

# Chapter: Branches of Government

**Subject:** Civics / Political Science

**Grade:** IB MYP Grade 10

**Unit Title:** Governance and Power

**Key Concept:** Systems

**Related Concepts:** Authority, Rights, Structure

**Global Context:** Fairness and Development

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## Introduction

A modern democratic government is based on the principle of separation of powers, where different branches are responsible for different functions. This helps ensure that no single part of government becomes too powerful and that governance is efficient, accountable, and just. The three primary branches—**Legislative**, **Executive**, and **Judicial**—work in coordination but also provide checks and balances on each other. Understanding these branches is essential for grasping how governments function in both theory and practice.

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## 1. The Principle of Separation of Powers

### Definition

The doctrine of separation of powers was developed to avoid the concentration of authority in one single body. It divides governmental responsibilities into three distinct branches:

- **Legislative** (makes laws)
- **Executive** (implements laws)
- **Judiciary** (interprets laws)

### Importance

- Prevents abuse of power
  - Promotes rule of law
  - Ensures accountability and transparency
  - Encourages specialization and efficiency
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## 2. The Legislative Branch

### Role and Function

The legislative branch is primarily responsible for:

- Making, amending, and repealing laws
- Approving budgets and taxation
- Debating national issues
- Representing the electorate

### Structure

In most democratic nations, the legislature is bicameral, meaning it has two houses:

- **Lower House (e.g., House of Commons / Lok Sabha)**
- **Upper House (e.g., House of Lords / Rajya Sabha)**

### Types of Legislatures

- **Unicameral Legislature:** One legislative house (e.g., Sweden, New Zealand)
- **Bicameral Legislature:** Two legislative houses (e.g., India, USA, UK)

### Checks on Power

- Can hold the executive accountable through votes of confidence or impeachment procedures
  - Controls national expenditure
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## 3. The Executive Branch

### Role and Function

The executive is the branch that:

- Implements and enforces laws
- Manages day-to-day administration
- Frames policies
- Represents the country internationally

## Structure

The structure varies by system of government:

- **Presidential System (e.g., USA):** President is both Head of State and Head of Government
- **Parliamentary System (e.g., UK, India):** Prime Minister is Head of Government; President/Monarch is ceremonial Head of State

## Key Offices

- **President / Monarch:** Ceremonial or active leadership depending on the system
- **Prime Minister / Chancellor:** Political leader and policymaker
- **Council of Ministers / Cabinet:** Advises the Prime Minister and manages departments

## Checks on Power

- Can be removed by legislature through a vote of no confidence
  - Bound by constitutional limits and judicial review
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# 4. The Judicial Branch

## Role and Function

The judiciary:

- Interprets laws and the Constitution
- Resolves disputes
- Protects individual rights and freedoms
- Ensures justice is delivered fairly

## Structure

- **Supreme Court:** Highest court in the country
- **Appellate Courts:** Hear appeals from lower courts
- **Lower Courts / Trial Courts:** Handle civil and criminal cases at the grassroots level

## Judicial Review

Courts have the power to declare laws or executive actions unconstitutional. This reinforces the rule of law.

## Independence of Judiciary

- Judges are appointed based on merit
  - Fixed tenures and salaries
  - Free from executive and legislative influence
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## 5. Checks and Balances

### What It Means

Checks and balances refer to the system where each branch can monitor and limit the functions of the other branches to maintain a balance of power.

### Examples

- Legislature passes a law → Judiciary can declare it unconstitutional
  - Executive proposes a budget → Legislature approves or modifies it
  - Judiciary interprets a law → Legislature can amend the law if needed
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## 6. Comparison of Systems

Feature	Parliamentary System	Presidential System
Head of State	Ceremonial (e.g., President)	Executive (e.g., President)
Head of Government	Prime Minister	President
Fusion or Separation	Fusion of executive and legislative	Separation of powers
Example Countries	UK, India	USA, Brazil



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## 7. Importance in Democratic Governance

- Encourages accountability of government officials
- Provides legal redress and protection for citizens

- Ensures no single branch dominates governance
  - Promotes citizen trust and participation
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## Summary

The **three branches of government**—**Legislative**, **Executive**, and **Judicial**—form the pillars of a functioning democracy. Each branch performs distinct but interrelated functions and is equipped with mechanisms to keep the others in check. The **Legislative** branch makes laws, the **Executive** enforces them, and the **Judiciary** interprets them. This **separation of powers** ensures that power is not concentrated in any one branch, thereby maintaining the principles of democracy, justice, and equality. Understanding how these branches interact is fundamental for active and informed citizenship.

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