




# CHECKS AND BALANCES

The writers of the U.S. Constitution wanted to create a strong national government. But they also wanted to make sure that one person or group did not have too much power. That's why they separated the government's powers into three branches: the executive, legislative and judicial. This structure is often called a system of "checks and balances." Each branch has certain powers to "check" the other branches and make sure that power is balanced among them.

The chart below shows how the three branches of government use some of their powers to make laws. Use the chart to answer the questions.

<b>LEGISLATIVE</b>	
	<p><b>Congress</b></p> <p>Congress members write bills, then vote on whether the bills should become new laws. The President can say no to a bill Congress has passed. That is called a veto. However, if two-thirds of all Congress members vote for the bill, they can cancel the President's decision.</p>
<b>EXECUTIVE</b>	
	<p><b>President, Vice President and the Cabinet members</b></p> <p>The President signs bills into law or vetoes them.</p>
<b>JUDICIAL</b>	
	<p><b>Supreme Court</b></p> <p>The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country. Its members decide if laws agree with the U.S. Constitution. The Supreme Court can declare laws unconstitutional.</p>

**1.** During the recent elections, citizens in every state elected lawmakers to serve in the House of Representatives. In 34 states, voters elected senators. These elected officials who will work to write and vote on bills are part of what branch of government?

\_\_\_\_\_

**2.** Why do you think the founders of our country created a system of checks and balances?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3.** To show how checks and balances work, fill in the correct answers.

Which branch writes and votes on a new bill? \_\_\_\_\_

Which branch has the power to sign the bill into law or veto the bill? \_\_\_\_\_

Which branch has the power to decide if the law is fair or unfair? \_\_\_\_\_

**4.** Do the three branches of government need to work together? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



President George W. Bush and many newly elected representatives and senators belong to which political party? If more than half of the members of the legislative branch and the President belong to the same political party, how might this affect the system of checks and balances? Discuss your ideas with a family member.