**Political Glossary**

A.

Administrative Agency.

A federal, state, or local government unit established to perform a specific function. Such an agency is created and authorized by a legislative body to administer and enforce specific law(s).

Aristocracy. [From Greek aristos = best and krateein = to rule.]

Rule by an upper class, which claims that it is 'best'. Compare with theocracy.

Authoritarian.

A regime of command and control by the ruler of the government. The government is fully controlled by the ruler. In contrast with a totalitarian state, some social and economic institutions exist outside of government control.

Authority [AGBV, 2005].

The right to decide, command, and act, given to the government by the people who believe it has the right to rule.

Authorization.

A formal declaration by a legislative committee that a certain amount of funding may be available to an agency. Some authorizations terminate after a year. Some are renewable automatically without further congressional action.

B.

Bicameral Legislature.

A legislature that comprises two parts or chambers. The USA Congress is a bicameral legislature; its two chambers are the House of Representatives and the Senate. Compare with unicameral legislature.

C.

Capitalism.

An economic system in which the means of production and distribution are mainly in private ownership for private gain at the expense of the non-owners. Mechanisms include free markets and freedom of contract.

Checks and Balances.

A principle of a system of government whereby each branch of the government can check the actions of the others. As originally conceived, this was true of the government of the USA.

Civil Disobedience.

A nonviolent, public refusal to obey allegedly unjust laws.

Civil Law.

The law regulating conduct between private persons over noncriminal matters. The government provides the forum for the settlement of disputes between private parties in contracts, domestic relations, business interactions, and similar matters.

Common Law.

Judge-made law (originating in England) from decisions shaped according to prevailing customs. Decisions were applied to similar situations and then gradually became common to the nation.

Communism.

A social system in which goods and services are shared communally (as in early Christian communities). A variant of socialism that favors centralized public ownership of the means of production and the sharing of the products of labor.

Concurrent Powers.

Powers held jointly by the national and state governments.

Confederal System.

A league of independent states, each having essentially sovereign powers. The central government created by such a league has only limited powers over the states.

Confederation.

A voluntary association of states; usually limits central authority to foreign affairs and is less permanent than a federation. A political system where states or regional governments retain ultimate authority, except for powers expressly delegated to a central government.

Constitution.

The fundamental law of a nation. Defines the power of the government; specifies offices and their authority.

Court.

A place where justice is administered.

Criminal Law.

Law that defines crimes and provides punishment for violations. In criminal cases, the government is the prosecutor because crimes are against the public order.

D.

Deficit.

The amount by which a required sum of money is short. A national deficit is established by borrowing against the issue of government securities, to allow governmental expenditures to exceed receipts. See also: recession, (budget) surplus, fiscal policy.

Democracy. [From Greek demos = people and krateein = to rule.]

Rule by the people.

Democratic Republic.

A republic in which the representatives elected by the people make and enforce laws and policies.

Devolution.

Transfer of powers from the national or central government to state or local government. This happened in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth century.

Détente [French].

Reduction of discord between nations. Example: U.S.A.-Soviet relations that developed under U.S.A. President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Diplomacy.

The art and science of conducting negotiations between nations.

Direct Democracy [AGBV, 2005].

A system of government where political decisions is made by the people directly, rather than by their elected representatives.

Dominant Culture.

Values, customs, and language of the group(s) that control politics and government in a society.

E.

Equality.

The political idea that all people are of equal worth.

Exports.

Goods and services produced domestically and sold or traded abroad. Contrast with imports.

F.

Fascism.

A totalitarian system of government developed in Italy in 1919 by the Fascistic led by Benito Mussolini, in opposition to Socialism and Communism. Fascism:

Benito Mussolini in Italy, particularly from 1922 to 1943

(Often) Nazi Germany.

Francisco Franco, who led Spanish rebels with the aided of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; overcame the liberal Spanish Republic in the 1936 Spanish Civil War. [To isolate itself from the Spanish Civil War, the U.S.A. broadened its neutrality to civil wars.]

Federal System.

A system of government where power is divided between a central government and regional, or sub divisional, governments. Each of those levels has a domain where its policies are dominant. And each has political or constitutional guarantee of authority.

Federalism.

A political system in which authority is shared between a central government and a state or regional government.

Federation.

An association of states; usually more permanent than a confederation. A political system where states or regional governments retain ultimate authority, except for powers expressly delegated to a central government.

G.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Value of all final goods and services produced during a one-year period.

Government [AGBV, 2005].

The establish form of rule and ultimate authority within a society or a nation. The institution that has authority and that makes decisions to resolve conflicts or allocate benefits and privileges.

I.

Ideology.

A world view or set of comprehensive beliefs about people and the role of government.

Imports.

Goods and services brought into a country from abroad for commercial purposes. Contrast with exports.

L.

Legislature.

That part of government primarily responsible for making laws.

Legitimacy.

Acceptance by the citizens of the right and power of a government or ruler to exercise authority.

Liberal Democracy [AGBV, 2005].

Democratic government that provides for the protection of individual human rights, in order to prevent a majority from oppressing a minority.

Liberalism.

Advocacy of positive government action to improve the welfare of individuals, support for civil rights, and tolerance for political and social change.

Libertarianism.

A political ideology of skepticism or opposition toward most government activities.

Liberty.

The fullest freedom of individuals consistent with the freedom of others in the society.

Limited Government.

A government whose powers are limited, particularly by institutional checks.

M.

Majority.

Over 50 percent.

Majority Rule.

In any political unit, support by the greatest number of citizens selects officials and determines policies.

Monetary Policy.

Manipulation of changes in the amount of money in circulation to adjust credit markets, employment, and the rate of inflation.

Moral Idealism.

Assumption that nations as willing to cooperate and agree on moral standards of conduct.

N.

Nuclear Proliferation.

Development of nuclear weapons by nations that did not have them before.

O.

Order.

A state of peace and security, maintained by protecting citizens from violence and criminal activity.

P.

Parliamentary System [AGBV, 2005].

Representative democracy where political power is vested in an elected legislature. Used in most European countries.

Pluralism.

A social condition where different racial, ethnic, and religious groups are intermingled geographically. Also, a theory of politics as a conflict among interest groups, where political decision making requires bargaining and compromise.

Political Culture.

Beliefs and attitudes of a community or nation toward government and the political process.

Political Socialization.

The process by which citizens learn political attitudes and form opinions about social issues. Important forces in this process are the family and the educational system.

Politics [AGBV, 2005].

The art and science of government and conducting the affairs of a state. Also, the struggle for power within organizations and informal groups that can grant and withhold benefits or privileges. The management of conflict over who will run the government and to what ends.

Political Realism.

Each nation acts principally in its own interests.

Power [AGBV, 2005].

The ability to force someone to change one's behavior, no matter what their wishes.

Popular Sovereignty.

Ultimate political authority is based on the will of the people.

Presidential System [AGBV, 2005].

Representative democracy where political power is vested in separately elected and appointed branches of national government. This system is used in the USA.

Primary [election] [AGBV, 2005].

Election to determine which will be a party's candidate for office. [In Europe, this selection is done by the party leader.]

Recall [AGBV, 2005].

An election procedure that allows the people to vote to dismiss an elected official from state office before his or her term has expired.

Referendum.

Legislative or constitutional measures referred by the legislature to the voters for approval or disapproval.

Representative Democracy [AGBV, 2005].

A form of government in which representatives are elected by the people to make and enforce laws and policies. Political decisions are made by the officials elected by the people. [Some such democracies retain a monarchy in a ceremonial role.]

Republic [AGBV, 2005].

A form of government in which sovereignty rests with the people (or a portion of the people), as opposed to a king or monarch or dictator. This form of Representative Democracy was created by the framers of the US constitution.

S.

Separation of Powers.

The division of governmental functions and powers among different branches of government, so that the various self-interests of each group would moderate those of the others.

Social Contract.

A voluntary agreement among individuals to establish and secure their rights and welfare by creating a government and abiding by its rules.

Socialism.

Public collective ownership and control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.

Also viewed as a political ideology based on strong support for economic and social equality, in a society where major businesses are taken over by the government or by employee cooperatives.

State.

A group of people occupying a particular region and organized under a single government; a nation or a subunit of a nation.

Subsidy.

Aid, usually money or of monetary value, given by the government to support a public service.

In-kind subsidy: Goods or services (food stamps, housing, medical care, etc.) provided by a government to low-income groups.

Supremacy Clause.

The provision in the Constitution that makes the Constitution and the federal laws superior to any conflicting state and local laws.

Supremacy Doctrine.

Doctrine that asserts the priority of national law over state laws. In the USA, this principle is in Article VI of the Constitution, which provides that the supreme law of the land comprises:

the Constitution,

the laws passed by the national government under its constitutional powers, and all treaties.

T.

Tax.

Also: Estate Tax, Federal Corporate Income Tax, Federal Income Tax, and social security tax.

theocracy. [From Greek theos = god and krateein = to rule.]

Rule by a god, which in practice means rule by a priesthood. No separation of church and state. Compare with aristocracy.

Totalitarian.

A regime of command by the government and obedience by the citizens. The regime controls all aspects of political and social life (as in George Orwell's 1984). In contrast with an authoritarian state, all social and economic institutions are under government control.

U.

Unicameral Legislature.

A legislature that comprises a single part or chamber. In the USA (early 21st century) only the state of Nebraska has a unicameral legislature. Compare with bicameral legislature.

Unitary System.

A centralized governmental system where local or regional governments exercise only the powers that the central government gives them.