

Chapter 18: The Federal Court System

Section 1

Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Explain why the Constitution created a national judiciary, and describe its structure.
2. Identify the criteria that determine whether a case is within the jurisdiction of a federal court, and compare the types of jurisdiction.
3. Outline the process for appointing federal judges, and list their terms of office.
4. Understand the impact of judicial philosophy.
5. Examine the roles of court officers.

▶ Key Terms

- **inferior courts:** the lower federal courts beneath the Supreme Court
- **jurisdiction:** the authority of a court to try and decide a case
- **concurrent jurisdiction:** when federal and state courts both have the power to hear a case
- **plaintiff:** the person who files a lawsuit
- **defendant:** the person against whom a legal complaint is made

▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **original jurisdiction:** the power held by the first court to hear a case
- **appellate jurisdiction:** the power to hear a case on appeal from the court with original jurisdiction
- **judicial restraint:** the philosophy that judges should decide cases based on the original intent of the lawmakers and on precedent
- **precedent:** prior judicial decisions that guide rulings on similar cases
- **judicial activism:** the philosophy that judges should also take current social conditions into account when deciding cases

► Introduction

- What are the structure and function of the national judiciary?
 - The **national judiciary** is made up of the Supreme Court and the inferior courts, which include the special courts and the more numerous constitutional courts.
 - The **national judiciary** hears cases involving federal law and interstate cases. It also interprets the constitutionality of laws.

► Origins of the Judiciary

- The Constitution created the Supreme Court.
- Article III gives Congress the power to create the rest of the federal court system, which it did in 1789.
- The states each have their own court systems that exist side-by-side with the federal courts.
- Most cases tried each year are heard by state courts.

▶ Types of Federal Courts





- Congress created the inferior courts.
 - **Constitutional courts** exercise the judicial power of the United States and hear a wide range of cases dealing with federal laws.
 - **Special courts** hear specific types of cases related to the expressed powers of Congress.

► Types of Federal Courts

- The Constitution created only the Supreme Court, giving Congress the power to create any lower, or “inferior,” courts as needed.
 - Congress created the Constitutional Courts under the provisions of Article III to exercise the broad “judicial Power of the United States.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURTS

Congress created the constitutional courts under the provisions of Article III to exercise the broad “judicial Power of the United States.”

			
94 District Courts	12 U.S. Courts of Appeals	U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit	U.S. Court of International Trade

► Types of Federal Courts, cont.

- Congress created the special, or legislative, courts to help exercise its powers as spelled out in Article I.
- These courts have narrowly defined jurisdictions.

THE SPECIAL COURTS

Congress created the special, or legislative, courts to help exercise its powers as spelled out in Article I. These courts have narrowly defined jurisdictions.



U.S. Court of
Federal Claims



U.S. Tax
Court



Territorial
Courts



U.S. Court
of Appeals
for the
Armed Forces



Courts
of the
District of
Columbia



U.S. Court of
Appeals for
Veterans
Claims

▶ Federal Jurisdiction

- **Federal courts** hear cases based upon subject matter or the parties involved in the cases.
 - Federal courts usually try cases that only they have authority to hear.
- **Federal courts** can hear any case whose subject matter involves the interpretation and application of a provision in the Constitution or in a federal law or treaty.

▶ Federal Jurisdiction, cont.

- Checkpoint: What parties must bring their cases to a federal court?
 - The United States or its officers and agencies
 - An official representative of a foreign government
 - One of the 50 states suing another state, a resident of another state, or a foreign government
 - A U.S. citizen suing a citizen of another state or a foreign government or citizen

▶ Types of Jurisdiction

- Cases with concurrent jurisdiction can be tried in *either* a federal or state court.
- The court in which a case is first heard has original jurisdiction for that case.
- A court with appellate jurisdiction rules on cases that were first tried in other courts.
 - Appellate courts review these cases to ensure that the law was correctly applied. They can uphold or overturn earlier decisions.

▶ Which Court?

- Two separate court systems, federal and State, hear and decide cases in the United States.
- **Scenario:** Citizen M robs a bank in California.
- **Jurisdiction:**
FEDERAL



► Which Court? cont.

- **Scenario:** Citizen X of Michigan sues Citizen Y of Massachusetts for \$80,000 in damages caused as the result of a car accident.
- **Jurisdiction:**
CONCURRENT



▶ Which Court? cont.

- **Scenario:** Citizen Y of Ohio has her car repaired at AJ's, the local repair shop. Her car breaks down on her way home. She sues the repair shop for breach of contract.
- **Jurisdiction: STATE**



▶ Federal Judges

- The President appoints federal judges and the Senate confirms or rejects them.
- Judges on the constitutional courts are appointed for life and can be removed only through impeachment.



Judge Maryanne Trump Barry, U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit

▶ Federal Judges, cont.

- There are no constitutional qualifications for being a federal judge.
 - It is now customary for appointees to have legal backgrounds, prior judicial experiences, and to belong to the same political party as the President.

▶ Judicial Restraint

- Judges make decisions that shape public policy.
- **Judicial restraint** argues that the courts should defer to the policy decisions of the legislative and executive branches.
- Supporters of **judicial restraint** believe that judges should decide cases based upon:
 - The intent of the Framers and Congress when the law was originally written
 - Precedents set by rulings in similar cases.

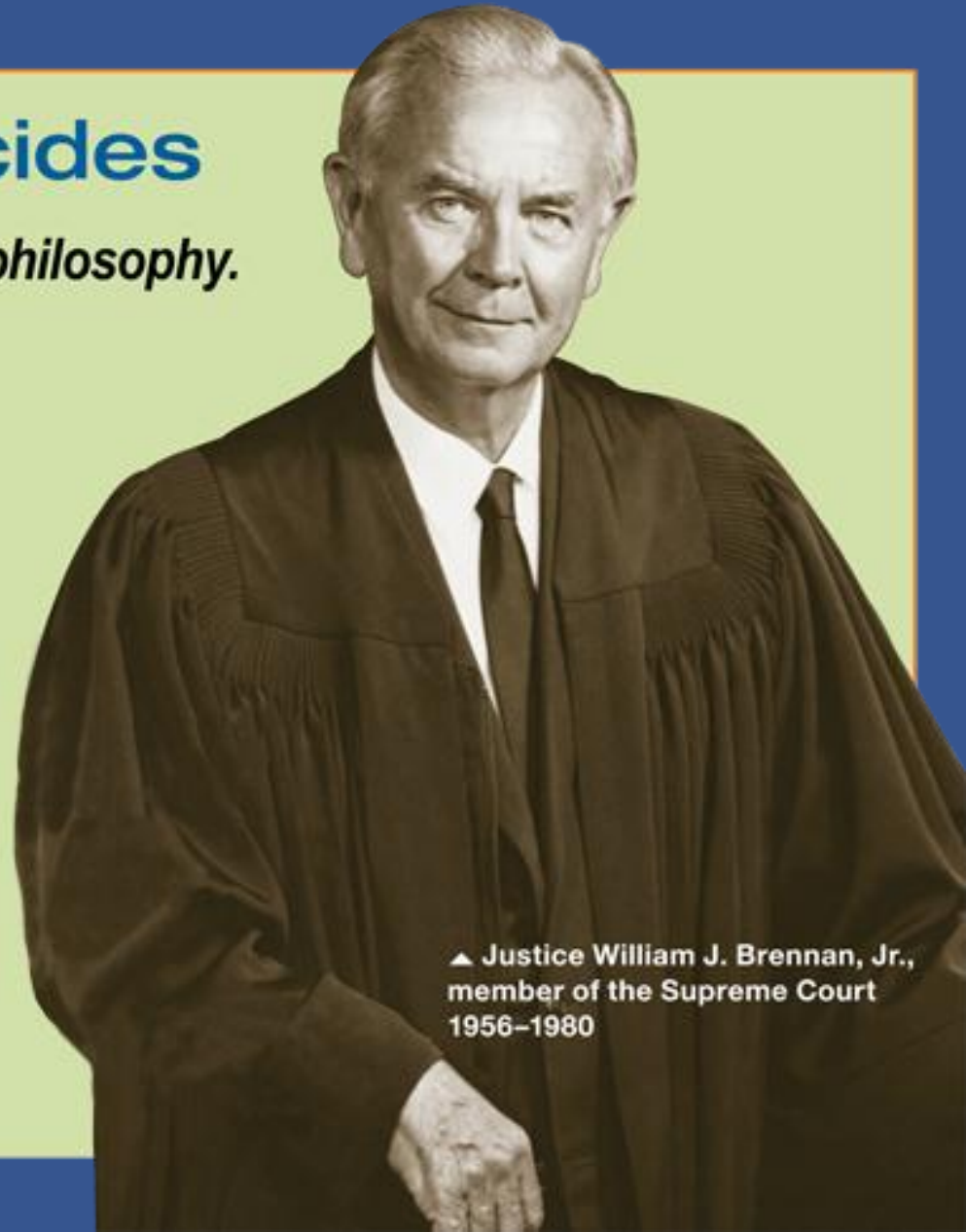
▶ Judicial Activism

- **Judicial activism** argues that judges should take into account how social values and conditions may have changed over time when they interpret the law.
- Supporters of this principle believe that judges can and should make independent decisions when their interpretation of law differs from that of the legislative and executive branches.

How a Judge Decides

*Over time, a judge may change his philosophy.
What impact might this have?*

- **Facts** of the Case
- Relevant **Precedent**
- Text of the **Constitution**
- Judicial **Philosophy**



▲ Justice William J. Brennan, Jr.,
member of the Supreme Court
1956–1980

▶ Court Officers

- Court officers handle the daily administration of a court.
 - Magistrates are appointed to eight-year terms and may issue arrest warrants, hear evidence, set bail, and try minor cases.
 - U.S. Attorneys serve each federal judicial district by prosecuting federal offenders and representing the United States.
 - U.S. marshals and deputy marshals perform many law enforcement duties for the district courts.

▶ Review

- Now that you have learned about the structure and function of the national judiciary, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Does the structure of the federal court system allow it to administer justice effectively?