

As you read, fill out the Checks and Balances flowchart.

The System of Checks and Balances

In the system set up by the U.S. Constitution, the national government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. These three branches are not independent of one another because the Constitution set up a system of checks and balances to help ensure that no one branch became too powerful. Each branch has powers that it can use to check and balance the operations and power of the other two branches. Following is a look at the specific checks that each branch has been given.

Checks and Balances of the Legislative Branch

The Legislative Branch is given the powers to make the laws. It has the following checks over the Executive Branch:

- May override presidential vetoes with a two-thirds vote
- Has the power over the purse strings to actually fund any executive actions
- May remove the president through impeachment
- Senate approves treaties
- Senate approves presidential appointments

The Legislative Branch has the following checks over the Judicial Branch:

- Creates lower courts
- May remove judges through impeachment
- Senate approves appointments of judges

Checks and Balances of the Executive Branch

The Executive Branch is given the power to carry out the laws. It has the following checks over the Legislative Branch:

- Veto power
- Ability to call special sessions of Congress
- Can recommend legislation
- Can appeal to the people concerning legislation and more

The Executive Branch has the following checks over the Judicial Branch:

- President appoints Supreme Court and other federal judges

Checks and Balances of the Judicial Branch

The Judicial Branch is given the power to interpret the laws. It has the following checks over the Executive Branch:

- Judges, once appointed for life, are free from controls from the executive branch
- Courts can judge executive actions to be unconstitutional through the power of judicial review

The Judicial Branch has the following checks over the Legislative Branch:

- Courts can judge legislative acts to be unconstitutional.

The American system of checks and balances has worked well over the course of America's history. Even though some huge clashes have occurred when vetoes have been overridden or appointees have been rejected, these occasions are rare. The system was meant to keep the three branches in balance. Even though there have been times when one branch has risen preeminent, overall the three branches have achieved a workable balance with no one branch holding all the governmental power.