

## NOTES ON PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

### **Defining Government and Its Purposes**

- Government
  - the institutions, people, and processes through which a nation-state (or other political unit) is ruled
  - creates and administers public policy
- Nation-state
  - a political unit with authority (power) to rule itself
  - defined territory and population
  - government with authority to make and enforce laws
- Purposes of government
  - protection of its right to self-rule (sovereignty)
  - maintenance of public order
  - resolution of social conflicts
  - responsibility for a stable economy
  - provision of public service

### **Forms of Government**

- Unitary systems
  - all powers of the government are held by a single unit or agency
  - ex – France, China, Great Britain
- Federal system
  - governmental powers are divided/shared between a central authority and a number of regional subdivisions
  - ex – United states, Canada, Germany, India
- Confederation
  - an association of sovereign states or communities, usually created by treaty but often later adopting a common constitution.
  - Confederations tend to be established for dealing with critical issues, such as defense, foreign affairs, foreign trade, and a common currency, with a weak central government being required to provide support for all members.
  - ex – United States just after the Revolutionary War, European Trade Union

### **Who Participates?**

- Rule by one (autocracy)
  - absolute monarchy
    - gains power through inheritance
  - dictatorship
    - dictators (or totalitarians) usually seize power and keep power through force
    - no political opposition
    - many controls imposed on citizens (especially in the area of civil liberties)

## AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

- Rule by a few (oligarchy)
  - aristocracy
    - rule by the finest(also known as elites)
    - definition of elite varies over time and place (land ownership, male, money, etc)
  - theocracy
    - power to rule lies in the hands of a religious group
    - rarely exists in pure form
  - political party
    - leaders carefully selected/controlled from within the top ranks of a political party (ex. Communist party)
- Rule by many (democracy)
  - direct, or participatory, democracy
    - most citizens participate directly in either holding office or making policy
  - democratic centralism
    - a government is democratic if it serves the true interests of the people
    - very few actually participate in government]
  - representative democracy
    - rather than allowing all eligible citizens to participate, a small number are elected (by the people) to serve as representatives