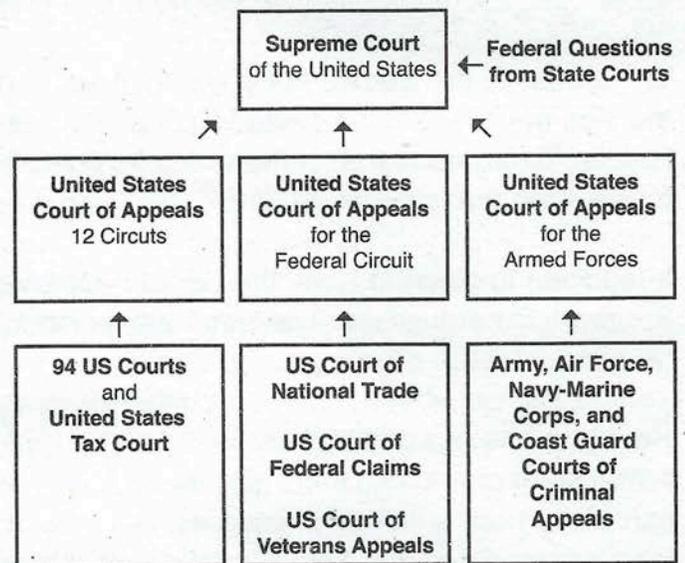


Federal Government: Judicial Branch

Article III of the Constitution establishes the **judicial branch** of the federal (United States) government. There are two judicial systems in the United States: the **federal** judicial system and the **state** judicial system. All of the courts in the United States are part of the judicial system. The federal judicial branch makes judgments according to the Constitution and other laws that are passed. This means it judges whether something is legal or illegal.

The federal judicial system hears (makes legal judgments about) cases about federal laws or the Constitution. It also hears cases between citizens and federal government, and between individuals or groups from different states. It can also decide cases involving other countries. There is at least one federal court system in each state.

The federal judicial system is made up of three levels of courts. These courts have different functions. The **first level** is the district court. It is also called the trial court because it decides cases in front of a judge or jury. The **second level** is the court of appeals. The court of appeals is an appellate court. This means that it considers cases that have already been heard by the district court. If a defendant (the person being accused) or plaintiff (the person who is doing the accusing) does not like the decision made by judge or jury at the district court level, that decision may be "appealed," which means the case goes to a higher court.



The **third level** is the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is the nation's highest court. It has the final say on whether a law is **constitutional** (obeys the Constitution) or not, and it can also overrule or uphold decisions made by other courts. The judges on the Supreme Court are called **justices**. There are nine justices, one of whom is the chief justice. Supreme Court justices are **appointed** by the president for life but must be **approved** by the Senate.

Judges are always lawyers, because they must be trained to understand the law. In the state-level judicial systems, either the president or a governor can appoint the state judges, or the people can elect them.

Answer the Following

- Name the three levels of the judicial system. _____
- What is the highest court in the United States? _____
- What does the judicial system do? _____