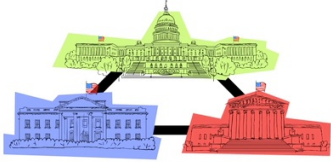


Three Branches of Government

“Checks and Balances”

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1.



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There are three branches of the US government.

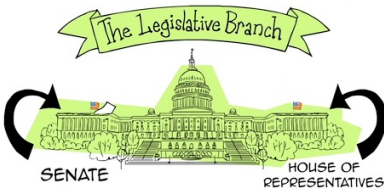
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When the founders were creating a new American government, the abuses of power from a single ruler were fresh in their minds. They didn't want another king! So the United States government was designed to prevent any single person or group from becoming too powerful. We call this idea "separation of powers."

The Constitution separates the government's power into three branches. Each branch has separate responsibilities, but they all must interact with each other in different ways. This separation of powers includes a system of checks and balances, which are ways that each branch can limit the others.

Notes

2.



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The legislative branch, or Congress, is responsible for writing legislation. Congress also has the power to collect taxes, borrow money for the United

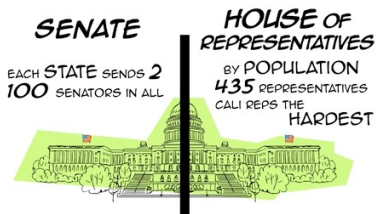
States, regulate commerce, coin money and declare war. Congress has two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. This two-chamber system is an example of checks and balances within a single branch of government.

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To pass, a bill must receive at least majority approval in both the Senate and the House. In the House, that means 218 of the 435 votes. In the Senate, senators can debate a bill for as long as they like. This is often called a filibuster. To make sure that senators actually vote on a bill and don't become deadlocked with a filibuster, the senate can break up a debate and pass a bill with 60 of the 100 senators voting.

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3.



When the founders were trying to figure out how best to represent citizens in Congress, those from states with larger populations clashed with those from states with smaller populations. More populated states

argued for representation based on population—meaning, they would have a louder voice in Congress. But states with smaller populations resisted this idea: Why should the more populated states get more power? They were in favor of an equal number of representatives per state so that they wouldn't get overshadowed. What to do? A two-chamber system, or "bicameral legislature," was the compromise. The Senate has two senators from each state, regardless of the population of the state. The number of representatives in the House, on the other hand, is based on population size. This system ensures that the smaller states still have their voices heard, but that the people and their interests are fairly represented.

Notes

Notes

4.



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Congress can override a presidential decision.

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Congress is responsible for legislation, but the president has to sign a bill before it becomes law and also has the option to reject, or veto, the bill. A presidential veto isn't necessarily the end of a bill though. If there is enough support for the bill, members of Congress can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote. This is part of the checks and balances plan. The president can check Congress's power with a veto, but Congress can check the president back with an override.

Notes

5.



The executive branch is responsible for ensuring that laws are carried out, or executed. The president has the most power in the executive branch.

The president serves as commander in chief of the armed forces. That means

that he or she has the final say in military plans. However, Congress has the power to declare war. The president also negotiates treaties. The president is the leader of his or her political party. The president and his or her party may collaborate to draft legislation that is then promoted by the party in Congress. The president also dictates US foreign policy. In addition to the president, the executive branch includes the vice president, the Cabinet and other federal agencies.

Notes

6.



b''

The president is responsible for appointing people to the Cabinet. The cabinet is made up of the heads of fifteen executive departments. These

departments are the Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, the Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury and Veterans Affairs departments.

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Additionally, the president appoints judges to the Supreme Court. The president doesn't have final say on all of these appointments. The Senate must approve many of them.

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Some positions in the president's team don't have to be approved by anyone. These are positions like the Chief of Staff, whose duties vary depending on the presidential administration, and various advisors.

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7.



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Major law decisions are made by the US Supreme Court.

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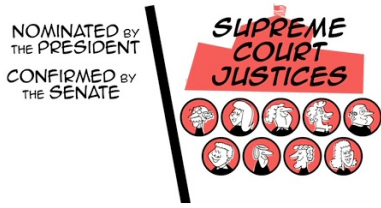
The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land, and it has the final say when it comes to federal law. When laws in different places conflict, the Supreme Court settles the argument. The judicial branch also includes lower federal courts. While the legislative branch creates laws and the executive branch carries them out, the judicial branch interprets the laws and evaluates the fairness of the laws.

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Notes

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8.



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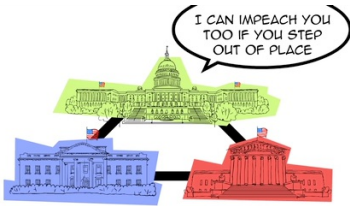
The US Supreme Court has nine justices.

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Notes

There are nine justices in the Supreme Court, including a chief justice. To try and keep the Supreme Court out of party politics, justices are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. In addition, justices do not serve limited terms of two, four, or six years like the members of the legislative and executive branches do. They get to serve until they retire or die. And if justices do something illegal, the Senate has the power to impeach them. It's all about the checks and balances. The federal judges that serve in district courts are also appointed instead of elected.

9.



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Impeachment is a serious process.

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Notes

When federal officials are accused of breaking the law, they face impeachment. The legislative branch can impeach members of the executive and judicial branches. In cases of impeachment, the House of Representatives accuses the official, who is then tried by the Senate. Impeachment is very rare only four presidents have faced it: Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton, and Donald Trump.

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