

TRANSCRIPT: HOW IS POWER DIVIDED IN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT? - BELINDA STUTZMAN

i *The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.*

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Have you ever wondered
who has the authority to make laws
or punish people who break them?
When we think of power in the United States,
we usually think of the President,
but he does not act alone.
In fact, he is only one piece of the power puzzle
and for very good reason.
When the American Revolution ended in 1783,
the United States government was in a state of change.
The founding fathers knew
that they did not want to establish another country
that was ruled by a king,
so the discussions were centered on
having a strong and fair national government
that protected individual freedoms
and did not abuse its power.
When the new constitution was adopted in 1787,
the structure of the infant government of the United States
called for three separate branches,
each with their own powers,
and a system of checks and balances.
This would ensure that no one branch
would ever become too powerful
because the other branches would always be able
to check the power of the other two.
These branches work together to run the country
and set guidelines for us all to live by.
The legislative branch is described in Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution.
Many people feel that the founding fathers
put this branch in the document first
because they thought it was the most important.
The legislative branch is comprised of
100 U.S. Senators
and 435 members in the U.S. House of Representatives.
This is better known as the U.S. Congress.
Making laws is the primary function of the legislative branch,
but it is also responsible for
approving federal judges and justices,

passing the national budget,
and declaring war.
Each state gets two Senators
and some number of Representatives,
depending on how many people live in that state.
The executive branch is described in Article 2 of the Constitution.
The leaders of this branch of government
are the President and Vice President,
who are responsible for enforcing the laws
that Congress sets forth.
The President works closely with a group of advisors,
known as the Cabinet.
These appointed helpers assist the President
in making important decisions within their area of expertise,
such as defense,
the treasury,
and homeland security.
The executive branch also appoints government officials,
commands the armed forces,
and meets with leaders of other nations.
All that combined is a lot of work for a lot of people.
In fact, the executive branch employs
over 4 million people to get everything done.
The third branch of the U.S. government is the judicial branch
and is detailed in Article 3.
This branch is comprised of all the courts in the land,
from the federal district courts
to the U.S. Supreme Court.
These courts interpret our nation's laws
and punish those who break them.
The highest court, the Supreme Court,
settles disputes among states,
hears appeals from state and federal courts,
and determines if federal laws are constitutional.
There are nine justices on the Supreme Court,
and, unlike any other job in our government,
Supreme Court justices are appointed for life,
or for as long as they want to stay.
Our democracy depends on an informed citizenry,
so it is our duty to know how it works
and what authority each branch of government has
over its citizens.
Besides voting,
chances are that some time in your life
you'll be called upon to participate in your government,
whether it is to serve on a jury,
testify in court,
or petition your Congress person
to pass or defeat an idea for a law.
By knowing the branches,
who runs them,
and how they work together,
you can be involved,

informed,
and intelligent.