

Politics Isn't Always the 'Art of the Possible'

In an 1867 interview, the great German Statesman Otto von Bismarck [first said](#) that "Politics is the art of the possible."

This phrase has since become one of the main cornerstones of political science, and specifically of political campaigns and their paid consultants.

While theologians typically deal in the realm of truth, political consultants such as myself typically deal in the realm of power. We spend most of our time asking questions such as: Do I have enough votes? Will this action make me friends or enemies? What is the public perception?

Political consultants—if they want to keep their jobs—usually recommend actions to politicians that fulfill the following criteria: 1) they make them friends; 2) they are already supported by the majority of people in power; 3) they have enough votes for passage. We don't often see bold actions from politicians who contract with political consultants.

Yet sometimes the bold is exactly what is needed in politics, and results in successes that no political consultant could predict.

A historical case in point is when the Jews won back the Second Temple from the pagan Seleucids in the [Maccabean Revolt \(167-160 BC\)](#). Under King Antiochus the Seleucids had looted the Temple in Jerusalem and forbidden Jewish Law. They had banned the Jewish ritual of circumcision, and sacrificed a pig at the Temple's altar in the name of Zeus.

During Antiochus' reign the Jews had become a persecuted minority. From a political consultant's

perspective, they did not have the votes or even the means to take on the new pagan king. They certainly would not be making any friends in openly opposing him, and in fact, would be putting themselves in even greater danger. The easiest political strategy for the Jews would have been to accept the political trends and adapt accordingly.

I can imagine the conversations that today's political consultants would have had with the leader of the Jewish revolt, Judah Maccabee. You can certainly presume they would have told him things like "we need to accept the current state," "don't try to make a difference too quickly," "try to work with the pagans," and "do not do anything until it becomes popular."

But unlike many of today's politicians, Judah Maccabee realized that "possible" is not a synonym for "easy" or "politically expedient." He and his followers engaged in guerilla warfare, and as the story goes, with the help of God, they were able to liberate the Second Temple.

Luckily today, we do not have to use violence or warfare to create change. However, we should heed the lesson that taking chances and going against the grain is sometimes the right thing to do if "change" is what's really wanted—even if there are some adverse consequences to your popularity, or it makes you the enemy of the establishment political class.

But as Donald Trump's unexpected victory in last November's election teaches us, it's possible to win in politics without the political class. And as the Maccabean Revolt and other historical events teach us, it's possible to be an underdog when it comes to a policy and still win.

Sometimes it pays not to listen to political consultants.