

SIX MAJOR PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Popular sovereignty is the basic principle of government that the people are the only source of any and all governmental power. The Preamble to the Constitution begins with this bold phrase: "We the people..." These words announce that in the United States, the people establish government and give it its power. The people are sovereign. Since the government receives its power from the people, it can govern only with their consent. People are allowed to vote on who represents them in a government position. Then the person who was elected represents the people of their area and their opinions.

LIMITED GOVERNMENT

Limited government means that neither the government itself nor any government official is "above the law" and can overstep these constitutional bounds. Because the people are the source of government power, the government has only as much authority as the people give it. Much of the Constitution, in fact, consists of specific limitations on government power. A limited government defines how much power the government can have, which is decided on how much the people give them. This is why we vote on how much taxes are, we decide how much money the government can take from us. This is all decided on by a majority of the population.

SEPARATION OF POWERS

The separation of powers allows for the government to be separated into different groups. This allows them all to focus on one job only. This also makes it so one group not to have all the power. They are separated into the legislative (Congress), the executive (President), and the judicial (federal courts). The legislative is in charge of making laws; the executive is in charge of enforcing the laws; the judicial decides on the punishments for those who break the law. This separation of powers is intended to prevent misuse of power by any of the three branches of government.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

The system of checks and balances was designed to keep one branch of the government from getting too much power. If one branch has more than the other groups, the others either help to decrease the powers of that group, or build themselves up so they are on the same level. Each branch of government has the authority to restrain the actions of either of the other two branches. This system makes government less efficient but also prevents tyranny by one branch of government.

JUDICIAL REVIEW

Judicial review allows for the judicial branch to decide on punishments that government officials deserve. If the President broke the law the judicial review allows for a court to decide what consequences the president deserves to have. Who decides whether an act of government oversteps the limits placed on it by the Constitution? Historically, the federal courts have done so. The principle of judicial review was established early in this nation's history. It means that federal courts have the power to review governmental actions and to nullify (cancel) any that are unconstitutional, any that violate some provision of the Constitution.

FEDERALISM

Federalism is the idea of splitting political power between a large group and smaller groups. In the case of the United States, there is a national (or federal) government and regional (or state) governments. The national government controls everyone who lives in the nation, and the state governments are in charge of a small portion of people who live within their state. This sharing of power is intended to ensure that the central government is powerful enough to be effective, yet not so powerful as to threaten the existence of the regional governments or the rights of the people. It also allows individual States to deal with local problems as they choose— so long as their actions are constitutional.