



"This independence of the judges is ... requisite to guard the Constitution and the rights of individuals."
Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Paper No. 78.

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America's Courts: A Primer



ARTICLE III U.S. COURTS

Most federal courts are established under Article III of the U.S. Constitution. They include the Supreme Court; 12 Courts of Appeals covering different regions; one Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington; District Courts for 94 federal judicial districts; and the Court of International Trade.

These courts hear cases involving the constitutionality of laws; criminal and civil cases involving the laws and treaties of the United States; and disputes between two or more states.

Article III Court judges are nominated by the president, confirmed by the Senate and have life tenure, which can be taken away only through impeachment and conviction by the U.S. Senate.

ARTICLE I U.S. COURTS

These are established by Congress under Article I of the U.S. Constitution and include the U.S. Court of Military Appeals; the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals; the U.S. Court of Federal Claims; the U.S. Tax Court; and Bankruptcy Courts, which are separate units of the District Courts. Unlike Article III judges, these fall within the executive branch of the government.



Article I Courts do not have full judicial power. They cannot issue a final decision in all questions of Constitutional law, all questions of federal law or hear claims at the core of habeas corpus issues.

STATE COURTS

Organized under each state's constitution, state courts hear most criminal cases, probate (involving wills and estates), personal injury cases, and family law cases. They hear appeals under state laws and constitutions. It is estimated that they handle 95 percent of all active litigation in courts in the United States. Many states also have municipal court systems that hear cases involving traffic and other minor offenses.



OUR COURTS PROTECT US. ARE WE PROTECTING THEM?

Want to find out more about the courts? Click [here](#) to read about Our Courts America, a civics education project of Justice at Stake.

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Keep our courts fair and impartial.

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