The three branches of government

The Constitution divides the federal government into three branches, so no one person or group has too much power.

The Constitution of the United States

Legislative branch

Article I of the Constitution

Who is in it
Congress: the Senate, 100 senators, two from each state, serving six-year terms, and the House of Representatives, 435 voting members, serving two-year terms.

What it does
Makes the laws. Confirms or rejects the president's choices for judges and agency heads, and can declare war.

Executive branch

Article II of the Constitution

Who is in it
The president, serving a four-year term, the vice president and the cabinet, who advise the president.

What it does
Carries out the laws. The president is commander in chief of the armed forces and can veto bills Congress passes.

Judicial branch

Article III of the Constitution

Who is in it
The Supreme Court, nine justices: the chief justice and eight associate justices, and the other federal courts.

What it does
Decides what laws mean, applies them to cases, and decides whether a law goes against the Constitution.

Checks and balances: how each branch can stop the others

- The president can veto a bill Congress passes.
- Congress can pass a bill over a veto with a two-thirds vote in each house.
- The Senate confirms or rejects the president's choices for judges and agency heads.
- The House can impeach a president, and the Senate can then remove the president from office.
- The Supreme Court can overturn a law that goes against the Constitution.

From the Constitution (National Archives), USAGov, the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court.