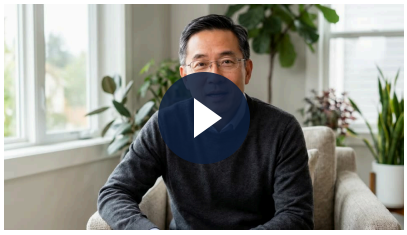
COLLECTION I — THE 12 POINTS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Separation of Powers — Citizen's Guide

How the division of legislative, executive, and judicial authority protects democratic governance.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026



WATCH THE VIDEO

Separation of Powers in 60 Seconds · 0:59

Watch it on American Civic Power or YouTube.

https://www.americancivicpower.com/goodgovernance#separation-of-powers

What it means

Separation of powers divides government into branches. Legislatures make laws and budgets, executives carry them out, and courts interpret them. Each branch can check the others, so no single office holds unchecked power.

Why it matters

Concentrated power is easy to abuse. When branches check each other, mistakes and overreach get caught, and decisions get a second look.

Signs it's working

- Legislatures actually review and amend budgets, rather than rubber-stamping them.
- Independent oversight bodies, like comptrollers and inspectors general, do their jobs.

- Courts can rule against the government.
- Party organizations don't control both the executive and the legislative agenda behind closed doors.

Warning signs

- Legislative bodies that never vote against the executive.
- Oversight officials appointed by, and loyal to, the people they oversee.
- Executive orders used to bypass the legislature on routine matters.
- The same people holding party leadership and government power.

What you can do

1. Learn how your county and town divide power. Many have an elected executive and a separate legislature or board.
2. Watch how often your legislature amends the executive's budget.
3. Support independent oversight offices and ask that their reports be acted on.
4. Ask candidates how they'd use their office to check other branches, not just cooperate with them.

Related points

Rule of Law, Accountability, Ethical Leadership.

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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