

Unit 1: Foundations of American Democracy

Category	Key Term	Definition & Applicable Examples
Philosophical Foundations	Limited Government	The principle that government power is restricted by law (usually a Constitution) to protect individual rights.
	Natural Rights	Rights inherent in human beings (life, liberty, property) not dependent on government; a core Enlightenment idea from John Locke .
	Popular Sovereignty	The doctrine that the government's right to rule comes from the "consent of the governed".
	Social Contract	An agreement where people give up some freedom to a government in exchange for the protection of their remaining rights.
	Republicanism	A form of government where leaders are elected to represent the people's interests for a specific period.
Models of Democracy	Participatory Democracy	Emphasizes broad citizen participation in government operations (e.g., town halls, voting).
	Pluralist Democracy	A model where group-based activism (e.g., interest groups like the ACLU) competes to influence policy.
	Elite Democracy	Theory that a small number of wealthy or high-status individuals make the most important government decisions.
Foundational Documents	Federalist No. 10	Madison's essay arguing a large republic is the best way to control the negative effects of factions .
	Brutus No. 1	Anti-Federalist essay arguing that a large central government would be uncontrollable and distant from the people.

	Articles of Confederation	The first U.S. constitution; established a weak central government that lacked the power to tax or regulate commerce.
Constitutional Compromises	Great (Connecticut) Compromise	Created a bicameral legislature with the House (proportional) and the Senate (equal representation).
	Three-Fifths Compromise	Agreement to count 60% of the enslaved population for both House representation and taxation.
Powers & Federalism	Separation of Powers	Division of government into Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches to prevent tyranny.
	Checks and Balances	The constitutional power of each branch to limit the actions of the other two (e.g., a Presidential veto).
	Federalism	A system where power is divided and shared between national and state governments.
	Expressed (Enumerated) Powers	Powers specifically granted to the federal government in Article I, Section 8 (e.g., coining money).
	Implied Powers	Powers not explicitly stated but deemed " necessary and proper " for Congress to carry out its expressed duties.
	Reserved Powers	Powers not given to the federal government that are kept by the states, per the 10th Amendment .
	Inherent Powers	Powers that belong to the national government simply because it is a sovereign state (e.g., regulating borders, acquiring territory).
Fiscal Federalism	Categorical Grants	Federal money provided to states for a specific, narrow purpose, often with "strings attached".

Block Grants

Federal funds given to states for a broad policy area, offering states more flexibility in spending.

Mandates

Federal requirements imposed on states; "unfunded mandates" require state action without providing funding.