

# OPTIMATES ET POPULARES

GAME DESIGN BY  
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*Optimates et Populares* is a game for two players about the fractious, violent political struggle that defined the last hundred years of the Roman Republic, and served as prelude to the series of civil wars that ultimately led to the establishment of Augustus's Principate. During the late Republic, almost all wealth, land, and power was concentrated in the hands of privileged elites, while the impoverished, hungry masses were crushed by insurmountable, systemic debt. Politicians who agitated and advocated on the behalf of these underclasses often found a receptive audience, and for motives both pure and cynical, these *Populares* ("of the people") pushed for progressive, egalitarian reforms. These were stiffly and uncompromisingly resisted by the *Optimates* ("best men"), and the resultant deadlock eroded the previously sacrosanct foundations of the Republic. Mob violence, corruption, intimidation, and proscription - government-sanctioned murder of political opponents to confiscate their property as a means of balancing the books - became the rule rather than the exception.

In this game, each player controls one of these two factions. Each faction has two inter-related goals: first, to pass legislation that either maintains the status quo (*Optimates*) or moves past it (*Populares*), and second, to gain and keep political power. Key to this contest is the concept of Political Will (PW). Anger at *Populares* gains energizes the *Optimates*, and vice-versa; therefore every action you take has the potential to cede Political Will to your opponent, which he can use to reverse your gains.

## 2.0 COMPONENTS

The game is played with a Display sheet, a Tracking sheet, 88 counters, and one eight-sided die.

### 2.1 THE DISPLAY

The display is divided into four major areas:

- *The Offices* are used to indicate the holders of Major Offices (two Consuls and one Tribune) and Minor Offices (Quaestor and Aedile).
- *The Senate* is used to show the allegiances of influential Senators.
- *The People* is used to show the allegiances of the People of Rome. These are divided into three groups, or *Blocks*: the Poor, the Merchants, and the Legions. Symbols for each Block indicate issues that are important to that Block: blue symbols indicate support for the *Populares*, and red symbols for the *Optimates*.
- *The Laws* are used to track the current laws of the land regarding four wedge issues: Italic Franchise, the Grain Dole, Debt Relief, and Agrarian Reform.

## 2.2 TRACKING SHEET

The Tracking sheet is home to the following Tracks:

- Each player uses a *VP Marker* on the *VP Track* to track Victory Points.
- Each player uses a *Political Will Marker* on their own *Political Will Track*.

## 2.3 SENATE COUNTERS



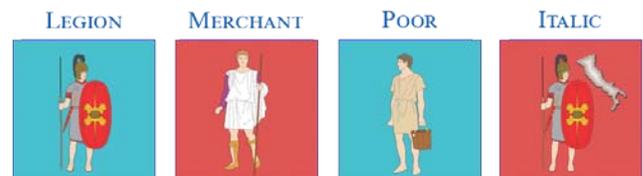
There are 24 Senators in the game. Each Senator has an Influence rating of 1, 2, 3, or 4.

- 2-, 3-, and 4-Senators are double-sided, and can switch allegiance from the *Populares* (blue) to the *Optimates* (red) and vice-versa. They will begin the game in play.
- 1-Senators are double-sided, but they never switch allegiance. They may enter the game during play.

## 2.4 OFFICE COUNTERS

There are 5 Office counters in the game. These are double-sided, and are flipped to demonstrate which player controls a given Office.

## 2.5 PEOPLE OF ROME COUNTERS



There are 32 People of Rome counters in the game. Each counter belongs to the Block indicated on the counter. Like Senators and Officers, these are double-sided and are flipped to show allegiance. Counters with an Italic Franchise symbol enter play later, if and when citizenship is granted to some of Rome's Italic allies.

## 2.6 LAW COUNTERS



There are 4 Law counters in the game, one for each of the four laws. Each Law counter is double-sided; when a Law is passed (or vetoed), the Law counter is flipped over to its "No Pass" side, preventing further action on that issue during the same Game Turn.

## 2.7 COIN COUNTERS



In denominations of "1", "2", "3", "5", "7", and "10", representing the player's financial resources. Spent money is returned to a stock.

## 3.0 SETTING UP THE GAME

The game is set-up as follows.

### The Offices:

- 1 Optimates Consul
- 1 Populares Consul
- 1 Populares Tribune
- 1 Optimates Quaestor
- 1 Optimates Aedile

### The People of Rome:

- Poor: 8 Populares
- Legions: 5 Optimates and 3 Populares
- Merchants: 5 Optimates and 3 Populares
- Place the remaining People of Rome markers on the indicated spaces of the Italic Franchise track. (*Variant: mix these 8 markers and randomly draw and place 2 on the first space, and 3 on each of the remaining spaces.*)

### The Senate:

Place the eight 1-Senators aside. Place the remaining Senators in an opaque container:

- The Optimates Player blindly draws one and places it, Optimates side up, on the red "1" space.
- The Populares Player blindly draws one and places it, Populares side up, on the blue "1" space.
- The players continue alternating blind draws from the cup, placing the Senators on the next numbered space in sequence, until eight red Optimates pieces are placed in the eight red spaces, and eight blue Populares pieces in the eight blue spaces.

### The Laws:

Place each of the four Law Markers on the right-most red space (a "2" for the Grain Dole and "0" for all others) of their respective Law Tracks.

### Populares Player starts with

- 6 PW
- 4 Coins

### Optimates Player starts with

- 3 PW
- 4 Coins

## 4.0 SEQUENCE OF PLAY

The game is played over the course of several Game Turns (usually 8-10), until one or both players triggers one of the Game End conditions. Each Game Turn consists of the following phases, performed in the following order:

**FIRST PLAYER PHASE:** The player who holds two or three Major Offices is the First Player. He takes actions, expending PW accordingly, until he exhausts his supply of PW or decides to Pass.

**SECOND PLAYER PHASE:** The player who holds only one (or zero) Major Offices is the Second Player. He takes actions, expending PW accordingly, until he exhausts his supply of PW or decides to Pass.

**ELECTIONS PHASE:** Players determine who will hold what Offices in the following Game Turn. Coins are collected, and Victory Points (VP) are scored.

## 5.0 ACTIONS

During a player's Player Phase, he may take Actions. Each Action usually requires the expenditure of a certain number of PW (and possibly Coins), and may result in his opponent gaining PW. Each Action is resolved completely before the Player can take another Action. There is no limit to the number of times a player can take a given action so long as he has the PW to do so, and so long as the action is not prohibited due to the current game state. When a player runs out of PW, or elects to Pass, his Player Phase ends.

### 5.1 SENATE ACTIONS

These are actions that alter the allegiances of members of the Senate.

#### INFLUENCE

This action uses one of your Senators to "flip" adjacent enemy Senators to your side. The number of Senators that can be flipped depends on the Influence rating of your activated Senator:

- 2-Senators can flip (1) enemy 2-Senator. **Cost: 2 PW.**
- 3-Senators can flip up to (2) enemy 2- or 3-Senators. **Cost: 3 PW.**
- 4-Senators can flip up to (3) enemy 2- or 3-Senators. **Cost: 4 PW.**

Senators are adjacent only when they share an edge (i.e., diagonals are never adjacent). *Your opponent earns 1 PW for each of his Senators that are flipped.*

#### NUDGE

This action moves one of your Senators into an adjacent space occupied by another Senator (enemy or friendly); the displaced Senator is then placed in the empty space. As with 5.1, diagonals are not adjacent. **Cost: 1 PW.** *Your opponent does not earn PW when you take this action.*

**BRIBE PERSUADE**

This action flips an enemy Senator by expending Coins equal to twice their Influence rating (i.e., 4 coins for 2-Senators, 6 for 3-Senators, and 8 for 4-Senators). It costs no PW and does not earn your opponent PW. It is one of two Actions that can directly flip a 4-Senator.

**INTIMIDATE**

This action attempts to use the threat of mob violence to flip an enemy Senator:

- Announce the target of your threat. **Cost: 3 PW.**
- Your opponent has the option to *Oppose* your threat; if he does so, he expends 2 PW.
- Consult the Poor Block, and add "1" for each piece you have there. If your threat is *Opposed*, subtract "1" for each piece your opponent has in that Block. Roll the die and add the net total, positive or negative, to the result. If the modified die roll exceeds three times the Senator's Influence rating (6 for 2, 9 for 3, 12 for 4), the Senator is flipped. If the result is less than or equal to the target number, nothing happens.
- *Your opponent earns PW equal to the Influence rating of the Senator (whether or not the attempt was successful).*

**PROSCRIPTION ACTION** (*must hold all 3 Major Offices*)

This action straight-up murders an enemy Senator, replacing him with a compliant toady and confiscating his property, and is only available when you hold all three Major Offices:

- Announce the proscribed enemy Senator piece. **Cost: PW equal to its Rank.**
- Remove the Senator piece, placing it back in the box. Replace it with a 1-Senator loyal to your cause.
- The masses eat this up: flip enemy counters in the Poor block equal to the proscribed Senator's rank.
- The Senators aren't so happy about it: your opponent flips two of your Senators of equal or lesser rank (but does not flip any 1-Senators).
- You earn Coins equal to *twice* the Senator's rank.
- *Your opponent earns 1 PW.*

**General rule: 1-Senators, once placed, never flip.**

**5.2 PEOPLE OF ROME ACTION**

This is an action that attempts to alter the allegiances of the People of Rome. *Note that Law Actions also influence the People of Rome.*

**PUBLIC GAMES**

This action "buys" the votes of the populace through lavish gifts, public games, and well-placed bribes. Upon announcing the action, and spending **2 PW**, you must spend at least 1 Coin, placing the Coins spent in the center of the table. This is your "bid".

Your opponent may now make a "bid" of his own, so long as it equals or exceeds yours. At that point, you may up your own bid with additional Coins, again so that the total equals or exceeds your opponent's, and he may then up his, continuing in this fashion until one of the two players either cannot or will not match or exceed his opponent's total.

When the bidding comes to an end, the Coins bid by *both* players are spent. The difference between the two final bids will determine the maximum number of enemy People of Rome pieces that may be flipped by the highest bidder:

- 1 Coin: only 1 counter.
- 2 Coins: 2 counters in the same Block.
- 3-4 Coins: 2 counters, each in a different Block.
- 5 Coins: 3 counters in the same Block.
- 6 or more Coins: 3 counters, one from each Block.

*The low bidder gains 1 PW for each Block affected by this Action.*

**5.3 LAW ACTIONS**

These are actions that seek to pass legislation. These are the most complicated actions in the game; a full understanding of this section is necessary for good play.

**CONSUL ACTION (CONSUL ONLY)**

A Consul Action targets one Law, and seeks to move it one space in that player's direction (toward the red end of the track for the Optimates, and toward the blue end of the track for the Populares). Each Law can only be the target of one Consul Action in a given Game Turn; once a Consul Action has been taken for that Law, regardless of the outcome, it is flipped to its "No Pass" side, which prohibits it from being the target of a Consul Action.

- The first Consul Action you take in a phase costs you **2 PW**; if it passes, your opponent gains 1 PW.
- The second Consul Action costs **3 PW**; if it passes, your opponent gains 2 PW.
- The third Consul Action costs **5 PW**; if it passes, your opponent gains 3 PW.
- The fourth Consul Action costs **8 PW**; if it passes, your opponent gains 5 PW.

Note that the amount of PW ceded to one's opponent is dependent on the outcome of that specific Action, and not the Actions before it. For example, if the first Consul Action fails, the opponent gains no PW, but if the second one passes, he will still gain 2 PW.

A Consul Action succeeds and a Law passes unless it is Vetoed by a Consul's Veto or Tribune's Veto (your opponent can only use one of these options). Note that a Veto can be overridden if the price is right.

Laws that pass have game effects as detailed in 6.0.

### CONSUL'S VETO ACTION (CONSUL ONLY; NON-PHASING PLAYER)

When the phasing player takes a Consul Action, after he has paid his PW but before the action is resolved, his opponent may Veto the Law if he controls the other Consul. He must expend PW to do so, depending on the following circumstances:

- If the phasing player's Senators have more total Influence than the opposing player's, the opposing player must expend **1 PW**.
- If the phasing player controls more People of Rome counters than the opposing player, the opposing player must expend **1 PW**.
- If the current space the Law occupies on the Law Track is the color of the phasing player (red for Optimates and blue for Populares), the opposing player must expend **1 PW**.

Therefore, the opposing player would need to expend 3 PW if all these apply. All of this expended PW is given immediately to the phasing player. If none of these apply, then the opposing player expends 0 PW to issue his Veto, and the phasing player gains no PW.

A Vetoed Law Action fails - the counter remains on its original space - unless the phasing player chooses to bribe his colleague. If the opposing player controls a Consul, but does not control the Tribune, the phasing player must pay **6 coins**. If the opposing player controls both a Consul and the Tribune, the phasing player must pay **8 coins**. This money is not paid to the other player so that he can use it to further his goals, but rather lines the pockets of the corrupt individuals (return it to the stock). A bribe cannot be refused, and a Vetoed Law Action that is then bribed succeeds.

Note that when a Law is Vetoed, the phasing player still expends PW, and that if a bribe is used to override that Veto, the opposing player still expends his PW (and the phasing player still gains PW).

### TRIBUNE'S VETO ACTION (TRIBUNE ONLY; NON-PHASING PLAYER)

When the phasing player takes a Consul Action, after he has paid his PW but before the action is resolved, his opponent may Veto the Law if he controls the Tribune. He expends **2 PW** to do so. This Veto can be overridden with a bribe, just as with a Consul's Veto, costing **6 coins** if the non-phasing player only controls the Tribune, and **8 coins** if he controls both a Consul and the Tribune.

If the Tribune's Veto is *not* overridden by a bribe, the phasing player flips one enemy Senator to his own side. He must flip a 2-Senator if possible. If no enemy 2-Senators remain, he may flip a 3-Senator. 4-Senators cannot be flipped in reaction to a Tribune's Veto.

### TRIBUNE ACTION (TRIBUNE ONLY)

The Tribune may also pass Laws. This differs from the way Consuls pass Laws in three important ways:

- A Tribune Action can never be Vetoed.
- A Tribune Action can target Laws that are already on their "No Pass" side.
- A Tribune Action cannot be used to move a Law to its "3" space.

Each Tribune Action costs **3 PW**, and cedes 2 PW to the opposing player.

## 5.4 PASSING

A Player may voluntarily end their Player Phase without spending all their PW by Passing.

## 6.0 LAWS & THE PEOPLE OF ROME

Laws are more than ways to generate Victory Points (though they do that, too); they're also a way to build and maintain support with the People of Rome. Each of the three blocks has a set of symbols, indicating the support (or lack thereof) for progressive measures. Passage of a Law (a successful Consul or Tribune Action) will shift support within the blocks as follows:

- If the Law marker is moved to a blue space, and is moved toward the blue end of the track, some counters within a block containing that Law's blue symbol will flip from red to blue. If a block has that Law's red symbol, some counters within that block will flip from blue to red.
- If the Law marker is moved into a red space, and is moved toward the red end of the track, some counters within a block containing that Law's blue symbol will flip from red to blue. If a block has that Law's red symbol, some counters within that block will flip from blue to red.

The maximum number of counters within each block that flip is equal to the numerical value of the new space. For example, if the action results in the Law marker progressing from a "1" space to a "2" space, then two counters in each of the affected blocks will flip. If there aren't enough counters, only flip the ones you can.

Further, each Law has its own special game effects, detailed in the sections that follow.

## 6.1 ITALIC FRANCHISE

The extension of citizenship and voting rights to Rome's Italic allies. When the Populares Player progresses this Law to its "1", "2", and "3" spaces for the first time, the People of Rome counters on the adjacent space are added to their respective People of Rome blocks, supporting the Populares. For example, when it is moved for the first time to the blue "1" space, the two Merchant counters are added to the Merchants block.



Note that passage of a Law into either the blue or red spaces will cause all three People of Rome blocks to flip pieces into the red (none of the existing citizenry is too keen about extending their hard-won rights and privileges to the Italic peoples). *Important:* counters are flipped *before* any new counters are added to the block; that is, the new citizens of Rome aren't going to turn reactionary over their own franchise - though they may very well oppose the granting of citizenship to other Italics in future Turns; they've got theirs, Jack (or Julius, as the case may be).

(Variant: As noted under 3.0, you can randomize the eight Italic counters, placing two on the "Merchants" space of the track, and three each in the "Legions" and "Poor" spaces. This variant is available if both players agree to it at the start of the game.)

## 6.2 GRAIN DOLE

The immensely popular Grain Dole was the "bread" part of "bread and circuses", proposed and advocated for by the Populares, and firmly established by Augustus's Principate as a way to keep the populace compliant and peaceful. It is so popular, in fact, especially with the potentially violent urban poor, that while it can be Vetoed by the Optimates when a Consul proposes it, they cannot repeal it. That is, the Grain Dole can never be targeted by an Optimates Law Action, and gains made here by the Populares can never be reversed.



## 6.3 DEBT RELIEF

Many Roman citizens, especially the poor, were saddled with crushing debts they never could quite get out from underneath. Calls for debt relief proved popular with those who were suffering, and less so for their creditors. Passage of Laws in either direction will flip the Poor from red to blue, and the Merchants from blue to red.



## 6.4 AGRARIAN REFORM

The centrality of agrarian reform - the redistribution of arable land, which had been concentrated into the hands of the wealthiest of elites - to the struggles of the late Roman Republic cannot be overstated. It had broad and passionate support from the landless poor, from upwardly-mobile merchants looking to move into the big leagues, and from the soldiers who had been promised (and denied) land in return for their military service. As such, this is the one issue that will cause all three blocks to flip blue.



The only folks who don't care for it, of course, are the elites in the Senate. Whenever the Populares Player advances the Agrarian Reform Law marker to a blue space, the Optimates Player flips a number of Populares Senators equal to that space. For example, when it is moved to the blue "2" space, the Optimates Player flips two Senators, and when it is moved to the blue "3" space, he flips three. When doing so, the Optimates Player must flip 2-Senators first, and can only flip 3-Senators when there are no 2-Senators left (4-Senators do not flip).

## 7.0 ELECTIONS PHASE

After both Players have concluded their Player Phases, the Elections Phase is resolved as follows.

### 7.1 CONSERVATIVE LEAN

At the beginning of the Elections Phase, if there is at least one blue Merchants counter, flip one blue Merchants counter to its red side.

### 7.2 CONSULAR ELECTIONS

Count the number of Influence each Player has in the Senate. If one Player has at least *twice* as much Influence as the other, he wins election to *both* Consulships. Otherwise, each player wins a Consulship. Flip the Consul markers accordingly.

### 7.3 TRIBUNAL ELECTION

Count the number of in-play People of Rome counters each Player controls. The Player with the most People of Rome counters wins the Tribune. If there is a tie, the Populares Player wins the Tribune.

If one player controls all 3 Major Offices, his opponent immediately flips one enemy Senator, and any/all enemy Senators *adjacent* to that Senator (again, as usual, diagonals do not count).

### 7.4 QUAESTOR ELECTION

Count the number of in-play Legion counters each Player controls. The Player with the highest total wins the Quaestor. If there is a tie, the player with the most Major Offices wins the Quaestor.

## 7.5 AEDILE ELECTION

Count the number of in-play Merchants counters each Player controls. The Player with the highest total wins the Aedile. If there is a tie, the player with the most Major Offices wins the Aedile.

## 7.6 TO THE VICTOR, THE SPOILS

For each Office a Player controls, he earns 1 Coin (2 Coins for the Aedile) and 1 Victory Point. For each Office his opponent controls, he gains 1 PW. Then, Players score Victory Points for each Law that is on their color space, equal to the number on that space. (For example, red "2" earns 2 VP for the Optimates, and blue "1" earns 1 VP for the Populares.) Finally, all "No Pass" Law counters are flipped to their other side to prepare for the next Game Turn.

## 8.0 GAME END CONDITIONS & VICTORY

There are two Game End Conditions checked at the end of the Game Turn:

- If either player has scored at least 50 VP, or has 20 more VP than his opponent.
- If either player has three of the four Laws on the final space of his side of the track.

If either or both of these conditions occur, there will be one more Game Turn, in which players score *double* VP. At the conclusion of that turn,

- If the Populares Player has 10 or more VP than the Optimates Player, the Populares Player wins.
- Otherwise, the Optimates Player wins, *unless* the VP score is tied.
- If the VP is tied, then score double VP again for Laws *only*. The player *with the highest* score is the winner. If a tie persists, the Optimates Player wins.

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SENATE ACTIONS	
INFLUENCE	Activate one Senator to flip adjacent enemy Senators. 2-Senators flip (1) 2-Senator, 3-Senator flips (2) 2- or 3-Senators, 4-Senator flips (3) 2- or 3-Senators.
	<b>Cost:</b> PW equal to Rank <b>Opponent:</b> 1 PW per Senator flipped
NUDGE	Move one of your Senators into an adjacent space.
	<b>Cost:</b> 1 PW <b>Opponent:</b> No PW gained
<del>BRIBE</del> PERSUADE	Flip an enemy Senator.
	<b>Cost:</b> Coins equal to twice Senator's Rank <b>Opponent:</b> No PW gained
INTIMIDATE	Attempt to flip an enemy Senator by rolling die, +1 for each friendly Poor Block piece (-1 for enemy Poor Block if Opposed). If die roll exceeds three times Senator's Rank, it succeeds.
	<b>Cost:</b> 3 PW <b>Opponent Cost to Oppose:</b> 2 PW <b>Opponent:</b> PW equal to Senator's Rank (even if attempt fails)
	Murder a Senator, replacing it with a 1-Senator. Flips enemy Poor pieces equal to Senator's Rank; opponent flips two of your Senators of equal or lesser rank; you earn Coins equal to <i>twice</i> the Senator's Rank.
PROSCRIPTION ACTION (must hold all 3 Major Offices)	<b>Cost:</b> PW equal to Senator's Rank <b>Opponent:</b> 1 PW

PEOPLE OF ROME ACTION	
PUBLIC GAMES	Bid to buy loyalty of the public. High bidder flips enemy pieces depending on the difference in the final bids: 1 Coin = 1, 2 = 2 in same Block, 3-4 = 2 in different Blocks, 5 = 3 in same Block, 6+ = 3 in different Blocks.
	<b>Cost:</b> 2 PW <b>Opponent:</b> PW equal to number of Blocks affected

LAW ACTIONS	
CONSUL ACTION	Subject to veto, cannot target Laws on "No Pass" side.
	<b>Your 1st Consul Action:</b> 2 PW; if passed, Opponent gets 1 PW <b>Your 2nd:</b> 3 PW; if passed, Opponent gains 2 PW <b>Your 3rd:</b> 5 PW; if passed, Opponent gains 3 PW <b>Your 4th:</b> 8 PW; if passed, Opponent gains 5 PW
	Opponent can Veto Consul Action:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ +1 PW if phasing player has more Influence in Senate</li> <li>■ +1 PW if phasing player has more People of Rome</li> <li>■ +1 PW if precedent (Law already on phasing player's side of track)</li> <li>■ Veto is free if none of these apply</li> <li>■ Phasing player gains PW equal to PW expended to Veto</li> </ul>
TRIBUNES VETO ACTION	Opponent can Veto Consul Action:
	<b>Cost:</b> 2 PW <b>Opponent:</b> Gains no PW, but flips 1 enemy Senator (lowest Rank available)
OVERRIDE OF VETO	Opponent's Veto of Consul Action can be overridden.
	<b>Cost:</b> 6 Coins if Opponent controls only one Major Office <b>Cost:</b> 8 Coins if Opponent controls two Major Offices <b>Opponent:</b> no gains other than those in Consul Action
	Not subject to Veto, can target Laws on "No Pass" side, cannot move Law to "3" space.
TRIBUNES ACTION	<b>Cost:</b> 3 PW <b>Opponent:</b> 2 PW
	<b>SPECIAL LAW EFFECTS (POPULARES SPACES)</b> <b>Italic Franchise:</b> place new People of Rome. <b>Grain Dole:</b> Cannot be reversed by Optimates. <b>Agrarian Reform:</b> Flip blue Senators to red equal to VP value of space.

MAJOR OFFICES		MINOR OFFICES		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 1 VP/1 Coin per Office;</li> <li>■ 1 PW per enemy Office;</li> <li>■ If all 3 Major Offices are held by one player, Opponent flips 1 Senator &amp; adjacent Senators</li> </ul>
<u>CONSULS</u>	<u>TRIBUNES</u>	<u>QUAESTOR</u>	<u>AEDILE</u>	
Each player wins one Consulship unless one player has twice as much Influence	Majority of People of Rome; ties to Populares	Majority of Legions; ties to most Major Offices	Majority of Merchants; ties to most Major Offices; 2 Coins for Aedile instead of 1	