



Introduction: This elementary level module intends to assist young students in their comprehension of basic democratic (civics) concepts, called collectively, Core Democratic Values. The reason for civic education in a constitutional democracy is that the health of the country (body politic) requires the widest possible participation of its citizens. Not only is it important that citizens understand their own rights, but that they also understand that by acting for the common good, they protect the rights of all individuals from unconstitutional abuses by the government. Responsible and effective civic participation fosters these qualities and constitutes the mission of civic education.

## **Core Values and Basic Rights of American Constitutional Democracy**

Core democratic values are the basic American cultural beliefs that provide the underpinnings of our **democracy** and protect the **individual's rights**. They are the constitutional principles that unite all Americans. These **values** and **rights** are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, federal and state statutes, and other significant documents, speeches, and writings of the nation. Below is a list of some of our **rights** as American citizens and essential **core democratic values**.

### **• Individual Rights of American Democracy:**

**Life** – each citizen has the right to the protection of their life

**Liberty** – should be considered an unalterable aspect of the human condition. This right includes the following

Right to private property – individuals should be free to acquire, use, transfer and dispose of private property without unreasonable governmental interference

Freedom of the press – individuals should be free to express themselves in printed form

Freedom of speech – individuals should be able to speak their opinion

Freedom of assembly and association – individuals should be able to gather in groups with whomever they wish

Freedom of religion – individuals should be free to believe as they wish

Privacy – individuals have a right to be let alone

Freedom to petition the government – an individual has the right to approach the government, either individually, or most commonly as a group, to promote some form of change or address an issue

**Political Equality** – all citizens may participate in the democratic process equally

Right to vote and seek office -

## **Legal Equality**

Equal protection - all citizens have under the law

Equal opportunity – all citizens have an equal right to access to any form of public education, public housing and public facilities

Equal opportunity in employment – all citizens have a right to seek employment on an equal basis

**Justice** – People should be treated fairly in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of society, corrections of wrongs and injuries, and gathering of information and making of decisions

Right of due process – assures individuals that their life, liberty and property cannot be taken away without “due process of law” – including a fair hearing conducted according to all legal safeguards that protect the person against sanctions imposed by the state.

Writ of habeas corpus – citizens have the right to be brought before a judge and a court of law when arrested. This is considered to be the one of the best safeguard to Democracy

Rule of law – individuals, or the governed, are subject to the same laws as the government. Government decisions are actions shall be made according to established laws rather than arbitrary action or decree.

Right to a speedy public jury trial – citizens suspected of criminal wrong doing must be brought before a jury in a public trial in a speedy fashion.

Right to no excessive bails, fines, or cruel and unusual punishment – corrective justice and the punishment of crimes must match codified law.

Right to confront witnesses against you – citizens have this civil right

Prohibition against the passage of a bill of attainder – protects the individual from being punished by the legislature rather than a court of law.

Assistance of Council in your defense – each citizen has the right to legal representation under statutory law.

Protection against unreasonable search and seizure – procedures must be observed as prescribed by codified law when the private domain of a citizen is search or property seized.

Protection against double jeopardy – an individual may not be tried twice for the same crime

Protection against ex post facto laws – this prohibition forbids the government from passing a law that makes something a crime that was not a crime when it was done or for making a crime more serious after the act was committed.

**Pursuit of happiness** – includes the idea that while no government can guarantee the happiness of citizens, it is the right of citizens in American democracy to attempt to attain happiness in their own way, so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. The government may not define happiness for the people nor may it dictate how people may pursue happiness.

## **Constitutional Government – Limited Government**

The rule of law – the government is subject to the same laws as the citizenry and must make decisions and take actions according to the established laws rather than arbitrary decree.

Separation of powers – It is an essential part of American constitutional tradition that legislative, executive and judicial powers should be exercised by different institutions with the power distributed between a federal government, state government, and the people.

Checks and balances – the powers given to the different branches of government are

balanced so that no branch can completely dominate the others. Many of the powers of one branch are shared and checked by those of the other branches.

Minority rights – the idea of minority rights means that decisions made in accordance with the principle of majority rule should not unreasonably and unfairly infringe upon the rights of minorities. Constitutionally guaranteed rights should be placed out of the reach of legislative majorities.

Civilian control of the military – the principle of civilian control of the military is implied in the constitutional provisions that the president is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and that Congress has the power to declare war.

Separation of church and state – the First Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus protecting the individual’s right to freedom of religion and belief.

Power of the Purse – This principle states that all federal laws for raising revenue must originate in the legislative house closest to the people (House of Representatives) and be approved by the Congress as a whole.

Popular sovereignty – the citizenry is collectively the sovereign of the state and hold ultimate authority over public officials and their policies. Within constitutional limits majorities should have the right to make political decisions.

Federalism – assures a limited government by establishing the citizenry as sovereign and be delegating certain powers to the federal government, other powers to the state government, and by reserving certain powers for themselves.

Majority rule – a fundamental concept to Democracy is that citizens have the right to place their vote, that their vote be counted equally and that the majority of those votes will win.

Consent of the governed – the citizens are the sovereign rulers of America, and give **explicit** consent by agreeing to the contract that establishes the society in which the members of the society establish the government and choose its officers and by giving their implicit consent by accepting the laws and services of the government and nation.

### **Core Democratic Values of American Democracy**

These civic principles can be defined as those principles of government that best enable society to realize its civic values. Such principles define our commitment to constitutional government and democracy. Civic values express our most fundamental beliefs about the purpose of government within a society and the goals we expect a government to achieve.

Public or Common Good – American democracy emphasizes the common good and the obligation of each citizen to serve the good of the whole community. Citizenship requires that we put this general good before our own self-interest, especially when the two conflict. It is generally considered that within the context of Common Good, the citizens and government should be concerned with providing general safety, a common defense, domestic tranquility, and general welfare of the people.

Truth and open and free inquiry – Citizens can legitimately demand that truth-telling, as refraining from lying, and full disclosure by government be the rule. Truth in the veracity of government constitutes an essential element of the bond between citizens, (the governed), and the governors, (elected and appointed officials of the government).

Patriotism – Included within the concept of patriotism is the concept of loyalty to the

fundamental values and principles underlying American constitutional Democracy as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, Pledge of Allegiance, and the pledge taken by the U. S. Military to Constitution.