

# **10. Courts**

**Breakout Sessions**

**POLS 1101**

**12:40pm-1:30pm Park Hall 145**

**& 1:50pm-2:40pm Leconte Hall 135**

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# **Supreme Revenge: Battle for the Court (2019)**

- **How has the U.S. Supreme Court become a central battlefield in American partisan politics?**
  - Since Supreme Court justices serve for life, appointments by a certain president can have further impacts beyond his office, shaping the future of American law and society.
- The failed nomination of Robert Bork (Conservative) in 1987
- Decades in escalating political conflict over judicial appointments
- Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's strategy to block President Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland (Liberal), and to later secure seats for President Trump's appointees

# Key Figures (thanks to ChatGPT!)

Name	Role/Position	Involvement in the Court Battle
<b>Mitch McConnell</b>	Senate Majority Leader (Republican, Kentucky)	Blocked Merrick Garland's nomination in 2016; later pushed through Trump's nominees. Central figure of the "revenge" narrative.
<b>Chuck Grassley</b>	Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee (Republican, Iowa)	Refused to hold hearings for Garland's nomination in 2016, supporting McConnell's strategy.
<b>Robert Bork</b>	Supreme Court nominee (1987, by President Reagan)	Defeated in Senate confirmation, marking the start of highly politicized judicial battles.
<b>Clarence Thomas</b>	Supreme Court Justice (nominated by President George H.W. Bush, 1991)	Confirmation hearings dominated by sexual harassment allegations; symbol of divisive confirmations.
<b>Merrick Garland</b>	Supreme Court nominee (2016, by President Obama)	Blocked from even receiving a hearing; later became U.S. Attorney General under President Biden.
<b>Brett Kavanaugh</b>	Supreme Court Justice (nominated by Trump, 2018)	Took the seat that would have gone to Garland. Faced a highly contentious confirmation with allegations of sexual misconduct.
<b>Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG)</b>	Supreme Court Justice (appointed by President Clinton, 1993)	Iconic liberal justice; her 2020 death opened the door for the third major rightward shifts in the Court since 1953.

# Potential Questions for Reflection

- Do you think the Supreme Court can still be considered an independent, nonpartisan institution? Why or why not?
- Should the Senate have such strong power to block or push through judicial nominations (leading to partisanship)?
- Should Supreme Court justices still serve for life, or should there be term limits (given their really big influence)?
- Was Mitch McConnell's blocking of Merrick Garland in 2016 justified, or was it purely partisan revenge?
- How does the politicization of the Court affect public trust in American democracy?
- If you were a policymaker, what reforms (if any) would you propose for the Supreme Court?



FULL FILM

# SUPREME REVENGE



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# Next week...

- Read materials on **Political Parties & Interest Groups** before class, and that will be helpful to participate in peer discussions.
- Feel free to email me if you have any questions!
- ENJOY YOUR WEEKEND!