

The American Citizen
Chapter 11 Vocabulary Terms and Definitions
Politics In Action



Learning these terms and concepts is necessary to understand America's political system. In this course, you must be able to recognize definitions of these terms for classroom lecture/discussions and (eventually) quizzes and tests.

absentee ballot

An official ballot mailed to an election official by a voter before an election because the voter is unable to vote on election day

Australian ballot

A ballot that is printed, paid for, and distributed by state or local governments to qualified voters at polling places established by state law; a secret ballot.

bipartisan

When something is supported by members of two major political parties.

canvass (as a political term)

A political survey used to determine voters' opinions. (Can be used as a verb or as a noun.)

caucus

a meeting of political party members to nominate candidates and decide party strategy for an election.

closed primary

a type of direct primary election, in which citizens must declare their party affiliation and can vote only for their party's candidates.

"dark horse" candidate

During political parties' national nominating conventions, many ballots may be needed to decide on a presidential nominee, and in last-minute bargaining, dark horse candidates sometimes have won nomination when the front runners became deadlocked.

direct primary

An election in which all party members may vote to choose the party's candidate.

endorsement

The public support given to a candidate, usually by a newspaper or radio or television station.

favorite son/daughter

During national nominating conventions the names of favorite sons / daughters may be placed into nomination -- as a courtesy to them -- by the delegates from their home states.

franchise

The right to vote.

general election

An election in which all voters choose the winner for each office.

grandfather clause

The provision in the laws of Southern states permitting a person to vote without taking the literacy test or paying a tax to vote, if he or one of his ancestors had been entitled to vote (directed against blacks and declared unconstitutional in 1915).

keynote speech

The opening speech at a national nominating convention, which praises the party and criticizes the opposition.

literacy test

Written or oral examination, now illegal, requiring citizens to prove their ability to read, write, and understand documents before being allowed to vote.

nominating petition

A petition with the signatures of a required number of qualified voters who support putting a candidate's name on the ballot.

nomination

Naming a candidate to run for office.

office-group ballot

Type of ballot that lists candidates together by the office they are seeking, and their party affiliation is listed beside their name.

off-year election

During an off-year election, when there are races for Congress, governor, and state and local lawmakers, voter turnout is lower than when there is also a race for President of the U.S.

open primary

The type of direct primary in which voters do not have to declare a party preference.

party-column ballot

Type of ballot that lists the candidates from each political party in a single column, and the parties are identified by symbols at the top of each column.

plurality

When a winning candidate receives the highest number of votes, he or she has received a plurality of the votes.

poll tax

The fee, now illegal, that a person had to pay before voting. (24th Amendment prohibits these in national elections.)

poll watcher

A person who is present at a polling place to ensure an honest election.