

# The Seven Principles of Government

## Limited Government

The principle of limited government ensures that the government can only exercise the powers granted to it by the Constitution. This is one way to ensure that the government cannot become too powerful. Every person in the government must follow the laws and requirements established in the Constitution.

The Texas Constitution of 1876 limited the powers of the state government in several ways. The Texas legislature has the power to pass taxes; however, it may only pass taxes for specific purposes listed in Texas's Constitution. Some of these purposes include funding education, paying off state debts, and paying government officials. The Legislature may **not** pass taxes for purposes not outlined in the Constitution. This is one example of limited government in the Texas Constitution of 1876.

Many other principles of government are connected to the principle of Limited Government.

## Republicanism

The principle of republicanism states that the citizens of a state or country have the right to elect representatives to serve in government. This principle ensures that the government is comprised of leaders who are chosen by the people and who work in the interests of the people they represent.

When the Texas Constitution of 1876 was written, the right to vote only extended to men ages 21 and over. In 1919, women gained the right to vote with the addition of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the United States Constitution. Then, in 1971 the legal voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 with the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution.

These changes to the U.S. Constitution automatically extended to all of the states in the U.S. This allowed more people to take part in the principle of republicanism by voting for their representatives in government.

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## Separation of Powers

The principle of separation of powers ensures that the power in the government is not concentrated in the hands of only a few people. According to the principle of separation of powers, the powers of the government are divided and granted to different groups, or branches, within the government.

There are three branches in the Texas government, each with their own individual powers. The legislative branch of the government contains the Texas Senate and House of Representatives, which are responsible for passing laws and taxes. The judicial branch contains the courts, which are responsible for hearing cases and interpreting the laws of the Constitution. The final branch is the executive branch, which contains the governor, who is responsible for carrying out the policies of the state legislature, appointing certain government positions, and commanding the State's Defense Forces.

Dividing the power of the government into three different branches according to the principle of separation of powers is one way to ensure that no one person or group within the government becomes too powerful.

## Checks and Balances

The principle of checks and balances provides a way for different parts of the government to limit other parts of the government. There are three different parts, or branches, of the government: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. Each branch has its own responsibilities and powers.

According to the principle of checks and balances, each branch also has certain powers it can use to ensure that the other branches are not abusing their powers.

The legislative branch of the government passes laws and taxes, however the governor in the executive branch has the power to veto, or reject, a law that he or she deems unconstitutional. Additionally, the Texas Supreme Court in the judicial branch has the power to declare the executive actions of the governor or laws passed by the legislature to be unconstitutional.

The principle of checks and balances ensures that each branch of the government can keep the power in the government balanced by checking, or limiting, the actions of the other branches when necessary.

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## Federalism

The principle of federalism grants some powers of the government to the federal government and some powers to the states. Some of the powers granted to the Federal government by the U.S. Constitution are the power to regulate commerce, pass taxes, declare war, and coin money.

Any power not specifically granted to the federal government is reserved for the states. Some of the powers delegated to the states are the ability to create and run their own school systems, manage commerce within state borders, run elections and establish voter qualifications, establish state police forces, and issue licenses for driving, marriage, and professions like medicine and law.

Under the principle of federalism, the power of the government is divided between the national and state levels, ensuring that both the individual states and the federal government have certain powers.

## Popular Sovereignty

The principle of Popular Sovereignty states that the power of the government comes from the people. Citizens have the right to take part in their government, and the government has no power without the consent of the people.

The United States Declaration of Independence states, “*Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*” In other words, people establish their governments, and it is the people that give their governments power – not a king or queen or dictator.

One of the primary ways people can exercise their power in the United States is by voting in elections. In this way, people can make their voices heard, and vote for the type of government they believe is best for their cities, states, and the country. In Texas and other states across the U.S., popular sovereignty is demonstrated when people vote for positions like the mayor of their city, the governor or legislators of their state, or the U.S. Senators and Representatives from their state who work in Washington D.C.

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## Individual Rights

The principle of Individual Rights states that everyone has rights that cannot be taken away. The first ten amendments to the United States Constitution are called the Bill of Rights, and they protect important individual rights like the right to free speech, freedom of religion, and the rights of people who have been accused of a crime.

Over the years, more amendments have been added to the United States Constitution to extend individual rights to more groups of people. Following the Civil War, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments extended rights to the formerly enslaved people in the country. Later, the Nineteenth amendment extended voting rights to women.

The principle of Individual Rights ensures that people in the United States have guaranteed rights that are protected, and that cannot be taken away.