Court Organization: Structure, Functions, and the Trial Process

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The Federal Government of the US comprises three branches: Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. The Judiciary consists of civil and criminal courts that interpret the Constitution.

In the 18th century, Montesquieu presented the idea of ‘Separation of Powers’. According to this model, the government is divided into distinct branches and each branch has independent and separate powers. The theory of Montesquieu was fully incorporated into the Constitution. The fundamental principle that every branch will be independent, and no branch will use powers owned by any of the other branches (Wright, 1918).

           In the constitution of the U.S., the rule of law has always played a key role. The power given to Government is defined by the laws of the Constitution. This paper will explore the organization of courts operating in the United States. The structure, functions and the Trial process implemented are described in detail.

# Structure

In total there exist 94 federal judicial districts and the division of districts is according to 28 U.S.C. §§ 81–131, present in every state of U.S., Puerto Rico and District of Columbia.

There exist three levels of the federal court system of the U.S. The district courts are at first level and also known as trial courts. The circuit courts are at second level of the system and are the first-level appeal. At the last level of appeal, exists the Supreme Court of the country. So, the overall sum of courts is 94 district courts, 13 circuit courts, and a Supreme Court. These courts are not completely independent and have numerous interaction points.

With the comprehensive authority of judicial review, federalism permits state and federal courts to set and amend rules which states are permitted to impose. This freedom allows the courts to shape the level up to which state policy can accord with the desire of average voters in that state (Kastellec, 2018).

# Function

A judge of the district court is accountable for handling court and managing employees of the court. Provided that they exhibit good performance, they can serve, and also congress can prosecute and remove them. More than 670 district court judges are appointed nationwide.

The decision announced in district courts is reviewed in the United States Court of Appeals according to their region of the district court.

           There are several judges present in a circuit court, between 6 on the first circuit to 29 on the ninth circuit. The President appoints the circuit court judge who is then validated by the Senate. After the district court has decided the verdict, any case can be sent to the circuit court for appeal. At first, panels, containing three circuit court judges, the appeal is heard. The briefs are then filed to the court, in disagreement about why an affirm trial’s court decision has to be taken. Then, oral arguments are scheduled, which includes the arguments of a lawyer before the court and answering the questions asked by the judge.

According to the understanding of the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court has set a nominal degree of defense in a certain law, the states has to fulfill. Thus, this much protection acts as a federal ground for state policy. It can be observed in Miranda v. Arizona, according to the well-known verdict of Supreme Court, the police officials in each police department should inform accused about right to stay silent. The states can offer more safety to suspects, However, they cannot offer any less than that.

           The Supreme Court of the U.S. can use state policy as references and overrule the decisions of the circuit courts.

# Trial Process

In a trial, the parties come together over the dispute, provide information and evidence in front of the court. It is a formal setting with the involvement of authority to adjudicate the disputes and claims. The trial process consists of key steps as follows:

****Opening Statements****

The trail for all the cases is almost similar. For criminal cases, a prosecutor attorney from a government and defendant and their defense lawyer present the argument to the court. While in the civil cases, the plaintiff and defendant and their lawyer, if they have, are included. The party who presses charges begins with an opening statement and overview of the case. They also have the major responsibility of presenting evidence and witness to the court. In a criminal case the first party to initiate trial is Prosecutor attorney while in civil cases, the plaintiff is the one to start proceedings. After which the defense presents their opening statement. The format is based on the argumentative system. Both parties go back and forth, presenting cases and responses to it.

## Submission of Plaintiff/Prosecution’s Evidence

Next, the prosecutor or plaintiff’s attorney submits documents, physical evidence and testimony of witnesses. The witness shares the knowledge with the court in the form of questions between the witness and the plaintiff’s attorney/ prosecutor and. The procedure is also known as direct examination.

Before the direct examination, witnesses take an oath that their statement is true. The evidence including weapons, articles of clothing, documents, has to be acceptable according to Arizona Rules of Evidence. Then it is up to judge to decide which evidence or testimony can be admitted according to the law (“How a Case Moves Through the Court System,” n.d.). After the direct examination, the attorney of the defendant’s attorney questions the witness which is known as cross-examination. A redirect examination can be conducted to allow the plaintiff to elaborate on matters discussed in cross-examination. Next, the defendants get a chance to cross-examine the evidence and testimonies provided by the plaintiff. After this, the plaintiff or prosecutor rests their case for the court to decide.

## Presenting the Defense’s Evidence

Next, the defendant provides evidence and testimonies from the witness and conduct the direct examination. After which, the prosecution cross-examines the evidence and witness. A redirect examination is also conducted similarly.

## Closing Arguments

## Both parties present closing arguments after all the proceedings and summarize their claims and supporting facts.

## The Jury’s Verdict

The primary goal of the judge of any court is to give punishment which is appropriate for the crime convict committed, but also not more than required. A sentencing hearing is arranged around ninety days after the verdict is announced. Meanwhile, the probation officer studies and prepares a pre-sentence report which helps the judge in determining the punishment. Before deciding the suitable punishment, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines are consulted. The punishment can be counseling, training, fines and restitution, imprisonment, supervised release, house arrest, and drug abuse treatment. Moreover, in specific cases, a supervised release is ordered after release from prison. The ex-convict has to abide by restrictions imposed by the court and the probation officer supervises the ex-convict periodically.

According to the U.S. Supreme Court, the defendants have the right to receive effective guidance from the council. However, the studies and circumstantial evidence indicates that the defense counsel, specifically appointed counsel, is unable to provide effective guidance particularly related to outcomes of the case. According to the analysis of these studies, it is concluded that cases with appointed counsel have a higher probability of sentencing, conviction, and longer imprisonments as an outcome. The researchers conducted previously, did not highlight the fact the how the type of counsel affects the case verdicts and overlooked the initial stages of a case. Preceding research has revealed that decisions of bail impact immensely on the case verdicts that they cannot be ignored (Williams, 2017).

# Conclusion

The Judicial System of the U.S. is one of the most cultured judicial systems in the world. In hope of justice, every day numerous people like judges, lawyers, law enforcement and government officials, victims and criminals get involved in this system.

According to researchers, the judicial system of America had provided an exemplary model of the judiciary which had to facilitate victims as well as defendants in criminal prosecutions, through quick case resolutions. In this way, public funds were significantly saved (Watson, 2010). However, John Gardner stated the institutions of a nation never end. They are created and have to be updated with time. They cannot be created once and left without any revision. Instead, they require to be created and recreated by understanding the needs of citizens. Now it is our turn to accept the weight of an accountable community (Adams, 1984). The ultimate goal of the judiciary is to keep the community safe, deter crimes, and rehabilitate individuals.

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