Congress and the President are often in conflict for three main reasons:

1. They Have Different Constituencies

Members of Congress are elected by constituents in their states or districts. The interests of the constituents are much narrower than those of the broad electorate that chooses the president. Thus senators and representatives may have viewpoints that differ considerably from the president.

2. They Have Different Political Timetables

The election cycles of the president, senators, and representatives are all different. A president has at most, if he/she is re-elected, eight years to pass a legislative agenda. Midway through the first four-year term, a president may be concerned about the next election.

3. Party Politics

Party politics is a major source of conflict between the branches. In shaping public policy, the president and Congress often clash because the president is often not of the same party as the majority party in both houses of Congress. Thus the different legislative agendas of each party automatically create contention.

Adding to this conflict are the ways in which each branch may block the other’s powers. Congress needs the president’s approval to pass legislation. The president may veto a bill, but Congress may override a presidential veto. Congressional committees can also block the president’s legislative proposals by stalling, revising, ignoring, or killing a bill at the prompting of a strong chairperson.