



# The Courts:

## The Judicial Branch in America

# Two Types of Cases

- Criminal Law – the government charges an individual with violating one or more specific laws (murder, theft, etc.)
- Civil Law – the court resolves a dispute between two parties (divorce, lawsuits for damages, etc.)

# Participants in Trial

Participants are known as litigants:

- Plaintiff – the party bringing the charges
- Defendant – the party being charged/accused
- Jury – the people (typically 12 people) who decide the outcome of a case
- Standing to sue: plaintiffs must have a serious interest in the case

# More Participants

- Groups – use the courts to change policies (Sierra Club; River Keepers; ACLU; Corporations, etc.)
- Can also file amicus curiae brief (used by outside groups to try and influence the Supreme Court)
- Attorneys – Prosecutors, corporate lawyers, criminal defense lawyers, etc.

# Structure of the Federal Court System

## The United States Federal Courts

**SUPREME  
COURT**

**UNITED STATES  
SUPREME COURT**

**APPELLATE  
COURTS**

**U.S. Courts of Appeals**  
12 Regional Circuit Courts of Appeals  
1 U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit

**TRIAL  
COURTS**

**U.S. District Courts**  
94 Judicial Districts  
U.S. Bankruptcy Courts  
**U.S. Court of International Trade**  
**U.S. Court of Federal Claims**

**FEDERAL COURTS  
AND OTHER ENTITIES  
OUTSIDE THE  
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

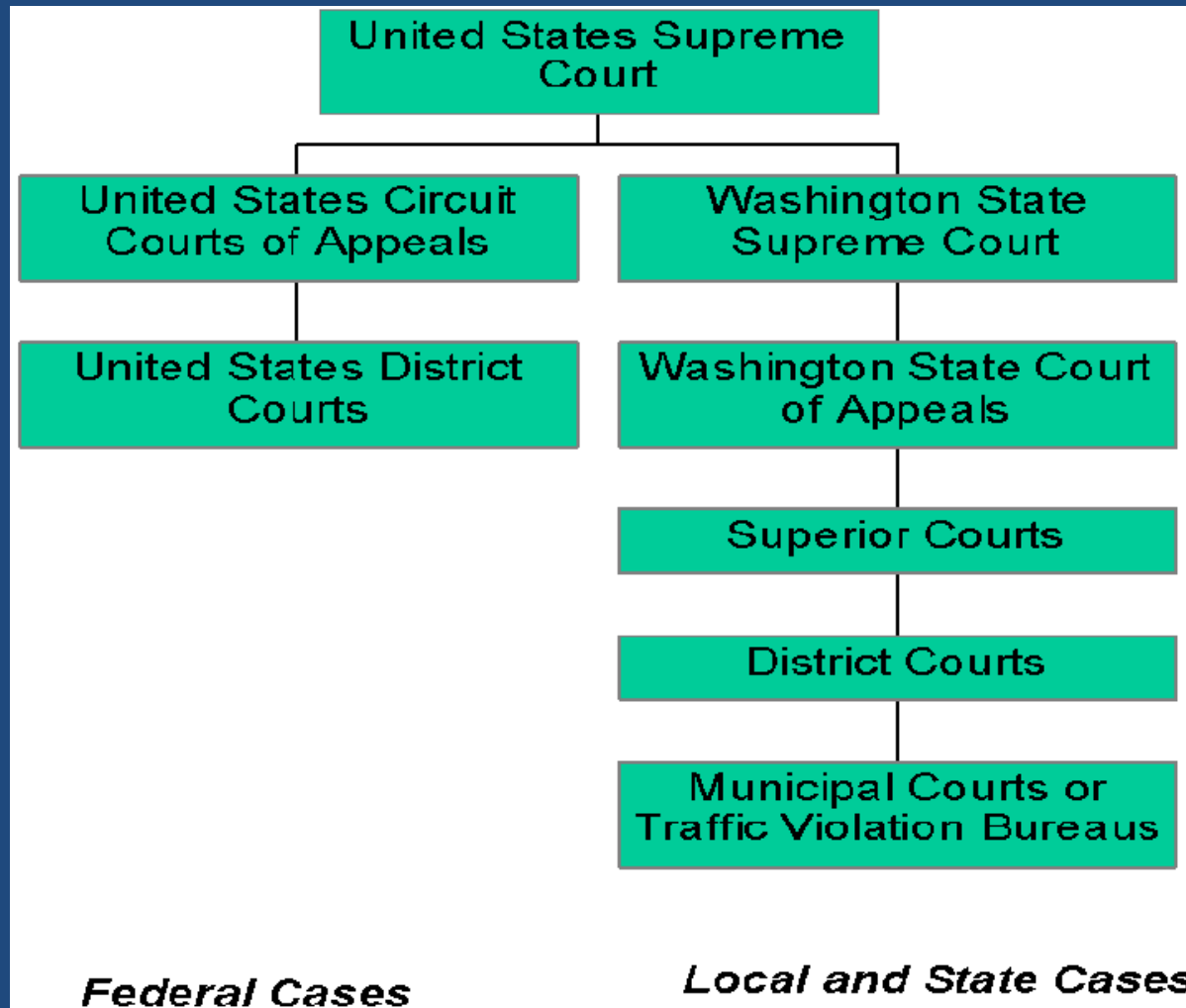
**Military Courts (Trial and Appellate)**  
**Court of Veteran's Appeals**  
**U.S. Tax Court**  
**Federal administrative agencies  
and boards**



# Federal System

- US District Courts
- Original Jurisdiction: courts that determine the facts about a case – the trial court
- Federal crimes only
- Civil suits under federal law/across state lines
- Bankruptcy/naturalization
- Maritime law

# Washington State Court System



# Federal System (continued)

- Courts of Appeal
- Appellate jurisdiction: reviews the legal issues in cases brought from lower courts
- Hold no trial and hear no testimony
- 12 circuit courts
- Focus on did the lower courts make a mistake when it came to procedures or interpretation of the law



# Federal System (continued)

- The Supreme Court
- 9 Justices: 1 Chief Justice; 8 Associate Justices
- Hear mostly cases on appeal
- Very few cases are heard by the US Supreme Court
- If they refuse to hear your case, then the lower court decision stands
- Power of Judicial Review

# Nine Members of the Court

*\*All federal judges are appointed for life!*

The  
Supreme  
Court  
Justices



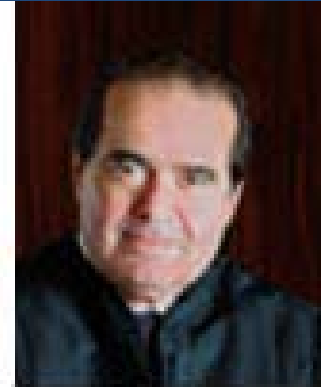
Roberts



Ginsburg



Breyer



Scalia



Thomas



Alito



Kennedy



Sotomayor



Kagan