

Criminal law

is the body of law that relates to crime. It proscribes conduct perceived as threatening, harmful, or otherwise endangering to the property, health, safety, and moral welfare of people inclusive of one's self. Most criminal law is established by statute, which is to say that the laws are enacted by a legislature. Criminal law includes the punishment and rehabilitation of people who violate such laws. Criminal law varies according to jurisdiction, and differs from civil law, where emphasis is more on dispute resolution and victim compensation, rather than on punishment or rehabilitation. Criminal procedure is a formalized official activity that authenticates the fact of commission of a crime and authorizes punitive or rehabilitative treatment of the offender.

The first civilizations generally did not distinguish between civil law and criminal law. One of the most important early codes was the Code of Hammurabi, which formed the core of Babylonian law. Only fragments of the early criminal laws of Ancient Greece have survived, e.g. those of Draco (→Draconian penalty is a punishment so severe that it seems excessive with respect to the crime being punished).

Five objectives of punishments are widely accepted to be enforced by the criminal law:

- Retribution – criminals ought to be punished in some way. Individuals may be incarcerated in prison or jail in a variety of conditions depending on the jurisdiction. Confinement may be solitary. Length of incarceration may vary from a day to life. Government supervision may be imposed, including house arrest, and convicts may be required to conform to particularized guidelines as part of a parole or probation regimen. Fines also may be imposed, seizing money or property from a person convicted of a crime. Capital punishment may be imposed in some jurisdictions for the most serious crimes.
- Deterrence – the aim is to discourage the offender from criminal behaviour.
- Incapacitation – serves to keep criminals away from society so that the public is protected from their misconduct.
- Rehabilitation – aims at transforming an offender into a valuable member of society. Its primary goal is to prevent further offense by convincing the offender that their conduct was wrong.
- Restoration – the goal is to repair, through state authority, any injury inflicted upon the victim by the offender.