (highlighted for Spain).

**Constitution** — A country's fundamental legal document that defines institutions, powers, and rights.

**Constitutional Court / Supreme Court** — High courts that protect the constitution and fundamental rights by reviewing laws and government actions.

**Constitutional Monarchy (Parliamentary)** — A democratic system with a monarch as head of state in a symbolic role, while elected institutions govern (e.g., Belgium, Spain).



**Corruption** — Abuse of entrusted power for private benefit; a key threat to democratic governance.

**Council of the EU (Council)** — Co-legislator with the European Parliament; represents member state governments.

**Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU)** — Ensures EU law is interpreted and applied consistently across member states.

**D'Hondt Method** — A mathematical method used to allocate seats proportionally; often slightly favours larger parties.

**Decentralisation** — Shifting powers and responsibilities from the national level to regional or local levels to bring decisions closer to citizens.

**Democracy** — A system where authority comes from the people through free and fair elections, political pluralism, and the rule of law.

**Digital Services Act (DSA)** — EU rules increasing platform accountability and addressing systemic online risks, including disinformation-related risks.

**Disinformation** — Deliberately false or misleading information spread to manipulate voters and weaken democratic processes.

**Door-to-door Canvassing** — Direct contact with voters at their homes; emphasised as effective in local campaigns.

**Election** — A formal process where citizens choose representatives or decide on issues, providing legitimacy to government authority.

**Electoral Threshold** — The minimum vote share required for a party to obtain seats (noted for Greece in EP elections).

**EU Funding Instruments (ERDF, ESF+, CAP, Recovery and Resilience Facility)** — EU funds shaping local/regional projects and requiring compliance with EU rules (procurement, state aid, sustainability).

**European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)** — A tool enabling citizens to invite the European Commission to consider proposing legislation.

**European Commission** — Proposes EU laws, enforces compliance, manages EU programmes and funding, and can open legal action when rules are not applied.

**European Council** — Heads of state/government setting EU strategic priorities and political direction.

**European Parliament (EP)** — Directly elected EU institution; co-legislator and overseer of the Commission.

**European Parliament Elections** — Elections for EP members; all member states use proportional systems, but implementation differs (open/closed lists, thresholds, constituencies).

**Executive Branch** — The part of government that implements laws and runs public policy (e.g., government/ministries; more prominent executive leadership is highlighted for France and Cyprus).

**Fact-checking** — Verification of claims to reduce the impact of false information (examples referenced in the text include Maldita.es).

**Federal System** — A system where powers are constitutionally shared between the national government and regions with significant autonomy (e.g., Belgium).

**Foreign Interference** — External influence that undermines electoral integrity (funding, manipulation, covert operations).

**GDPR** — EU data protection rules relevant for political profiling and campaign data practices.

**Governance** — How authority is exercised and how decisions are made and implemented across local, national, and EU levels.

**Government** — Institutions and leaders responsible for making and implementing public decisions.

**Government Formation** — The process of creating a government after elections; coalition talks are often needed in PR systems.

**Hybrid Media Model** — A media environment where traditional media and digital platforms operate side-by-side.

**Hybrid System (EU as a hybrid)** — The EU combines democratic elements (directly elected European Parliament) with technocratic and intergovernmental elements (Commission, Council).

**Infringement Procedure** — A mechanism where the Commission acts if a member state fails to comply with EU law.

**Judicial Branch** — The part of government that interprets and applies the law and protects rights through independent courts.

**Judicial Independence** — The principle that courts must be free from political pressure.

**Legislative Branch** — The part of government that makes laws and oversees the executive (parliaments; at EU level this is mainly the European Parliament together with the Council of the EU).

**Local Government / Municipality** — The level of government closest to citizens, responsible for services like urban planning, social services, local infrastructure, and environmental management.

**Majoritarian / Majority System** — A system where the winner in a constituency is the candidate/party that achieves a required majority, often using two rounds (highlighted for France nationally).

**Media Literacy** — The ability to evaluate sources critically and recognise manipulation; central to resilience against misinformation.

**Misinformation** — Incorrect information that spreads (not necessarily intentionally), potentially reducing trust and participation.

**Mobilisation / Voter Mobilisation** — Encouraging and enabling voters to participate and turn out.

**Multi-level Governance** — Shared decision-making and implementation across EU, national, regional, and local levels.

**Multilingual Communication** — Communicating across many languages, especially relevant at EU level.

**NextGenerationEU / Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** — EU financial instruments supporting reforms and investments, especially in crisis recovery.

**Observers/ Election Monitoring** — Oversight of elections to detect irregularities and strengthen trust (including public counting and observer presence).

**Open Lists / Preferential Voting** — Systems allowing voters to influence which candidates on a list are elected (noted for Greece and Belgium).

**Parliament** — An elected body that makes laws and oversees government.

**Parliamentary System** — A system where the government depends on parliamentary support and can be removed by parliament (highlighted for Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Portugal, Spain).

**Party List** — A list of candidates presented by a party in proportional systems.

**Political Communication** — How political actors communicate with citizens across traditional and digital media.

**Political Group (European Parliament)** — Coalitions of national parties in the European Parliament that coordinate votes and influence EU priorities.

**Political Party** — An organisation that groups ideas, presents candidates and programmes, helps form governments, and critiques those in power.

**Political System** — The framework through which authority is organised and public decisions are made.

**Polling Station** — The place (physical or electronic system) where voters cast their ballots.

**Power** — The ability to influence decisions or control outcomes through authority, resources, or social influence.

**Presidential System** — A system where a directly elected president serves as both head of state and head of government (Cyprus).

**Proportional Representation (PR)** — Seats are allocated in proportion to the votes each party receives; common across partner countries.

**Seat Allocation** — The process of converting votes into parliamentary seats, using an allocation method (e.g., D’Hondt).

**Second-order Elections** — European Parliament elections often treated by voters as less decisive than national elections, leading to lower turnout and more national framing.

**Semi-presidential System** — A system combining a directly elected president with a prime minister accountable to parliament (France; Portugal is discussed in a semi-presidential case study framing).

**Separation of Powers** — Dividing authority into executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

**Social Media (Political Use)** — Digital platforms used to reach voters directly and shape perceptions (noted for youth engagement and bypassing traditional gatekeepers).

**Spitzenkandidaten** — A process intended to personalise European elections by linking them to the Commission Presidency through lead candidates.

**State Oversight / State Supervision** — National supervision of local/regional authorities to ensure legality and accountability (highlighted for France and Greece).

**Subsidiarity** — The principle that decisions should be taken as closely as possible to citizens; central to EU governance and local self-government.

**Supranational Governance Model** — A system where member states share some decision-making authority with EU institutions and accept binding common rules.

**Territorial / Regional Autonomy** — The degree of self-government held by regions (strong in Spain’s Autonomous Communities; significant in Belgium and Italy).

**Transparency** — Openness of rules, processes, and funding; helps prevent fraud and builds trust.

**Turnout** — The share of eligible voters who vote; highlighted as often lower in European Parliament elections.

**Unitary System** — A system where the state is legally unified, even if it can be decentralised in practice (Greece, Portugal, Slovenia; Spain is formally unitary but highly decentralised).

**Universal Suffrage** — The principle that adult citizens have the right to vote, a basis for democratic participation.

**Voter Education** — Informing citizens so they can vote thoughtfully, understand rules, and evaluate candidates and programmes.

**Voter Registration (Automatic registration)** — Registering voters through population registers; described as automatic in the chapters.



## Your Next Steps

You've explored how governments work, why elections matter, and how your choices shape society. Understanding political systems is just the first step. Informed action is what makes a difference.

### Key Points to Keep in Mind

- Politics affects your everyday life, from local decisions to EU policies.
- Fair and transparent elections are essential for trust, accountability, and effective leadership.
- Being informed helps you evaluate political messages, understand debates, and participate responsibly.
- Knowledge of political systems enables you to engage critically with policies and social issues.

### How to Apply What You've Learned

- Participate in elections and encourage others to do so.
- Join civic or youth organizations, community initiatives, or student councils.
- Follow political debates at local, national, and European levels.
- Discuss politics respectfully with peers, family, and educators.
- Analyze and fact-check information before forming opinions or sharing online.
- Observe how political decisions affect your community and explore ways to contribute.



## Final Reflection

Literacy in politics is an ongoing process. Use this knowledge to stay informed, question decisions, and take part in shaping your community and Europe.

Every informed action contributes to stronger, more inclusive, and accountable governance.

**Uncover how decisions are made locally,  
nationally, and in Europe.**

**Explore, act, and see politics in action.**



# GET POLITICAL

THANK YOU!



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