

1. Sources and divisions of law

Law: definition

The word **law** \ˈlɔː\ does not have a universally accepted definition but it is very often defined in terms of **rules** and **guidelines** enforced by controlling institutions. However, rules and guidelines are also regarded as law when they regulate relations between people in society and therefore create and preserve **social order**. Because of different meanings given to law, one simple way of defining the concept is to say that law is concerned with the **regulation of social conduct by the state**.



law in fixed phrases

above the law	allowed to not obey the law
against the law	contrary to law, act in disregard of law
break the law	fail to observe a law, regulation, agreement
by law / under law	according to law
obey the law	abide by the law
enforce the law	comply with a law, rule, or obligation
go to law	resort to legal action in order to settle a matter
law and order	a situation characterized by respect for and obedience to the rules of a society
lay down the law	issue instructions to other people in an authoritative and dogmatic way
take someone to law	initiate legal proceedings against someone

(Adapted from Pearsall, *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1998)

The law of the United Kingdom

All legal systems worldwide deal with the same basic issues of law, but distinct legal jurisdictions have their own legal and political systems. The United Kingdom is a **constitutional monarchy** and **parliamentary democracy**. It has three legal systems:

- English law operating in England and Wales,
- Northern Ireland law operating in Northern Ireland, and
- Scots law operating in Scotland.