


Unit Resources - Glossary Terms from "Foundations of American Government"

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Glossary Terms from: 

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Albany Plan of Union

a plan proposed by Benjamin Franklin in 1754 for cooperation among the thirteen colonies but was never adopted

alien

foreign-born resident, or noncitizen

Anti-Federalists

those persons who opposed the ratification of the Constitution in 1787–1788

Aristotle

(384–322 B.C.) Greek philosopher who viewed the lives of individual humans as linked in a social context; he wrote about various types of government and the obligations of the individual citizen

Articles of Confederation

plan of government adopted by the Continental Congress after the American Revolution; established "a firm league of friendship" among the states but allowed few important powers to the federal government

Bill of Rights

the first 10 amendments to the Constitution

cabinet

an advisory body to the president

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

colonialism

the control of one nation over foreign lands

Commerce and Slave Trade Compromise

an agreement reached at the Constitutional Convention to protect slaveholders; it denied Congress the power to tax the export of goods from any state and, for 20 years, denied Congress the power to act on the slave trade

concurrent powers

those powers that both the national government and the states possess and exercise

confederation

a joining of several groups for a common purpose

Connecticut Compromise

an agreement reached during the Constitutional Convention that Congress should be composed of a Senate, in which each state would be represented equally, and a House, in which each state would be represented based on the state's population

delegate

person with authority to represent others at a conference or convention

delegated powers

those powers, expressed, implied, or inherent, granted to the national government by the Constitution

democracy

form of government where 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

dictatorship

form of government where those who rule cannot be held responsible to the will of the people

due process

doctrine that holds that the government must act fairly and in accord with established rules in all that it does

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

English Bill of Rights

document written by Parliament and agreed to 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

exclusive powers

those powers which 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 power

the power to execute, enforce, and administer laws

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"

Federalists

those persons who supported the ratification of the Constitution in 1787–1788

feudalism

a loosely organized system in which powerful lords divided their land among other, lesser lords

formal amendment

change or addition that becomes part of the written language of the Constitution itself through one of the four methods set forth in the Constitution

government

the institution through which a society makes and enforces its public policies

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

inherent powers

powers the Constitution is presumed to have delegated to the national government because it is the government of a sovereign state within the world community

judicial power

the power to interpret laws, to determine their meaning, and to settle disputes that arise within the society

judicial review

the power of a court to determine the constitutionality of a governmental action

jus sanguinis

the law of blood, which determines citizenship based on the citizenship of one's parents

jus soli

the law of soil, which determines citizenship based on where a person is born

legislative power

the power to make laws and to frame public policies

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

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

mercantilism

an economic and political theory emphasizing money as the chief source of wealth to increase the absolute power of the monarchy and the nation

naturalization

the legal process by which citizens of one country become citizens of another

New Jersey Plan

plan that was 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

oligarchy

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

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

popular sovereignty

a government that exists only with the consent of the governed

presidential government

a form of government in which the executive and legislative branches of the government are separate, independent, and coequal

primary source

original information from an individual who experienced an event

proprietary

organized by a proprietor (a person to whom the king had made a grant of land)

quorum

fewest number of members who must be present for a legislative body to conduct business; majority

ratification

formal approval or final consent to the effectiveness of a constitution, constitutional amendment, or treaty

reserved powers

those powers that the Constitution does not grant to the national government and does not deny to the states

rule of law

concept that the government and its officers are always subject to the law

secondary source

information from an individual who did not experience an event

senatorial courtesy

an unwritten rule that is closely followed in the Senate

separation of powers

basic principle of American system of government that the executive, legislative, and judicial powers are divided among three independent and coequal branches of government

sovereign

when a state has supreme and absolute power within its own territory and can decide its own foreign and domestic policies

state

a body of people, living in a defined territory, organized politically (that is, with a government), and with the power to make and enforce law without the consent of any higher authority

territory

land with known and recognized boundaries

Three-Fifths Compromise

an agreement reached at the Constitutional Convention that a slave would be counted as three-fifths of a person when counting the population of a state

unconstitutional

contrary to constitutional provision and so illegal, null and void, of no force and effect

unitary government

a centralized government in which all government powers belong to a single, central agency

veto

chief executive's power to reject a bill passed by a legislature; literally (Latin) "I forbid"

Virginia Plan

plan presented by the 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 for the federal government