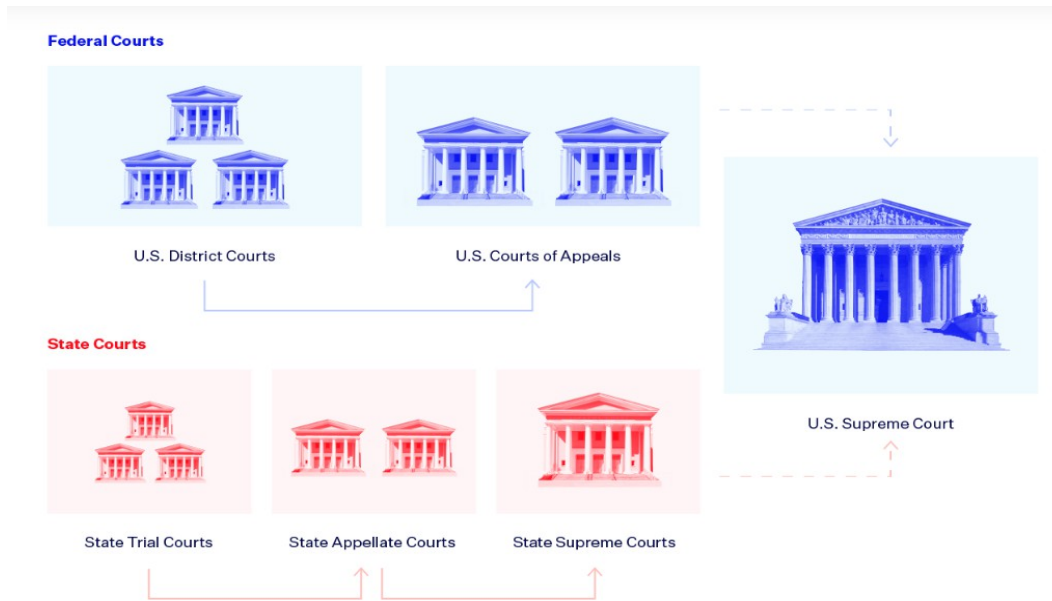


The United States is a dual court system where state and federal matters are handled separately.

There are two types of courts in the United States — state and federal. You can think about them as parallel tracks that can (though rarely) end up in the U.S. Supreme Court. Within the two respective tracks, there are three main levels: trial courts, appellate courts and the highest court for that respective track.



- To file a lawsuit in federal court, one must allege that there is a breach of federal law or the U.S. Constitution — these are cases that raise a “federal question.” Federal courts also hear a unique type of case involving “diversity of citizenship” where the case is between citizens of different states and potential damages exceed \$75,000.

- State courts are known as courts of general jurisdiction, meaning that one can raise any claim under state or federal law, except those that are under exclusive jurisdiction of federal courts.

In either federal or state court, a case starts at the lowest level: a U.S. District Court or a state trial court, respectively. If a party disagrees with the outcome at the trial level, they can appeal it to a higher court and eventually petition all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

There are, of course, exceptions to these procedural rules.

The federal court system has three main levels: district courts, circuit courts and the U.S. Supreme Court. Federal judges and Supreme Court justices are appointed by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate for a lifetime term.

There are [94 active district courts](#) across the country.

Circuit courts are the first level of appeal. **C**

The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court and final level of appeal. It chooses which cases it hears.

Parties who disagree with the decision made by a circuit court can petition the U.S. Supreme Court to take the case. Less frequently, parties can petition the U.S. Supreme Court to review the decision made by a state Supreme Court if the case deals with a federal question.

Unlike intermediate appellate courts, the U.S. Supreme Court is not required to hear cases. Instead, parties ask the court to grant a [writ of certiorari](#). The Supreme Court [hears around 80 cases per year](#), selected from over 7,000 cases that it is asked to review.