

# Civic Life, Politics, and Government

## Definitions

Before jumping into the foundations and roles of American democracy, it may be useful to make sure you know the following definitions. There will be additional definitions as we move through the course but to start and better understand the fundamentals, we will begin with the following.

**Private Life:** Relates to a citizen's right to privacy and the pursuit of private and personal interests.

**Civic Life:** The public life of the citizen concerned with the affairs of the community and nation.

**Limited Government:** The government has only the powers granted to it in the Constitution, and it can only conduct actions permitted by the Constitution. In other words, there are established and respected restraints on government power.

**Rule of Law:** An essential component of limited government. The central notion of a rule of law is that society is governed according to widely known and accepted rules followed not only by the governed but also by those in authority.

**Checks and Balances:** The Constitutionally granted power for one branch of government to block action by an equal branch of government. The Constitution specifies instances in which one of the three branches can stop action by another. Historical precedents have established others.

**Separation of Powers:** The Constitution keeps the three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) separate. The powers and responsibilities of each is described in a separate Article. Separation makes each Branch the equal of the others.

Source: <https://guides.lib.purdue.edu/civicsliteracy/civiclif>

## Politics:

- The activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power.
- The activities of governments concerning the political relations between countries.
- The academic study of government and the state.

Source: Oxford Dictionary



**Aristotle** is regarded as the father of political science. He was a great Greek philosopher. He was the first one to give a working definition of political science. He believed that political science was a powerful and dynamic branch of science.



**Power Politics** is a theory in international relations which contends that distributions of power and national interests, or changes to those distributions, are fundamental causes of war and of system stability.

**Government:** the governing body of a nation, state, or community.  
A government is the authority that sets rules for a society.

**The act or process of governing** specifically includes

- Authoritative direction or control.
- The office, authority, or function of governing.
- The continuous exercise of authority over and the performance of functions for a political unit : rule.  
(Miriam Webster).

**Power & Authority:**

**Power is the capacity of a person to influence others and alter their actions, beliefs, and behaviors.**

**Authority is the legitimate power that a person or group is granted to practice over others within an organization.**

Example: A company president has the power to order a product design change to a product. A police officer has the authority to arrest an offender of the law.

Power therefore is the possession of authority, control, or influence by which a person influences the actions of others, either by direct authority or by some other, more intangible means.

**Civic Engagement** involves “working to make a difference in the civic life of one’s community and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” Civic engagement includes both paid and unpaid forms of political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service. Volunteering, national service, and service-learning are all forms of civic engagement.

Source: <https://youth.gov>