

GUIDE

Rule of Law

**What It Means. Why It Matters.
What You Can Do.**



WHAT IS THE RULE OF LAW?

The Rule of Law means one simple thing: **Rules apply to everyone, fairly and equally.**

THAT INCLUDES:

- Everyday people
- Police and government officials
- Judges and elected leaders

If rules apply to some people but not others, that's not fairness — that's not the Rule of Law. While some people in power may act as if the Rule of Law doesn't apply to them, that's wrong because the principles apply to them too.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

What does this look like in real life?

The Rule of Law impacts everyday situations to ensure fairness and prevent abuse of power:

- A landlord cannot deny you housing based on your identity or background, including race, religion, or country of origin.
- Police and ICE must follow legal rules during stops, searches, or arrests
- Schools must treat students fairly in disciplinary actions
- Government agencies must follow the law; it's not just their own judgment calls

No one is above the law.

Not politicians, not police officers, not judges, not government agencies.

If the rules are not followed, you can sue. You have the right to challenge injustice in court.

HOW POWER IS LIMITED

Checks and balances

The Rule of Law is built into the very structure of our government through the Constitution. How our system works:

POWER IS DIVIDED INTO THREE BRANCHES:

- **Legislative (Congress):**
Makes the laws.
- **Executive (President and government agencies):**
Enforces the laws.
- **Judicial (Courts):**
Interprets the laws.

Each branch plays an important role with important limits to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful, corrupt or abusive.

WHAT THIS MEANS:

- No single person or branch has total or absolute power.
 - Government decisions can be reviewed or challenged in court to ensure they are legal and fair.
 - All government actions—from laws to executive orders—must follow the Constitution.
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REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE:

Early in 2025, the federal government issued an executive order seeking to end “birthright citizenship,” a constitutional right. Through a lawsuit, **Lawyers for Civil Rights** and its community partners are challenging the executive order in court.

This case shows how the **Judicial branch** (courts) reviews actions by the **Executive branch** (President and agencies) to ensure they follow the Constitution. That is how checks and balances work. It’s the Rule of Law in action.



WHAT DOES IT GUARANTEE?

The Rule of Law helps protect your rights:

DUE PROCESS RIGHTS

The government must follow the appropriate legal steps and procedures before taking action that affects your life, liberty, or property.

EQUAL PROTECTION RIGHTS

You can't be treated unfairly or discriminated against based on your identity or background, including race, religion, gender, or country of origin.

LIMITS ON POWER

Ensures that even those in powerful positions must operate within the boundaries of the law.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Everyone has the right to get legal help and to go to court.

IMPORTANT REALITY CHECK

This is how it's supposed to work

The Rule of Law is not always automatic—and it's not always perfect.

FAR TOO OFTEN:

- Rights are ignored or violated.
- Rules are not applied equally to everyone.
- Our legal system fails to protect the vulnerable.
- This is why individuals, communities, and organizations push back. They challenge unfair treatment, unfair decisions, and unfair systems. This helps create better laws, better policies, and better outcomes for everyone.

The Rule of Law only works—and continues to work—if people continue to protect it and demand its full promise.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO UPHOLD THE RULE OF LAW

You don't need to be a lawyer to stand up for justice and fairness. Your actions matter!

- **Know your rights:** Understand what you are legally entitled to.
 - **Ask questions:** If something feels unfair or unclear, ask for explanations.
 - **Document what happens:** Keep records of incidents, including relevant names, dates, and details like who, what, when, where, and why.
 - **Support others:** Stand in solidarity with your neighbors and community members facing injustice and share resources.
 - **Speak up:** If you feel safe, use your voice when you see something is wrong.
 - **Connect with legal organizations:** Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR) and other groups can often help.
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WHY LEGAL SUPPORT MATTERS

The law is complex and navigating it alone can be frustrating. Legal organizations like Lawyers for Civil Rights play a critical role in bridging the gap between principle and practice.

LEGAL GROUPS CAN HELP:

- **Explain your rights** in understandable terms.
- **Represent you** in court and other legal proceedings.
- **Challenge discriminatory and unfair decisions**, outcomes, systems, and practices.
- **Advocate for stronger protections** and more just laws.

Access to legal support helps ensure the Rule of Law is a living reality, not just an abstract idea.



**LAWYERS FOR
CIVIL RIGHTS™**



MORE RESOURCES

[lawyersforcivilrights.org/
resources](https://lawyersforcivilrights.org/resources)