

American Government Glossary

A

Absentee Voting: Provisions made for those unable to get to their regular polling places on Election Day.

Acquit: Find not guilty of a charge.

Act of Admission: A congressional act admitting a new State to the Union.

Adjourn: Suspend, as in a session of Congress.

Administration: The officials in the executive branch of a government and their policies and principles.

Affirmative Action: A policy that requires most employers take positive steps to remedy the affects of past discrimination.

Albany Plan of Union: Plan proposed by Benjamin Franklin in 1754 that aimed to unite the 13 colonies for trade, military, and other purposes; the plan was turned down by the colonies and the crown.

Alien-Foreign: Born resident or non citizen.

Ambassador: An official representative of the united states of the united states appointed by the president to represent the nation in matters of diplomacy.

Amendment: A change in, or addition to, a construction or law.

Amnesty: A blanket pardon offered to a group of law violators.

Anti-Federalists: Those persons who opposed the ratification of the constitution in 1787-1788.

Appellate Jurisdiction: The authority of a court to review decisions of inferior courts.

Apportion: Distribute, as in seats in a legislative body.

Appropriate: Assign to a particular use.

Articles: Numbered sections of a document. The unamended Constitution is divided into seven articles.

Articles of Confederation: Plan of government adopted by the continental congress after the American revolution; established "a league of friendship" among the states, but allowed few important powers to the central government.

Assemble: To gather with one another in order to express views on public matters.

Assessment: The process of determining the value of property to be taxed.

Assimilation: The process by which people of one culture merge into, and become part of, another culture.

At-Large Election: Election of an officeholder by the voters of an entire governmental unit, rather than by the voters of a district or subdivision.

Attorney General: The head of the department of justice.

Authoritarian: A form of government in which those in power hold absolute and unchallengeable authority over the people. All dictatorships are authoritarian.

Autocracy: A form of government in which a single person holds unlimited political power.

Autonomous: Independent.

B

Bail: A sum of money that the accused may be required to post as a guarantee that he or she will appear in court at the proper time.

Balance the ticket: When a presidential candidate chooses a running mate who can strengthen his chance of being elected by virtue of certain ideological, geographic, racial, gender, or other characteristics.

Ballot: The device voters use to register a choice in an election.

Bankruptcy: The legal proceeding by which a bankrupt person's assets are distributed among those to whom he or she owes debts.

Bench Trial: A trial in which the judge alone hears the case.

Bicameral: An adjective describing a legislative body composed of two chambers.

Bill: A proposed law presented to a legislative body for consideration.

Bill of Attainder: A legislative act that inflicts punishment without a court trial.

Bill of Rights: The first ten amendments to the Constitution.

Bipartisan: Supported by two parties.

Blanket Primary: A voting process in which voters receive a long ballot containing the names of all contenders, regardless of party, and can vote however they choose.

Block Grant: One type of federal grants in aid for some particular but broadly defined area of public policy.

Bourgeoisie: The social class between the autocracy and the proletariat class; the middle class.

Boycott: Refusal to buy or sell certain products or services.

Budget: A financial plan for the use of money, personnel, and property.

Bureaucracy: A large, complex administrative structure that handles the everyday business of an organization.

Bureaucrat: A person who works for a bureaucratic organization.

By-Election: A special election held to choose a replacement for a member of Parliament, in the event of death.

C

Cabinet: Presidential advisory body, traditionally made up of heads of the executive departments and other officers.

Capital: All the human-made resources that are used to produce goods and services.

Capitalist: Someone who owns capital and puts it to productive use; often applied to people who own large businesses.

Capital Punishment: The death penalty.

Categorical Grant: One type of federal grants-in-aid; made for some specific, closely defined, purpose.

Caucus: As a nominating device, a group of like-minded people who meet to select the candidates they will support in an upcoming election.

Censure: Issue a formal condemnation

Centrally Planned Economy: A system in which government bureaucrats plan how an economy will develop over a period of years.

Certificate: A method of putting a case before the Supreme Court; used when a lower court is not clear about the procedure or rule of law that should apply in a case and asks the Supreme Court to certify the answer to a specific question.

Charter: A city's basic law, its constitution; a written grant of authority from the King.

Checks and Balances: System of overlapping the powers of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches to permit each branch to check the actions of the others; *see separation of powers*.

Chief Administrator: Term for the President as head of the administration of the Federal Government.

Chief Citizen: Term for the President as the representative of the people, working for the public interest.

Chief Diplomat: Term for the President as the main architect of foreign policy and spokesperson to the other countries.

Chief Executive: Term for the President as vested with the executive power of the United States.

Chief Legislator: Term for the President as architect of public policy and the one who sets the agenda for Congress.

Chief of Party: Term for the President as the leader of his or her political party.

Chief of State: Term for the President as the ceremonial head of the United States, the symbol of all the people of the nation.

Citizen: A member of a state of nation who owes allegiance to it by birth or naturalization and is entitled to full civil rights.

Civil Case: A case involving a noncriminal matter such as a contract dispute or a claim of patent infringement.

Civil Law: The portion of the law relating to human conduct, to disputes between private parties, and to disputes between private parties and government not covered by criminal law.

Civil Liberties: The guarantees of the safety of persons, opinions, and property from the arbitrary acts of government, including freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Civil Rights: A term used for those positive acts of government that seek to make constitutional guarantees a reality for all people, e.g., prohibitions of discrimination.

Civil Service: Those civilian employees who perform the administrative work of the government.

Civilian Tribunal: A court operating as part of the judicial branch, entirely separate from the military establishment.

Clemency: Mercy or leniency granted to an offender by a chief executive; *see pardon and reprieve*.

Closed Primary: A party nominating election in which only declared party members can vote.

Cloture: Procedure that may be used to limit or end floor debate in a legislative body.

Coalition: A temporary alliance of several groups who come together to form a working majority and so to control a government.

Coattail Effect: The effect of a strong candidate running for an office at the top of a ballot helping to attract voters to other candidates on the party's ticket.

Cold War: A period of more than 40 years during which relations between the two superpowers were at least tense, and often hostile. A time of threats and military build up.

Collective Security: The keeping of international peace and order.

Collectivization: Collective or state ownership of the means of production.

Commander in Chief: Term for the President as commander of the nation's armed forces.

Commerce and Slave Trade Compromise: An agreement during the Constitutional Convention protecting slave holders; denied Congress the power to tax the export of goods from any State and, for 20 years, the power to act on the slave trade.

Commerce Power: Exclusive power of Congress to regulate interstate and foreign trade.

Commission Government: A government formed by commissioners, heads of different departments of city government, who are popularly elected to form the city council and thus enter both legislative and executive powers in one body.

Committee Chairman: Member who heads a standing committee in a legislative body.

Committee of the Whole: A committee that consists of an entire legislative body; used for a procedure in which a legislative body expedites its business by resolving itself into a committee of itself.

Common Law: An unwritten law made by a judge that has developed over centuries from those generally accepted ideas of right and wrong that have gained judicial recognition.

Commune: A large grouping of several collective farms.

Communism: An ideology which calls for the collective, or state, ownership of land and other productive property.

Commutation: The power to reduce (commute) the length of a sentence or fine for a crime.

Compromise: An adjustment of opposing principles or systems by modifying some aspect of each.

Concurrent Jurisdiction: Power shared by federal and State courts to hear certain cases.

Concurrent Powers: Those powers that both the National Government and the States possess and exercise.

Concurrent Resolution: A statement of position on an issue used by the House and Senate acting jointly; does not have the force of law and does not require the President's signature.

Concurring Opinion: Written explanation of the views of one or more judges who support a decision reached by a majority of the court, but wish to add or emphasize a point that was not made in the majority decision.

Confederation: A joining of several groups for a common purpose.

Conference Committee: Temporary joint committee created to reconcile and differences between the two houses' versions of a bill.

Connecticut Compromise: Agreement during the Constitutional Convention the Congress should be composed of a Senate, in which States would be represented equally, and a House, in which representation would be based on a State's population.

Consensus: General agreement among various groups on fundamental matters; broad agreement on public questions.

Constituency: The people and interests that an elected official represents.

Constituent Power: The non-legislative power of Constitution-making and the constitutional amendments.

Constitution: The body of fundamental laws setting out the principles, structures, and processes of a government.

Constitutionalism: Basic principle that government and those who govern must obey the law; the rule of law; *see limited government*.

Containment: A policy based in the belief that if communism could be kept within its existing boundaries, it would collapse under the weight of its internal weaknesses.

Content Neutral: The government may not regulate assemblies on the basis on what might be said.

Continuing Resolution: A measure which allows agencies to continue working based on the previous year's appropriations.

Continuous Body: Governing unit (e.g. The United States Senate) whose seats are never all up for election at the same time.

Controllable Spending: An amount decided upon by Congress and the President to determine how much will be spent each year on many individual government expenditures, including environment protection programs, aid to education, and so on.

Copyright: The exclusive, legal right of a person to reproduce, publish, and sell his or her own literary, musical, or artistic creations.

Council-Manager Government: A modification of the mayor-council government, it consists of a strong council of members elected on a non-partisan ballot, a weak mayor, elected by the people, and a manager, named by the council; *see also weak mayor government*.

County: A major unit of local government in most States.

Court-Martial: A court composed of military personnel, for the trial of those accused of violating military law.

Criminal Case: A case in which a defendant is tried for committing a crime as defined by the law.

Criminal Law: The portion of the law that defines public wrongs and provides for their punishment.

Cultural Revolution: Begun in 1966, Mao Tse Tung's Red Guards attacked, bullies, and "reeducated" teachers, intellectuals, and anyone else who seemed to lack revolutionary fervor.

Custom Duty: A tax laid on goods brought into the United States from abroad, also known as tariffs, import duties, or imposts.

D

De Facto Segregation: Segregation even if no law requires it, e.g., housing patterns.

De Jure Segregation: Segregation by law, with legal sanction.

Defendant: In a civil suit, the person against whom a court action is brought by the plaintiff; in a criminal case, the person charged with the crime.

Deficit: The yearly shortfall between revenue and spending.

Deficit Financing: Practice of funding government by borrowing to make up the difference between government spending and revenue.

Delegated Powers: Those powers, expressed, implied, or inherent, granted to the National Government by the Constitution.

Democracy: A form of government in which the supreme authority rests with the people.

Denaturalization: The process through which naturalized citizens may involuntarily lose their citizenship.

Deportation: A legal process in which aliens are legally required to leave the United States.

Detente: A relaxation of tensions.

Deterrence: The policy of making America and its allies so militarily strong that their very strength will discourage, or prevent, any attack.

Devolution: The delegation of authority from the central government to the regional governments.

Dictatorship: A form of government in which the leader has absolute power and authority.

Diplomatic Immunity: When an ambassador is not subject to the laws of the state to which they are accredited.

Direct Popular Election: Proposal to do away with the electoral college and allow the people to vote directly for President and Vice President.

Direct Primary: An election held within a party to pick that party's candidates for the general election.

Direct Tax: A tax that must be paid by the person on whom it is levied; *see indirect tax*.

Discharge Petition: A procedure enabling members to force a bill that has been pigeonholed in committee onto the floor for consideration.

Discrimination: Bias, unfairness.

Dissenting Opinion: Written explanation of the views of one or more judges who disagree with (dissent from) a decision reached by a majority of the court; *see majority opinion*.

Dissolution: The power of the Prime Minister to dissolve the House of Representatives.

District Plan: Proposal for choosing presidential electors by which two electors would be selected in each State according to the Statewide popular vote and the other electors would be selected separately in each of the State's congressional districts.

Division of Powers: Basic principle of federalism; the constitutional provisions by which governmental powers are divided on a geographic basis (in the United States, between the National Government and the States).

Docket: A court's list of cases to be heard.

Doctrine: Principle or fundamental policy.

Domestic Affairs: All matters not directly connected to the realm of foreign affairs.

Double Jeopardy: Part of the 5th Amendment which says that no person can be put in jeopardy of life or limb twice. Once a person has been tried for a crime, he or she cannot be tried again for the same crime.

Draft: Conscription, or compulsory military service.

Due Process: The government must act fairly and in accord with established rules in all that it does.

Due Process Clause: Part of the 14th Amendment which guarantees that no state deny basic rights to its people.

E

Economic Protest Parties: Parties rooted in poor economic times, lacking a clear ideological base, dissatisfied with current conditions and demanding better times.

Electoral College: Group of persons chosen in each State and the District of Columbia every four years who make a formal selection of the President and Vice President.

Electoral Votes: Votes cast by electors in the electoral college.

Electorate: All of the people entitled to vote in a given election.

Eminent Domain: Power of a government to take private property for public use.

Enabling Act: A congressional act directing the people of a United States territory to frame a proposed State constitution as a step towards admission to the Union.

English Bill of Rights: Document written by Parliament and agreed on by William and Mary of England in 1689, designed to prevent abuse of power by English monarchs, forms the basis for much in American government and politics today.

Engross: To print a bill in its final form.

Entitlement: A benefit that federal law says must be paid to all those who meet the eligibility requirements, e.g., Medicare, food stamps, and veterans' pension.

Entrepreneur: An individual with the drive and ambition to combine land, labor, and capital resources to produce goods or offer services.

Espionage: Spying.

Establishment Clause: Separates church and state.

Estate Tax: A levy imposed on the assets of one who dies.

Ex Post Facto Law: A law applied to an act committed before its passage.

Excise Tax: A tax laid on the manufacture, sale, or consumption of goods and/or the performance of services.

Exclusionary Rule: Evidence gained as the result of an illegal act by police cannot be used against the person from whom it was seized.

Exclusive Jurisdiction: Power of the federal courts alone to hear certain cases.

Exclusive Powers: Those powers that can be exercised by the National Government alone.

Executive Agreement: A pact made by the President directly with the head of a foreign state; a binding international agreement with the force of law but which (unlike a treaty) does not require Senate consent.

Executive Article: Article II of the Constitution. Establishes the presidency and gives the executive power of the Federal Government to the President.

Executive Departments: Often called the Cabinet Departments, they are the traditional units of federal administration.

Executive Office of the President: An organization of several agencies staffed by the President's closest advisors.

Executive Order: Directive, rule, or regulation issued by a chief executive or subordinates, based upon constitutional or statutory authority and having the force of law.

Executive Power: The power to execute, enforce, and administer law.

Expatriation: The legal process by which a loss of citizenship occurs.

Expressed Powers: Those delegated powers of the National Government that are spelled out, expressly, in the Constitution; also called the "enumerated powers."

Extradition: The legal process by which a fugitive from justice in one State is returned to that State.

F

Faction: A conflicting group.

Factors of Production: Basic resources which are used to make all goods and services.

Federal Budget: A detailed financial document containing estimates of federal income and spending during the coming fiscal year.

Federal Government: A form of government in which powers are divided between a central government and several local governments.

Federalism: A system of government in which a written constitution divides power between a central, or national, government and several regional governments.

Federalists: Those persons who supported the ratification of the Constitution in 1787-1788.

Felony: A serious crime which may be punished by a heavy fine and/or imprisonment or even death.

Filibuster: Various tactics (usually long speeches) aimed at defeating a bill in a legislative body by preventing a final vote; associated with the U.S. Senate; see *cloture*.

Fiscal Year: The 12-month period used by a government and the business world for its record-keeping, budgeting, revenue-collecting, and other financial management purposes.

Five-year Plan: A plan which projects economic development over the next five years.

Floor Leaders: Members of the House and Senate picked by their parties to carry out party decisions and steer legislative action to meet party goals.

Foreign Affairs: A nation's relationships with other countries.

Foreign Aid: Economic and military aid to other countries.

Foreign Policy: A group of policies made up of all the stands and actions that a nation takes in every aspect of its relationships with other countries; everything a nation's government says and does in world affairs.

Formal Amendment: Change or addition that becomes part of the written language of the Constitution itself through one of four methods set forth in the Constitution.

Framers: Group of delegates who drafted the United States Constitution at the Philadelphia Convention in 1787.

Franchise: The right to vote.

Franking Privilege: Benefit allowing members of Congress to mail letter and other materials postage-free.

Free Enterprise System: An economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods; investments that are determined by private decision rather than by senate control and determined in a free market.

Free Exercise Clause: The second part of the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, which guarantees to each person the right to believe whatever he or she chooses to believe in matters of religion.

Full Faith and Credit Clause: Constitution's requirement that each State accept the public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of every other State.

Fundamental Law: Laws of basic and lasting importance which may not easily be changed.

G

Gender Gap: Measurable differences between the partisan choices of men and women today.

General Election: The regularly scheduled election at which voters make a final selection of officeholders.

Gerrymandering: The drawing of electoral district lines to the advantage of a party or group.

Gift Tax: A tax on a gift by a living person.

Glasnost: The Soviet policy of openness under which tolerance of dissent and freedom of expression increased.

Gosplan: A large agency in the Soviet Union, introduced by Stalin, to run centralized planning.

Government: The institution through which a society makes and enforces its public policies.

Government Corporation: Corporations within the executive branch subject to the President's direction and control, set up by Congress to carry out certain business-like activities.

Grand Jury: The formal device by which a person can be accused of a serious crime.

Grants-In-Aid Program: Grants of federal money or other resources to States, cities, counties, and other local units.

Grass Roots: Of or from the people, the average voters.

Great Leap Forward: The five-year plan for 1958 which was an attempt to quickly modernize China.

H

Hard Money: Campaign money that is subject to regulations by the FEC.

Heterogeneous: Of another or different race, family, or kind; composed of a mix of elements.

I

Ideological Parties: Parties based on a particular set of beliefs, a comprehensive view of social, economic, and political matters.

Immigrant: Those people legally admitted as permanent residents of a country.

Impeach: To bring formal charges against a public official; the House of Representatives has the sole power to impeach civil officers of the United States.

Imperial Presidency: Term used to describe a President as an "emperor" who acts without consulting Congress or acts in secrecy to evade or deceive Congress; often used in reference to Richard Nixon's presidency.

Implied Powers: Those delegated powers of the National Government that are suggested by the expressed powers set out in the Constitution; those “necessary and proper” to carry out the expressed powers; *see delegated powers, expressed powers.*

Income Tax: A tax levied on the income of individuals and/or corporations.

Incorporation: The process by which a State establishes a city as a legal body.

Incumbent: The current office holder.

Independent Agencies: Additional agencies created by Congress located outside the Cabinet departments.

Independent Executive Agencies: Agencies headed by a single administrator with regional subunits, but lacking Cabinet status.

Independent Regulatory Commissions: Independent agencies created by Congress, designed to regulate important aspects of the nation’s economy, largely beyond the reach of presidential control.

Independents: A term used to describe people who have no party affiliation.

Indictment: A formal complaint before a grand jury which charges the accused with one or more crimes.

Indirect Tax: A tax levied on one party but passed on another for payment.

Inferior Courts: The lower federal courts, beneath the Supreme Court.

Information: A formal charge filed by a prosecutor without the action of a grand jury.

Inherent Powers: Powers that the Constitution is presumed to have delegated to the National Government because it is the government of a sovereign state within the world community.

Inheritance Tax: A tax levied on the beneficiary’s share of an estate.

Initiative: A process in which a certain number of qualified voters sign petitions in favor of a proposed statute or constitutional amendment, which then goes directly to the ballot.

Injunction: A court order that forces or limits the performance of some act by a private individual or by a public official.

Integration: The process of bringing a group into equal membership in society.

Interest: A charge for borrowed money, generally a percentage of the amount borrowed.

Interest Group: Private organizations whose members share certain views and work to shape public policy.

Interstate Compact: Formal agreement entered into with the consent of Congress, between or among States, or between a State and a foreign State.

Involuntary Servitude: Forced labor.

Isolationism: A purposeful refusal to become generally involved in the affairs of the rest of the world.

Item Veto: A governor may veto one of more items in a bill without rejecting the entire measure.

J

Jim Crow Law: A law that separates people on the basis of race, aimed primarily at African Americans.

Joint Committee: Legislative committee composed of members of both houses.

Joint Resolution: A proposal for action that has the force of law when passed; usually deals with special circumstances or temporary matters.

Judicial Power: The power to interpret laws, to determine their meaning, and to settle disputes within the society.

Judicial Review: The power of the court to determine the constitutionality of a governmental action.

Jurisdiction: The authority of a court to hear a case.

Jury: A body of persons selected according to law who hear evidence and decide questions of fact in a court case.

Jus Sanguinis: The law of blood, which determines citizenship based on the one’s parents’ citizenship.

Jus Soli: The law of soil, which determines citizenship based on where a person is born.

Justice of Peace: A judge who stands on the lowest level of the State judicial system and presides over justice courts.

K

Keynote Address: Speech given at a party convention to set the tone for the convention and the campaign to come.

L

Labor Union: An organization of workers who share the same type of job, or who work in the same industry, and press for government policies that will benefit their members.

Laissez-Faire Theory: A theory which suggests that government should play a very limited role in society.

Law of Supply and Demand: A law which states that when supplies of goods and services become plentiful, prices tend to drop. When supplies become scarcer, prices tend to rise.

Legal Tender: Any kind of money that a creditor must, by law, accept in payment for debts.

Legislative Power: The power to make a law and to frame public policies.

Libel: False and malicious use of printed words.

Liberal Constructionist: One who argues a broad interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution, particularly those granting powers to the Federal Government.

Limited Government: Basic Principle of American government which states that government is restricted in what it may do, and each individual has rights that government cannot take away; *see constitutionalism, popular sovereignty.*

Line Agency: An agency which performs the tasks for which the organization exists.

Line-item Veto: A President's cancellation of specific dollar amounts (line items) from a congressional spending bill; instituted by a 1996 congressional act, but struck down by a 1998 Supreme Court decision.

Literacy: A person's ability to read or write.

Lobbying: Activities by which group pressures are brought to bear on legislators, the legislative process, and all aspects of public-policy-making process.

M

Magistrate: A justice who handles minor civil complaints and misdemeanor cases that arise in an urban setting.

Magna Carta: Great Charter forced upon King John of England by his barons in 1215; established that the power of the monarchy was not absolute and guaranteed trial by jury and due process of law to the nobility.

Major Parties: In American politics, the Republican and Democratic parties.

Majority Opinion: Officially called the Opinion of the Court, announces the Court's decision in a case and sets out the reasoning upon which it is based.

Mandate: The instructions or commands a constituency gives to its elected officials.

Market Economy: Economic system in which decisions on production and consumption of goods and services are based on voluntary exchange of markets.

Mass Media: Those means of communication that reach large audiences, especially television, radio, printed publications, and the Internet.

Mayor-Council Government: The oldest and most widely used type of city government -- an elected mayor as the chief executive and an elected council as its legislative body.

Medicaid: A program administered by the State to provide medical insurance to low-income families.

Medium: A means of communication; something which transmits information.

Mestizo: A person with both Spanish or Portuguese and Native American ancestry.

Metropolitan Area: A city and the area around it.

Minister: Cabinet members, most commonly of the House of Commons.

Minor Party: One of the political parties not widely supported.

Miranda Rule: The constitutional rights which police must read to a suspect before questioning can occur.

Misdemeanor: A lesser offense, punishable by a small fine and/or a short jail term.

Mixed Economy: An economy in which private enterprise exists in combination with a considerable amount of government regulation and promotion.

Monarchy: A government lead by a hereditary ruler.

Monopoly: A firm that is the only source of a product or service.

Multiparty: A system in which several major and many lesser parties exist, seriously compete for, and actually win, public offices.

N

National Bonus Plan: Proposal for electing a President by which the winner of the popular vote would receive a bonus of 102 electoral votes in addition to his or her State-based electoral college votes. If no one received at least 321 electoral votes, a run-off election would be held.

National Convention: Meeting at which a party's delegates vote to pick their presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

Nationalization: The governmental acquisition of private industry for public use.

Naturalization: The legal process by which citizens of one country become citizens of another.

Necessary and Proper Clause: Constitutional clause that gives Congress the power to make all laws “necessary and proper” for executing its powers; *see implied powers*.

New Jersey Plan: Plan presented as an alternative to the Virginia Plan at the Constitutional Convention; called for a unicameral legislature in which each State would be equally represented.

Nomination: The process of candidate selection in a democracy.

Nonpartisan Election: Elections in which candidates are not identified by party labels.

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): An agreement which removed trade restrictions among the United States, Canada, and Mexico, thus increasing cross-border trade.

O

Oath of Office: Oath taken by the president on the day he takes office, pledging to “faithfully execute” the office and “preserve, protect, and defend” the Constitution.

Off-year election: Congressional election that occurs between presidential election years.

Oligarchy: A form of government in which the power to rule is held by a small, usually self-appointed elite.

One-Party System: A political system in which only one party exists.

Open Primary: A party-nominating election in which any qualified voter can take part.

Opinion Leader: Any person who, for any reason, has an unusually strong influence on the views of others.

Ordinance Power: Power of the president to issue executive orders; originates from the Constitution and acts of Congress.

Original Jurisdiction: The power of a court to hear a case first, before any other court.

Oversight Function: Review by legislative committees of the policies and programs of the executive branch.

P

Pardon: Release from the punishment of legal consequences of a crime, by the President (in a federal case) or a governor (in a State case).

Parliamentary Government: A form of government in which the executive branch is made up of the prime minister, or premier, and that officials cabinet.

Parochial: Church-related, as in parochial school.

Parole: The release of a prisoner short of the complete term of the original sentence.

Partisan: Lawmakers who owe his/her first allegiance to his/her political party and votes according to the party line.

Partisanship: Government action based on firm allegiance to a political party.

Party Caucus: A closed meeting of a party’s House or Senate members; also called a party conference.

Party Identification: Loyalty of people to a political party.

Party in Power: In American politics, the party in power is the party that controls the executive branch of government -- i.e., the presidency at the national level, or the governorship at the State level.

Patent: A license issued to an inventor granting the exclusive right to manufacture, use, or sell his or her invention for a limited period of time.

Patronage: The practice of giving jobs to supporters and friends.

Payroll Tax: A tax imposed on nearly all employers and their employees, and on self-employed persons--the amounts owed by employees withheld from their paychecks.

Peer Group: People with whom one regularly associates, including friends, classmates, neighbors, and co-workers.

Perestroika: The reconstructing of political and economic life under the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Perjury: The act of lying under oath.

Persona non Grata: An unwelcome person; used to describe recalled diplomatic officials.

Petit Jury: Jury that decides the guilt or innocence in a criminal trial, or who is right and wrong in a civil trial.

Petition of Right: Document prepared by Parliament and signed by King Charles I of England in 1628; challenged the idea of the divine right of kings and declared that even the monarch was subject to the laws of the land.

Picketing: Patrolling of a business site by workers who are on strike.

Plaintiff: In civil law, the party who brings a suit or some other legal action against another (the defendant) in court.

Platform: A political party’s formal statement of basic principles, stands on major issues, and objectives.

Pluralistic Society: A society which consists of several distinct cultures and groups.

Plurality: In an election, the number of votes that the leading candidate obtains over the next highest candidate.

Pocket Veto: Type of veto a chief executive may use after a legislature has adjourned; when the chief executive does not sign or reject a bill within the time allowed to do so; *see veto*.

Police Power: The authority of each State to act to protect and promote the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of its people.

Political Action Committee: The political extension of special-interest groups which have a major stake in public policy.

Political Efficacy: One's own influence or effectiveness on politics.

Political Party: A group of persons who seek to control government through the winning of elections and the holding of public office.

Political Socialization: The process by which people gain their political attitudes and opinions.

Politico: Lawmaker who attempts to balance the basic elements of the trustee, delegate and partisan roles; *see trustee, delegate, partisan*.

Poll Book: List of all registered voters in each precinct.

Poll Tax: A special tax, demanded by States, as a condition of voting.

Polling Place: The place where the voters who live in a certain precinct go to vote.

Popular Sovereignty: Basic principle of the American system of government which asserts that the people are the source of any and all governmental power, and government can exist only with the consent of the governed.

Preamble: Introduction.

Precedent: Court decision that stands as an example to be followed in future, similar cases.

Precinct: The smallest unit of election administration; a voting district.

Preclearance: Mandated by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the prior approval by the Justice Department of changes to or new election laws by certain States.

Prefecture: The 47 political subdivisions into which Japan is divided.

Preliminary Hearing: The first step in a major criminal prosecution where the judge decides if the evidence is enough to hold the person for action by the grand jury or the prosecutor.

President of the Senate: The presiding officer of a senate; in Congress, the Vice President of the United States; in a State's legislature, either the lieutenant governor or a senator.

President Pro Tempore: The member of the United States Senate, or of the upper house of a State's legislature, chosen to preside in the absence of the president of the Senate.

Presidential Elector: A person elected by the voters to represent them in making a formal selection of the Vice President and President.

Presidential Government: A form of government in which the executive and legislative branches of the government are separate, independent, and coequal.

Presidential Primary: An election in which a party's voters (1) choose State party organization's delegate to their party's national convention, and/or (2) express a preference for their party's presidential nomination.

Presidential Succession: Scheme by which a presidential vacancy is filled.

Presidential Succession Act of 1947: Law specifying the order of presidential succession following the Vice President.

Presiding Officer: Chair.

Preventive Detention: A law which allows federal judges to order that an accused felon be held, without bail, when there is good reason to believe that he or she will commit yet another serious crime before trial.

Prior Restraint: The government cannot curb ideas before they are expressed.

Privatization: The process of returning national enterprises to private ownership.

Privileges and Immunities Clause: Constitution's stipulation (Article IV, Section 2) that all citizens are entitled to certain "privileges and immunities," regardless of their State of residence' no State can draw unreasonable distinctions between its own residents and those persons who happen to live in other States.

Probable Cause: Reasonable grounds, a reasonable suspicion of crime.

Procedural Due Process: The government must employ fair procedures and methods.

Process of Incorporation: The process of incorporating, or including, most of the guarantees in the Bill of Rights into the 14th Amendment's Due Process Clause.

Progressive Tax: A type of tax proportionate to income.

Project Grant: One type of federal grants-in-aid; made for specific projects to states, localities, and private agencies who apply for them.

Proletariat: The working class.

Propaganda: A technique of persuasion aimed at influencing individual or group behaviors to create a particular belief, regardless of its validity.

Property Tax: A tax levied on real and personal property.

Proportional Plan: Proposal by which each presidential candidate would receive the same share of a State's electoral vote as he or she received in the State's popular vote.

Proportional Representation Rule: Rule applied in Democratic primaries whereby any candidate who wins at least 15 percent of the votes gets the number of State Democratic convention delegates based on his or her share of the primary vote.

Proprietary: Organized by a proprietor (a person to whom the king had made a grant of land).

Prorogue: Adjourn, as in a legislative session.

Public Affairs: Those events and issues that concern the people at large, e.g., politics, public issues, and the making of public policies.

Public Agenda: The public issues on which the people's attention is focused.

Public Debt: All of the money borrowed by the government and not yet repaid, plus the accrued interest on that money; also called the national debt or federal debt.

Public-Interest Group: An interest group that seeks to institute certain public policies of benefit to all or most people in this country, whether or not they belong to or support that organization.

Public Opinion: The complex collection of the opinions of many different people; the sum of all their views.

Public Opinion Poll: Devices that attempt to collect information by asking people questions.

Public Policy: All of the goals a government sets and the various courses of action it pursues as it attempts to realize these goals.

Purge: The process of reviewing lists of registered voters and removing the names of those no longer eligible to vote; a purged cation.

Q

Quasi-Judicial: Having to do with powers that are to some extent judicial.

Quasi-Legislative: Having to do with powers that are to some extent legislative.

Quorum: Least number of members who must be present for a legislative body to conduct business; majority.

Quota: A rule requiring certain members of jobs or promotions for members of certain groups.

Quota Sample: A sample deliberately constructed to reflect several of the major characteristics of a given population.

R

Random Sample: A certain number of randomly selected people who live in a certain number of randomly selected places.

Ratification: Formal approval, final consent to the effectiveness of a constitution, constitutional amendment, or treaty.

Reapportionment: Redistribute, as in seats in a legislative body.

Recall: A petition procedure by which voters may remove an elected official from office before the completion of his or her regular term.

Recognition: The exclusive power of a President to recognize (establish formal diplomatic relations with) foreign states.

Redress: Satisfaction of a claim by payment.

Referendum: A process by which a legislative measure is referred to the State's voters for final approval or rejection.

Refugee: One who leaves his or her home to seek protection from war, persecution, or some other danger.

Regional Security Alliances: Treaties in which the U.S. and other countries involved have agreed to take collective action to meet aggression in a particular part of the world.

Register: A record or list of names, often kept by an official appointed to do so.

Registration: A procedure of voter identification intended to prevent fraudulent voting.

Regressive Tax: A tax levied at a flat rate, without regard to the level of a taxpayer's income or ability to pay them.

Repeal: Recall.

Representative Government: System of government in which public policies are made by officials selected by the voters and held accountable in periodic elections; *see democracy*.

Reprieve: An official postponement of the execution of a sentence; *see pardon*.
Reservation: Public land set aside by a government for use by Native American Tribes.
Reserved Powers: Those powers that the Constitution does not grant to the National Government and does not, at the same time, deny to the states.
Resolution: A measure relating to the business of either house, or expressing an opinion; does not have the force of law and does not require the President's signature.
Revenue Sharing: Form of federal monetary aid under which Congress gave a share of federal tax revenue, with virtually no restrictions, to the States, cities, counties, and townships.
Reverse Discrimination: Discrimination against the majority group.
Right of Association: The right to associate with others to promote political, economic, and other social causes.
Right of Legation: The right to send and receive diplomatic representatives.
Rider: Unpopular provision added to an important bill certain to pass so that it will "ride" through the legislative process.
Rule of Law: Concept that holds that government and its officers are always subject to the law.
Runoff Primary: A primary in which the top two vote-getters in the first direct primary face one another.

S

Sales Tax: A tax placed on the sale of various commodities, paid by the purchasers.
Sample: A representative slice of the public.
Search Warrant: A court order authorizing a search.
Secretary: An official in charge of a department of government.
Sectionalism: A narrow-minded concern for, or devotion to, the interest of one section of a country.
Sedition: The crime of attempting to overthrow the government by force, or to disrupt its lawful activities by violent acts.
Seditious Speech: The advocating, or urging, of an attempt to overthrow the government by force, or to disrupt its lawful activities with violence.
Segregation: The separation of one group from another.
Select Committee: Legislative committee created for a limited time and for some specific purpose; also known as a special committee.
Senatorial Courtesy: Custom that the Senate will not approve a presidential appointment opposed by a majority party senator from the State in which the appointee would serve.
Seniority Rule: Unwritten rule in both houses of Congress reserving the top posts in each chamber, particularly committee chairmanships, for members with the longest records of service.
Separate-but-Equal Doctrine: A constitutional basis for laws that separate one group from another on the basis of race (Jim Crow Laws).
Separation of Powers: Basic principles of American system of government, that the executive, legislative, and judicial powers are divided among three independent and coequal branches of government; *see checks and balances*.
Session: Period of time during which, each year, Congress assembles and conducts business.
Shadow Cabinet: Members of opposition parties who watch, or shadow, particular cabinet members, and would be ready to run the government.
Shield Law: A law which gives reporters some protection against having to disclose their sources or reveal other confidential information in legal proceedings.
Single-Interest Group: Political action committees that concentrate their efforts exclusively on one issue.
Single-Issue Parties: Parties that concentrate on only one public policy matter.
Single-Member District: Electoral district from which one person is chosen by the voters for each elected office.
Slander: False and malicious spoken words.
Socialism: A philosophy based on the idea that the benefits of economic activity should be fairly distributed.
Soft Money: Money given to state and local party organizations for voting-related activities.
Sound Bite: Short, sharply focused reports that can be aired in 30 or 45 seconds.
Sovereign: Having supreme power within its own territory; neither subordinate or responsible to any other authority.
Soviets: A government council, elected by and representing the people.

Speaker of the House: The presiding officer of the House of Representatives, chosen by and from the majority party in the House.

Special District: An independent unit created to perform one of more related governmental functions at the local level.

Special Session: An extraordinary session of a legislative body, called to deal with an emergency situation.

Splinter Parties: Parties that have split away from one of the other major parties.

Split-Ticket Voting: Voting for candidates of different parties for different offices at the same election.

Spoils System: The practice of giving offices and other favors of government to political supporters and friends.

Staff Agency: An agency which supports the chief executive and other administrators by offering advice and other assistance in the management of the organization.

Standing Committee: Permanent committee in a legislative body to which bills in a specified subject matter area are referred; *see select committee*.

State: A body of people living in a defined territory who have a government with the power to make and enforce law without the consent of any higher authority.

Statutory Law: A law passed by the legislature.

Straight-Ticket Voting: The practice of voting for candidates of only one party in an election.

Straw Vote: Polls that seek to read the public's mind simply by asking the same question of a large number of people.

Strict Constructionist: One who argues a narrow interpretation of the Constitution's provisions, in particular those granting powers to the Federal Government.

Strong-Mayor Government: A type of government in which the mayor heads the city's administration.

Subcommittee: Division of existing committee that is formed to address specific issues.

Subpoena: An order for a person to appear and to produce documents or other requested materials.

Subsidy: A grant of money, usually from a government.

Substantive Due Process: The government must create fair policies and laws.

Successor: A person who inherits a title or office.

Suffrage: The right to vote.

Surplus: More income than spending.

Symbolic Speech: Expression by conduct; communicating ideas through facial expressions, body language, or by carrying a sign or wearing an armband.

T

Tax: A charge levied by government on persons or property to meet public needs.

Tax Return: A declaration of taxable income and of the exemptions and deductions claimed.

Term: Two-year period of time during which Congress meets.

Terrorism: The use of violence to intimidate a government or society.

Three-Fifths Compromise: An agreement at the Constitutional Convention to count a slave as three-fifths of a person when determining the population of a state.

Township: A subdivision of a country.

Trade Association: Interest groups within the business community.

Transient: Person living in a State for only a short time, without legal residence.

Treason: Betrayal of one's country; in the Constitution, by levying war against the United States or offering comfort or aid to its enemies.

Treaty: A formal agreement between two or more sovereign states.

Trust: A device by which several corporations in the same business work to eliminate competition and regulate prices.

Trustee: Lawmaker who votes based on his or her conscience and judgement, not the views of his or her constituents.

Two-Party System: A political system dominated by two major parties.

U

UN Security Council: A 15-member panel which bears the UN's major responsibility for keeping international peace.

Unconstitutional: Contrary to constitutional provision and so illegal, null and void, of no force and effect.

Uncontrollable Spending: Spending that Congress and the President have no power to change directly.

Unicameral: An adjective describing a legislative party with one chamber; *see bicameral*.

Unitary Government: A centralized government in which all government powers belong to a single, central agency.

Urbanization: The percentage of population of a State living in cities of more than 250,00 people or in suburbs of cities with more than 50,000.

V

Veto: Chief executive's power to reject a bill passed by a legislature; literally (Latin) "I forbid"; *see pocket veto*.

Virginia Plan: Plan presented by delegates from Virginia at the Constitutional Convention; called for a three-branch government with a bicameral legislature in which each state's membership would be determined by its population or its financial support of the central government.

W

Ward: A unit into which cities are often divided for the election of city council members.

Warrant: A court order authorizing, or making legal, some official action, such as a search warrant or an arrest warrant.

Weak-Mayor Government: A type of government in which the mayor shares his or her executive duties with other elected officials.

Welfare: Cash assistance to the poor.

Welfare State: Countries that provide extensive social services at little or no cost to the users.

Whips: Assistants to the floor leaders in the House and Senate, responsible for monitoring and marshaling votes.

Winner-Take-All: An almost obsolete system whereby a presidential aspirant who won the preference vote in a primary automatically won all the delegates chosen in the primary.

Writ of Assistance: Blanket search warrant with which British custom officials had invaded private homes to search for smuggled goods.

Writ of Certiorari: An order by a higher court directing a lower court to send up the record in a given case for review from the Latin meaning "to be more certain."

Writ of Habeas Corpus: A court order which prevents unjust arrests and imprisonments.

Z

Zoning: The practice of dividing a city into a number of districts and regulating the uses to which property in each of them may be put.