



Checks and Balances

Step 1. Reading

Read Section 9.6 and answer the questions below:

1. What does the term *checks and balances* mean?

2. Why did the framers feel the need to include checks and balances in the Constitution?

Step 2. Constitution Question Cards

Get a set of Checks and Balances cards. To answer each question, refer to either Section 9.6 or the Constitution, which starts on page 474 in *History Alive! The United States Through Industrialism*. Record the answers below in complete sentences. For bonus points, record the article and section where the answer can be found.

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Article/Section</i>
17. _____ _____	_____
18. _____ _____	_____
19. _____ _____	_____
20. _____ _____	_____
21. _____ _____	_____
22. _____ _____	_____

checks and balances the system that allows each branch of government to limit the powers of the other branches

9.6 Checks and Balances Between the Branches

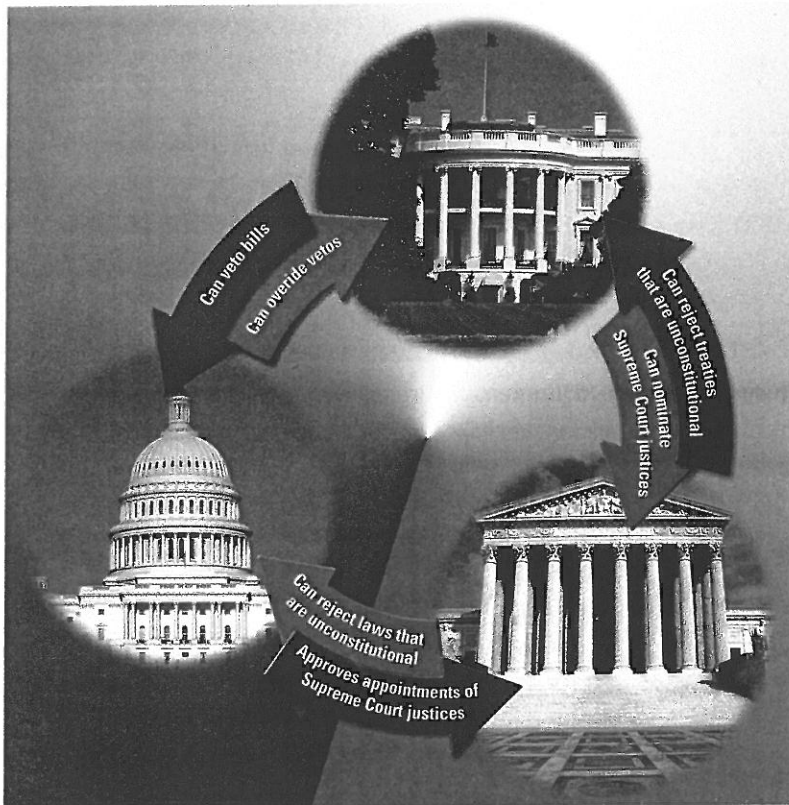
The framers of the Constitution were very concerned about achieving a balance between a strong national government and protection for American freedoms. Dividing the federal government into three branches was one way they hoped to limit the government's power. But what would keep one branch from dominating the others? As one delegate to the Constitutional Convention pointed out, "From the nature of man, we may be sure that those who have power in their hands...will always, when they can...increase it."

Because of this concern, the framers developed a system that would enable each branch of the government to limit the power of the other branches. This system is called **checks and balances**.

This diagram illustrates the concept of checks and balances, one of the most significant features of the Constitution. Checks and balances prevent one branch of government from gaining too much power.

Checking the Power of Other Branches "Checks" allow one branch to block the actions of another branch. For instance, Congress has the power to pass laws. But the president can check this power by vetoing a bill before it becomes law. In turn, Congress can check the president's power by overriding the veto by a two-thirds vote in both houses.

Similarly, the judicial branch can check the actions of the other two branches. Through its power of judicial review, the Supreme Court can declare that a law, a treaty, or an executive action is unconstitutional.



Balancing the Power of Other Branches

"Balances" allow each branch of the government to have some role in the actions and power of the other branches. For instance, judges, ambassadors, and cabinet members are appointed only if the president nominates them and the Senate approves the nomination. Similarly, the president has the power to sign treaties, but they take effect only if the Senate approves them.

The powers of the judicial branch are also balanced against the powers of the other branches. Even though the Supreme Court can declare laws unconstitutional, it is the president who chooses federal judges—and the Senate must approve these appointments. In addition, Congress can impeach federal judges. In these ways, the legislative and executive branches have some role in the actions of the judicial branch.

These checks and balances keep any one branch of the federal government from being too strong. This balance of powers is one of the most important features of the American system of government.