





Supreme Court

- Highest court in the federal system
- Nine Justices, meeting in Washington, D.C.
- Appeals jurisdiction through *certiorari* process
- Limited original jurisdiction over some cases



Courts of Appeal

- Intermediate level in the federal system
- 12 regional "circuit" courts, including D.C. Circuit
- No original jurisdiction; strictly appellate



District Courts

- Lowest level in the federal system
- 94 judicial districts in 50 states & territories
 - No appellate jurisdiction
- Original jurisdiction over most cases

The United States Supreme Court

- Highest court in the land and the ONLY one established by Article III of U.S. Constitution.
- Term: First Monday October- late June
- Nine Justices: one Chief, eight associate justices which serve life tenure appointments. Death, resignation, retirement, or conviction on impeachment are the only ways justices leave the Supreme Court.
- No trials or juries- lawyers appear on behalf of litigants. Usually evaluates arguments about legal and Constitutional questions of cases.
- Each side gets **30 minutes** to argue their case before the Justices. A case goes before the court if four justices agree to hear it. This is called the "rule of four".

The United States Supreme Court

- Annual Salary: associate justices \$213,900; chief justice \$223,500. Constitution prohibits Congress from reducing pay for incumbent justices. A justice may retire and earn his or her final salary for life, plus cost of living increases.
- Court is ruled by seniority. The Chief Justice is considered the most senior member of the Court, regardless of length of service. Associate Justices are ranked by the length of service.
- During Court sessions, justices sit according to seniority, with Chief Justice in center, and Associate Justices on alternating sides, with the most senior Associate Justice on the Chief Justice's immediate right, and the most junior Associate Justice seated on the left farthest away from the Chief Justice.
- Each justice is also a "circuit justice" and is assigned to oversee one or more federal judicial circuits.

The United States Supreme Court

- Primarily an appellate court; has original jurisdiction over small number of cases.
- Three "routes" to the U.S. Supreme Court:
 - 1) original jurisdiction over cases involving disputes between states (least common- one-two cases per term).
 - 2) cases on appeal from circuit courts- a party files a petition (cert) and justices determine if they will hear it (most common route).
 - 3) appeals from state supreme courts- generally on Constitutional issues.

The Roberts Court: 2005- present



United States Courts of Appeals

- Hears appeals from the district courts located within its circuit, as well as appeals from decisions of federal administrative agencies.
- Have strictly *appellate jurisdiction*- handling appeals from U.S. District Courts and are the intermediate appellate courts in the federal system.
- Considered most powerful and influential courts in the federal system. The Courts of Appeals serve as the final arbiter on most federal cases and set legal precedent in regions that cover millions of people (because the Supreme Court chooses to hear fewer than 100 of the more than 10,000 cases filed with it annually).
- The Courts of Appeals have strong policy influence on U.S. law.

United States Court of Appeals

- Court of appeals decisions establish binding precedents. Other federal courts in same circuit must follow the appeals court's guidance in similar cases, regardless of whether the trial judge thinks the case should be decided differently.
- Do not handle jury trials- only handle cases where party argues that district court judge made an error in handling their case.
- Currently 179 Judges on U.S. Courts of Appeals authorized by Congress and Article III of the Constitution. Judges are nominated by the president and then confirmed by the Senate.
- Judges have lifetime tenure and earn an annual salary of \$184,500.

Federal Courts of Appeals Regional Districts



United States District Courts

- Lowest level of courts in federal system. 94 United States district courts with least one judicial district for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
- Serve as general trial courts of the U.S. federal court system and handle both civil and criminal cases. They have no appellate jurisdiction and have original jurisdiction over most cases and can conduct jury trials. There is one bankruptcy court associated with each U.S. district court.
- Part of the "inferior" courts established by Congress. There is no constitutional requirement that there be any district courts. Number of judges in each district court and structure of the judicial system are set by Congress and usually based on population.
- The President appoints federal district judges whose role is to decide questions of law and fact.