



*Federal Courts' National Educational Outreach that Involves, Informs, Inspires, and Ignites*

## PATHWAYS TO THE U.S. SUPREME COURT



*This is a teaching tool that simplifies key points for students. Find more information in the educational resources section of [uscourts.gov](https://uscourts.gov)*

### CASES COME FROM FEDERAL AND STATE COURTS

#### *Federal Court System*

##### **13 U.S. Courts of Appeals**

The final deciders in all but ~100 appeals taken by the U.S. Supreme Court annually.

When parties think the trial court made an error in their case, they, usually, can ask a U.S. Court of Appeals to examine the proceedings, the law(s) used, and the decision.

Typically, three judges on the bench review the trial record to see if there was unfairness in the process and/or errors in what law was selected and how it was applied.

At an appeal, there is no jury, no witnesses, no new evidence.

##### **94 U.S. District Courts**

A judge presides over a trial to make sure the process is fair. The judge decides what law(s) to apply. When there is no jury, the judge listens to the witnesses, weighs the evidence, applies the law, and makes the final decision.

In a jury trial, the judge does not make the final decision. Jurors analyze the evidence—the testimony and the exhibits. They decide the facts based on what evidence is credible and relevant. The judge decides what law(s) to apply. The jury makes the final decision.

#### *State Court System*

##### **52 State Courts of Last Resort**

State Courts of last resort have different titles in different states. In some states they are called the State Supreme Court. However, all review cases appealed from intermediate courts of appeals and trial courts.

Some of their decisions can be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

##### **46 Intermediate Courts of Appeals**

Many states have an intermediate court that handles most of the appeals from the trial courts. These courts usually work in three-judge panels. Decisions can be appealed to the highest court in the state—the court of last resort.

##### **~16,000 State Trial Courts**

State trial courts handle the vast majority of legal cases in the nation. They hear criminal, civil, domestic relations, juvenile, and traffic matters. Problem-solving courts deal with issues such as drugs and mental health.

**Developed by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts**

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