

AP U.S. Government and Politics Vocabulary

Constitutional Democracy

Democracy – Government by the people, both directly or indirectly, with free and frequent elections.

Direct democracy – Government in which citizens vote on laws and select officials directly.

Representative democracy – Government in which the people elect those who govern and pass laws; also called a *republic*.

Constitutional democracy – A government that enforces recognized limits on those who govern and allows the voice of the people to be heard through free, fair, and relatively frequent elections.

Constitutionalism – The set of arrangements, including checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, rule of law, due process, and a bill of rights, that requires our leaders to listen, think, bargain, and explain before they act or make laws. We then hold them politically and legally accountable for how they exercise their powers.

Statism – The idea that the rights of the nation are supreme over the rights of the individuals who make up the nation.

Popular consent – The idea that a just government must derive its powers from the consent of the people it governs.

Majority rule – Governance according to the expressed preferences of the majority.

Majority – The candidate or party that wins more than half the votes cast in an election.

Plurality – Candidate or party with the most votes cast in an election, not necessarily more than half.

Theocracy – Government by religious leaders, who claim divine guidance.

Articles of Confederation – The first governing document of the confederated states drafted in 1777, ratified in 1781, and replaced by the present Constitution in 1789.

Annapolis Convention – A convention held in September 1786 to consider problems of trade and navigation, attended by five states and important because it issued the call to Congress and the states for what became the Constitutional Convention.

Constitutional Convention – The convention in Philadelphia, May 25 to September 17, 1787, that debated and agreed upon the Constitution of the United States.

Shays's Rebellion – Rebellion led by Daniel Shays of farmers in western Massachusetts in 1786-1787, protesting mortgage foreclosures. It highlighted the need for a strong national government just as the call for the Constitutional Convention went out.

Bicameralism – The principle of a two-house legislature.

Virginia Plan – Initial proposal at the Constitutional Convention made by the Virginia delegation for a strong central government with a bicameral legislature dominated by the big states.

New Jersey Plan – Proposal at the Constitutional Convention made by William Paterson of New Jersey for a central government with a single-house legislature in which each state would be represented equally.

Connecticut Compromise – Compromise agreement by states at the Constitutional Convention for a bicameral legislature with a lower house in which representation would be based on population and an upper house in which each state would have two senators.

Three-fifths compromise – Compromise between northern and southern states at the Constitutional Convention that three-fifths of the slave population would be counted for determining direct taxation and representation in the House of Representatives.

Federalists – Supporters of ratification of the Constitution and of a strong central government.

Antifederalists – Opponents of ratification of the Constitution and of a strong central government, generally.

The Federalist – Essays promoting ratification of the Constitution, published anonymously by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison in 1787 and 1788.

The Living Constitution

Natural law – God's or nature's law that defines right from wrong and is higher than human law.

Separation of powers – Constitutional division of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, with the legislative branch making law, the executive applying and enforcing the law, and the judiciary interpreting the law.

Checks and balances – Constitutional grant of powers that enables each of the three branches of government to check some acts of the others and therefore ensure that no branch can dominate.

Divided government – Governance divided between the parties, especially when one holds the presidency and the other controls one or both houses of Congress.

Direct primary – Election in which voters choose party nominees.

Initiative – Procedure whereby a certain number of voters may, by petition, propose a law or constitutional amendment and have it submitted to the voters.

Referendum – Procedure for submitting to popular vote measures passed by the legislature or proposed amendments to a state constitution.

Recall – Procedure for submitting to popular vote the removal of officials from office before the end of their term.

Marbury v. Madison - A landmark case in United States law and the basis for the exercise of judicial review in the United States, under Article Three of the United States Constitution. The case resulted from a petition to the Supreme Court by William Marbury, who had been appointed as Justice of the Peace in the District of Columbia by President John Adams shortly before leaving office, but whose commission was not delivered as required by John Marshall, Adams's Secretary of State. When Thomas Jefferson assumed office, he ordered the new Secretary of State, James Madison, to withhold Marbury's and several other men's commissions. Marbury and three others petitioned the Court to force Madison to deliver the commission to Marbury. The Supreme Court denied Marbury's petition, holding that the statute upon which he based his claim was unconstitutional.

Judicial review – The power of a court to refuse to enforce a law or a government regulation that in the opinion of the judges conflicts with the U.S. Constitution or, in a state court, the state constitution.

Writ of mandamus – Court order directing an official to perform an official duty.

Impeachment – Formal accusation by the lower house of legislature against a public official, the first step in removal from office.

Executive order – Directive issued by a president or governor that has the force of law.

Executive privilege – The power to keep executive communications confidential, especially if they relate to national security.

Impoundment – Presidential refusal to allow an agency to spend funds that Congress authorized and appropriated.

American Federalism

Devolution revolution – The effort to slow the growth of the federal government by returning many functions to the states.

Federalism – Constitutional arrangement in which power is distributed between a central government and subdivisional governments, called *states* in the United States. The national and the subdivisional governments both exercise direct authority over individuals.

Dual federalism (layer cake federalism) – Views the Constitution as giving a limited list of powers—primarily foreign policy and national defense—to the national government, leaving the rest to the sovereign states. Each level of government is dominant within its own sphere. The Supreme Court serves as the umpire between the national government and the states in disputes over which level of government has responsibility for a particular activity.

Cooperative federalism – Stresses federalism as a system of intergovernmental relations in delivering governmental goods and services to the people and calls for cooperation among various levels of government.

Marble cake federalism – Conceives of federalism as a marble cake in which all levels of government are involved in a variety of issues and programs, rather than a layer cake, or dual federalism, with fixed divisions between layers or levels of government.

Competitive federalism – Views the national government, 50 states, and thousands of local governments as competing with each other over ways to put together packages of services and taxes. Applies the analogy of the marketplace: we have some choice about which state and city we want to “use”, just as we have choices about what kind of telephone service we use.

Permissive federalism – Implies that although federalism provides “a sharing of power and authority between the national and state governments, the state’s share rests upon the permission and permissiveness of the national government.”

“Our federalism” – Championed by Ronald Reagan, presumes that the power of the federal government is limited in favor of the broad powers reserved to the states.

Unitary system – Constitutional arrangement that concentrates power in a central government.

Confederation – Constitutional arrangement in which sovereign nations or states, by compact, create a central government but carefully limit its power and do not give it direct authority over individuals.

Express powers – Powers the Constitution specifically grants to one of the branches of the national government.

Implied powers – Powers inferred from the express powers that allow Congress to carry out its functions.

Necessary and proper clause – Clause of the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 3) setting forth the implied powers of Congress. It states that Congress, in addition to its express powers has the right to make all laws necessary and proper to carry out all powers the Constitution vests in the national government.

Inherent powers – The powers of the national government in foreign affairs that the Supreme Court has declared do not depend on constitutional grants but rather grow out of the very existence of the national government.

Commerce clause – The clause in the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 1) that gives Congress the power to regulate all business activities that cross state lines or affect more than one state or other nations.

Federal mandate – A requirement the federal government imposes as a condition for receiving federal funds.

Concurrent powers – Powers that the Constitution gives to both the national and state governments, such as the power to levy taxes.

Full faith and credit clause – Clause in the Constitution (Article 4, Section 1) requiring each state to recognize the civil judgments rendered by the courts of the other states and to accept their public records and acts as valid.

Extradition – Legal process whereby an alleged criminal offender is surrendered by the officials of one state to officials of the state in which the crime is alleged to have been committed.

Interstate compact – An agreement among two or more states. Congress must approve most such agreements.

National supremacy – Constitutional doctrine that whenever conflict occurs between the constitutionally authorized actions of the national government and those of a state or local government, the actions of the federal government will prevail.

Preemption – The right of a federal law or a regulation to preclude enforcement of a state or local law or regulation.

Centralists – People who favor national action over action at the state and local levels.

Decentralists – People who favor state or local action rather than national action.

Categorical-formula grants – Congress appropriates funds for a specific purpose, such as school lunches or for building airports and highways. These funds are allocated by formula and are subject to detailed federal conditions, often on a matching basis; that is, the local government receiving the federal funds must put up some of its own dollars. Categorical grants, in addition, provide federal supervision to ensure that the federal dollars are spent as Congress wants.

Project grants – Congress appropriates a certain sum, which is allocated to state and local units and sometimes to nongovernmental agencies, based on applications from those who wish to participate. Examples are grants by the National Science Foundation to universities and research institutes to support the work of scientists or grants to states and localities to support training and employment programs.

State's rights – Powers expressly or implicitly reserved to the states.

Block grants – These are broad state grants to states for prescribed activities—welfare, child care, education, social services, preventive health care, and health services—with only a few strings attached. States have greater flexibility in deciding how to spend block grant dollars, but when the federal funds for any fiscal year are gone, there are no more matching federal dollars.

Direct orders – A technique of Congress to establish federal regulations. Direct orders must be complied with under threat of criminal or civil sanction. An example is the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, barring job discrimination by state and local governments on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin.

Cross-cutting requirements – A technique of Congress to establish federal regulations. Federal grants may establish certain conditions that extend to all activities supported by federal funds, regardless of their source. The first and most famous of these is Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which holds that in the use of federal funds, no person may be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin. More than 60 cross-cutting requirements concern such matters as the environment, historic preservation, contract wage rates, access to government information, the care of experimental animals, and the treatment of human subjects in research projects.

Crossover sanctions – A technique of Congress to establish federal regulations. These sanctions permit the use of federal money in one program to influence state and local policy in another. For example, a 1984 act reduced federal highway aid by up to 15 percent for any state that failed to adopt a minimum drinking age of 21.

Total and Partial Preemption - A technique of Congress to establish federal regulations. Total preemption rests on the national governments power under the supremacy and commerce clauses to preempt conflicting state and local activity. Building on this constitutional authority, federal law in certain areas entirely preempts state and local governments from the field. Sometimes federal law provides for partial preemption in establishing basic policies but requires states to administer them. Some programs give states an option not to participate, but if a state chooses not to do so, the national government steps in and runs the program. Even worse from the state's point of view is *mandatory partial preemption*, in which the national government requires states to act on peril of losing other funds but provides no funds to support state action.

Creative federalism – During the Great Society, the marble cake approach of intergovernmental relations.

Fiscal federalism – Through different grant programs, slices up the marble cake into many different pieces, making it even more difficult to differentiate the functions of the levels of government.

“Necessary and proper” clause – Clause in the Constitution that states that “Congress should have the power to make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers. . . .” This clause is also known as the elastic clause as is a major and significant power of Congress, granting Congress the ability to interpret its lawmaking ability in a broad manner.

Linkage institutions – The means by which individuals can express preferences regarding the development of public policy.

Photo ops – Photo opportunities set up by the candidates. The media have been accused of simplifying complicated political issues by relying on photo ops to explain them to the public.

Sound bites – 30-second statements on the evening news shows. The media have been accused of simplifying complicated political issues by relying on sound bites to explain them to the public.

Political Culture and Ideology

Political culture – The widely shared beliefs, values, and norms about how citizens relate to governments and to one another.

Social capital – Democratic and civic habits of discussion, compromise, and respect for differences, which grow out of participation in voluntary organizations.

Natural rights – The rights of all people to dignity and worth; also called *human rights*.

Democratic consensus – Widespread agreement on fundamental principles of democratic governance and the values that undergird them.

Majority rule – Governance according to the expressed preferences of the majority.

Popular sovereignty – A belief that ultimate power resides in the people.

American dream – The widespread belief that the United States is a land of opportunity and that individual initiative and hard work can bring economic success.

Capitalism – An economic system characterized by private property, competitive markets, economic incentives, and limited government involvement in the production, distribution, and pricing of goods and services.

Suffrage – The right to vote.

Monopoly – Domination of an industry by a single company that fixes prices and discourages competition; also, the company that dominates the industry by these means.

Antitrust legislation – Federal laws (starting with the Sherman Act of 1890) that tried to prevent a monopoly from dominating an industry and restraining trade.

Political ideology – A consistent pattern of beliefs about political values and the role of government.

Liberalism – A belief that government can and should achieve justice and equality of opportunity.

Conservatism – A belief that limited government insures order competitive markets and personal opportunity.

Socialism - An economic and governmental system based on public ownership of the means of production and exchange.

Libertarianism – An ideology that cherishes individual liberty and insists on minimal government, promoting a free market economy, a noninterventionist foreign policy, and an absence of regulation in moral, economic, and social life.

The American Political Landscape

Ethnocentrism – Belief in the superiority of one's nation or ethnic group.

Political socialization – The process by which we develop our political attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Demographics – The study of the characteristics of populations.

Political predisposition – A characteristic of individuals that is predictive of political behavior.

Reinforcing cleavages – Divisions within society that reinforce one another, making groups more homogenous or similar.

Cross-cutting cleavages – Divisions within society that cut across demographic categories to produce groups that are more heterogeneous or different.

Manifest destiny – A notion held by a nineteenth-century Americans that the United States was destined to rule the continent, from the Atlantic the Pacific.

Race - A grouping of human beings with distinctive characteristics determined by genetic inheritance.

Ethnicity – A social division based on national origin, religion, language, and often race.

Gender gap – The difference between the political opinions or political behavior of men and of women.

Fundamentalists – Conservative Christians who (as a group) have become more active in politics in the last two decades and were especially influential in the 2000 presidential election.

Gross domestic product (GDP) – The total output of all economic activity in the nation, including goods and services.

Socioeconomic status (SES) – A division of population based on occupation, income, and education.

Interest Groups

Faction – A term the founders used to refer to political parties and special interests or interest groups.

Pluralism – A theory of government that holds that open, multiple, and competing groups can check the asserted power by any one group.

Interest group – A collection of people who share a common interest or attitude and seek to influence government for specific ends. Interest groups usually work within the framework of government and try to achieve their goals through tactics such as lobbying.

Movement – A large body of people interested in a common issue, idea, or concern that is of continuing significance and who are willing to take action. Movements seek to change attitudes or institutions, not just policies.

Open shop – A company with a labor agreement under which union membership cannot be required as a condition of employment.

Closed shop – A company with a labor agreement under which union membership can be a condition of employment.

Free rider – An individual who does not join a group representing his or her interests yet receives the benefit of the group's influence.

Nongovernmental organization (NGO) – A nonprofit association or group operating outside of government that advocates and pursues policy objectives.

Collective action – How groups form and organize to pursue their goals or objectives, including how to get individuals and groups to participate and to cooperate. The term has many applications in the various social sciences such as political science, sociology, and economics.

Public choice – Synonymous with “collective action,” it specifically studies how government officials, politicians, and voters respond to positive and negative incentives.

Federal Register – An official document, published every weekday, which lists the new and proposed regulations of executive departments and regulatory agencies.

***amicus curiae* brief** – Literally, a “friend of the court” brief, filed by an individual or organization to present arguments in addition to those presented by the immediate parties to a case.

Lobbyist – A person who is employed by and acts for an organized interest group or corporation to try to influence policy decisions and positions in the executive and legislative branches.

Lobbying – Engaging in activities aimed at influencing public officials, especially legislators, and the policies they enact.

Revolving door – Employment cycle in which individuals who work for governmental agencies that regulate interests eventually end up working for interest groups or businesses with the same policy concern.

Issue network – Relationships among interest groups, congressional committees and subcommittees, and the government agencies that share a common policy concern.

Political action committee (PAC) – The political arm of an interest group that is legally entitled to raise funds on a voluntary basis from members, stockholders, or employees to contribute funds to candidates or political parties.

Leadership PAC – A PAC formed by an officeholder that collects contributions from individuals and other PACs and then makes contributions to other candidates and political parties.

Bundling – A tactic in which PACs collect contributions from like-minded individuals (each limited to \$2000) and present them to a candidate or political party as a “bundle,” thus increasing the PAC’s influence.

Soft money – Unlimited amounts of money that political parties previously could raise for party-building purposes. Now largely illegal except for limited contributions to state and local parties for voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts.

Quid pro quo – Something given with the expectation of receiving something in return.

Independent expenditures – The Supreme Court has ruled that individuals, groups, and parties can spend unlimited amounts in campaigns for or against candidates as long as they operate independently from the candidates. When an individual, group, or party does so, they are making an independent expenditure.

Issue advocacy – Unlimited and undisclosed spending by an individual or group on communications that do not use words like “vote for” or “vote against,” although much of this activity is actually about electing or defeating candidates.

527 organization – A political group organized under section 527 of the IRS code that may accept and spend unlimited amounts of money on election activities so long as they are not spent on broadcast ads run in the last 30 days before a primary or 60 days before a general election in which clearly identified candidate is referred to and a relevant electorate is targeted.

Political Parties

Political party – An organization that seeks political power by electing people to office so that its positions and philosophy become public policy.

Nonpartisan election – A local or judicial election in which candidates are not selected or endorsed by political parties and party affiliation is not listed on ballots.

Patronage – The dispensing of government jobs to persons who belong to the winning political party.

Soft money – Money raised in unlimited amounts by political parties for party-building purposes. Now largely illegal except for limited contributions to state or local parties for voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts.

Hard money – Political contributions given to a party, candidate, or interest group that are limited in amounts and fully disclosed. Raising such limited funds is harder than raising unlimited funds, hence the term “hard money.”

Independent expenditure – The Supreme Court has ruled that individuals, groups, and parties can spend unlimited amounts in campaigns for or against candidates as long as they operate independently from the candidates. When an individual, group, or party does so, they are making an independent expenditure.

Honeymoon – Period at the beginning of the new president’s term during which the president enjoys generally positive relations with the press and Congress, usually lasting about six months.

Caucus – A meeting of local party members to choose party officials or candidates for public office and to decide the platform.

Party convention – A meeting of party delegates to vote on matters of policy and in some cases to select party candidates for public office.

Direct primary – Election in which voters choose party nominees.

Open primary – Primary election in which any voter, regardless of party, may vote.

Crossover voting – Voting by member of one party for a candidate of another party.

Closed primary – Primary election in which only persons registered in the party holding the primary may vote.

Proportional representation – An election system in which each party running receives the proportion of legislative seats corresponding to its proportion of the vote.

Winner-take-all system – Election system in which the candidate with the most votes wins.

Minor party – A small political party that rises and falls with a charismatic candidate or, if composed of ideologies on the right or left, usually persists over time; also called a *third party*.

Libertarian party – A minor party that believes in extremely limited government. Libertarians call for a free market system, expanded individual liberties such as drug legalization, and a foreign policy of nonintervention, free trade, and open immigration.

Green party – A minor party dedicated to the environment, social justice, nonviolence, and the foreign policy of nonintervention. Ralph Nader ran as the Green party's nominee in 2000.

Reform party – A minor party founded by Ross Perot in 1995. It focuses on national government reform, fiscal responsibility, and political accountability. It has recently struggled with internal strife and criticism that it lacks an identity.

Realigning election – An election during periods of expanded suffrage and change in the economy and society that proves to be a turning point, redefining the agenda of politics and the alignment of voters within parties.

Laissez-faire economics – Theory that opposes governmental interference in economic affairs beyond what is necessary to protect life and property.

Keynesian economics – Theory based on the principles of John Maynard Keynes, stating that government spending should increase during business slumps and the curve during booms.

Divided government – Governance divided between the parties, as when one holds the presidency and the other controls one or both houses of Congress.

National party convention – A national meeting of delegates elected in primaries, caucuses, or state conventions who assemble once every four years to nominate candidates for president and vice president, ratify the party platform, elect officers, and adopt rules.

Party registration – The act of declaring party affiliation; required by some states when one registers to vote.

Party identification – An informal and subjective affiliation with a political party that most people acquire in childhood.

Dealignment – Weakening of partisan preferences that points to a rejection of both major parties and a rise in the number of independents.

Public Opinion, Participation, And Voting

Public opinion – The distribution of individual preferences or evaluations of a given issue, candidate, or institution within a specific population.

Random sample – In this type of sample, every individual has unknown and random chance of being selected.

Manifest opinion – A widely shared and consciously held view, like support for homeland security.

Political socialization - The process – most notably in families and schools – by which we develop our political attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Attentive public – Those citizens who follow public affairs carefully.

Voter registration – System designed to reduce voter fraud by limiting voting to those who have established eligibility to vote by submitting the proper documents.

Australian ballot – A secret ballot printed by the state.

General election – Elections in which voters elect officeholders.

Primary election – Elections in which voters determine party nominees.

Presidential election – Elections held in years when the president is on the ballot.

Midterm election – Elections held midway between presidential elections.

Turnout – The proportion of the voting age public that votes, sometimes defined as the number of registered voters that vote.

Party identification – An informal and subjective affiliation with a political party that most people acquire in childhood.

Candidate appeal – How voters feel about a candidate's background, personality, leadership ability, and other personal qualities.

Prospective issue voting – Voting based on what a candidate pledges to do in the future about an issue if elected.

Retrospective issue of voting – Holding incumbents, usually the president's party, responsible for their records on issues, such as the economy or foreign policy.

Campaigns and Elections

Winner-take-all system – An election system in which the candidate with the most votes wins.

Single-member district – An electoral district in which voters choose one representative or official.

Proportional representation – Election system in which each party running receives the proportion of legislative seats corresponding to its proportion of the vote.

Electoral college – Electoral system used in electing the president and vice president, in which voters vote for electors pledged to cast their ballots for particular party's candidates.

Safe seat – Elected office that is predictably won by one party or the other, so the success of the party's candidate is almost taken for granted.

Coattail effect – The boost that candidates may get in an election because of the popularity of candidates above them on the ballot, especially the president.

Candidate appeal – The tendency in elections to focus on the personal attributes of a candidate, such as his/her strengths, weaknesses, background, experience, and visibility.

National tide – The inclination to focus on national issues, rather than local issues, in an election campaign. The impact of the national tide can be reduced by the nature of the candidates on the ballot who might have differentiated themselves from their party or its leader if the tide is negative, as well as competition in the election.

Name recognition – Incumbents have an advantage over challengers in election campaigns because voters are more familiar with them, and incumbents are more recognizable.

Caucus – A meeting of local party members to choose party officials or candidates for public office and to decide the platform.

National party convention – A national meeting of delegates elected at primaries, caucuses, or state conventions who assemble once every four years to nominate candidates for president and vice president, ratify the party platform, elect officers, and adopt rules.

Interested money – Financial contributions by individuals or groups in the hope of influencing the outcome of the election and subsequently influencing policy.

Federal Election Commission (FEC) - A commission created by the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act to administer election reform laws. It consists of six commissioners appointed by president and confirmed by the Senate. Its duties include overseeing disclosure of campaign finance information and public funding of presidential elections, and enforcing contribution limits.

Soft money – Contributions to a state or local party for party-building purposes.

Hard money – Donations made to political candidates, party committees, or groups which, by law, are limited and must be declared.

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) – Largely banned party soft money, restored a long-standing prohibition on corporations and labor unions for using general treasury funds for electoral purposes, and narrowed the definition of issue advocacy.

Issue advocacy – Promoting a particular position or an issue paid for by interest groups or individuals but not candidates. Much issue advocacy is often electioneering for or against a candidate, and until 2004 had not been subject to any regulation.

527 organizations – Interest groups organized under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code may advertise for or against candidates. If their source of funding is corporations or unions, they have some restrictions on broadcast advertising. 527 organizations were important in recent elections.

Independent expenditures – Money spent by individuals or groups not associated with candidates to elect or defeat candidates for office.

The Media and American Politics

Mass media – Means of communication that are reaching the public, including newspapers and magazines, radio, television (broadcast, cable, and satellite), films, recordings, books, and electronic communication.

News media – Media that emphasize the news.

Issue advocacy – Promoting a particular position or an issue by interest groups or individuals but not candidates. Much issue advocacy is often electioneering for or against a candidate and, until 2004 had not been subject to regulation.

Political socialization – The process by which we develop our political attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Selective exposure – The process by which individuals screen out messages that do not conform to their own biases.

Selected perception – The process by which individuals perceive what they want to in media messages.

Horse race – A close contest; by extension, any contest in which the focus is on who is ahead and by how much rather than on substantive differences between the candidates.

Congress

Constituents – The residents of a congressional district or state.

Reapportionment – The assigning by Congress of congressional seats after each census. State legislatures reapportion state legislative districts.

Redistricting – The redrawing of congressional and other legislative district lines following the census, to accommodate population shifts and keep districts as equal as possible in population.

Gerrymandering – The drawing of legislative district boundaries to benefit a party, group, or incumbent.

Safe seat – An elected office that is predictably won by one party or the other, so the success of that party's candidate is almost taken for granted.

Incumbent – The current holder of the elected office.

Bicameralism – The principle of a two-house legislature.

Enumerated powers – The powers expressly given to Congress in the Constitution.

Speaker – The presiding officer in the House of Representatives, formally elected by the House but actually selected by the majority party.

Party caucus – A meeting of the members of a party in a legislative chamber to select party leaders and to develop party policy. Called a *conference* by the Republicans.

Majority leader – The legislative leader selected by the majority party who helps plan party strategy, confers with other party leaders, and tries to keep members of the party in line.

Minority leader – the legislative leader selected by the minority party as spokesperson for the opposition.

Whip – Party leader who is the liaison between the leadership and the rank-and-file in the legislature.

Closed rule – A procedural rule in the House of Representatives that prohibits any amendments to bills or provides that only members of the committee reporting the bill may offer amendments.

Open rule – A procedural rule in the House of Representatives that permits floor amendments within the overall time allocated to the bill.

President pro tempore – Officer of the Senate selected by the majority party to act as chair in the absence of the vice president.

Hold – A procedural practice in the Senate whereby a senator temporarily blocks the consideration of the bill or nomination.

Filibuster – A procedural practice in the Senate whereby a senator refuses to relinquish the floor and thereby delays proceedings and prevents a vote on a controversial issue.

Cloture – A procedure for terminating debate, especially filibusters, in the Senate.

Senatorial courtesy – Presidential custom of submitting the names of perspective appointees for approval to senators from the states in which the appointees are to work.

Standing committee – A permanent committee established in a legislature, usually focusing on a policy area.

Special or select committee – A congressional committee created for a specific purpose, sometimes to conduct an investigation.

Joint committee – A committee composed of members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate; such committees oversee the Library of Congress and conduct investigations.

Earmarks – Special spending projects that are set aside on behalf of individual members of Congress for their constituents.

Seniority rule – A legislative practice that assigns the chair of the committee or subcommittee to the member of the majority party with the longest continuous service on the committee.

Conference committee – Committee appointed by the presiding officers of each chamber to adjust differences on a particular bill passed by each in different form.

Delegate – An official who is expected to represent the views of his or her constituents even when personally holding different views; one interpretation of the role of legislator.

Trustee – An official who is expected to vote independently based on his or her judgment of the circumstances; one interpretation of the role of the legislator.

Logrolling – Mutual aid and vote trading among legislators.

Attentive public – Those citizens who follow public affairs closely.

Discharge petition – Petition that, if signed by majority of the House of Representatives' members, will pry a bill from committee and bring it to the floor for consideration.

Rider – A provision attached to a bill – to which it may or may not be related – in order to secure its passage or defeat.

Pocket veto – A veto exercised by the president after Congress has adjourned; if the president takes no action for 10 days, the bill does not become law and does not return to Congress for possible override.

Override – An action taken by Congress to reverse the presidential veto, requiring a two-thirds majority in each chamber.

The Presidency

Parliamentary system – A system of government in which the legislature selects the prime minister or president.

Presidential ticket – The joint listing of the presidential and vice presidential candidates on the same ballot as required by the Twelfth Amendment.

Treaty – A formal, public agreement between the United States and one or more nations that must be approved by two thirds of the Senate.

Executive agreement – A formal agreement between the U.S. president and the leaders of other nations that does not require Senate approval.

Congressional-executive agreement – A formal agreement between a U.S. president and the leaders of other nations that acquires approval by both houses of Congress.

Veto – A formal decision to reject the bill passed by Congress.

Pocket veto – A formal decision to reject a bill passed by Congress after it adjourns – if Congress adjourns during the ten days that the president is allowed in order to sign or veto law, the president can reject the law by taking no action at all.

Take care clause – The constitutional requirement (in Article II, Section 3) that presidents take care that the laws are faithfully executed, even if they disagree with the purpose of those laws.

Inherent powers – Powers that grow out of the very existence of government.

State of the Union Address – The president's annual statement to Congress and the nation.

Impeachment – Formal accusation against a president or other public official, the first step in removal from office.

Executive privilege – The right to keep executive communications confidential, especially if they relate to National Security.

Executive orders – Formal orders issued by the president to direct action by the Federal bureaucracy.

Impoundment - A decision by the president not to spend money appropriated by Congress, now prohibited under Federal law.

Line item veto – Presidential power to strike, or remove, specific items from a spending bill without vetoing the entire package; declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

Chief of staff – The head of the White House staff.

Executive Office of the President – The cluster of presidential staff agencies that help the president carry out his responsibilities. Currently the office includes the Office of Management and Budget, the Council of Economic Advisers, and several other units.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) – Presidential staff the agency that serves as a clearinghouse for budgetary requests and management improvements for government agencies.

Cabinet – Advisory council for the president consisting of the heads of the executive departments, the vice president, and a few other officials selected by the president.

Rally point – A rising public approval of the president that follows a crisis as Americans “rally ’round the flag” and the chief executive.

Mandate – A president’s claim of broad public support.

Cycle of decreasing influence – The tendency of presidents to lose support over time.

Cycle of increasing effectiveness – The tendency of presidents to learn more about doing their jobs over time.

The Federal Administrative System

Bureaucracy – A form of organization that operates through impersonal, uniform rules and procedures.

Bureaucrat – A career government employee.

Department – Usually the largest organization in government with the largest mission; also the highest rank in Federal hierarchy.

Independent agency – A government entity that is independent of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Independent regulatory commission – A government agency or commission with regulatory power whose independence is protected by Congress.

Government corporation – A government agency that operates like a business corporation, created to secure greater freedom of action and flexibility for a particular program.

Senior Executive Service – Established by Congress in 1978 as a flexible, mobile corps of senior career executives who worked closely with presidential appointees to manage government.

Spoils system – A system of public employment based on rewarding party loyalists and friends.

Merit system – A system of public employment in which selection and promotion depend on demonstrated performance rather than political patronage.

Office of Personnel Management (OPM) – Agency that administers civil service laws, rules, and regulations.

Hatch Act – Federal statute barring Federal employees from active participation in certain kinds of politics and protecting them from being fired on partisan grounds.

Implementation – The process of putting a law into practice through bureaucratic rules or spending.

Administrative discretion – Authority given by Congress to the Federal bureaucracy to use reasonable judgment in implementing the laws.

Regulations – The formal instructions that government issues for implementing laws.

Rule-making process – The formal process for making regulations.

Uncontrollable spending – The portion of the Federal budget that is spent on programs, such as Social Security, that the president and Congress are unwilling to cut.

Entitlement programs – Programs such as unemployment insurance, disability relief, or disability payments that provide benefits to all eligible citizens.

Indexing – Providing automatic increases to compensate for inflation.

Oversight – Legislative or executive review of a particular government program or organization. Can be in response to a crisis of some kind or part of routine review.

Central clearance – Review of all executive branch testimony, reports, and draft legislation by the Office of Management and Budget to ensure that each communication to Congress is in accordance with the president's program.

The Judiciary

Judicial review – The power of a court to refuse to enforce a law or government regulation that in the opinion of the judges conflicts with the U.S. Constitution or, in a state court, the state constitution.

Adversary system – A judicial system in which the court of law is a neutral arena where two parties argue their differences.

Criminal law – A law that defines crimes against the public order.

Civil law – A law that governs relationships between individuals and defines their legal rights.

Justiciable dispute – A dispute growing out of an actual case or controversy and that is capable of settlement by legal methods.

Defendant – In a criminal action, the person or party accused of an offense.

Plea bargain – Agreement between a prosecutor and a defendant that the defendant will plead guilty to a lesser offense to avoid having to stand trial for a more serious offense.

Public defender system – Arrangement whereby public officials are hired to provide legal assistance to people accused of crimes who are unable to hire their own attorneys.

Original jurisdiction – The authority of a court to hear a case “in the first instance.”

Appellate jurisdiction – The authority of a court to review decisions made by lower courts.

Court of appeals – A court with appellate jurisdiction that hears appeals from the decisions of lower courts.

Precedent – A decision made by a higher court such as a circuit court of appeals or the Supreme Court that is binding on all other federal courts.

Writ of *habeas corpus* – A court order requiring explanation to a judge why a prisoner is being held in custody.

Senatorial courtesy – Presidential custom of submitting the names of prospective appointees for approval to senators from the states in which the appointees are to work.

Judicial restraint – Philosophy proposing that judges should interpret the Constitution to reflect what the framers intended and what its words literally say.

Judicial activism – Philosophy proposing that judges should interpret the Constitution to reflect current conditions and values.

Stare decisis – The rule of precedent, whereby a rule or law contained in a judicial decision is commonly viewed as binding on judges whenever the same question is presented.

Writ of certiorari – A formal writ used to bring a case before the Supreme Court.

Docket – The list of potential cases that reach the Supreme Court.

***Amicus curiae* brief** – Literally, a “friend of the court” brief, filed by an individual or organization to present arguments in addition to those presented by the immediate parties to a case.

Opinion of the Court – An explanation of the decision of the Supreme Court or any other appellate court.

Dissenting opinion – An opinion disagreeing with a majority in a Supreme Court ruling.

Concurring opinion – An opinion that agrees with the majority in a Supreme Court ruling but differs on the reasoning.

First Amendment Freedoms

Writ of *habeas corpus* – A court order requiring explanation to a judge why a prisoner is being held in custody.

***Ex post facto* law** – Retroactive criminal law that works to the disadvantage of a person.

Bill of attainder – Legislative act inflicting punishment, including deprivation of property, without a trial, on named individuals or members of a specific group.

Due process clause – Clause in the Fifth Amendment limiting the power of the national government; similar clause in the Fourteenth Amendment prohibiting state governments from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

Selective incorporation – The process by which provisions of the bill of rights are brought within the scope of the Fourteenth Amendment and so applied to state and local governments.

Establishment clause – Clause in the First Amendment that states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. The Supreme Court has interpreted this to forbid governmental support to any or all religions.

Vouchers – Money government provides to parents to pay their children's tuition in a public or private school of their choice.

Free exercise clause – Clause in the First Amendment that states that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

Bad tendency test - Interpretation of the First Amendment that would permit legislatures to forbid speech encouraging people to engage in illegal action.

Clear and present danger test – Interpretation of the First Amendment that holds that the government cannot interfere with speech unless the speech presents a clear and present danger that it will lead to evil or illegal acts.

Preferred position doctrine – Interpretation of the First Amendment that holds that freedom of expression is so essential to democracy that governments should not punish persons for what they say, only for what they do.

Nonprotected speech – Libel, obscenity, fighting words, and commercial speech, which are not entitled to constitutional protection in all circumstances.

Libel – Written defamation of another person. For public officials and public figures, the constitutional tests designed to restrict libel actions are especially rigid.

Sedition - Attempting to overthrow the government by force or use violence to interrupt its activities.

Obscenity – Quality or state of a work that taken as a whole appeals to a prurient interest in sex by depicting sexual conduct in a patently offensive way and that lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Fighting words – Words that by their very nature inflict injury on those to whom they are addressed or incite them to acts of violence.

Commercial speech – Advertisements and commercials for products and services; they receive less First Amendment protection, primarily to discourage false and misleading ads.

Prior restraint – Censorship imposed before a speech is made or a newspaper is published; usually presumed to be unconstitutional.

Civil disobedience – Deliberate refusal to obey law or comply with orders of public officials as a means of expressing opposition.

Rights to Life, Liberty, and Property

Naturalization – A legal action conferring citizenship on an alien.

Dual citizenship – Citizenship in more than one nation.

Right of expatriation – The right to renounce one's citizenship.

Property rights – The rights of an individual to own, use, rent, invest in, buy, and sell property.

Contract clause – Clause of the Constitution (Article I, Section 10) originally intended to prohibit state governments from modifying contracts made between individuals; for a while interpreted as prohibiting state governments from taking actions that adversely affect property rights; no longer interpreted so broadly and no longer constrains state governments from exercising their police powers.

Police powers – Inherent powers of state governments to pass laws to protect the public health, safety, and welfare; the national government has no directly granted police powers but accomplishes the same goals through other delegated powers.

Eminent domain – Power of a government to take private property for public use; the U.S. Constitution gives national and state governments this power and requires them to provide just compensation for property so taken.

Regulatory taking – Government regulation of property so extensive that government is deemed to have taken the property by the power of eminent domain, for which it must compensate the property owners.

Due process – Established rules and regulations that restrain government officials.

Procedural due process – Constitutional requirement that governments proceed by proper methods; limits how government may exercise power.

Substantive due process - Constitutional requirement that governments act reasonably and that the substance of the laws themselves be fair and reasonable; limits what the government may do.

Search warrant – A writ issued by a magistrate that authorizes the police to search a particular place or person, specifying the place to be searched and the objects to be seized.

Racial profiling – Police targeting of racial minorities as potential suspects of criminal activities.

Exclusionary rule – Requirement that evidence unconstitutionally or illegally obtained be excluded from a criminal trial.

Immunity – Exemption from prosecution for a particular crime in return for testimony pertaining to the case.

Grand jury – A jury of 12 to 23 persons who, in private, hear evidence presented by the government to determine whether persons shall be required to stand trial. If the jury believes there is sufficient evidence that a crime was committed, it issues an indictment.

Indictment – A formal written statement from a grand jury charging an individual with an offense; also called a *true bill*.

Plea bargain – Agreement between a prosecutor and a defendant that the defendant will plead guilty to a lesser offense to avoid having to stand trial for more serious offense.

Petit jury – A jury of 6 to 12 persons that determines guilt or innocence in a civil or criminal action.

Double jeopardy – Trial or punishment for the same crime by the same government; forbidden by the Constitution.

Community policing – Assigning police to neighborhoods where they walk the beat and work with churches and other community groups to reduce crime and improve relations with minorities.

Equal Rights under the Law

Natural rights - The rights of all people to dignity and worth; also called *human rights*.

Affirmative action – Remedial action designed to overcome the effects of discrimination against minorities and women.

Women's suffrage – The right of women to vote.

Equal protection clause - Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment that forbids any state to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. By interpretation, the Fifth Amendment imposes the same limitation on the national government. This clause is the major constitutional restraint on the power of governments to discriminate against persons because of race, national origin, or sex.

Due process clause – Clause in the Fifth Amendment limiting the power of the national government; similar clause in the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits the state governments from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

White primary – Democratic party primary in the old “one-party South” that was limited to white people and essentially constituted an election; ruled unconstitutional in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944).

Racial gerrymandering – The drawing of election districts so as to ensure that members of a certain race are a minority in the district; ruled unconstitutional in *Gomillion v. Lightfoot* (1960).

Poll tax – Tax required to vote; prohibited for national elections by the Twenty-Fourth Amendment (1964) and ruled unconstitutional for all elections in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966).

Literacy test – Literacy requirements some states imposed as a condition of voting, generally used to disqualify black voters in the South; now illegal.

Majority-minority district – A congressional district created to include a majority of minority voters; ruled constitutional so long as race is not the main factor in redistricting.

Jim Crow laws – State laws formerly pervasive throughout the South requiring public facilities and accommodations to be segregated by race; ruled unconstitutional.

De jure segregation – Segregation imposed by law.

De facto segregation – Segregation resulting from economic or social conditions or personal choice.

Commerce clause – The clause of the Constitution (Article I, Section 8, Clause 3) that gives Congress the power to regulate all business activities that cross state lines or affect more than one state or other nations.

Class action suit – Lawsuit brought by an individual or group of people on behalf of all those similarly situated.

Restrictive covenant – A provision in a deed to real property prohibiting its sale to a person of a particular race or religion. Judicial enforcement of such deeds is unconstitutional.

Making Economic and Regulatory Policy

Public policy – A specific course of action taken by government to achieve a public goal.

Policy agenda – The informal list of issues that Congress and the president consider most important for action.

Distributive policy – A type of policy that provides benefits to all Americans.

Redistributive policy – A type of policy that takes benefits (usually through taxes) from one group of Americans and gives them to another (usually through spending).

Rule – The precise legal definition of how government will implement a policy.

Iron triangle – A policy-making alliance that involves a very strong ties among a congressional committee, an interest group, and a Federal Department or agency.

Issue network – A policy-making alliance among loosely connected participants that comes together on a particular issue, then disbands.

Fiscal policy – Government policy that attempts to manage the economy by controlling taxing and spending.

Monetary policy – Government policy that attempts to manage the economy by controlling the money supply and thus interest rates.

Inflation – A rise in the general price level (and decrease in dollar value) owing to an increase in the volume of money and credit in relation to available goods.

Unemployment – The number of Americans who are out of work but actively looking for a job. The number does not usually include those who are not looking.

Excise tax – Consumer tax on a specific kind of merchandise, such as tobacco.

Deficit – The difference between the revenues raised annually from sources of income other than borrowing and the expenditures of government, including paying the interest on past borrowing.

Tariff – Tax levied on imports to help protect the nation's industries, labor, or farmers from foreign competition. It can also be used to raise additional revenue.

Progressive tax – A tax graduated so that people with higher incomes pay larger fraction of their income than people with lower incomes.

Regressive tax – A tax whereby people with lower incomes pay a higher fraction of their income than people with higher incomes.

National debt – The total amount of money the Federal government has borrowed to finance deficit spending over the years.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) – Presidential staff agency that serves as a clearinghouse for budgetary requests and management improvements for government agencies.

Congressional Budget Office (CBO) – An agency of Congress that analyzes presidential budget recommendations and estimates the cost of proposed legislation.

Sales tax – General tax on sales transactions, sometimes exempting food and drugs.

Value-added tax (VAT) – A tax on increased value of the product at each stage of production and distribution rather than just at the point of sale.

Tax expenditure – Loss of tax revenue due to Federal laws that provide special tax incentives or benefits to individuals or businesses.

Monetarism – A theory that government should control the money supply to encourage economic growth and restrain inflation.

Federal Reserve System – The system created by Congress in 1913 to establish banking practices and regulate currency in circulation and the amount of credit available. It consists of 12 regional banks supervised by the Board of Governors. Often called simply *the Fed*.

Laissez-faire economics – Theory that opposes governmental interference in economic affairs beyond what is necessary to protect life and property.

Keynesian economics - Economic theory based on the principles of John Maynard Keynes stating that government spending should increase during business slumps and be curbed during booms.

Trade deficit – An imbalance in international trade in which the value of imports exceeds the value of exports.

World Trade Organization (WTO) – International organization derived from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that promotes free trade around the world.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – An international trade organization with more than 130 members, including the United States and the People's Republic of China, that seeks to encourage free trade by lowering tariffs and other trade restrictions.

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – Agreement signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico in 1992 to form the largest free trade zone in the world.

Protectionism - Policy of erecting trade barriers to protect domestic industry.

Offshoring – The practice of exporting U.S. jobs to lower paid employees in other nations.

Regulation – Efforts by government to alter the free operation of the market to achieve social goals such as protecting workers and the environment.

Monopoly - Domination of an industry by a single company; also the company that dominates the industry.

Antitrust legislation – Federal laws (starting with the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890) that try to prevent a monopoly from dominating an industry and restraining trade.

Trust – A monopoly that controls goods and services, often in combinations that reduce competition.

Closed shop - A company with a labor agreement under which union membership is a condition of employment.

Union shop – A company in which new employees must join a union within a stated time period.

Labor injunction – A court order forbidding specific individuals or groups from performing certain acts (such as striking) that the court considers harmful to the rights and property of an employer or community.

Collective bargaining – Method whereby representatives of the union and employer determine wages, hours, and other conditions of employment through direct negotiation.

Environmental impact statement – Statement required by Federal law from all agencies for any project using Federal funds to assess the potential affect of the new construction or development on the environment.

Deregulation – A policy promoting cutbacks in the amount of Federal regulation in specific areas of economic activity.

Making Social Policy

Unfunded mandates – Programs that the Federal government requires States to implement without Federal funding.

Entitlements – Programs such as unemployment insurance, disaster relief, or disability payments that provide benefits to all eligible citizens.

Means-tested entitlements – Programs such as Medicaid and welfare under which applicants must meet eligibility requirements based on need.

Public assistance - Aid to the poor; “welfare.”

Social insurance – Programs in which eligibility is based on prior contributions to government, usually in the form of payroll taxes.

Social Security – A combination of entitlement programs, paid for by employer and employee taxes, that includes retirement benefits, health insurance, and support for disabled workers and the children of deceased or disabled workers.

Medicare – National Health Insurance program for the elderly and disabled.

Medicaid – Federal program that provides medical benefits for low-income persons.

Health maintenance organization (HMO) – Alternative means of health care in which people or their employers are charged a set amount and the HMO provides health care and covers hospital costs.

Medical savings account – Alternative means of health care in which individuals make tax-deductible contributions to a special account that can be used to pay medical expenses.

Making Foreign and Defense Policy

Realism – A theory of international relations that focuses on the tendency of nations to operate from self-interest.

Idealism – A theory of international relations that focuses on the hope the nations will act together to solve international problems and promote peace.

Isolationism – The desire to avoid international entanglement altogether.

Internationalism – The belief that nations must engage in international problem solving.

Unilateralism – A philosophy that encourages individual nations to act on their own when facing threats from other nations.

Bush Doctrine – A policy adopted by the Bush administration in 2001 that asserts America's right to attack any nation that has weapons of mass destruction that might be used against U.S. interests at home or abroad.

Multilateralism – A philosophy that encourages individual nations tacked together to solve international problems.

Hard power – The reliance on economic and military strength to solve international problems.

Soft power – The reliance on diplomacy and negotiation to solve international problems.

Theory of deterrence – A theory that is based on creating enough military strength to convince other nations not to attack first.

Weapons of mass destruction – Biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons that can cause a massive number of deaths in a single use.

Normal trade relations – Trade status granted as part of an international trade policy that gives a nation the same favorable trade concessions and tariffs that the best trading partners receive.

National Intelligence Director – The Federal government’s primary intelligence officer, responsible for overseeing all national intelligence agencies and providing advice to the President on terrorist threats.

Bipartisanship – A policy that emphasizes a united front and cooperation between the major political parties, especially on sensitive foreign policy issues.

Economic sanctions – Denial of export, import, or financial relations with the target country in an effort to change that nation’s policies.