

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch of government is established in Article III of the Constitution with the creation of the Supreme Court. This court is the highest court in the country and is empowered with the judicial powers of the government. There are lower Federal courts but they were not created by the Constitution. Rather, Congress deemed them necessary and established them using power granted from the Constitution. Courts decide arguments about the meaning of laws, how they are applied, and whether they break the rules of the Constitution. A court's authority to decide constitutionality is called judicial review.

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court, part of the judicial branch, was established in the Constitution as the highest court in the nation. The Supreme Court's most important responsibility is to decide cases that raise questions of constitutional interpretation. The Court decides if a law or government action violates the Constitution. This is known as judicial review. It enables the Court to overrule both federal and state laws when they conflict with its interpretation of the Constitution. Since the Supreme Court stands as the ultimate authority in constitutional interpretation, its decisions can be changed only by a constitutional amendment.

Judicial review puts the Supreme Court in an important role in the American political system. It is the referee in disputes among various branches of the federal, as well as state governments, and is the ultimate authority for the most important issues in the country. For example, in 1954, the Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* banned racial segregation in public schools. The ruling started a long process of desegregating schools and other institutions.

The Supreme Court is made up of nine Justices. One of these is the Chief Justice. They are appointed by the President and must be approved by the Senate. Justices have their jobs for life, unless they resign, retire, or are impeached (removed, as described in the Constitution).

There are no official qualifications for Justices, but all have been trained in the law. Many Justices served as members of Congress, governors, or members of the President's Cabinet. One president, William Howard Taft, was later appointed Chief Justice.

Here is a list of the current Supreme Court Justices:

- Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr.
- Justice Anthony Kennedy
- Justice Clarence Thomas
- Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg
- Justice Stephen G. Breyer
- Justice Samuel Anthony Alito
- Justice Sonia Sotomayor
- Justice Elena Kagan
- Justice Neil M. Gorsuch

The number of Supreme Court Justices has changed over the years. Initially, the Court was made up of six Justices who had been appointed by George Washington. The first time they met was February 1, 1790. The number of Justices has been as high as 10. President Franklin D. Roosevelt tried to raise the number to 15 at one point, but the number has been nine since 1869.