Becky Taylor

Texas Government

January 2, 2013

Government Enforcement

The government has ways both subtle and overt to enforce its laws, regulations and even ideals on the people. Through history, of course, the primary means that a government uses to enforce its will on the people has been through the monopolization of violence. However, we are no longer in the middle ages wherein a local lord can strike down a peasant for looking at him the wrong way. In a day and age when people understand their rights as citizens of a nation, the monopolization of violence must be exercised more subtly, but it still exists. For example, an individual citizen would be in for a world of trouble if he or she locked up a neighbor in their cellar for doing something he or she didn’t like, but the idea that the government locks up citizens who commit crimes is well accepted. Furthermore, law enforcement forces are allowed to go about armed at times and in places where average citizens would not be able. That is not to mention the fact that the government controls the armed forces with all the might that entails.

The second major pillar of government control, particularly in the United States, is through money. The government giveth and the government taketh away, so to speak. Money can be granted to people or groups to encourage behaviors that the government wants to see but doesn’t necessarily want to make criminal statutes to enforce. Likewise, taxes are used to discourage unwanted behaviors. As a good example of this there are sin taxes. Sin taxes are used as a penalty-free way of raising money in a time that taxation is seen as negative government interference, but they also discourage behaviors that we, as a society, feel are undesirable. Similarly, many business regulations are enforced by the threat of fines if the businesses involved do not comply. There are, of course, subtler and more detailed answers to the question of government control, but when taken to their core, the key means of enforcement of laws come down to these two things: money and violence.