

# Chapter 18: The Federal Court System

## Section 2

### Lecture Notes

# AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

# ► Objectives

1. Describe the structure and jurisdiction of the federal district courts.
2. Describe the structure and jurisdiction of the federal courts of appeals.
3. Describe the structure and jurisdiction of the two other constitutional courts.

## ▶ Key Terms

- **criminal case:** a court case in which a defendant is tried for committing a federal crime
- **civil case:** a court case dealing with a non criminal dispute
- **docket:** a list of cases to be heard by a court
- **record:** the transcript of the proceedings from a trial court

# ► Introduction

- What are the structure and jurisdiction of the inferior courts?
  - District courts are federal trial courts. They are divided into judicial districts and handle about 80 percent of federal cases.
  - There are 13 courts of appeals that hear appeals from the district courts and special courts.
  - The Court of International Trade tries civil cases related to the nation's trade laws.

# ▶ Judicial Districts

- Each state forms at least one judicial district, with at least two judges.
  - Larger states are divided into multiple districts and larger districts may have more judges.
  - There are 94 district courts, serving all 50 states as well as U.S. territories.
- Most district cases are heard by a single judge.

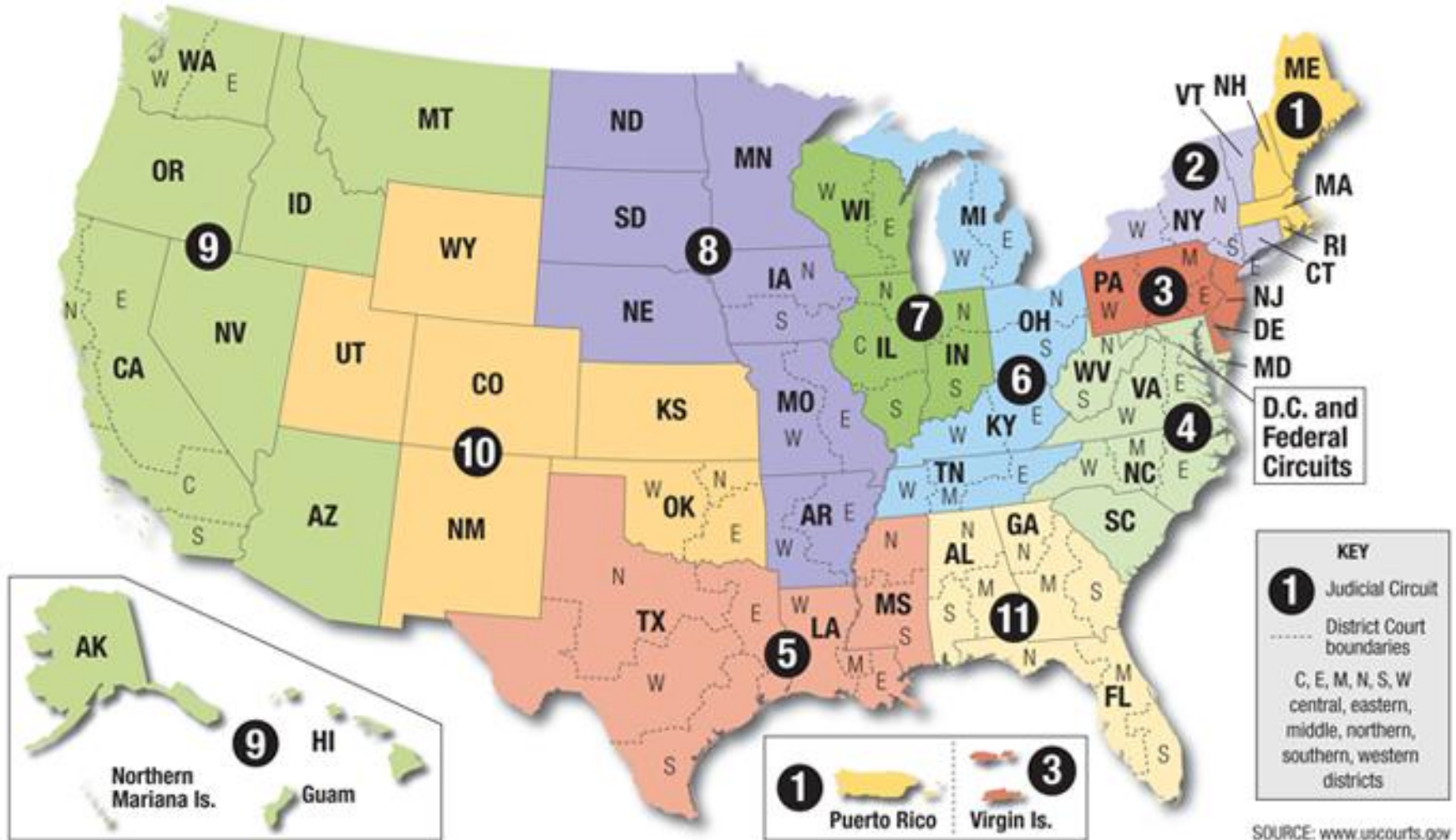




## ▶ Multi-Judge Panels

- Three-judge panels try some cases involving apportionment, civil rights, or antitrust laws.
- The **Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court** is made of 11 district court judges and issues secret search warrants to monitor suspected spies and terrorists.
- The **Alien Terrorist Removal Court** is made up of 5 district judges and decides whether to expel suspected foreign terrorists from the country.

# Federal Court Circuits and Districts



# ▶ District Court Jurisdiction

- Checkpoint: What is the principal role of the federal district courts?
  - **District courts** have original jurisdiction over more than 80 percent of federal criminal and civil cases.
  - **Federal criminal cases** include bank robbery, kidnapping, counterfeiting, mail fraud, tax evasion and terrorism.
  - **Federal civil cases** include disputes involving bankruptcy, postal, tax, and civil rights laws.



# ▶ District Court Jurisdiction

- In **federal criminal cases**, the United States is always the prosecutor.
- Most **federal civil cases** are between private parties, but the United States may be a plaintiff or defendant.
- Most of the decisions made in district courts are not appealed.
  - A few cases are appealed to the courts of appeals or directly to the Supreme Court.

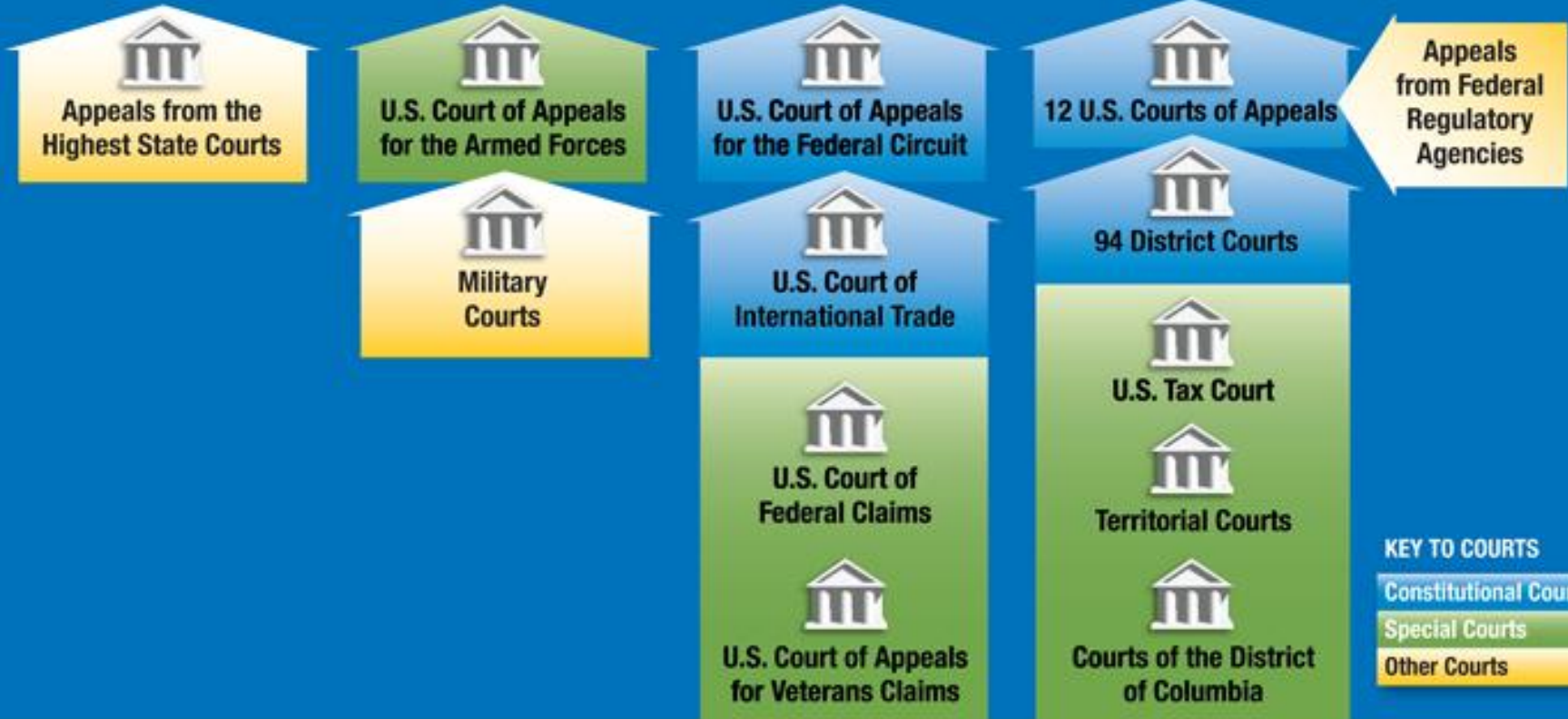
## ▶ Courts of Appeals: Structure

- Congress created the **courts of appeals** in 1891 to ease the burden on the Supreme Court.
  - There are 13 courts of appeals today.
  - The nation is divided into 12 circuits, each with its own court of appeals.
  - Each court of appeals hears cases on appeal from one of the district courts within its circuit.

## ▶ Structure, cont.

- The **Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit** has nationwide jurisdiction.
  - This **13th circuit court** deals with appeals from:
    - The Court of International Trade
    - The Court of Federal Claims
    - The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
    - The 94 district courts if the case appealed involves copyright or patent issues.

# The Appellate Path in the Federal Courts



## ▶ Courts of Appeals: Operation

- Each circuit court has from 6 to 28 judges, who usually sit in three-judge panels.
  - A justice of the Supreme Court is also assigned to each circuit.
- They do not conduct trials or accept new evidence.
  - Instead they review the record and the arguments of a case.
- Less than one percent of their decisions are appealed to the Supreme Court.



## ▶ Court of International Trade

- Congress created the **Court of International Trade** in 1890 and made it a constitutional court in 1980.
- The Trade Court's nine judges sit in panels of three and often hold jury trials in major ports.
- The Trade Court has original jurisdiction over all civil cases involving the nation's international trade and customs laws.

## ► Review

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