

ZOOM IN...

American Institutions

Three branches of power: each has control over the other two, to avoid abuse of power → system called “checks and balances.”



1 Legislative power The US Congress, at the Capitol

Its powers are enumerated in the Constitution: taxation, trade, army, diplomacy, budget....

Congress has a right of impeachment (= removal from office) against high federal officials and the president, if charged with misconduct.



▲ The Supreme Court building.

2 Executive power The president, or POTUS, at the White House

A president can serve two terms. “**The presidential ticket**” (= POTUS + vice president) is elected for a four-year term. The vice president substitutes for the president in case he dies, resigns or is incapacitated from office.

The president has **powers shared with Congress**: he is Commander in Chief of the armed forces, he nominates federal officials and Supreme Court judges with the Senate’s approval.

Exclusive power: he can grant pardon.

The president gives the State of the Union Address

before Congress every year, in which he presents his political agenda.

3 Judicial power The Supreme Court, or SCOTUS

• **The Supreme Court of The United States** reviews the laws voted in Congress (= it checks their conformity with the Constitution).

• **Nine judges, called “Justices,”** sit in the Supreme Court. They are appointed for life by the president with the approval of the Senate. They cannot be replaced, except by process of impeachment, or if they die or resign.

The Congress is composed of two chambers:

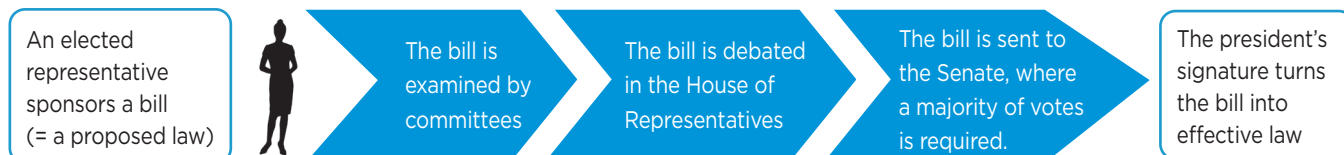
The House of Representatives

- 435 members: each state has at least one representative.
- The representation of a state is proportional to its population: a census is conducted every 10 years.
- Representatives are elected by universal suffrage and serve a two-year term, with no limit to the number of terms.

The Senate

- 100 senators (two per state).
- Senators are elected for 6 years by universal suffrage.
- One third of the Senate is renewed every two years to insure political stability.
- The vice president of the USA is also the president of the Senate.

The Legislative process



If the POTUS vetoes a law, the Congress can overrule the veto by a two-thirds majority in both chambers.