

iCitizen

Civic Literacy for Young Americans



HSLDA'S
GENERATION  **JOSHUA**

Glossary

Absentee ballot: A paper ballot requested by someone who cannot vote in person on Election Day. Voters must submit their absentee ballots by a certain date in order for their votes to be counted in the election results.

Ambassador: The head of an embassy, and the highest diplomatic person representing their nation to another nation.

Amendment: An official change to a document by adding, deleting, or altering text.

American exceptionalism: The idea held by some Americans that our country stands out as a moral beacon, a city on a hill, and an example to the world of how a society should function.

Antifederalists: During the founding era of our country, those who supported state rights over a strong central government. They generally argued against ratifying the Constitution.

Apolitical: Not political in nature.

Appellate court: A court that hears appeals from lower courts.

Appellate review: The hearing of appeal cases.

Article I courts: Special courts that are derived from Article I of the Constitution.

Article III courts: Courts established through Article III of the Constitution, including the Supreme Court and most federal courts.

Associate justices: Members of the Supreme Court who are not the chief justice.

Autocracy: A system in which all political power belongs to one person.

Ballot access: The process of determining who can appear on an election ballot.

Bias: A set of personal convictions and opinions that influence a person's presentation of a subject.

Bicameralism: Literally means *two houses*. Congress is bicameral since it has two chambers, a House of Representatives and a Senate.

Bill: A proposal that is drafted for the purpose of making a law (much like a joint resolution). A bill is used for proposing anything that does not fall under the category of a joint resolution. In order to become law, a bill must pass both houses of Congress and be signed by the president.

Bill of Rights: The first 10 amendments to the United States Constitution.

Bourgeois: The property owners in class warfare, as described in classic communist literature.

Cabinet: A group of trusted advisors to the president.

Campaign: An organized effort by a group of people to persuade people to elect a given candidate or enact a particular policy proposal.

Canvassing: See "Literature drops."

Capitalism: A socioeconomic system based on the recognition of individual rights, specifically property rights, in which most property is privately owned rather than publicly owned by the government.

Caucus: A method of candidate selection in which voters select delegates to advance to a meeting. At the meeting, more delegates are selected for the next level of meetings. Eventually the delegates are narrowed to a small pool at the highest meeting level, the state convention. The delegates chosen at the state convention attend the party's national convention, where they—together with the delegates from the other states—ultimately decide the party's presidential candidate.

Centrists: Those who do not strongly identify with conservative or liberal views as a whole, but may embrace isolated or moderated tenets of either.

Chair: The leader of a committee or subcommittee, usually elected to the position based on experience and seniority.

Checks and balances: A check is when one branch of government monitors another branch's actions to make sure they are constitutional. A balance is when branches of government have competing interests. Checks and balances is a foundational principle of American government.

Chief justice: The leading member of the Supreme Court.

Citizens: U.S. citizens are people born in the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, or born to United States citizens.

Closed primary: An election held within a party, in which only registered voters who have declared their affiliation with the party may vote, for the purpose of choosing a candidate for the general election.

Committee: A committee is a select group of representatives or senators that decide the fate of a bill—whether it is moved on to whole-chamber debate or dies. A committee can debate a bill, amend it, pass it to the floor for a vote, or table it.

Committee of the Whole: A meeting of the entire House under committee rules for the consideration of a bill.

Common property resources: Resources that are not owned by any particular person, such as fish in the ocean or a cubic foot of air.

Communism: An economic system that advocates the common ownership of all property throughout the state. Popularized by Karl Marx and his book, *The Communist Manifesto*.

Comparative politics: The study of different structures of government.

Concurrent resolution: A type of resolution that must pass both houses of Congress, but does not go to the president. Concurrent resolutions are used for five main purposes: (1) to establish congressional budgets, (2) to authorize use of the Capitol rotunda for a ceremony, (3) to create a new joint committee of Congress, (4) to give Congress's opinion on a matter (without making a law), and (5) to accomplish anything requiring the action of both chambers.

Conscientious objection: The legal way for a person to avoid participation in military service on religious or ethical grounds.

Constitution: A document that embodies the principles of a people and outlines the structure and limitations of a government to protect the people's rights.

Consul: The head of a consulate.

Consulate: A diplomatic mission, smaller than a regular embassy and offering fewer services.

Cooperative federalism: The system in which the states still have the final say in some areas of governance, but the national government is the ultimate authority.

County government: A step above municipal government. Each of the 50 states is divided into counties (also known as parishes or boroughs) covering specific geographic areas, which encompass and oversee several municipalities.

Deficit: The gap formed when more money is spent than is received in revenue.

Demand: The amount of a good or service that people want to purchase.

Democracy: A government in which the people hold the power to govern. In a pure democracy, the people govern themselves by direct vote on every issue.

Diplomacy: A government's establishment and maintenance of international relations.

Diplomatic ties: Official relations with other nations.

Diplomats: Members of the State Department who maintain relationships with other countries and their diplomats.

Direct governance: Citizens exercising political power by directly voting on each issue.

Dissenting opinion: A nonbinding opinion written by a justice of the Supreme Court in opposition to the majority opinion.

Divided government: A situation in which one party controls the presidency, while another controls one or both houses of Congress.

Doves: "Dove" is a nickname for internationalists, highlighting their emphasis on using diplomatic means over military force to maintain peace between nations.

Dual federalism: A system of government in which states govern issues that directly affect the people, and the federal government deals mainly with foreign affairs. This system was in effect until the Civil War.

Due Process Clause: Clause in the 14th Amendment that applied the Bill of Rights to the states, protecting citizens' rights from being threatened by their state governments.

Economic and Social Council: The United Nations agency that helps the General Assembly by gathering information, talking with member nations about economic and social cooperation and development, and making recommendations.

Economics: The production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

Economy: Economics occurring in a particular geographic region.

Electoral College: The system by which we elect a president, involving electors chosen to represent the people in their state. The votes of the electors, not the popular vote, determine who becomes president.

Electors: Members of the Electoral College, who are elected by the members of their states and who cast votes for the president and vice president.

Embassy: A permanent diplomatic mission.

Eminent domain: The government's power to convert private property into public.

Enactment clause: The final portion of a bill, which explains when the bill will take effect if it is passed. Enactment dates are generally more than 90 days after the passage of the bill.

Equal Protection Clause: The clause in the 14th Amendment that requires states to apply their laws equally to all people within their respective jurisdictions.

Equilibrium: A balance between supply and demand.

Executive branch: The president and the president's agencies, which execute (enforce) the laws Congress makes.

Executive orders: Orders given by the president of the United States that direct policy for the executive branch.

Exit poll: An election poll taken as voters leave a polling place.

Exploratory committees: Committees formed to identify funding sources and evaluate whether candidates have the personal commitment and sufficient party backing to run for president.

Export: To send goods made in America to other countries.

Factions: James Madison called a faction "a number of citizens . . . who are united and actuated by a common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."

Federal holidays: Official holidays specifically recognized by the government for observation as a nation.

Federalism: Federalism refers to the structure of power sharing and power separation between the federal and state governments. The balance of power between the federal and state governments changed after the Civil War.

Federalists: During the founding era, those who supported a strong federal (central) government. They argued for ratification of the Constitution.

Federal Reserve: The central bank of the United States, which serves as the government's banker (dealing with payments, taxes, government payroll checks, and fiscal policy).

Fiscal conservatives: Fiscal conservatives focus on an economic policy of restraint that respects the ownership of private property, emphasizes low taxes with little or no government debt, and encourages a flourishing free market.

Fiscal liberals: Fiscal liberals see wealth as a public good, something to be shared in common and redistributed to make everyone's financial standing more equal.

Fiscal policy: The spending of government revenue collected from taxes to effect a desired economic outcome.

Foreign policy: Official action or attitude toward another nation.

Foreign service officers: Diplomats who serve in official diplomatic mission facilities such as embassies and consulates.

Fractional reserve banking: A form of banking in which banks hold only a fraction of the money deposited by customers.

General Assembly: The assembly of all member states of the United Nations.

Global economy: The world as one giant economic system.

Government: An institution or political body that has the power to make and enforce laws over a certain group of people, territory, or collection of property.

Government Printing Office: Prints legislative bills and distributes copies to each representative or senator.

Hawks: Nickname for interventionists because of their willingness to use the military at a moment's notice to resolve tension between nations.

Hegemon: A country that exercises great influence over other countries without directly ruling or having political authority over them.

Hegemony: A Greek word signifying leadership or influence. It refers to an entity that exerts indirect influence over others.

Hopper: A box under the oversight of the clerk of the House or Senate, into which new legislative proposals are placed.

Host country: A country that hosts an American embassy or consulate and allows the State Department to promote American values within its borders.

“I Have a Dream”: Speech given by African-American civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., advocating equal social treatment for all people regardless of skin color.

Illegal aliens: Also known as *illegal immigrants* or *undocumented aliens*; people who cross national borders and reside in the U.S. in a way that violates our immigration laws.

Impeachment: The process by which a president can be removed from office.

Import: To bring goods made in one country into another country.

Inalienable rights: Certain basic freedoms that God gave every human.

Inauguration: The ceremony in which the president-elect takes the oath of office and assumes the role of president.

Incentives: Benefits for buyers that make them willing to pay for goods or services.

Independent cities: Cities that operate outside the jurisdiction of any county government. There are just over 40 independent cities in the United States—mostly in Virginia.

Independents: Individuals who are not affiliated with any political party.

Indirect governance: Citizens exercising political power through representatives they elect to make political decisions on their behalf.

Inflation: A situation in which more money is printed than can be backed by gold.

Initiative: In an initiative, voters sign a petition asking for a specific law to be made. If enough people sign the petition, then voters will be given the chance to vote on the law proposal. If a majority (more than half) of the votes are in favor of the law, it goes into effect.

Interest rates: The Federal Reserve sets the rates that banks may charge or give as interest on loans or bank accounts.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS): The government collection agency responsible for enforcing tax laws.

International Court of Justice: The United Nations' judicial body, responsible for hearing and deciding disputes among nations.

Internationalists: People who think America should maintain its position as world superpower to ensure global stability. They seek to use diplomatic means as their primary tool instead of military force.

International relations: Relationships between nations.

Interventionists: People who believe that America's foreign policy should be based on self-interest, meaning that all diplomatic and military endeavors should be decided on what is best for America.

Isolationism: The idea that America should totally isolate itself from the rest of the world and not engage in international trade or be party to any treaties.

Joint committee: A committee composed of members from both chambers of Congress.

Joint resolution: Used to make national law. A joint resolution is traditionally used (1) to amend the Constitution, (2) for continuing appropriations, (3) for the purpose of disapproving of executive actions or federal agency regulations, or (4) to declare war. It must pass both houses of Congress and be presented to the president in order to become law.

Judicial branch: Composed of the Supreme Court and federal court system, this branch deals with court cases of national or constitutional importance.

Judicial pragmatism: The theory that the Constitution is a “living document” and that its meaning can adapt to modern political and cultural viewpoints.

Judicial review: The process by which the judicial branch evaluates the constitutionality of laws.

Jury: The job of a jury is to determine, based on the evidence, whether a person is guilty of the charges brought against them.

Justice system: The network of state and federal courts.

Laffer curve: Named for its originator, Arthur Laffer, the Laffer curve posits a relationship between government revenue and taxation.

Lame duck period: The time between an election and an inauguration, which was shortened by the 20th Amendment. The *lame duck effect* is the tendency of outgoing presidents and Congress to do nothing during the time period.

Legislation: A matter of business for or under consideration by a legislative body—for Congress, usually a bill.

Legislative branch: The lawmaking part of government; Congress.

Liberty Enlightening the World: The official name of the Statue of Liberty.

Literature drops: Door-to-door distribution of campaign brochures to garner support for a candidate, or door-to-door voter registration.

Majority leader: The head of the majority party. In the House, the majority leader is second to the Speaker of the House. In the Senate, the majority leader holds the most powerful position and is that chamber’s de facto leader, since the U.S. vice president rarely presides.

Majority opinion: A ruling of the Supreme Court on which at least five of the nine justices agree.

Majority party: In a chamber of Congress, the political party with the greatest number of representatives or senators. The majority party holds more political power, and members of this party chair most of the committees.

Margin of error: An estimate of the accuracy of a sample. Generally, it is plus or minus 3%.

Market: The arena in which economic exchanges take place.

Military draft: A forced conscription of young, able-bodied men for military service.

Minority leader: The highest-ranking member of the minority party.

Minority party: The political party with the smaller number of representatives or senators.

Miranda warning: The warning police must read to suspects before arresting them, advising them of their Fifth Amendment rights.

Monetary policy: The set of strategies the Federal Reserve uses to effect economic change.

Monroe Doctrine: The doctrine stated by President James Monroe in 1823 that the Americas were closed to further European colonization.

Muckraker journalism: A form of journalism prominent in the early 1900s in which journalists writing for popular magazines investigated government organizations and powerful industries looking for sensational material.

Municipality: Government at the town or city level; the most local form of government.

Nationals: Natives of certain American territories (such as American Samoa); while they do not have the same political privileges of U.S. citizens, they are guaranteed the same legal protections as citizens.

Natural-born citizens: People who are born in the United States or on a U.S. facility overseas, such as a military base.

Naturalized citizens: People born in foreign countries who become U.S. citizens by going through a naturalization process.

Natural rights: The political theory that people are born with certain inherent rights.

Neutrality: A neutral stance towards all nations, favoring none.

“The New Colossus”: The poem by Emma Lazarus posted inside the Statue of Liberty, featuring the line, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

New Deal: The New Deal was a two-part bundle of programs created by Franklin Roosevelt’s presidential administration to provide immediate relief and economic recovery from the Great Depression, and to implement reforms to prevent such a disaster from happening again.

New England towns: Governing bodies that exercise county government powers.

New media: A form of media that emphasizes on-demand news, interactive content, and the opportunity for dialogue and participation, usually via the internet.

Noninterventionists: People who believe that America should not be involved in global affairs and should instead focus on domestic issues.

Nonpartisan: Having to do with issues that transcend party lines and do not demand specific party responses.

Nonresident aliens: Citizens of other countries who are visiting or passing through U.S. territories, such as tourists.

Open primary: A primary in which all registered voters in a state—regardless of party affiliation—may vote, but only if they have not voted in another primary.

Original intent: A theory that seeks to interpret the Constitution from the mindset of those who originally wrote it.

Original jurisdiction: The power of a court to hear a case for the first time, as opposed to appellate jurisdiction, in which a court hears a case after it has been heard by other courts.

Pacifism: Belief that war is never acceptable and that conflicts should be solved through nonviolent means.

Party whip: In each chamber of Congress, each party has a majority whip or minority whip—a representative or senator who makes sure party members vote according to the preferences of party leadership. A whip is often helped by a team of deputy whips.

Petition for certiorari: A request that a state supreme court or the U.S. Supreme Court hear a case.

Phone banking: A campaign activity in which volunteers call lists of potential voters and encourage them to vote for their candidate.

Platform: The aims and principles of a political party.

Pocket veto: When a president does not sign or veto a bill, and Congress adjourns within 10 days of sending the bill to the president's desk; the bill loses its chance to become law.

Political action committees (PACs): Organizations created to campaign for or against political candidates, ballot initiatives, and legislation.

Political dissent: Any expression designed to convey dissatisfaction with or opposition to the policies of a governing body.

Political parties: Groups of like-minded people who organize to attain political influence and to put candidates who represent their viewpoints into office.

Politics: How people make choices for a community when they disagree.

Pollsters: People who conduct public opinion polls.

Poll tax: A tax requiring citizens to pay for the privilege of voting.

Popular vote: The tally of all votes cast by the people.

Preamble: The opening lines of a document that state its purpose.

Precinct: Each state is divided into voting districts or precincts. A citizen may only vote at a designated polling place within his or her precinct.

President of the Senate: The vice president of the United States, who is also the head of the Senate.

President pro tempore: The officer who takes the place of the vice president when he or she is unable to preside over the Senate.

Profit: The gain in wealth a producer earns on his or her product.

Progressives: At the end of the 19th century, people who advocated social and economic change (progress). They were successful in effecting a number of political changes, including several constitutional amendments.

Prohibition: A policy instituted by the 18th Amendment, making the sale of alcohol illegal.

Proletariat: The working class, as defined by communist thought.

Proportional representation: Representation that is proportional to the population of each state.

Protectionism: Strong support of domestic industry over foreign production, through tariffs and taxes.

Proxy wars: Wars fought through proxies, as during the Cold War, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union never directly engaged, but fought through countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan.

Public good: A good, service, or property that is provided by the government, not by the market, for the public's benefit.

Public opinion polls: Surveys of public opinion concerning a candidate or issue.

Public policy: The political issues that occupy the public's mind, whether the economy, immigration, terrorism, abortion, or the environment.

Public property: Land or real estate owned by the government, including parks, roads, libraries, and most government buildings.

Quotas: Restrictions on the numbers of goods that can be imported.

Ratify: To officially adopt in the legislature.

Recession: A period when the economy stops growing or shrinks.

Referendum: A law passed by a state legislature and then sent to the voters for their acceptance or rejection. Like an initiative, the referendum passes or fails based on a majority vote.

Republic: A type of representative government in which those who hold the right to vote possess sovereign power. Instead of all citizens governing directly by voting on every issue, citizens elect representatives who are responsible for carrying out the administration of the government according to the law.

Resident aliens: Citizens of other countries who obtain legal status to live in the U.S. through a visa or residence permit that regulates the terms of their employment and the length of their stay.

Resolution: Also known as a "simple resolution," this type of legislation addresses matters that are entirely the prerogative of either the House of Representatives or the Senate. Simple resolutions are used to make rules within one house or to express a single house's sentiments (for example, to congratulate people on accomplishments or offer condolences). A simple resolution does not go to the other house of Congress and is not presented to the president for action.

Rule of law: The foundational principle in American government that a written document (the law)—not a person—is the supreme authority. No one, not even the president, is above the law.

Sample: The number of people surveyed in a public opinion poll.

School districts: Local entities that oversee public education; part of most state governments.

Secretariat: A United Nations agency that carries out certain duties for other U.N. bodies; it provides much of the research, information, and studies used in U.N. meetings.

Secretary of state: The head of the State Department and the chief diplomat of the United States.

Security Council: The U.N. council responsible for global peacekeeping and security. It is made up of five permanent members and 10 nonpermanent members.

Select committee: A select committee is formed for a specific purpose, usually because an existing standing committee doesn't have the scope to appropriately consider a piece of legislation or conduct a hearing or investigation. Select committees can be permanent or temporary.

Self-government: The principle of people governing themselves without external pressures to ensure that they follow law.

Separation of powers: In American government, the idea that the powers of government should be apportioned between separate departments to prevent the accumulation of all power into one hand.

Sign waving: The placing of volunteers on well-traveled street corners to hold signs promoting a candidate to passing pedestrians and drivers.

Simple majority: More than 50% of the vote. In the House, this is 218 votes out of a possible 435. In the Senate, it is 51 votes.

Social conservatives: Emphasize respect for all human life and for the integrity of the traditional family unit of a married mother and father.

Social contract: Theory of governance holding people originally lived in a state of freedom in which each man was responsible for himself. Then, man created government in order to provide for needs that he could not fulfill himself. In exchange for the order and protection that government provides, people agree to obey the government's authority.

Socialism: A milder form of communism, socialism often adheres to communist ideas of property ownership without embracing its revolutionary policies.

Social liberals: People who hold to the belief that people is basically good and that morality is private, not public, and should not be regulated by the government.

Society: An organized group of individuals living within particular geographic boundaries.

Sovereignty: The independence of a country to make its own laws and craft its own policies.

Speaker of the House: The head of the House of Representatives.

Special committee: While considered a separate category of committee from select committees, special committees have no real difference in form or function from select committees. "Special committee" and "select committee" are often used interchangeably.

Special districts: Organized entities authorized by state law to provide specific services; sometimes known as boards, commissions, or authorities.

Special interest groups (SIGs): Groups of people organized around common interests for the purpose of lobbying for policies favorable to those interests.

Sponsor: The representative or senator who introduces a legislative proposal in the House or Senate.

Standing committee: Permanent committee that handles important ongoing issues. Standing committees are the most common category of committee.

Structuralist: A theory that interprets the Constitution on the basis of its main structural provisions, such as federalism and the separation of powers.

Subsidize: The partial payment of production costs by the government, which artificially lowers domestic prices below that of imported goods.

Supply: The economic principle that people will produce a good as long as the cost of production is less than the price they receive in exchange for it.

Supply-side economics: An economic theory that economic growth occurs when there are fewer barriers to market suppliers (less government control over how and what they supply and more money for them to invest in their products).

Supreme Court: The highest court in the land.

Table: To lay aside a bill so that it will not be voted on.

Tariffs: Taxes levied on businesses for imported goods.

Textualist: A theory of constitutional interpretation that looks only at the text of the Constitution and nothing else (such as the writer's intent or cultural concerns).

Theocracy: A form of government under the direct rule of God.

Third parties: Any political parties other than the two dominant ones.

Tomb of the Unknowns: A tomb at Arlington National Cemetery housing the remains of an unknown soldier from each world war and the Korean War.

Totalitarian regime: The state holds ultimate power over everything; citizens have little or no freedom of choice since the government controls every aspect of their lives (economic, social, religious, etc.).

Town meeting: A unique type of municipal government in which residents of a town come together regularly to make decisions rather than leaving the town's administration up to an elected council. This is an example of direct democracy at work. Also called a "town hall."

Township governments: Some states have township governments, which are similar to county governments.

Uniform Holidays Act: An act of Congress in 1971 changing the official dates of several federal holidays to Mondays for the sake of creating three-day weekends.

Unions: A union is an organization of workers in a given field dedicated to advocating their rights and protecting the integrity of their line of work.

United Nations (U.N.): Founded in 1945 to help nations cooperate in the global advancement of human rights, peace, international law, and economic and social conditions.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A document meant to define human rights and serve as a standard for U.N. member states.

Veto: When the president refuses to approve a bill or joint resolution, he or she vetoes it to prevent it from being passed into law. Congress can override a veto by a two-thirds vote of both chambers.

Visa: A residence permit that regulates a resident alien's terms of employment and length of stay.

Volunteerism: An aspect of American culture in which people volunteer to perform services that benefit society.

Voter registration: The process of registering to vote. It is mostly left to the states to regulate.

Winner-take-all: A system in which the winner of the popular vote in a state wins all of its electors in the Electoral College.

Women's suffrage: Women's right to vote, established with the 19th Amendment.

Write-in candidates: Candidate who do not appear on the ballot; voters must write them in. Only allowed in some states.

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