

**A Dictionary
of Concepts on
American Politics**

James B. Whisker

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American Politics***

James B. Whisker
West Virginia University

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Preface

No topic of political science is more adequately covered than American government. Most textbooks are quite good and, as subsequent editions appear, become even better if only because of the stiff competition they encounter. A valuable insight or new approach is seldom ignored and significant new literature on any institution of national government is almost immediately incorporated. Aids to learning such as narratives, case studies, contemporary methodologies, cartoons, and road maps, enhance the presentation of material.

However, there is an urgent need for a concentrated primer on the main ideas, events, concepts, and institutions of American government. This need is all the more acute when texts offer points of view and narratives to the near exclusion of a basic discussion of government. My purpose in this dictionary is to provide the student with a readable and useful source book that, in as little space as possible, tells what an idea, concept, event, or institution is and why it is important.

All of us who teach American national government can and do offer overviews and perspectives on the concerns that shape the American political tradition. This is essentially the “profess” part of being a professor. I believe that we have an obligation to place our own viewpoints before students in the free marketplace of ideas. Certainly, most of our textbooks offer such perspectives.

Still, many of us have the definite feeling that the basics are often neglected. We know and understand American national government so well that, at times, we pass over a fundamental idea that is and remains

unclear in the minds of our students. This book is aimed at that audience. If students need to know precisely what an idea is or what an institution does, they may look it up here.

There are several techniques for organizing a dictionary of this kind. One can organize it thematically as I have chosen to do, or one may simply list the terms alphabetically, as some other dictionaries have done. In choosing the general topic headings I have risked creating an organizational framework that might not correspond to the instructor's or to that of the text being used. But certain general themes, such as the presidency, Congress, and the courts, are almost universally accepted.

The instructor who assigns this dictionary as "required" or as "recommended" will likely suggest how its chapters correspond to the class needs in the syllabus. Additionally, an index is provided. It is not unusual for a teacher to recall or to anticipate a term from another section out of normal sequence. The student who wishes more information or a refresher may look for the term in the general index.

It is possible to teach a course in American government from a dictionary alone. In that instance, the instructor may choose to offer his or her own narrative and perspective, grounding the student in the basics from the dictionary.

Not all of the entries in this volume may be considered vital or important. No attempt has been made to rank them according to importance. Because of the wide diversity of books and teaching methods, I have tried to be inclusive rather than exclusive. I welcome suggestions from students and professors alike on additions to the book.

Often agencies have multiple purposes and acts, and treaties and resolutions have many clauses. I have only identified the most important portions of the concepts concerning them. One might discuss the Budget and Impoundment Control Act in several places and with different emphases. In discussing the Congress, the emphasis might be placed on the creation of the powerful Congressional Budget Office, whereas in teaching the presidency one might point out the attempts to control the impoundment of monies. I have reduced the duplication of entries and have provided cross-references throughout the book. The actual choice of placement of entries is, for the most part, arbitrary.

In teaching our courses, both primary and advanced, most of us encourage discussion within our classes. The best type of discussion is one that is based on fundamental knowledge of the ideas and concepts of American government and on an understanding of its functions and institutions. The aim of this dictionary is to provide such knowledge and understanding.

I was guided in my work by the authors of prior dictionaries and by the authors of the many American government textbooks available. I based my choices of terms on those previously published materials, noting especially those concepts that recur in all or nearly all of the standard ones. However, no list of terms is final or complete. I thank those who read my typescript and provided suggestions for improving it, especially those who suggested the addition of terms I had initially overlooked. In this vein, my special appreciation goes to my editor, Wayne Anderson of Wiley and his reviewers, George A. Schutte of San Diego City College and Richard H. Foster of Idaho State University. Of course, I alone accept full and complete responsibility for errors.

James B. Whisker

Contents

1	<i>Political Ideas</i>	1
2	<i>The Founding of the Republic</i>	20
3	<i>Federalism</i>	31
4	<i>Politics and Political Parties</i>	47
5	<i>The Presidency</i>	75
6	<i>The Bureaucracy</i>	95
7	<i>Congress</i>	110
8	<i>The Court System</i>	136
9	<i>Civil Liberties and Civil Rights</i>	158
10	<i>Taxation and Fiscal Policy</i>	194
11	<i>International and Military Affairs</i>	212
12	<i>State and Local Government</i>	231
	<i>The Declaration of Independence</i>	247
	<i>The Constitution</i>	251
Index		269

Political Ideas

Absolutism: Absolutist governments exist where democracies have either not been developed or where they have failed. Such governments have almost totally unrestrained political powers given to single individuals, such as dictators or kings, or to single political parties that are rigidly controlled by elitist groups. There are few, if any, rights guaranteed to citizens over and against government.

Accountability: In modern, democratic states we believe that leaders are responsible and accountable to the people. The people as the electorate have placed leaders in office and they have a right to know how these leaders have fulfilled their positions of public trust. Closely tied to accountability is the concept of placing all men, leaders included, under the control of the law. When the Nixon administration fell, it was because it had failed to be limited by the law and be accountable to those who had placed it in power.

Alienation: First used by Proudhon and Marx, the term refers to the estrangement of persons from their political and social environment. When individuals are alienated they no longer function as responsible citizens. Political sociologists since Marx have used this term to describe the natural by-product of political corruption and the disillusionment of individuals with corrupted or impotent political systems. When societies find their government is unable or unwilling to deal with crises, members of society may become alienated from the state mechanism.

2 POLITICAL IDEAS

Anarchism: Governments are thought to be necessary and desirable in every mode of political thought except anarchism. It is the negation of government. Society would exist in a much happier way if it were not restrained by government. The founder of modern anarchism, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, taught that government granted monopoly powers to some at the expense of all others. Thus, he advocated the partial, but not total, abolition of government. The most eloquent spokesperson of *peaceful anarchism* was Peter Kropotkin, who taught that a society of mutual cooperation was possible without government. Some advocated violent revolution, beginning with acts of individual violence directed against the general population, as a way to achieve *terroristic anarchism*. Either way, the general program of anarchism is the abolition of the state mechanism.

Aristocracy: In medieval societies, and in those still accepting such medieval ideas, there is supposedly a "superior" class of persons chosen by God to govern. Such persons are *aristocrats by birth*. Jefferson, John Adams, and others in colonial America spoke of a *natural aristocracy* who were naturally more talented than other men, and who should govern. Some, like Adams, wanted to build devices into the Constitution to guarantee government by aristocracy, while others, like Jefferson, merely hoped that men would naturally tend to select such men for office. There are some men whose natural talents allow them to accumulate more wealth than other men. These *economic aristocrats* (or "aristocracy of wealth") were held by some to have a natural right to govern, or at least to have the right to a greater say in governance by, for instance, having more votes or votes in accordance with their property value or the taxes they paid.

Authority: This is the legal power given to a public agency or body that enables it to perform the functions assigned to it. In a democratic state, authority is given to the government and its many departments and divisions by the people. Authority may be defined by the Constitution and bylaws made according to that basic document.

Autocracy: This is a governmental system in which political power is found in the hands of one individual, or, occasionally, a small group of persons. Unlike kingships, autocracies are often accompanied by mass indoctrination, political propaganda, mass support trumped up by the leaders, and political ideology. Kings generally have some legitimate claim to their thrones, as in the case of a son of a king who follows his father to

power. Autocrats seize power and hence are not necessarily "legitimate" rulers. This often accounts for the mass rallies autocrats hold, as these rallies serve to ensure popular support of the autocratic regime.

Bill of Rights: Several nations have basic and fundamental written documents that guarantee basic civil liberties and rights to their citizens over and against government. The first modern document of this type was the English Magna Carta (Great Charter), signed in 1215. In republican governments these documents are of fundamental importance, for they limit government and remove from it certain prerogatives. These documents protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority.

Bourbon Democrat: This term usually refers to conservative Democrats, especially in the South or in the Border States. The term is archaic. Presently, one identifies such conservatives as conservatives.

Bourgeoisie: This is a largely archaic term for the business class in western societies. Its use is rather restricted today to communist rhetoric. Communists describe the capitalistic systems as "bourgeois capitalist" meaning that the pseudo-democracies of the West are actually run by and for the profit of the capitalist class. It is opposed by the workers who are called "proletariat."

Capitalism: This is the modern economic system generally found in the Western or free world. Private property exists as do property rights for the owners. Individual enterprises are owned by private investors who seek to compete with similar enterprises owned by other private parties for the sale and distribution of goods and services. In a modern state, the state itself produces nothing, for this is the job of private enterprise, not the government. Extensive government intervention in the free enterprise system through regulatory commissions and boards has changed capitalism significantly from its earlier forms.

Central Economic Planning: In his book, *Road to Serfdom*, Friedrich Hayek has suggested that the road to totalitarianism is prepared by beginning centralized economic planning not only for the governmental functions but for those things that have traditionally been done by private enterprise. Under centralized planning the goals of society are set by the state, which then develops plans to achieve these goals. Precious resources

are allocated to industries and projects according to the value of the project within the government's total plan. In its final form centralized planning, with direct allocations of investment, industrial consumption, and production becomes antithetical to capitalism.

Centrism: This term is much more at home in European (especially continental Europe) politics than in America. While our political tradition leads us toward political center, thus avoiding extremes, we seldom use the term centrism to describe this tendency. In Europe, centrism means political movements that tend to gather in the middle of the political spectrum, avoiding such extremes as facism, communism, monarchism, or socialism.

Charisma: This term has been borrowed from the field of religion. There it is applied to the reception accorded some especially outstanding individual by his followers over whom he exercises no particular power save that of his ideas and personality. It is a rare attribute of a great leader. All of the founders of the great religions are said to have been charismatic figures whose ideas and leadership shaped and formed the world (or a significant portion thereof). Today the term is applied to almost any political leader of public opinion who maintains a substantial following. Since the advent of radio and television, image makers have been able to manufacture "charisma" in near wholesale quantities. The term thus has lost most of its true meaning.

Class: In aristocratic societies of Europe class distinctions were drawn according to birth (nobility) and position (title). The more democratic a society the less class is emphasized, so that modern democratic states are moving toward classlessness. Most societies show significant disparities in wealth and some find that this can be a base for class distinctions. In America we often speak of "upper class," "middle class," and "poor class." Political sociologists are more likely to use the term "socioeconomic status (SES)" than "class."

Collectivism: In modern, alienated society some individuals seek protection and escape from individualistic isolation through collective movements. Those political ideologies that offer mass escape from the rigors of individualism are termed collectivism. Quite often, collectivists preach some form of socialist ownership and operation of the factors of production and of the land. Mass values are chosen over individual conscience, and mass liberties are preferred to individual rights.

Communism: In its pure form, communism means that all things are held in common, with the individual possessing at best a residual right to use what he or she needs. Such pure communism may occasionally be found in strict religious organizations. The term is more commonly used to describe the "scientific" socialism of Karl Marx and his followers. Marx taught that history is divided into epochs and that dialectical laws propel history necessarily toward the last epoch of mankind, communism. Before communism can triumph there will be a series of frightful collisions between the workers and their capitalist "masters." The Communists will necessarily triumph in the end. After a series of preludes, the final stage of communism will be developed wherein each will receive what he or she needs while contributing what he or she can to the whole.

Concurrent Majority: This theory was developed by John C. Calhoun during his search for a means of protecting the slave states from the growing antislavery sentiments in the North. Each society has two major climates of opinion. In his time one of these developed in the North and the other in the South. Each should be protected from the possible tyranny of the other. To do this each group should be given a kind of veto power over the other in matters that touch their respective special concerns. Thus, major decisions could be reached only with the approval of each group.

Consensus: Amerindians developed a method of reaching a conclusion without the formality of voting. Each individual or at least each leader of the group talked in favor of his or her view. As the issues were discussed each individual looked for common areas of agreement and eventually a consensus was reached which all could support. In any society a consensus is an ideal that the society should strive for. It is the ideal replacement for majority rule, an idea that threatens the minority with the tyranny of the majority. To the degree societies can reach consensus on issues, their policies will be strengthened. It is an ultimate form of regime support.

Conservatism: In European traditions, conservatism supported the idea of natural or traditional aristocracies. This form of *aristocratic conservatism* was defeated by integral or French liberalism, but it never made much impact in America. Europeans developed a *traditional conservatism*, which was popularized in the writing of Edmund Burke, especially in his condemnation of the French revolution. Many of his ideas were popularized in America by Alexander Hamilton and John Adams. *Modern conservatism* emphasizes limited government, republican ideals, constitu-

tional government, judicial restraint, and stability through maintenance of present conditions. Many contemporary conservatives are really remnants of 19th-century or laissez-faire liberalism. One major tenet of Burke's conservatism accepted by modern conservatives is the notion that society is a continuum, a partnership, involving the living, the dead, and those yet to be born. Society breaks this chain if it practices total revolution, and this is the ultimate sin, for it dispossesses the future generations from their natural heritage.

Constitution: In any state a constitution is the fundamental statement of principles under which government operates and by whose authority laws are made. Constitutions determine the type of state to be formed, as unitary or federal. They specify the offices to be created and the method to be used in filling those offices. They explain the basic rationale of government. Some constitutions are strictly applied by some authority such as the courts; in other states constitutions are only a general guide to action and may be violated at will by the government. Most constitutions are written, but some are "traditional." In ancient Greece a constitution was merely a history of the politics of the nation.

Constitutionalism: In a limited state a constitution is a basic statement of the powers of government and the rights of citizens. It is central to republican thought, for it provides a bulwark against constant change emanating from a series of temporary majorities. It is the protector of minority rights, for it ideally contains the basic principles of a free nation that are not subject to change by 50 percent of the population.

Consumerism: The self-appointed leader of American consumer interests, Ralph Nader, has sought to obtain laws from Congress and rulings from bureaucratic and regulatory agencies which might protect individuals and small businesses from the larger, more powerful corporations. Areas where Nader and his Raiders have sought action include: truth in lending and full disclosure of finance terms; limitations on food additives and protection from allegedly dangerous chemicals; controls over auto engine emissions and safety devices in autos; regulation of certain areas of medicine and law; truth in labeling, packaging, and selling of merchandise; and installation of air bags in autos. Nader's efforts have popularized consumerism to some degree and of course, Nader has inspired imitators.

Democracy: This Greek idea is formed by the combination of two words "demos" meaning "people" and "kraots" meaning "authority." In *pure democracy* the people rule directly, deciding issues among them-

selves. In *representative democracy* the people select others to represent them.

Democratic Socialism: In this system of government the state takes over the factors of production, owning them in the name of the people. The extent of governmental ownership is determined by the people using democratic means. Actually, the democracy of such systems is more like a republic than a democracy, for most such systems have bills of rights and other constitutional safeguards associated with republics. Several European nations have democratic socialist systems, including England and Sweden. The most important feature of democratic socialist systems is the absence of authoritarian government. In this it differs from Marxist or scientific socialist systems.

Demagogue: In our descriptions of leaders of totalitarian states, a demagogue is a leader who has come to power by trickery, revolution, or intimidation and who has no legitimate claim to power. Hitler might be considered the archetype of a demagogue. The term may also be applied to a ruthless politician who has been elected to office, but whose rule seems to be authoritarian and intimidating. Huey Long of Louisiana was called a demagogue at times during his tenure in office in the 1930s.

Direct Democracy: Most democratic systems depend on representatives chosen from among and by the people at large. On some occasions the entire population may become involved in the law-making process. Devices for popular democratic participation in government include initiative, recall, referendum, and plebiscite. In a very small area direct democracy may occur regularly, as in New England town meetings.

Divine Right of Kings: James I of England wrote the best known defense of the divine right of kings, the *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*. All rights in the state belong to, and may occasionally be dispensed by, the king. No one but the king has any kind of right by nature's law. God ordained that kings should rule and any attempt to alter that situation would be sin. Kings are God's messengers to men for their good.

Economic Determinism: Although principally associated with the ideology espoused by Karl Marx (dialectical and historical materialism of communism), there have been many political philosophers who believed that the economic system of the times determined the way political systems would be set up. Among the modern non-Marxist thinkers who taught economic determinism were James Harrington and Charles A. Beard. Har-

rington taught that the way property is distributed among the classes determines the political forms people adopt in government. Beard taught that the Founding Fathers were economically determined, as members of the economic aristocracy, to frame a constitution that was conservative and protective of property rights.

Fascism: This political ideology was originated by Benito Mussolini in reaction to socialism and French liberalism. It was supernationalistic and militaristic. It taught the unity of theory and action, but failed to develop a viable theory during its existence (1933–1943). It shared a strong commitment to state control of major enterprises and central economic planning with socialism. However, most property remained in private hands. Its party adherents gloried in paramilitary training and uniforms (“Black Shirts”). There are several varieties of fascism. The German form, nazism, was racially based. Pseudofascist governments were created in Spain under Franco, Portugal under Salazar, and Argentina under Peron. Fascism is a postdemocratic, postindustrial, highly nationalistic ideology.

Government: The political and administrative authority of a state is called a government. These organizations exercise full political authority in executive, judicial, and legislative matters. Government may be democratic, authoritarian, or totalitarian.

Ideology: This unique development of the 20th century teaches a kind of “secular religion.” It offers a closed system of thought about man, society, and the state. It is based on one or more fundamental books, such as Marx’s *Capital* or *Communist Manifesto* or Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. In its rightist versions (fascism, nazism) it teaches supernationalism while its leftist version (communism) teaches internationalism and the brotherhood of the working class. True ideology denies the possibility of further development of knowledge beyond applying the principles of the philosophical system to new situations or sciences. Even science may be subject to ideological constraints.

Integral Liberalism: Popularized by Jefferson and his followers in this nation, this 19th-century form of liberalism triumphed over old, aristocratic conservatism by preaching a philosophy of freedom of conscience and natural rights of man. Much of American liberalism of the 19th century came from the writings of English philosopher, John Locke. Man, Locke taught, is endowed with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and property. Jefferson used this idea in the Declaration of Independence, a fundamental work of American liberalism of the 19th century.

Jefferson and his followers believed in very limited government that would do very little except act as policeman and protector from foreign invasions. Government should not interfere with the lives of private individuals any more than was absolutely necessary.

Jacksonian Democracy: The term is associated with the expressions of political power by frontiersmen, newly liberated from disenfranchisement by property qualification to vote. Jacksonian democracy taught equality of men and rejected the Jeffersonian notion of a natural aristocracy. The frontier spirit and experience were fundamental to the development of the individual. Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting America during this time, noted the individualism of the people of the frontier. Jackson ran the nation by "gut feelings" rather than political philosophy. He despised strong government and complex institutions that he did not understand. He felt that the president was the coequal of the Supreme Court in determining the constitutionality of laws and that the president was morally obligated to invalidate laws that were incorrectly framed or that violated the public trust.

Jeffersonian Democracy: Those who followed the ideas of Thomas Jefferson were said to be Jeffersonian Democrats. These ideas included: natural aristocracy among men; fundamental and basic civil liberties and the rights for all men; very limited government; dependence on local self-government; minimum controls by government over individuals; subordination of military to civil authority; fear and distrust of standing armies; preference for an agrarian, not an industrial society; and a belief in natural rights placed in nature by God. This is sometimes called Jeffersonian liberalism.

Laissez-faire Capitalism: Laissez-faire is a French expression meaning "to leave something alone." In this, the earliest form of capitalism, the state was to allow capitalism to develop on its own without state interference. It was advocated by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776). He saw a society filled with small producers and small shopkeepers and merchandisers, and filled with individual laborers. Each sold his or her own labor to these small businesspersons, and purchased locally produced goods and services. Smith's ideas clearly influenced the development of American capitalism.

Left: The political spectrum is often divided into right, center, and left. Those of the political left include liberals, socialists, communists, and radicals. Those of the political left subscribe, in varying degrees, to ideas of

change and alteration in the political system. They generally favor, or pretend to favor, mass democracy and popular sovereignty. In Europe, the distinction is seen more clearly than in America. One might not speak of a "liberal" as a "leftist" here so frequently as one might in Europe. Continental European parties tend more toward political extremes whereas American parties tend toward the political center.

Legitimacy: Governments and rulers prefer to exercise power that is recognized by the people and by foreign powers. A government has achieved legitimacy when it is accepted as a legal and full representative of the people by other major powers, by international organizations and, most of all, by the vast majority of its citizens. Governments believed to be illegitimate often find that diplomatic recognition is not afforded them by civilized nations, by the international community, and by world organizations.

Liberal: Liberals are those who seek to change the status quo. *Nineteenth century liberalism* as it was known in the United States opposed government intervention in the lives of men and in governing more than was minimally necessary to preserve public order. The principal exponents of this form of liberalism were the Antifederalists and the Jeffersonians. *Modern (interventionist) liberalism* seeks constantly more governmental controls over areas that were heretofore considered the private concern of free enterprise or of individuals. Liberals generally have great faith in the intellectual abilities of men. Evils of society exist only as privations of goods that ought to be present. Hence, poverty can be eliminated by applying governmental powers and moneys to the problems of society. They place much emphasis on civil liberties and civil rights and seek governmental intervention to ensure such rights. Human rights are preferred to property rights.

Majority Rule: This is closely associated with theories of democracy. If the people are truly sovereign then the majority of them ought to be able to decide policy. In legislature and in most other places where ballots are taken 50 percent + 1 are said to constitute a majority. In many votes not nearly all eligible to cast votes choose to do so. Thus, the result of a ballot may not equal a majority that is committed to a policy. In representative democratic systems the legislature may not truly represent the population. Some groups, such as religious or racial minorities, may be under-represented (or over-represented). Majority rule is frequently mitigated by the republican device of protecting minority rights by building into funda-