

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

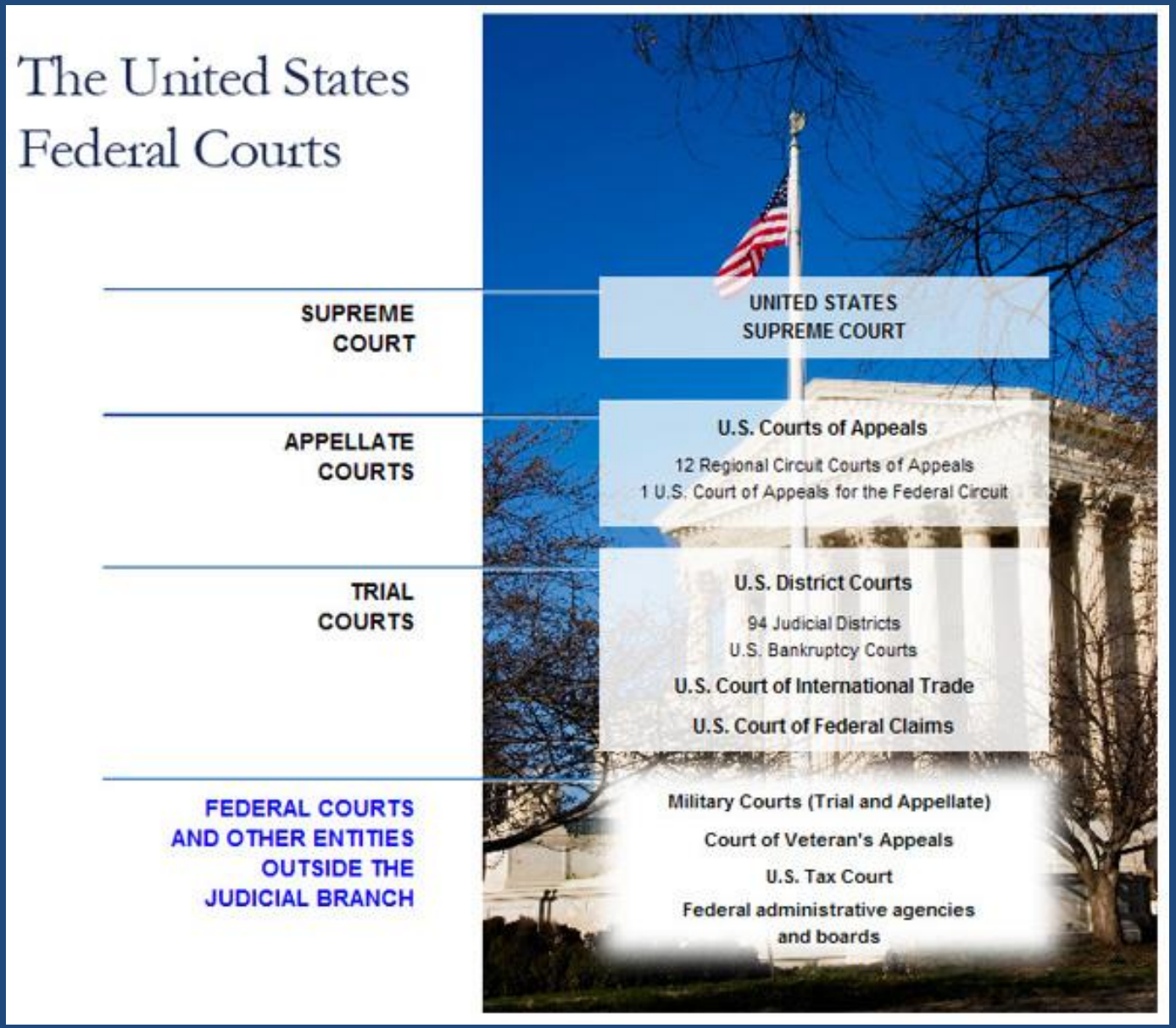
Participants are known as litigants:

- 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.

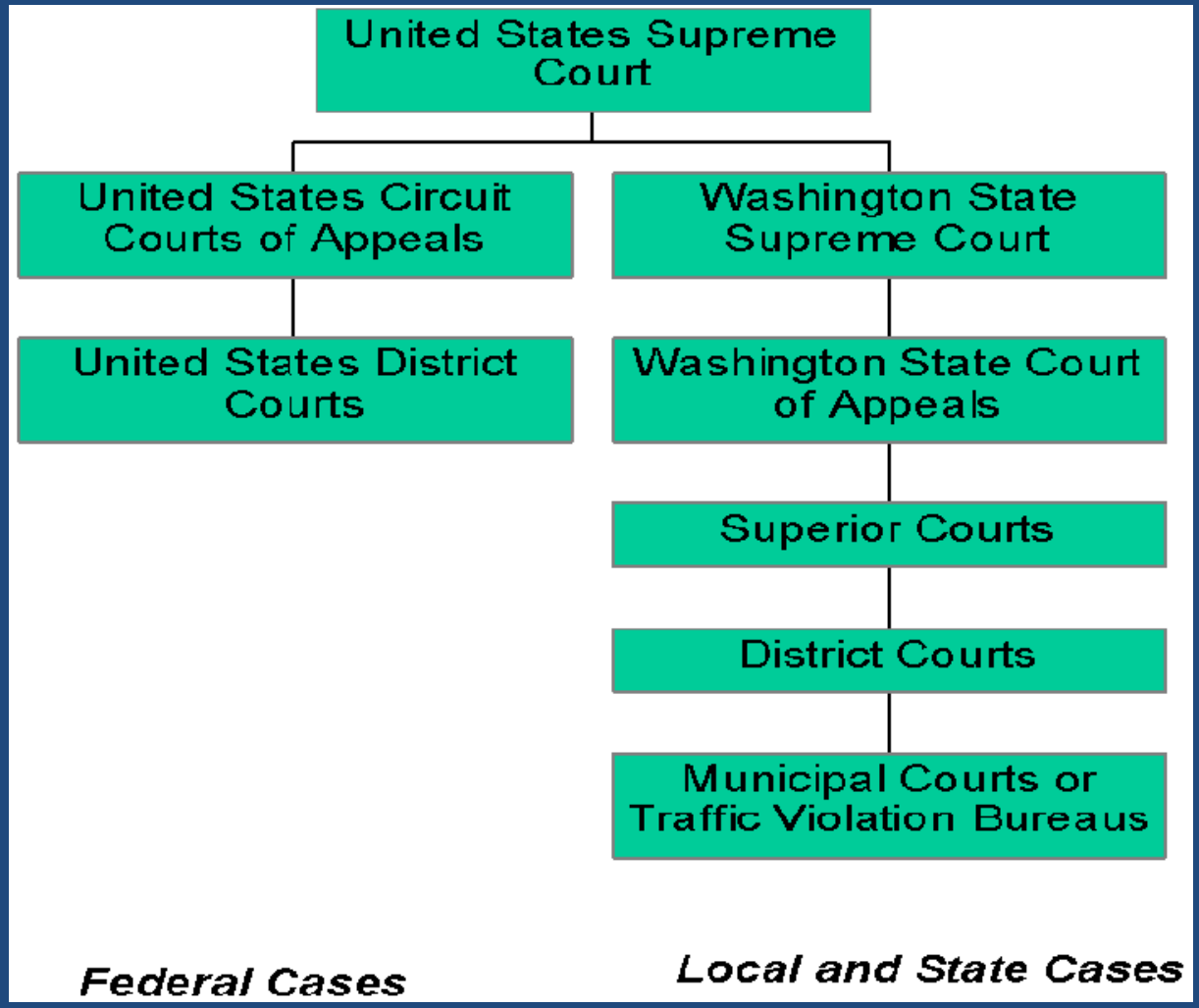
Structure of the Federal Court System



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
- Loose vs. Strict Interpretation of the Constitution

Nine Members of the Supreme Court

**All federal judges are appointed for life!*

(Back row of the picture: Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, Ketanji Brown Jackson)



(Front row of picture: Sonia Sotomayor, Clarence Thomas, John Roberts, Samuel Alito, Elena Kagan)