Our plain English guide focuses on political terms this year as part of our campaign on literacy and political participation. We have chosen this theme in light of an expected general election by mid-2007.

Literacy difficulties can be a barrier to accessing, understanding and using information. As a result, adults with literacy difficulties may be excluded from:

- voting in elections and referenda;
- getting involved in political parties or local lobby groups; and
- understanding government and how it works for them.

This guide, along with other elements of our campaign on literacy and political participation, aims to help the public become more familiar with some of the most common political terms. We also hope it will remove some of the barriers that may currently prevent people from getting involved in political activity - whether that means voting, lobbying their local representative or joining a political party.

The guide and the campaign also aim to encourage Government departments, local authorities, political parties, statutory organisations and community and voluntary groups to become more aware of the issues faced by the estimated 500,000 adults with literacy difficulties (OECD, 1997) and to develop more effective and sensitive responses to encourage them to become more politically active.

A list of references and websites of the main political parties is included on page 55.

We aim to update this guide to make sure that it stays relevant. We invite your suggestions for additions, so please e-mail any suggestions to literacy@nala.ie.
Absentee ballot
A ballot paper that is filled in and posted to the Board of Elections before an election if a registered voter cannot get to a polling station on election day

Absolute monarchy
A government where a monarch (a king, queen or emperor) holds total power and can make laws without having to consult a parliament or the people

Act
A law that has been passed by the parliament (or legislature) and approved by the President

See also Bill and Legislature.

Absolute poverty
A level of poverty that leaves people without the necessities of life such as food, housing or clothing; usually relates to developing countries but can also apply to certain people in Ireland

Activist
A person who takes up and campaigns for a social or political cause, for example affordable housing or migrant rights

Ad hoc committee
A group of people that comes together to carry out a particular task and then breaks up when the task is over

Aegis
A form of power that offers protection, for example the power of a Government department over a state agency

Agenda
A list of things to be done

Agriculture and Food, Department of
The Government department responsible for regulating and supporting agriculture and food industries and monitoring and controlling animal and plant health, animal welfare and some aspects of food safety
**Alliance Party of Northern Ireland**
A political party without nationalist or unionist roots that aims to achieve and promote justice, diversity, prosperity and peace and is opposed to any form of violence.

**Amendment**
A change to the detail of a law or contract.

**Anarchy**
A society with political and social disorder caused by lack of laws and government control.

**Annexe**
Taking over an area under the control of a ruler or a state and adding it to a larger state.

**Anthem**
A song of praise; called a national anthem when it is about a country.

**Anti-social behaviour**
Any behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress.

**Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)**
A court order against a child aged 10 to 18 to prevent anti-social behaviour; currently used in Britain but not yet introduced in Ireland.

**Áras an Uachtaráin**
Official home of the President of Ireland.

See also President of Ireland.

**Ard Fheis**
An Irish term for the official gathering of a political party each year to discuss policies and how the party is organised and to vote on any changes to the party's policies or rules.

**Aristocracy**
A ruling system based on social class, wealth and noble birth.
Arts, Sports and Tourism, Department of

The Government department responsible for promoting and fostering the arts, including the Irish film industry, promoting and developing sports, through programmes and major sports projects, and promoting and developing the tourism industry.

Assembly

A group of people gathered together for a special purpose, sometimes as a law-making body, as in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Attorney General

The main legal advisor to the Irish Government, who is appointed by the Taoiseach.

Balanced budget

A government's annual budget in which income (for example from taxes) is equal to spending.

Balance of power

Power held by a small party or group of independent representatives when a major political party needs their support to form a government.

Ballot

A way of voting, usually using a ballot paper and ballot box.

Ballot box

A container for storing completed ballot papers during an election and only opened when votes are ready to be counted.
Ballot box stuffing
An illegal action that involves voting many times to affect the result of an election

Ballot paper
A slip of paper, usually with representatives' names and photos, that registered voters use to record their preferences in an election or referendum

Bandwagon effect
The tendency for a candidate or proposal that seems to be winning to gather extra support simply because of being ahead; also called the 'snowball effect'

Bias
Favouring one argument or person over others, usually unfairly; prejudice

Bi-cameral legislature
A law-making body, known in Ireland as the Oireachtas, that is divided into an upper and a lower house

See also Dáil Éireann, Legislature, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

'Big Brother'
A type of state, envisaged by George Orwell in his novel Nineteen Eighty Four, in which the government monitors each person's movements and knows everything about all citizens

Bill (law)
A draft of a new law or change to a current law that has yet to be passed by the Oireachtas

See also Act and Oireachtas.

Bill, Private Member's
A proposal for a law that comes from an individual TD or senator

Bi-partisanship
Co-operation on an issue or issues by two people or groups

Borough council
A local authority, usually in larger towns; found in Ireland in Clonmel, Drogheda, Kilkenny, Sligo and Wexford
'Brown envelope'  
A term referring to the practice of politicians receiving illegal payments (in brown envelopes) in exchange for favours

Branch  
A section of a political party that draws members from a local area

Bunreacht na hÉireann  
Irish Constitution - see Constitution of Ireland

Bureaucracy  
A system involving many rules and procedures and several levels of management and relying on written communication

By-election  
An election for a seat in the Dáil that becomes vacant if a TD dies or resigns their seat

Cabinet  
The group of Government ministers, the Taoiseach and the Attorney General, which decides policy and is responsible for all the Government departments

Campaign  
An organised competition for votes by people who are seeking a particular result from an election or referendum or who are seeking to change the behaviour of government, business, other large institutions and the general population through the media, protests, written proposals, public meetings and so on

Campaign spending limits  
Limits on the amount of money that political candidates can spend in an election campaign
Candidate
Someone who stands for election to a representative office

Canvassing
Trying to win votes by contacting voters directly, for example by going door to door

Capitalism
An economic system in which private individuals and corporations own goods, aim to make a profit and have freedom to set prices for goods and services

Cathaoirleach
The Irish word for chairperson

Caucus
A group or a meeting of people, especially members of a political party with power to decide on policy

Cause
A goal or aim of a group of people, normally for social or political change

Ceann Comhairle
The chairperson of Dáil Éireann, who chairs its proceedings and must make sure that all parties and independent members are treated fairly

See also Dáil Éireann.

Census
A detailed count by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of every person in Ireland, including people who don't usually live here, on a particular date roughly every five years

Centre
The middle point of the political spectrum, ranging from 'far left' (communism) to 'far right' (fascism)

See also Conservative, Fascism, Left-wing, Neo-conservative, Right-wing and Socialism.

Centrist
A person with moderate political opinions and policies
**Chancellor**
The holder of a high office of state, for example the head of government, as in Germany, or the finance minister (Chancellor of the Exchequer) in the UK

**Charter**
A formal statement of purpose or of legal, civil or political rights, for example the English Magna Carta (the Great Charter of 1215) or the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

**Checks and balances**
A term describing the actions of the three branches of government - the legislature, executive and judiciary - to monitor (check) each other's work and limit (balance) each other's powers so no branch becomes too powerful

See also Executive, Legislature, Judiciary and Separation of powers.

**Chief Justice**
The head of the Supreme Court

**Chief State Solicitor's Office**
The office that represents that State, the Attorney General, Government departments and certain State agencies in legal cases

**Chief Whip**
The member of Irish Government who organises and co-ordinates government business in Dáil Éireann

**Citizen**
A member of a city, state or nation who enjoys its legal, social and political rights and of whom loyalty and responsibility is expected
Citizenship (Irish)
A legal status granted to:
- anyone born in Ireland if one of their parents was an Irish citizen at the time of their birth; or
- anyone born abroad if one of their parents was born in Ireland; or
- a child born in Ireland after 1 January 2005 to non-citizen parents if one of the parents was lawfully living in Ireland for at least three of the four years before the child's birth

Citizenship rights
Rights that are enjoyed by a citizen, such as the right to vote and to live permanently in a particular country

City or county manager
The person who manages a city or county council

City state
A small state consisting only of a city and its surrounding land, for example Singapore or the Vatican

Civic participation or engagement
A process in which people use the freedoms of democracy to do things such as sign a petition, contact their local councillor, vote, stand for election and become informed on issues

Civil and political rights
Freedoms and entitlements given by a nation to its people, including the right to a fair trial, the right to privacy, the right to marry, the right to take part in public life and the right to freedom of movement

See also Citizen.
Civil law
The law that regulates relations between individuals, or between individuals and corporations, and deals with property rights, personal injury and personal dignity and freedom.

See also Criminal law.

Civil law system
A system in which most of the laws are decided by legislation.

See also Common law system.

Civil liberty
The freedom to act, assemble, think or speak as you wish, regulated only as much as is needed for the good of other people.

Civil service
The body of Government workers and officials who advise ministers and carry out the day-to-day work of Government departments.

Coalition
A collection of two or more groups or parties, usually to form a government or opposition.

Coalition government
A government made up of more than one political party because no party obtained enough votes to form a government on its own.

See also Balance of power.

Code of conduct for office holders
Rules for TDs to help them make sure they behave ethically, fairly and responsibly and act in the best interests of the public.

Committee on Procedures and Privileges
A committee in Dáil Éireann and in Seanad Éireann that works to make sure that members of each house do not act in a way that abuses the power that comes with their position and may recommend that members be disciplined if any abuse takes place.
**Common law system**

A system in which the rules of a country are based on custom or court decisions instead of only legislation.

*See also Civil law system.*

**Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Department of**

The Government department responsible for regulating and overseeing the broadcasting, telecommunications (post, Internet and telephone services) and energy sectors and protecting and developing marine and natural resources, such as minerals and oil.

**Communism**

An economic and political system put into place after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 in which people share the ownership of all goods and property; also, a system, such as in the former Soviet Union, where the government controls every aspect of a citizen's life and denies political freedoms.

**Communist**

A person who supports communism.

**Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Department of**

The Government department responsible for advancing the use of the Irish language and for promoting and supporting the growth of urban and rural communities, including Gaeltacht and island communities, to reduce disadvantage.

**Consensus**

Agreement that is generally acceptable.

**Conservation**

Using natural resources carefully (for example minerals, gas, water or plants) and maintaining places of environmental or cultural importance to make sure they are available to future generations.
**Conservative**
A person or political party who wishes to keep things the way they are, supports traditional values and opposes government interference; known as 'right', 'right wing' or 'right of centre' in politics

See also Right-wing and Neo-conservative.

**Constituency**
The area of voters that a politician represents

**Constituency boundary**
A border between one constituency and another

**Constitution**
A set of principles used by an organisation, including a country or a state, to govern, or the document setting out those principles

See also Constitution of Ireland.

**Constitution of Ireland**
Known in Irish as Bunreacht na hÉireann, the document in force since 29 December 1937 that outlines the values and structures of the State, must be obeyed by new laws or practices and can only be changed with the agreement of the people

**Convention**
An agreement between nations or sides, for example the European Convention on Human Rights; also, a formal meeting of members or representatives of groups such as political parties, professional associations or industry groups

**Council of State**
The group of current and past Taoisigh (Prime Ministers), Presidents, Chief Justices, the Ceann Comhairle, the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad and the Attorney General, which advises the President of Ireland and must be consulted before the President calls a meeting of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann or signs new bills into law
Councillor
A person elected to a county, city or urban district council to represent the interests of those living in the area covered by the council

County council
A type of local authority, covering a county that is responsible for services including housing, planning, roads, water supply and recreation facilities

County Development Boards
Boards set up in Ireland to bring together local development bodies, State agencies and other social partners to take part in long-term planning for counties over 10 years

See also Social partnership.

County Registrar
A person appointed to make sure that an election or referendum and the return of its results are carried out properly

See also Returning Officer.

Criminal law
The body of laws that ban certain behaviour - for example drunken driving, drug dealing, assault, murder and theft – that would otherwise cause social order to break down

Dáil Committee
A committee of members of the Dáil, broadly divided according to the division of Dáil seats among the political parties and independent TDs to consider matters relating to how TDs and certain public bodies carry out their functions

Dáil Éireann
Known as 'the Dáil' for short, the lower house of the Oireachtas, in which members carry out a number of functions, such as debating and voting on issues and passing bills

See also Oireachtas, Seanad Éireann and TD.
**Dark horse candidate**
An almost unknown contestant in an election, regarded by few people as a likely winner.

**Data Protection Commissioner**
An independent person appointed by the Government to make sure that people can keep their right to privacy when information about them is held on computers or on paper and to deal with complaints from anyone who feels their rights have been infringed.

**Defamation**
Saying or writing something false about a living person that is proven to damage their reputation in the eyes of right-minded people.

See also Libel and Slander.

**Deficit**
A situation that occurs when the Government is spending more money than it is taking in.

See also Surplus (economic).

**Delegate**
A representative at a political or other conference who has been given the power to make decisions for others at that conference.

**Democracy**
A society that favours equal rights, fair trials and freedom of speech and in which people govern themselves (direct democracy) or are governed by elected officials (representative democracy).
Democratic Party
One of the two major political parties in the United States; established under its current name in the 1820s and typically associated with civil liberties, workers' rights, social freedoms and favouring government measures to tackle social injustice

See also Republican Party.

Democratic rights
Rights to political or social equality for all

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
Unionist party in Northern Ireland founded by Reverend Ian Paisley

Demonstration
In political terms, a public show of protest against or sympathy with a particular cause

Deputy
In Ireland, the short name for someone elected to Dáil

Éireann to represent their constituency

See also Constituency and TD (Teachta Dála).

Despot
A ruler who exercises total power, especially in a cruel or harsh way

Devolution
A system in which the central government of a state passes a law granting certain powers to local, national or regional authorities while still keeping the central government's authority

Dictator
A ruler who has total power over a country or state, regardless of the laws of the state or any opposition

Dictatorship
A state in which one person or group has total power to govern
Diplomat
A person appointed to represent Ireland in other countries and to manage our relations with those countries

Director of Consumer Affairs
An independent person appointed by Government who is responsible for defending, enforcing and providing advice and information on consumer rights

Dirty politics
Unethical and illegal methods to gain political advantage

See also Mudslinging.

Dissolution
An action by the President of Ireland (with the support of the Taoiseach) to end the current term of the Dáil so a general election can be held

Economic and social rights
Rights that help people develop and enjoy an adequate standard of living, such as the right to work, the right to education and the right to free time, as outlined in the Covenant on Economic and Social Rights adopted by the United Nations 1966

Economic policy
A Government plan on how to manage money and taxes

Education and Science, Department of
The Government department responsible for devising education policy and overseeing programmes and services that help promote lifelong learning and provide education that meets personal, social, cultural and economic needs
Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)
A project organised by the Council of Europe to inform people about their rights and responsibilities in society and how they can use them.

Election
Choosing a person or a government by voting.

Election day
The day when the election takes place.

Election expenses
Amounts that political parties and independent candidates spend on advertising, canvassing and opposing other candidates during election campaigns, which, since 1997, must be accounted for and within certain limits.

Elector
A person who votes or has the right to vote.

Electoral Register (also known as Register of Electors)
A list of those who have the right to vote in national, local or European elections in Ireland, put together by city and county councils.

Electorate
All those who have a right to vote in an election.

Electronic voting
Using electronic equipment and computers to vote and count votes.

Emblem
An object or picture that represents an event, a group or a cause, often in the form of a badge or shield.

Empowerment
Making it possible for people to understand and exercise their powers and responsibilities as citizens.
Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of
The Government department responsible for regulating employment, health and safety at work, consumer issues, trade, competition and company matters and overseeing state bodies that provide training and promote trade and employment, such as FAS, Enterprise Ireland and the Industrial Development Agency (IDA)

Entitlement
A right or other benefit held by someone if they meet certain conditions

Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Department of
The Government department responsible for protecting the environment, preserving and promoting heritage buildings, collecting motor tax, co-ordinating elections, devising housing policy and overseeing county, city and urban district councils

Ethics
Studying what is right or wrong

Executive
One of the branches of government, which puts the laws into practice

See also Legislature and Judiciary.

Exit poll
A survey of a small percentage of people leaving the place where they have just voted to ask them who or what they voted for

Fat cat
A slang term for a wealthy, influential person who contributes a lot of money to a political party or campaign
**Federal**
Relating to national policies or rules rather than those for the nation's individual states, as in the United States

**Federal system**
A system of states that act as one unit but keep their internal affairs independent, as in the United States

**Federation**
A union of states into one nation, which involves giving up some powers and responsibilities to a national government

**Fianna Fáil**
National political party founded in 1926 with democratic Republican values

See also Republican.

**Finance, Department of**
The Government department responsible for implementing Government policy and advising the Minister for Finance on the finances of the State, drafting and reviewing finance and other laws and managing and developing the public sector

See also Public sector.

**Fine Gael**
National independent political party founded in 1933

**Flag**
A piece of cloth, often of various colours or decorated with emblems, that represents a country or a social group

**Foreign Affairs, Department of**
The Government department responsible for advancing Ireland's political and economic interests in the European Union and elsewhere, promoting Ireland's contribution to international peace, security and development through the European Union and international organisations, especially the United Nations, protecting Irish citizens abroad and dealing with political issues concerning Northern Ireland
**Franchise**
In political terms, a citizen's right to vote at elections

See also Suffrage.

**Free market**
An economic system where prices are set not by government but by competition between businesses

See also Capitalism.

**Freedom of Information Act**
A law giving a person the right to access certain records held by public bodies and Government departments, have any incomplete or false personal information corrected and obtain reasons for any public body's decisions that affect them

**Freedom of speech**
A right to speak freely on social and political matters without fear of forced silence

**Front bench**
Members of the Dáil who are ministers or spokespeople.

See also Junior minister, Minister, Shadow minister and Spokesperson.

**Front runner**
A candidate who is likely to win an election or be nominated by their party to take part in an election

**Gaisce**
See President's Award.

**Gender gap**
The difference between men and women in types and levels of employment, earnings, educational qualifications, voting and general health, among other areas

**General election**
A national election for all seats in the Dáil and Seanad, which must be held within 30 days of the dissolution of the Dáil.
Gerrymander
Dividing a constituency deliberately to give an advantage to one political party or to particular voters, for example according to racial or ethnic background

Government
A system, involving a group of senior ministers, that runs a state and gives effect to its laws

See also Executive.

Government Chief Whip
The person responsible for organising and co-ordinating Government business in Dáil Éireann

Government department
A group of civil servants, headed by a minister, which is responsible for a specific area of work within a government, for example health or the environment

Government revenue
Income that a government gets from tax, excise duties, customs and other sources

Grass roots
A basic source of support for a cause or a group, usually developed naturally without prompting or organisation from traditional holders of power

Grassroots movement
The action of groups of like-minded people who lobby for change on a particular issue, usually through door-to-door canvassing, letter writing, local meetings and so on

Green Paper
A document that sets out ideas about a proposed new law and invites comments from individuals and relevant groups

Green Party
Irish political party formed in 1981 that is part of a worldwide movement that believes in open government, protecting the environment and military neutrality
Head of state
A formal leader of a country or a group of people organised under one government, for example the President in Ireland and the Queen in the United Kingdom

Health and Children, Department of
The Government department responsible for managing, regulating and developing the health services, ensuring the safety and welfare of children and developing policies, programmes and information campaigns to protect and promote public health

House of Commons
The lower house of parliament in the United Kingdom and Canada; similar to the Dáil in Ireland

House of Lords
The upper House of Parliament in the United Kingdom

House of parliament
A gathering of representatives to debate issues and make laws, for example Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann

See also Bi-cameral, Dáil Éireann, Legislature, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

House of Representatives
The lower house of parliament in Australia and the United States

Ideology
A set of connected ideas, usually about a political system, or a way of looking at something

Implement
Do things to make something happen

Inaugural
First
**Incumbent**
A person who currently holds a post or office

**Independence**
Freedom from the influence or rule of another person, group or country

**Independent**
A TD, Senator or Councillor who does not belong to a political party

**Indicator**
A sign that something is happening; used by public bodies and other organisations to show the progress of a country in meeting a range of economic, social and environmental goals

**Influence**
The power to change the behaviour of someone or something

**Inter-culturalism**
An ideology that favours different cultures mixing with each other and learning about each other's music, art, literature, customs and so on to help prevent misunderstandings and fight racism

**Interest group**
A group of people organised to take action about a cause or interest

**Joint Oireachtas Committee**
A committee made up of members of the Dáil and Seanad to discuss and vote on particular matters, for example the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science and Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs

See also Dáil Committee and Seanad Committee.
Judicial review
The power of judges to review whether laws and official acts by the Government violate the Constitution or basic rules of justice and, if they do, strike them down or overturn them.

See also Checks and balances, Constitution of Ireland, Legislature and Separation of powers.

Judiciary
The branch of government that is concerned with interpreting laws and upholding justice through the courts.

See also Executive and Legislature.

Junior Minister
A member of government appointed by the Taoiseach to assist a senior minister for a Government department; officially called Minister of State.

Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of
The Government department responsible for protecting the security of the State, implementing Government policy on crime, advising criminal justice institutions (prisons, courts, Gardaí and Probation and Welfare Services) and developing and implementing policies on immigration and asylum, equality, anti-discrimination, human rights and childcare, among others.

Labour Court
A place that hears employment disputes when all other methods to resolve them have failed and gives non-binding opinions and recommendations on how to settle them.
Labour movement
A broad group of workers that includes trade unions and the Labour Party

Labour Party
Political party formed nationally in 1912 with a focus on equality, freedom, community and democracy

Laissez-faire
An ideology that opposes Government interference in economic affairs, other than the minimum necessary to maintain property rights and peace, and individual interference in another's freedom of choice and action

Lame duck
An elected representative, usually a leader, who is regarded as less powerful or effective than they were because they are near the end of their time in office either because they cannot or do not want to be re-elected or they are waiting for another elected official to formally take over their post

Law Reform Commission
An independent body set up by Government to review laws and advise the Government on necessary reforms, often after seeking the views of interest groups and the public

Leader of the opposition
The leader of the largest political party that is not in government and the opposition's main spokesperson

Leas Cathaoirleach
The Irish for vice chairperson, the person who chairs local authority or Seanad Éireann meetings when the Cathaoirleach is not present

See also Cathaoirleach.

Leas Ceann Comhairle
The person who chairs Dáil Éireann meetings when the Ceann Comhairle is not present
Left, the
Organisations or political parties that favour social justice and freedom, aim to share a country's wealth between all people equally and focus on workers' rights; originally comes from the French Revolution, when politicians representing the people's interests sat to the left of the president's chair.

See also Centre and Right.

Left-wing
The section of a political system or party that favours social justice over the free market.

See also Free market and Right wing.

Leftie
A slang, usually critical, term for a person who believes in the values of liberalism and socialism.

See also Liberal and Socialism.

Legal rights
Rights of all individuals in a society as outlined in the laws of the State.

Legislation
A law or a set of laws or the act of making laws.

Legislature
The branch of government that makes laws, known in Ireland as the Oireachtas.

See also Executive, Judiciary, Oireachtas and Separation of powers.

Legislative power
The power to make and change laws.

Legislative process
A series of actions that result in a law being made.

Libel
A written or recorded (on radio or TV) statement about a person that is proven to be false and damaging to their reputation.

See also Defamation and Slander.
Liberalism
A broad political ideology that generally favours individual freedom, open government and the free market, but contains different views on whether the government should interfere in the market, for example through anti-discrimination laws or social welfare for those who are unable to work.

See also Ideology and Free market.

Libertarian
A person who supports individual personal and property rights and minimal government involvement in people's lives.

See also Liberalism.

Liberty
Freedom from control by a person or group.

Lobby
Trying to influence public opinion to change laws or certain actions, for example by writing letters, making proposals or meeting decision makers; originally comes from the UK, where people waited in the lobby (entrance hall) or corridors of parliament to talk to Members of Parliament.

Lobby group
A group that tries to get support for a particular cause to change laws or certain actions.

Lobbyist
A person who lobbies.

Local authority
A local form of government, consisting of elected officials and full-time staff, which is responsible for providing a range of public services, for example libraries, swimming pools and refuse collection.

Local authority meetings
Gatherings of elected members, open to the public and the media, to decide on the direction and work of the local authority.
**Local elections**
Elections held in Ireland every five years, usually in May or June, to elect councillors to represent the community in local authorities around the country.

**Local government**
A term to refer to the system of county and city councils whose members are elected by the people.

See also Local authority, Councillor and County council.

**Mmandate**
The authority to represent people's interests and take action for them, given by voters to elected officials or sometimes by members of an organisation to its leaders.

**Manifesto**
A document stating a political party's values, goals and intended actions.

See also Platform.

**Marginal seat**
A seat held by a political party by a very narrow margin and so at risk of being lost.

**Matching funds**
The amount of money that a group must be able to access if it seeks a grant, for example from the Government, and that must match the amount of grant sought.

**Mayor**
An elected or appointed head of a city or town.
Member
A person who belongs to an organisation or body

Member of Parliament (MP)
A member of the British House of Commons

Member of the European Parliament (MEP)
An elected politician who represents a region of their own country in the European Parliament

Military rule
A system of government where army officers form the government

Minister
A member of the Irish Government who runs and manages a department and may propose new or amended laws

Ministerial
Relating to a minister

Monarch
A king or queen

Monarchy
A system of government in which a king or queen is the head of state and has unlimited powers (absolute monarchy) or powers that are limited by the state's constitution (constitutional monarchy)

Motion of no confidence
A vote on the performance of a leader or a government, usually proposed by the opposition, that, if passed, may require the person to resign or the government to stand down and request a general election

See also Dáil Éireann, Dissolution and Opposition.

Mudslinging
The practice of saying negative things about an opponent during a political campaign; also known as 'dirty politics'

See also Dirty politics.
Multi-culturalism
An ideology that favours the presence of many cultures in society, each with equal rights

See also Ideology and Inter-culturalism.

NAPS - National Anti-Poverty Strategy
A Government medium-term plan (three to five years) to tackle poverty

Nation
A group of people, often with the same language or culture, who think of themselves as a community and have, or want to have, their own government

National
Belonging to or relating to a nation

National debt
The total amount of money owed by a government

Nationalise
Bringing an industry under the control or ownership of a government

Nationalism
A belief that a large group of people are or should be a nation with its own government and a policy of asserting the interests of a nation against other nations or the common interests of all nations

NDP - National Development Plan
A Government plan to improve the economy and living standards by investing money in education and training, regional development, social services, roads and so on
Neo-conservatives ('neo-cons')
A term used usually to refer to right-wing members of the US Republican Party who promote traditional family values, the free market and action by the United States against other countries to improve its standing and promote its values and interests.

See also Conservative, Free market and Right-wing.

Nominee
A person who is nominated, or proposed by others, as a candidate for public office.

Non-partisan
Neutral or not involving or influenced by a political party.

Non-party candidate
An independent candidate, one who is not a member of a political party.

NRA - National Roads Authority
The Government body responsible for planning, improving and managing the road network in Ireland.

NTMA - National Treasury Management Agency
The Government body responsible for managing the Government's assets and national debt as well as certain funds such as the National Pensions Fund and the Dormant Accounts Fund.
**Oireachtas**
The national parliament of Ireland, which consists of the President, Dáil Éireann (the lower house) and Seanad Éireann (the Senate or upper house), and whose powers and functions are outlined by the Constitution.

See also Dáil Éireann, Legislature, President, Seanad Éireann and Separation of powers.

**Oligarchy**
A form of government where power is held by a small number of people belonging to a dominant class or group.

**Ombudsman**
A public official who is responsible for investigating complaints against the Irish Government or the public service.

**One-person rule**
A system of government in which one person holds all power over a country or state.

See also Despot and Dictactor.

**OASIS - Online Access to Services, Information and Support**
An information system on the Internet that gives details on public services and people's rights and is set up and managed by the state information and advice body, Comhairle.

**Opposition**
The second largest political party or group of parties in the Dáil that opposes what it believes to be wrong with Government policies and actions.

'Opt out'
The option open to certain Member States of the European Union (EU) not to be governed by certain EU decisions, for example on ending cross-border controls.
OPW - Office of Public Works
The Government engineering agency responsible for restoring and preserving state buildings, buying and fitting office accommodation for Government departments, building and maintaining Garda stations and prisons and managing flood relief and drainage programmes

Parliament
An assembly of elected representatives that forms the legislature of a state or a nation and may have both an upper and a lower house

See also Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas, Legislature and Seanad Éireann.

Parliamentarian
An elected member of the upper or lower houses of parliament

Parliamentary
Relating to the parliament

Parliamentary questions (PQs)
Questions that TDs ask the Government – orally or in writing – about any issue for which the Government is responsible and that are recorded in the Official Report of Parliamentary Debates in Dáil Éireann and on the web site of the Houses of the Oireachtas

Pacifism
A belief that violence, especially war, must be avoided when resolving disputes
Parliamentary privileges
Certain rights granted to TDs and Senators in Ireland that are not enjoyed by the general public, for example the right not to be sued for defamation because of anything they say in a speech in the Dáil or Seanad.

See also Defamation.

Parliamentary wing (of a political party)
The people from a political party who have been elected to parliament.

Partisan
A person who strongly supports a political party or cause.

Party discipline
The control used by a political party, in particular its leader, to encourage its members in parliament to vote in the same way.

Party policy
The rules, values and approaches that a political party obeys and follows.

Party political
Relating to the business or interests of a political party.

Petition
A document, usually containing signatures from many people, that is presented to a person or group in power by those asking for action on a matter.

Philanthropy
The action, usually by wealthy people, of funding or giving other forms of practical support to organisations, without wanting anything in return, based on the desire to do good for society.

Philosophy
A general view or a set of beliefs or attitudes, usually based on reason.

See also Ideology.
Platform
A political party's written statement of its principles and policies on a number of topics, which is published during an election campaign

See also Manifesto.

Plebiscite
A vote by all voters on a topic, for example in a referendum, or by members of a party to decide on a candidate

Pledge
A solemn promise to do something, usually made when somebody takes a high-level official role

Policy
A statement of a person's or group's intended action on a matter

Political
Relating to how decisions are made within groups, for example political parties

See also Politics.

Political agenda
A set of issues that are dealt with in politics at a particular time and can sometimes be influenced by the media

Political freedom
A person's right to express their political beliefs freely and to vote as they want

See also Political rights.

Political ideology
A range of beliefs on which the aims and activities of a political party are based

Political literacy
An awareness of political values, attitudes, arguments and institutions that allows a person to make an informed vote and take action on issues

Political participation
Voting in a referendum or election and, or, taking part in political activities
**Political rights**
Rights that allow a person to take part in political life, including the right to vote, hold particular political views and join a political party and influence public life.

See also Political freedom.

**Political spectrum**
The range of political thoughts, policies and approaches from the right to the left.

See also Centre, Left-wing and Right-wing.

**Political values**
Beliefs and rules that are important to a political party or person, such as equality, liberty and tolerance of diversity.

**Politician**
A person who is active in politics and holds a political office to which they have been elected.

**Politics**
Activities involved in making decisions and using power, for example governing a country.

**Poll**
Asking and recording the opinion of people, for example in a survey or at an election.

See also Exit poll and Straw poll.

**Polling card**
A card sent to a person's home before an election to tell the date and time of voting and where to vote.

**Polling station**
A place where people vote.

**Populist**
A person whose public views reflect the interests and concerns of the average person.

**Precedent**
Something that has been done before and is a guide to what should be done again, for example a decision in a legal case that is followed when similar cases come before the courts.
Preferential voting
A voting system in which people vote for candidates in order of preference, putting 1 on the ballot paper beside their favourite candidate, 2 for their second favourite, 3 for their third favourite and so on

See also Candidate, Proportional representation and Single Transferable Vote.

President of Ireland
Irish head of state who is elected to serve a seven-year term (at most two terms), forms part of the Oireachtas, represents the people of Ireland when carrying out official engagements at home and has powers and functions that are set down in the Constitution

See also Bunreacht na hÉireann, Oireachtas and Legislature.

Presidential Commission
A group that carries out the functions of the President of Ireland if they die, resign, permanently lose their health, fail to perform their functions or are out of the country or removed from office

President's Award (Gaisce)
An award programme for people aged 15 to 25 years to reward them for setting and achieving demanding challenges for themselves in the four areas of community involvement, personal skill, physical recreation and adventure activity

Press gallery
A gallery in a house of parliament set aside for reporters from newspapers, radio and television (the media)

Prime Minister
The head of the national government

See also Taoiseach.

Private Member's Bill
See Bill, Private Member's.
**Proclamation**
An official public announcement, for example the 1916 Proclamation – a public announcement of independence from British rule.

**Progressive**
Something or someone that is concerned with reform, improvements and making progress.

**Progressive Democrats**
Political party founded mainly by former members of the Fianna Fáil party in 1985 that favours reduced taxes, careful use of public funds and an increased role for the individual in all areas of life.

**Progressive Unionist Party**
The political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force, which promotes union with Britain.

**Propaganda**
Ideas or information, not always true, that help or injure an institution, cause or person.

**Proportional representation (PR)**
An election system in which the number of seats won by a party are broadly in proportion to (a percentage of) the number of total votes its candidates receive.

**Protest**
A public statement or demonstration against a situation or the actions of others.

**Protest vote**
A vote for a candidate not out of support for them but to show disapproval of another political party and its candidate.
**Public**
A term to describe the people as a whole of a community, state or nation or something that is open to or concerns them

**Public funds**
Money generated from taxes and other sources that is spent by a government

**Public gallery**
An area in a house of parliament, for example Dáil Éireann, that is set aside for the public

**Public interest**
The common well-being of a society, often considered when debating policies and interpreting and implementing laws

**Public policy**
A body of laws, regulations and government action on matters concerning the public

**Public sector**
The part of a country's economy that involves representing the public and providing and managing services for them, for example through schools, state bodies or hospitals

**Public servant**
A person who works with the civil service, a local authority or other state body

**Public services**
Services that are wholly or partly funded through taxes, including national, regional and local government and state agencies

**Private sector**
The part of a country's economy that is involved in making profit, for example corporations, firms and banks
**Question time**
A period of time, currently from 2.30 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, during which TDs can ask questions of the Government (although the Taoiseach answers questions on Tuesdays and Wednesdays only)

See also Parliamentary questions (PQs).

**Question election results**
The right of a registered Dáil elector (or someone entitled to be registered) to question the results of a Dáil election in their constituency, provided they present a petition to the High Court no more than 28 days after the declaration of the result by the Returning Officer.

See also Returning Officer.

**Quota**
The number of votes that a candidate needs to win a seat under the proportional representation (PR) system.

See also Proportional representation and Single Transferable Vote.

**Radical**
Something very different from the usual or traditional or a person who favours major political or social change.

**Radical reform**
Major and dramatic changes, usually to an organisation and its activities.

**Reading (of a bill)**
A formal stage in the passage of a bill, which involves considering what the bill covers and anything that should be removed or included.

**Rebellion**
Open, organised and often armed opposition to a country's government or ruler.
**Referendum**
A vote on a topic or question

See also Referendum, constitutional and Constitution of Ireland.

**Referendum Commission**
A group established before each referendum to tell the public what the referendum is about and to give the arguments for and against the proposal on which people will vote

**Referendum, constitutional**
A referendum that takes place to let voters decide whether the Government can make a proposed change to the Constitution and to give them a chance to say they are for or against the proposed change

See also Constitution of Ireland.

**Regional Assembly**
(BMW - Border, Midland and West - and S & E - South and East)
A public body that handles EU Structural Funds and co-ordinates how public services are delivered in the region it covers

**Regional authorities**
State-funded bodies that co-ordinate and review public services at regional level

**Register of Political Parties**
A list of legally registered political parties, which is entered on a ballot paper at elections

**Regulation**
A law made by an Act or sometimes a Government minister
Religious right
A movement of people that follow Old Testament Christian teachings, support traditional values on gender, reproduction and homosexuality and oppose certain forms of medical research, based on their religious beliefs.

Representative
A person who acts on behalf of others or someone elected to a law-making body.

Representative democracy
A system of government where voters elect representatives to make decisions for them.

Republic
A state that is ruled by elected representatives rather than by a monarch.

See also Monarchy.

Republican
A person or group that campaigns for a republic in their country instead of a monarch; also, a member of the Republican Party, one of the two main political parties in the United States.

Republican Party
One of the two major political parties in the United States; established in 1854 and typically associated with conservative values, lower taxes and less government spending.

See also Democratic Party.

Republicanism
A political philosophy in favour of setting up a republic before any other political system.

See also Philosophy and Republic.

Resolution
A plan to do something or encourage others to do it.

Responsible government
A system in which a government answers for its actions to elected representatives of the people.
Returning Officer
A person who supervises the counting of votes during an election or referendum and who certifies and officially announces the results
See also County Registrar.

Revenue
Money coming in; usually associated with the money a government collects from the people through taxes and other sources

Revolution
A complete overthrow of a government or political system

Right, the
A term used to describe political parties and other groups that favour the free market and support the way things are now or want to return to past ways of doing things
See also Conservative, Free market and Left, the.

Right-wing
A section of a political party, organisation or a system that tends to be conservative
See also Conservative, Free market and Left-wing.

Rights
Claims that society recognises as fair, such as legal rights, political rights, social rights and human rights
See also Civil rights and Political rights.

Rule of law
A system in which the law applies to and must be obeyed by everyone, including a head of state or a government

Ruling party
The political party that controls the government

Running mate
A person who runs for election in the same constituency as another candidate from the same party and is expected to get fewer votes; often used to describe the vice-presidential candidate in the United States during national elections
Single Transferable Vote - STV
A system of preferential voting where several seats are available in a constituency that gives a person's vote to their favourite candidate and transfers unneeded or unused votes for that candidate (for example if they already have enough to be elected) to other candidates in the constituency until all seats are filled.

See also Constituency, Preferential voting, Proportional representation, Quota and Seat.

Safe seat
A seat in a constituency that is likely to go to a particular candidate because of the amount of support given to them or the political party they represent.

See also Federation.

Seanad Éireann
Known as 'the Seanad' for short, the upper house of the Irish parliament (Oireachtas), which currently has 60 members, known as Senators, who debate issues, revise laws passed in Dáil Éireann and sometimes begin the process of introducing new laws.

See also Dáil Éireann, Legislature and Oireachtas.

Seat
A place in an elected political assembly, such as a parliament or county council.

Secession
The act of pulling out from a political alliance or association, especially from a federation of states.

Secret ballot
A system of voting that allows people to vote in private and anonymously (without giving their name) so they cannot be pressured to vote in a certain way.
**Select Committee**
A committee in the Oireachtas, which consists of members of the Dáil or the Seanad, that is usually set up to review the work of a Government department.

See also Joint Oireachtas Committee.

**Self-government**
Also known as self-rule, the political independence of a country, people or region.

**Senator**
A member of the Senate, or Seanad Éireann in Ireland.

**Separation of powers**
A system in which each of the three branches of government - legislature, executive and judiciary - have separate functions and powers and the right to check the activities of the other branches to make sure that none of them becomes too powerful.

See also Checks and balances, Executive, Legislature and Judiciary.

**Shadow minister**
A term, usually used in the UK, to describe each member of the opposition that 'shadows', or follows closely, the area of responsibility of a minister in a government.

**Sinn Féin**
A republican political party seeking to end British rule in Northern Ireland.

See also Republican.

**Slander**
Something said about a person (for example at a public meeting) that is proven to be false and damaging to their reputation.

See also Defamation and Libel.
Social and civil services
The range of services available to the public, for example social welfare, education, health services, family supports and services that help people assert their rights on consumer issues, employment, equality and refugee status, among others.

Social and Family Affairs, Department of
The Government department responsible for devising and managing social welfare payments and benefits and developing and implementing policies to tackle poverty and long-term unemployment.

Social capital
A general term for the networks and common values that allow members of a community to co-operate with and support each other.

Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
A Northern Ireland political party founded in 1960 to represent the interests of nationalists and secure a united Ireland.

Social partnership
A system in which the Government, employers, voluntary and community organisations and trade unions work out a plan that covers wages, industrial action, housing, transport, education and other issues that affect the country’s social and economic development.

Social welfare
State support for people when they are unemployed, ill, retired, widowed or caring full-time for others through payments or other benefits each week or month; known in other countries as social security.
Socialism
A system and form of political thought that favours distributing wealth and assets equally so that all people, either directly or through their governments, have a say in how they are used.

See also Communism, Left-wing and Liberalism.

Socialist
A person who believes in and promotes the values of socialism.

Society
A large gathering of many communities under generally accepted rules and values.

Solidarity
Recognising the rights of others and joining with others to defend them.

Sound bite
A brief, quotable remark repeated on radio and TV news programmes to reflect the position of a political candidate or other spokesperson on a topic and regarded by some as superficial.

Special Committee
An Oireachtas committee set up only as needed so it can review a particular bill.

See also Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.

Spin
Public relations (PR) activity, for example press releases or interviews, or a way of interpreting information that aims to enhance the public image of a person or group, such as a politician or their party, at the expense of a political opponent or the opposition party.

Spoiled vote
A vote that is ignored when counting all votes in an election because the voter has filled in their ballot paper incorrectly or has written their name on it.
State
A territory controlled by a government or ruler with the aid of institutions such as the police, armed forces, the civil service and the courts

See also Territory.

Status quo
A situation that is unchanged or is as it was before a recent change

Statute law
A law passed by parliament, as opposed to common law, which is set by decisions made in court

See also Civil law system and Common law system.

Statutory
Something that is decided, set up or controlled by statute law

Straw poll
An unofficial vote or poll taken to see the general opinion among a group on a given issue

See also Exit poll and Poll.

Subject
In political terms, a person who lives under the rule of a monarch

See also Monarch and Monarchy.

Submission
A set of suggestions or arguments made orally or in writing to a decision-making authority such as a Government department, a committee or a court

Suffrage
The right to vote

See also Franchise.

Supreme Court
The highest court in Ireland, which hears appeals of decisions from the High Court
**Surplus (votes)**  
The amount of votes that exceed the quota needed for a candidate to be elected  

See also Proportional representation, Quota and Single Transferable Vote.

**Surplus (economic)**  
A situation in which the Government is taking in more money than it is spending  

See also Deficit.

**Swing voter**  
A person who votes but whose support can switch from one political party to another, depending on the issue at stake.

**Tánaiste**  
Irish Deputy Prime Minister, who takes the place of the Taoiseach if the Taoiseach dies, permanently loses health or is temporarily absent or if a successor has not yet been appointed; usually the leader of the smaller party in a two-party coalition government  

See also Taoiseach and Coalition government.

**Tactical voting**  
Voting that does not express a voter’s true preferences but may get a more favourable result, for example helping to elect a candidate with wide public support instead of voting for a favourite candidate who may have little real chance of winning.
**Taoiseach**
The head of the Irish Government, nominated by the Dáil, who speaks for the Government on major policy issues, chairs Cabinet meetings and has powers to reorganise the Cabinet

*See also Prime Minister and Cabinet.*

**Taoiseach, Department of the**
The Government department responsible for supporting and advising the Taoiseach in carrying out their duties, linking the Taoiseach and the President to other Government departments, developing and co-ordinating policy on economic and social matters, Northern Ireland and the EU, among others, and arranging and co-ordinating state functions

**Taxation**
Money charged on incomes, property, goods and services that must be paid to a government

**TD - Teachta Dála**
One of 166 members of Dáil Éireann, who represents their constituency, takes part in debates and question time, votes on bills, runs an office in their constituency and usually also provides a clinic - a service where the public can meet the TD at certain times during the week to discuss local issues

*See also Dáil Éireann, Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann.*

**Term limit**
The maximum number of times that a person may hold a particular political office

**Territory**
The land and waters under the control of a state or ruler

**Terrorism**
A co-ordinated movement involving planned acts of terror, for example bombings or poisonings, to frighten people into doing something they don't want to do
Think tank
A non-profit institute, corporation or group set up to research a range of areas and make recommendations to a government on public policy

See also Public policy.

Third way
A political thought, promoted by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, that borrows from the right and the left but is different to both

See also Left, Centre and Right.

Ticket
The list of candidates nominated by a political party in an election

Transport, Department of
The Government department responsible for devising and implementing policies on road building, road safety and driver licensing and testing, among others, providing safe and efficient public transport and supporting high quality, safe and competitive air travel

Treason
A betrayal by a citizen of their loyalty to the state or its ruler, for example by spying on the government or handing over secret government documents to an enemy, particularly in wartime

Treaty
A formal agreement between states on trade, peace or other issues

Tribunal of inquiry
A body set up by the Oireachtas and headed by a judge to investigate matters of urgent public importance, such as corrupt practices by public representatives or poor management of public services, and communicate its findings and recommendations to the Oireachtas
Two-party system
A political system, such as in the United States, that encourages power to be shared primarily by two political parties and works to exclude other political parties from power

Tyranny
Uncontrolled exercise of power, often by an oppressive or unjustly severe government or a ruler

See also Despot and Dictator.

Tyrant
An absolute ruler who uses his or her power unjustly or oppressively

See also Despot and Dictator.

Ulster Unionist Party
A Northern Ireland political party, founded in 1905, that wants to maintain British rule in Northern Ireland

See also Unionism.

Unionism
A political philosophy that favours union between Northern Ireland and Britain under the British government

Upper house
The second house in a two-chamber parliament

See also Bi-cameral, Legislature and Seanad Éireann.

Values
Beliefs and rules on which a person or organisation bases their behaviour

Veto
Blocking or rejecting a proposed law or change to the constitution; sometimes exercised by the President of Ireland if they refuse to sign into law a bill passed by the Dáil and the Seanad

See also Council of State, Legislature, President of Ireland and Oireachtas.
Vote
A formal expression of a choice, such as putting one's hand up or marking a ballot paper

See also Ballot paper and Election.

Voter turnout
The number or percentage of all voters who cast a vote in a given election

Voter
A person who is entitled to vote and does so - limited to citizens of Ireland over 18 years whose names appear on the Register of Electors

See also Register of Electors.

Ward
A district or division of a city or town, for purposes of management, voting and so on

Welfare
The well-being of all; also the money provided by the government to those who cannot earn it themselves

See also Social welfare.

Whip
The manager of a political party, who is responsible for organising members of their party to take part in debates and vote in a way that the party's leader desires

See also Chief Whip.

Whistleblower
An employee or a former employee of a business or public body who reports wrongdoing, for example fraud, underpaying staff or breaking safety regulations, to a person who can take corrective action directly or embarrass others into doing so

War chest
A fund for running a political campaign, consisting of money given to a candidate by other people and through various fundraising events
**White paper**
A document that outlines a government's plans for particular areas and sometimes forms the basis of later laws

**Winner-Take-All**
A simple system of voting, in which the person with the most votes wins or 'takes all', in contrast to the system of proportional representation and the Single Transferable Vote.

See also Proportional representation and Single Transferable Vote.
Please note: These links were accurate at time of going to print, but we are not responsible for any updated information or altered links since then.


Other sources of online information on political terms


For more information on political parties in the Republic of Ireland, please see their websites, which are listed below in alphabetical order.

Fianna Fáil - www.fiannafail.ie
Fine Gael - www.finegael.ie
Green Party - www.greenparty.ie
Labour Party - www.labour.ie
Progressive Democrats - www.progressivedemocrats.ie
Sinn Féin - www.sinnfein.ie
Socialist Workers Party - www.swp.ie
What is NALA?
The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a non-profit membership organisation, concerned with national coordination, training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland.

National Adult Literacy Agency
76 Lower Gardiner Street
Dublin 1

Telephone: (01) 855 4332
Fax: (01) 855 5475
Freephone support line: 1800 20 20 65
Email: literacy@nala.ie

Websites:
NALA website: www.nala.ie
Literacy learning and tuition website: www.literacytools.ie
Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers website: www.rug.ie

NALA Cork
Telephone: (021) 427 8655
Fax: (021) 427 8665
Email: mmurray@nala.ie

NALA Mullingar
Telephone: (044) 934 0374
Fax: (044) 934 5834
Email: pkiernan@nala.ie

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