

This glossary will help you prepare for the social studies section of the TASC test. This list is not exhaustive, so if you come across a term you don't find here, please consult a dictionary.

The terms are listed alphabetically for your convenience.

You might find it helpful to make flashcards—put the definition on one side of an index card and the term on the other—or to practice writing sentences that place the terms in context for easier memorization.

abolitionism	a reform movement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that advocated the end of African slavery in Europe and the Americas
Allied Powers	a military coalition formed between nations in opposition to another alliance of countries. In World War I, the Allied Powers included 28 nations that opposed the Central Powers. In World War II, the alliance fought the Axis Powers.
Articles of Confederation	the first compact uniting the American colonies (1781). It was replaced by the U.S. Constitution in 1789.
arctic zone	the climatic zone near the north or south pole characterized by long, cold winters and short, cool summers
Axis powers	an alliance created between Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II
Bill of Rights	the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Ratified in 1791, the Bill of Rights safeguards the liberties of individuals.
Bolshevik	a member of the radical faction of the Russian socialist party that took power in Russia and formed the Communist Party in 1918
Boston Tea Party	a 1773 incident staged by American colonists protesting the British tax on tea. The colonists threw three shipments of tea into Boston Harbor.
bubonic plague	an infectious disease that killed up to one third of all Europeans in the fourteenth century. Also called "the Black Death."
business cycle	periods of high and low productivity in a capitalist economy
capitalism	an economic system in which individuals and private organizations produce and distribute goods and services in a free market
Central powers	a military coalition of nations that fought against the Allied Powers in World War II. It included Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria, and Turkey.
charter	to approve or grant power to something, such as a town or city government
checks and balances	a system outlined by the U.S. Constitution that divides authority between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government so that no branch of government dominates the others
civilization	an advanced state of intellectual, cultural, and technological development in human society

climate	the atmospheric characteristics near the earth's surface over a period of time. Includes average temperature, rainfall, humidity, wind, and barometric pressure.
climactic zone	any of several broad areas that lie along latitudinal lines between the equator and the north and south poles
Cold War	term for the post-World War II rivalry between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) that ended in 1989
commission	a form of local government in which voters elect commissioners to head a city or county department, like the fire, police, or public works department
communism	an economic and political system in which the means of production are owned collectively and controlled by the state
Communist Manifesto	a document of communist principles written by Karl Marx in 1848
Confederate States of America	a republic formed in 1861 by eleven Southern states that withdrew from the United States. After its 1865 defeat in the American Civil War, the republic dissolved.
constitution	the fundamental principles of a nation's government embodied in one document or several documents
Constitution of the United States	the fundamental laws of the United States, written in 1787 and ratified in 1788
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	a measure of change in the cost of common goods and services, such as food, clothing, rent, fuel, and others
Continental Congress	an assembly of delegates from the American colonies that served as a governmental body that directed the war for independence
cost of living	the price of common goods and services that are considered living expenses, such as food, clothing, rent, fuel, and others
council-manager	a form of local government in which voters elect council members, who, in turn, hire a manager to run the day-to-day operations of the locality
Crusades	any of the military campaigns led by European Christians during the Middle Ages to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims
culture	a shared way of living among a group of people that develops over time
cultural geography	the study of the relationship between humans and their physical environment
Declaration of Independence	a document adopted on July 4, 1776, in which the American colonies proclaimed their independence from Great Britain
deflation	a decrease in prices due to decreased money supply and an increased quantity of consumer goods
demand	the quantity of goods or services that consumers want to buy at any given price. According to the principle of demand, demand decreases as price increases.

democracy	a form of government in which decisions are made by the people, either directly or through elected representatives
demography	the study of changes in population through birth rate, death rate, migration, and other factors
depression	a prolonged and severe period of low economic productivity and income
dictatorship	a form of government in which one ruler has absolute power over many aspects of society, including social, economic, and political life
discount rate	the interest rate that the U.S. Federal Reserve Board charges banks to borrow money
Dred Scott decision	an 1857 U.S. Supreme Court decision that ruled that the Court could not ban citizens from bringing slaves into free territories
Enlightenment	a philosophical movement of the eighteenth century in Europe and North America that emphasized rational thought
equator	the imaginary line that runs east and west at 0° latitude
equilibrium	when supply of a good or service equals that which customers are willing to buy (demand)
executive branch	the arm of government that carries out laws
fascism	an Italian term for military-based totalitarian government
federalism	a government structure that divides power between a central government and regional governments. The United States is a federal republic, a democracy that divides power between federal, state, and local governments.
Federalist Papers	a series of 85 essays written in 1787–1788 by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay in which they argued that federalism would offer a government structure that would preserve the rights of states and secure individual freedoms
Federal Reserve System (the Fed)	U.S. banking system established in 1913. Includes twelve Federal Reserve banks under an eight-member controlling board.
feudalism	a political and economic system that existed in Europe between the ninth and fifteenth centuries in which a lord granted land and employment to a tenant in exchange for political and military services
free enterprise	freedom of private business to organize and operate for profit with no or little government intervention
French and Indian War	the last of four North American wars fought between Great Britain and France in which each country fought for control of the continent (1754–1763)
general election	an election in which the citizens of a nation or region vote to elect the ultimate winner of a political contest
government	the act or process of governing; the control of public policy within a political organization
Great Depression	a severe economic recession characterized by bank closings, failed businesses, high unemployment, and homelessness that lasted

	through the 1930s in the United States
gross domestic product (GDP)	a measure of the total value of goods and services produced within a nation over the course of a year
gross national product (GNP)	a measure of the value of goods and services produced within a nation as well as its foreign investments over the course of a year
hemisphere	half of the earth; either the northern or southern half of the globe as divided by the equator or the eastern and western half as divided by the prime meridian
Hiroshima	a city in southwestern Japan that was the target of the first atomic bomb ever dropped on a populated area in August 1945
Holocaust	persecution and murder of millions of Jewish people and other Europeans under Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime
humanism	a cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance that emphasized classical ideals as a result of a rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman literature and art
immigration	the process of moving and settling in a country or region to which one is not native
imperialism	the practice of extending a nation's power by territorial acquisition or by economic and political influence over other nations
Industrial Revolution	the extensive social and economic changes brought about by the shift from the manufacturing of goods by hand to large-scale factory production that began in England in the late eighteenth century
inflation	an increase in prices due to an increase in the amount of money in circulation and a decreased supply of consumer goods
Intolerable Acts	a series of laws passed by the British Parliament in 1774 to punish the colony of Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party
isolationism	a national policy of avoiding political alliances with other nations
judicial branch	the arm of government that interprets laws
judicial review	a doctrine that allows the U.S. Supreme Court to invalidate laws and executive actions if the Court decides they conflict with the Constitution. This power was not established until the 1803 case of <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> .
labor union	an organization of wage earners that uses group action to seek better economic and working conditions
laissez-faire	a doctrine that believes economic systems work better without intervention by government
latitude	the distance north or south of the equator measured by angles ranging from 0° at the equator to 90° at the poles
legend	a table or list that explains the symbols used on a map or chart
legislative branch	law-making arm of a government
longitude	the distance east or west of the prime meridian measured by angles ranging from 0° at the prime meridian to 180° east or 180° west

Louisiana Purchase	vast land area in North America bought by the United States from France in 1803
market	any forum in which an exchange between buyers and sellers takes place
Mayflower Compact	an agreement that said that the settlers of the Plymouth Colony would make decisions by the will of the majority. It is the first instance of self-government in America.
mayor-council	a form of local government in which voters elect a mayor as city or town executive and elect a council member from each ward
Middle Ages	a period in Europe beginning with the decline of the Roman Empire in the fifth century and ending with the Renaissance in 1453
monarchy	a form of government headed by one ruler who claims power through hereditary or divine right
monotheism	belief in one God
Nagasaki	a seaport in western Japan that was the target of the second atomic bomb ever dropped on a populated area in August 1945. The bombing marked the end of World War II.
naturalization	the process by which one becomes a citizen of a new country
New Deal	a domestic reform program initiated by the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide relief and recovery from the Great Depression
oligarchy	a form of government in which decisions are made by a small, elite group that is not elected by the people
parliament	a national legislative body made up of elected and sometimes non-elected officials. The British Parliament is made up of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
Pearl Harbor	a United States military base in the Pacific Ocean that was attacked by Japan in 1941. The attack led to the entry of the United States into World War II.
Pilgrims	a group of religious separatists who were the founders of the Plymouth Colony on the coast of Massachusetts in 1620
plurality system	an electoral system in which a candidate need only receive more votes than his or her opponent to win
Plymouth Colony	a settlement made by Pilgrims on the coast of Massachusetts in 1620
polar zone	the climatic zone near the north or south pole characterized by long, cold winters and short, cool summers
political party	an organization that presents its positions on public issues and promotes candidates that support its point of view
polytheism	belief in many gods
population	the size, makeup, and distribution of people in a given area
primary election	a preliminary contest in which voters give their preference for a political party's candidate for public office

prime meridian	an imaginary line that runs north and south through Greenwich, England at 0° longitude
Progressivism	a reform movement of the early twentieth century that sought to remedy the problems created by industrialization
proportional representation	an electoral process in which political parties are awarded a proportion of legislative seats based on the percentage of votes they received
Puritans	a group of English migrants who sought to purify the Church of England. The group started settlements in New England in the seventeenth century.
ratify	to confirm or give formal approval to something, such as an agreement between nations
Reconstruction	From 1865 to 1877, the period of readjustment and rebuilding of the South that followed the American Civil War
recession	a period of low economic productivity and income
region	a land area that shares cultural, political, or geographic attributes that distinguish it from other areas
Renaissance	a term meaning "rebirth," that refers to a series of cultural and literary developments in Europe in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries
republic	a government based on the concept that power resides with the people, who then elect officials to represent them in government
reserve ratio	a portion of deposits that banks, which are members of the Federal Reserve system, set aside and do not use to make loans
revolution	a violent change in the political order and social structure of a society
Romanov dynasty	the family that ruled Russia from 1613 until the Russian Revolution in 1917
rule of law	the principle that all citizens, including functionaries of the government, must follow the law
sectionalism	the attitude or actions of a region or section of a nation when it supports its own interests over that of the nation as a whole
separation of powers	the practice of dividing the authority of a government between different branches to avoid an abuse of power
shortage	when demand for a good or service is greater than that which is produced
social studies	the study of how people live every day, including the exploration of humans' physical environment, culture, political institutions, and economic conditions
socialism	an economic system in which the state owns and controls the basic factors of production and distribution of wealth
Stamp Act	a measure passed by the British Parliament in 1765 as a means of collecting taxes in the American colonies. It required that all printed materials including legal documents and newspapers carry a tax stamp.

stock exchange	an organized market for buying and selling stocks and bonds
stock market crash of 1929	a collapse in the value of stocks that marked the onset of the Great Depression in the United States
suffrage	the right to vote
supply	the amount of goods and services available for purchase
surplus	when the supply of a good or service is greater than that which customers are willing to buy (demand)
tariff	a tax on imported, and sometimes exported, goods
temperance zone	a climatic zone characterized by four seasons, usually a hot summer, cold winter, and moderate spring and fall
topography	the representation of features of land surfaces, including the shape and elevation of terrain
totalitarianism	a government in which the rulers of the state control all aspects of society, including economic, political, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual life
Townsend Acts	measures passed by British Parliament in 1767 that taxed American colonists for imported glass, lead, paints, paper, and tea
treaty	a formal agreement between sovereign nations or groups of nations
Treaty of Versailles	the major treaty of five peace treaties that ended World War I in 1919
tropical zone	a climatic zone characterized by a hot, wet climate with few seasons
Tropic of Cancer	an imaginary line at 23.5° north latitude
Tropic of Capricorn	an imaginary line at 23.5° south latitude
unemployment	when willing and able wage earners cannot find jobs. The unemployment rate serves as one index of a nation's economic activity.
urbanization	the movement of a population from rural areas to cities with the result of urban growth
veto	the power of the executive to block the laws passed by the legislative branch