

Introduction to Criminal Law

- **Definition** – A body of rules that defines conduct prohibited by the state, prescribes punishments, and establishes procedures for enforcing those rules.
- **Purpose** –
 - Protect society and individual rights.
 - Deter wrongful conduct.
 - Retribute and rehabilitate offenders.
 - Maintain public order and confidence in the legal system.

Source	Description	Typical Examples
Statutes	Laws enacted by legislatures (e.g., penal codes).	Theft Act, Drug Enforcement Statutes
Case Law	Judicial decisions that interpret statutes and develop common-law principles.	Supreme Court rulings on self-defense
Constitutions	Constitutional provisions that limit or shape criminal authority (e.g., due-process clauses).	Fourth Amendment (unreasonable searches)
Administrative Regulations	Rules issued by governmental agencies that create criminal offenses or penalties.	Environmental compliance violations
International Treaties	Agreements that may create criminal obligations (e.g., war crimes, trafficking).	Rome Statute of the ICC

Category	Key Characteristics	Examples
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Felonies	Serious offenses; punishable by imprisonment >1 year, heavy fines, or death.	Murder, armed robbery, aggravated assault
Misdemeanors	Less serious; punishable by ≤1 year in jail or smaller fines.	Simple assault, petty theft
Infractions / Summary Offenses	Minor violations; usually result in a fine, no jail time.	Traffic tickets, littering
White-Collar Crimes	Non-violent, financially motivated offenses.	Embezzlement, insider trading
Violent Crimes	Involve force or threat of force against a person.	Homicide, rape
Property Crimes	Target property rather than persons.	Burglary, arson

4. Core Elements of a Crime

1. Actus Reus (Guilty Act)

- A voluntary physical act, omission, or possession that breaches the law.

2. Mens Rea (Guilty Mind)

- The mental state required:
 - *Purpose* (intentional)
 - *Knowledge* (aware of facts)
 - *Recklessness* (conscious disregard)
 - *Negligence* (failure to exercise reasonable care)

3. Causation

- The defendant's conduct must be the actual and proximate cause of the prohibited result.

4. Concurrence

- The actus reus and mens rea must occur together.

5. Legality (Nullum Crimen Sine Lege)

- No conduct can be criminal unless defined as such by law before the act.

6. Punishment

- The law must prescribe a sanction for the prohibited conduct.
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5. Parties to a Crime

Role	Description
Principal	Directly commits the criminal act.
Accomplice / Accessory Before the Fact	Helps plan or