

Law and Society Scholarship

In this scholarly tradition, the study of law and society starts from the premise that legal rules and decisions must be understood in context. The law is deeply embedded in the social world rather than standing apart from it as an autonomous system. Consistent with this view, law and society scholars focus on how the law operates in action rather than taking as given the formal law on the books. Law and society perspectives examine how law is socially and historically constructed, how law both reflects and affects culture, and how legal institutions can constitute and reproduce inequality.

Law and society scholarship tends to encompass a wide range of epistemological, disciplinary, and interdisciplinary perspectives. Although it is methodologically inclusive, it tends to be empirical and interdisciplinary rather than doctrinal in its approach. Law and society scholars also do not shy away from normative, policy-relevant concerns while still retaining a critical perspective. Comparative perspectives have long been part of the law and society tradition, as have studies across the individual, interactional, and institutional levels of analysis.