

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Law and Legal Systems

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should understand the following:

- Distinguish different philosophies of law—schools of legal thought—and explain their relevance.
- Identify the various aims that a functioning legal system can serve.
- Explain how politics and law are related.
- Identify the sources of law and which laws have priority over other laws.
- Understand some basic differences between the US legal system and other legal systems.

Law has different meanings as well as different functions. Philosophers have considered issues of justice and law for centuries, and several different approaches, or schools of legal thought, have emerged. In this chapter, we will look at those different meanings and approaches and will consider how social and political dynamics interact with the ideas that animate the various schools of legal thought. We will also look at typical sources of “positive law” in the United States and how some of those sources have priority over others, and we will set out some basic differences between the US legal system and other legal systems.

[1.1: What Is Law?](#)

[1.2: Schools of Legal Thought](#)

[1.3: Basic Concepts and Categories of US Positive Law](#)

[1.4: Sources of Law and Their Priority](#)

[1.5: Legal and Political Systems of the World](#)

[1.6: A Sample Case](#)

[1.7: Summary and Exercises](#)

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