

## MAKING COMPARISONS

# CHECKS AND BALANCES

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The United States Constitution calls for a federal government with three separate and equally powerful divisions: the legislative (Congress), the executive (the President), and the judicial (the Supreme Court) branches.

The Constitution gives each branch the ability to limit the powers of the other two. This is a system known as checks and balances. The table below shows some of the powers granted to each branch. Study it, then answer the questions.



**The U.S. Congress** makes the country's laws. It has two chambers: the U.S. House

of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

- Congress can check the executive branch through its power to appropriate funds (decide how much money will be spent on various purposes).
- If the President vetoes (rejects) a law, Congress can override the veto by a two-thirds vote in both chambers.
- The Senate must approve treaties and presidential appointments.
- The House has the power to impeach (accuse of a crime or misdemeanor) U.S. officials, including the President and Supreme Court Justices.
- The Senate has the power to try U.S. officials who have been impeached.



**The President** enforces federal laws, commands the U.S. Armed Forces, makes treaties, and

appoints judges, ambassadors, and other high-level officials.

- The President can check the power of Congress by vetoing bills. However, Congress can override this veto if it has enough votes in both chambers.
- The President checks the power of the Supreme Court by appointing its Justices. The Senate must approve these appointments.
- The President can pardon (excuse) people who have committed "offenses against the United States," except in cases of an official's impeachment.



**The Supreme Court** can hear and decide cases appealed from state

or federal courts under the Constitution, U.S. laws, or treaties. (On rare occasions, it may hear cases that haven't gone through the lower courts.) It can try cases involving disputes between states.

- The Court can check Congress by ruling that a law is unconstitutional.
- The Court can check the power of the executive branch by ruling that one or more of its actions is unconstitutional.

## QUESTIONS

*Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.*

1. Which branch of government can appoint judges, ambassadors, and other government officials?
2. How can Congress override a presidential veto?
3. How can the Supreme Court check actions by Congress?
4. Who has the power to impeach a government official?
5. Which branch of the federal government commands the U.S. Armed Forces?
6. Which branch of government can try a dispute between states?
7. Which group has the power to try an official who has been impeached?
8. Which branch makes the country's laws?
9. Which group has the power to approve treaties?
10. Would you rather be the President, a U.S. Senator, a U.S. Representative, or a Supreme Court Justice? Give reasons for your answer.