

A Lifetime of Law:

The Process of U.S. Supreme Court Appointments

Article III of the Constitution establishes the Judicial Branch of our government, represented by the Supreme Court. The structure of the court is left to Congress — there have been as few as six members, but since 1869 we've held to the standard of nine justices, including a chief justice. All justices are nominated by the president, confirmed by a majority vote in the Senate, and hold their offices for life.



The only way a federal judge can be “fired” from his or her job is through impeachment by the House of Representatives and conviction in the Senate. Otherwise, justices serve until their death or retirement.

WHY DO SUPREME COURT APPOINTMENTS MATTER?



The Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States, and the state courts must follow any decisions they make.



Because of their lifelong appointments, Supreme Court justices have a great deal of power.



They never have to face re-election, and they don't have to make sure that their decisions please the Senate or the president who appointed them.

THE ROAD TO SUPREME COURT APPOINTMENT



Think it Through

1. What do you think are the most important qualities a chief justice should have?
2. Do you agree with the current appointment process?
3. What would you change, if anything, about the appointment process? Why?

