

Three Branches of Federal Government

Leaders of the United States wanted to protect individual freedoms and prevent the government from abusing its power. They believed they could do this by having three separate branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judicial. This separation is described in the first three articles of the Constitution.

Executive Branch

The [President](#) is the head of the executive branch, which makes laws official. The President is elected by the entire country and serves a four-year term. The President approves and carries out laws passed by the legislative branch. He appoints or removes cabinet members and officials. He negotiates treaties, and acts as head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces.

The executive branch also includes the Vice President and other officials, such as members of the cabinet. The cabinet is made up of the heads of the 15 major departments of the government. The cabinet gives advice to the President about important matters.

The Cabinet

- [The Secretary of State](#)
- [The Secretary of the Treasury](#)
- [The Secretary of Defense](#)
- [The Attorney General](#)
- [The Secretary of the Interior](#)
- [The Secretary of Agriculture](#)
- [The Secretary of Commerce](#)
- [The Secretary of Labor](#)
- [The Secretary of Health and Human Services](#)
- [The Secretary of Homeland Security](#)
- [The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development](#)
- [The Secretary of Transportation](#)
- [The Secretary of Education](#)
- [The Secretary of Energy](#)
- [The Secretary of Veterans' Affairs](#)

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch is made up of the two houses of Congress—the [Senate](#) and the [House of Representatives](#). The most important duty of the legislative branch is to make laws. Laws are written, discussed and voted on in Congress. There are 100 senators in the Senate, two from each state. Senators are elected by their states and serve six-year terms. The Vice President of the U.S. is considered the head of the Senate, but does not vote in the Senate unless there is a tie. The Senate approves nominations made by the President to the Cabinet,

the Supreme Court, federal courts and other posts. The Senate must ratify all treaties by a two-thirds vote.

There are 435 representatives in the House of Representatives. The number of representatives each state gets is based on its population. Representatives are elected by their states and serve two-year terms. The Speaker of the House, elected by the representatives, is considered the head of the House.

Both parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives elect leaders. The leader of the party that controls the house is called the majority leader. The other party leader is called the minority leader.

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch oversees the court system of the U.S. Through court cases, the judicial branch explains the meaning of the Constitution and laws passed by Congress. The Supreme Court is the head of the judicial branch. Unlike a criminal court, the Supreme Court rules whether something is constitutional or unconstitutional-whether or not it is permitted under the Constitution.

On the Supreme Court there are nine justices, or judges: eight associate justices and one chief justice. The judges are nominated by the President and approved by the Senate. They have no term limits. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land. Its decisions are final, and no other court can overrule those decisions.