



A Political Glossary

Since this is an election year, we can expect to hear a lot of words — and the meaning of those words is not always clear. So it may be helpful to have a glossary of political terms.

One of the most versatile terms in the political vocabulary is “fairness.” It has been used over a vast range of issues, from “fair trade” laws to the Fair Labor Standards Act. And recently we have heard that the rich don’t pay their “fair share” of taxes.



Some of us may want to see a definition of what is “fair.” But a concrete definition would destroy the versatility of the word, which is what makes it so useful politically.

If you said, for example, that 46.7 percent of their income — or any other number — is the “fair share” of their income that the rich should have to pay in taxes, then once they paid that amount, there would be no basis for politicians to come back to them for more — and “more” is what “fair share” means in practice.

Life in general has never been even close to fair, so the pretense that the government can make it fair is a valuable and inexhaustible asset to politicians who want to expand government.

“Racism” is another term we can expect to hear a lot this election year, especially if the public opinion polls are going against President Barack Obama.

Former big-time TV journalist Sam Donaldson and current fledgling CNN host Don Lemon have already proclaimed racism to be the reason for criticisms of Obama, and we can expect more and more other talking heads to say the same thing as the election campaign goes on. The word “racism” is like ketchup. It can be put on practically anything — and demanding evidence makes you a “racist.”

A more positive term that is likely to be heard a lot, during election years especially, is “compassion.” But what does it mean concretely? More often than not, in practice it means a willingness to spend the taxpayers’ money in ways that will increase the spender’s chances of getting reelected.

If you are skeptical — or, worse yet, critical — of this practice, then you qualify for a different political label: “mean-spirited.” A related political label is “greedy.”

In the political language of today, people who want to keep what they have earned are said to be “greedy,” while those who wish to take their earnings from them and give it to others (who will vote for them in return) show “compassion.”

A political term that had me baffled for a long time was “the hungry.” Since we all get hungry, it was not obvious to me how you single out some particular segment of the population to refer to as “the hungry.”

Eventually, over the years, it finally dawned on me what the distinction was. People who make no provision to feed themselves, but expect others to provide food for them, are those whom politicians and the media refer to as “the hungry.”

Those who meet this definition may have money for alcohol, drugs or even various electronic devices.



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on June 26, 2012

And many of them are overweight. But, if they look to voluntary donations, or money taken from the taxpayers, to provide them with something to eat, then they are “the hungry.”

I can remember a time, long ago, when I was hungry in the old-fashioned sense. I was a young fellow out of work, couldn’t find work, fell behind in my room rent — and, when I finally found a job, I had to walk miles to get there, because I couldn’t afford both subway fare and food.

But this was back in those “earlier and simpler times” we hear about. I was so naïve that I thought it was up to me to go find a job, and to save some money when I did. Even though I knew that Joe DiMaggio was making \$100,000 a year — a staggering sum in the money of that time — it never occurred to me that it was up to him to see that I got fed.

So, even though I was hungry, I never qualified for the political definition of “the hungry.” Moreover, I never thereafter spent all the money I made, whether that was a little or a lot, because being hungry back then was a lot worse than being one of “the hungry” today.

As a result, I was never of any use to politicians looking for dependents who would vote for them. Nor have I ever had much use for such politicians.

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