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Foreign Law Sources

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Foreign law is national or subnational law. It governs the conduct of private individuals, corporations, and government entities in a particular country. Although it can regulate the conduct of foreign persons and entities, foreign law does not apply beyond national borders. Foreign law is found in constitutions, statutes, decrees, orders, case law, and administrative materials. It can be a challenge to locate. One of the best sources for starting foreign law research is Foreign Law Guide, discussed in more depth below.

A related area of law is international law, which governs interactions among countries and international organizations.

This guide covers general sources for starting research, points you toward authoritative research guides on individual countries, gives suggestions for researching statutory and case law, and gives the basics of citing to foreign law.

Please contact the Law Library's Research Services librarians during their Research Services hours, or via email to research.services@law.csuohio.edu for additional help.
Citing to Foreign Law

The Bluebook's Table 2 (T.2) explains how to cite to legal materials from foreign jurisdictions. Organized by country, this table covers foreign case law, constitutions, codes, statutes and decrees, periodicals, and other sources. Another useful Bluebook section is Rule 21 citing to international materials. The Bluebook is available online and in print.


General Sources
General Sources

The sources below will give you a general overview of the legal system of a particular country. They can also point you to legislation, case law, and other more specific sources for that country--for this reason, it is often useful to start your research with these types of publications.

- Foreign Law Guide
  The #1 source for starting foreign law research. Leads to statutes, other primary and secondary sources on particular topics for each country.

- "Doing Business In....", "Introduction to...." types of books.
  Search Scholar, the library catalog, to locate country-specific books on foreign legal systems or on business transactions. Examples include *A Legal Guide to Doing Business in South America* (2011) and *A Legal Guide to Doing Business in the Asia-Pacific* (2010).

- Martindale-Hubbell Law Digest
  The law digest for each country covers basic information on topics such as business regulation, intellectual property, family law, taxation, and employment law. It is not just a listing of laws (like in the subject headings of Foreign Law Guide), but rather a short prose description of the state of the law in a specific country. Also available on Lexis Advance.

- International Lawyer's Deskbook
  This ABA-published book takes a U.S.-centered approach to foreign legal transactions. It is organized topically, rather than by country, and is useful for American lawyers with a foreign focus to their work.
  Reference K559 .I57 2003

- Modern Legal Systems Cyclopedia
  Turn to this multi-volume set when you are researching lesser-known countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. If you can't find information on a country elsewhere, this can be a last place to check.
  K530 .M62

- Practical Law Company - WestlawNext
  Use the Country Q and A Comparison Tool on the right side, or the Country Q & A section of each topic.

- Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals
  HeinOnline

Constitutions

HeinOnline’s World Constitutions Illustrated is a searchable database of current and historical constitutions for 190 countries. The current constitutions are in their original language, plus there is at least one English translation. Periodicals, books and some constitutional histories too.

Also try the free web source Constitute.
Researching Individual Countries

**Research Guides on Individual Countries**

If you are focusing on the law of one particular country--say India--then one of the best research strategies is to locate a research guide that discusses that legal system, for example this Guide to India's Legal Research and Legal System written by the chief librarian at the Supreme Court in New Delhi.

Fortunately, it's relatively easy to find reputable guides online. One place to look is GlobaLex, a legal research site maintained at New York University. GlobaLex hosts over 125 foreign law research guides, covering nearly every country, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. You can find another comprehensive listing of national guides on the website of the Law Library of Congress.

Law libraries across the country maintain country guides on a limited basis, mostly geared toward specific library collections. These guides can point you toward the major free online, print, and database resources available. You can sometimes work with OhioLINK or interlibrary loan to access materials unavailable locally. A few library-sponsored guides include those listed below.

For even more leads on finding a legal guide to fit your research needs, consult Silke Sahl's *Selective List of Guides to Foreign Legal Research* -- it's a guide of guides that may point you in the right direction.

- Researching Australian Law
  Harvard Law School Library
- Canadian Legal Research
  Duke Law
- Legal Research and Writing (Canada) KE250 .T53 2004
- The German Legal System and Legal Language
  KK147 .F57 2009
- German Legal Research Guide
  Georgetown University Law Library
- Guide to Basic Research on Mexican Law
  Tarleton Law Library
- Chinese Law and Legal Research
  KNQ47 .L86 2005

**GlobaLex**

GlobaLex is an online collection of research guides on over 140 countries! It's a great starting point for any country-specific research.

Earth, globes, maps, planets, worlds
Approaches to Legislative Research

Generally, there are two approaches to foreign legislative research: by subject or by country. The Foreign Law Guide is a good place to start if you are looking for a specific piece of legislation from a certain country. Just use the pull-down menu at the top of the page to select the country, then scroll down to the subject heading you need.

By Subject

You will find many online and print resources that compile national laws on a particular subject. Such sources are often useful for finding the leading piece of legislation from a country on that subject. In the boxes to the left, you'll find examples of topical compilations from a couple areas of law. To find more, search the Web or Scholar, the online catalog.

Business Laws

- Competition Laws Outside the United States
  K3850 .C655 2011 - Covers Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, EU, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, and United Kingdom.
- International Franchise Sales Laws
  K3966 .I559 2006 (updated regularly) - Covers Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, US, and Vietnam.

Human Rights and Labor Laws

- Gender Law Library
  World Bank project. Here you will find legislation on gender discrimination, marriage and divorce, labor and more.
- Refworld
  Sponsored by the UNHCR. Country laws relating broadly to human rights and rule of law.
- NATLEX
  From the ILO. A database of national labor, social security and related human rights legislation from over 190 countries.
- International Labor and Employment Laws
  K1705 .I54 2003 - Representative countries from North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East.
By Country

- Foreign Law Guide
  The #1 source for starting foreign law research. Leads to statutes, other primary and secondary sources on particular topics for each country.

- Lexis Advance International Sources
- WestlawNext International Materials

Environmental Laws

- ECOLEX: The Gateway to Environmental Law
  ECOLEX is a wide collection of environmental law. FAOLEX is a subset of ECOLEX with food and agriculture laws.

Caselaw
Case Law

Finding foreign case law can be more of a challenge than locating foreign legislation. For one, finding a reliable translation may be problematic or impossible. Another thing to consider is the difference in importance assigned to case law in common law vs. civil law jurisdictions. Whereas common law jurisdictions (like the U.S.) assign primary law significance to cases, civil law jurisdictions (like France) relegate case law to secondary source status.

You are most likely to have success locating decisions of the highest foreign courts: supreme courts, constitutional courts, subnational high courts. If you are interested in a lower-court decision from a foreign country, sometimes you will have to settle for newspaper coverage or blog commentary in lieu of the actual decision.

Here are some places to start your online foreign case law research:

- Foreign Law Guide
  The #1 source for starting foreign law research. Leads to statutes, other primary and secondary sources on particular topics for each country.
- WestlawNext
  International Materials. You can find current legislation for the following countries on Westlaw: Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico, United Kingdom.
- Foreign Law Translations
  University of Texas at Austin. This site is a resource for English-language translations of judicial decisions from France, Germany, Israel, and Austria. The decisions are helpfully arranged by subject under each country. Some translated statutes are also included.
- WorldLII
  WorldLII is the collaborative effort of a number of Legal Information Institutes around the globe. Case law sources are included for many jurisdictions. Start by clicking “All Countries” at the top right.
- Lexis Advance International Materials

By Topic

Sometimes you’ll find compilations of case law on specific topics. Here are a couple examples.

- International Environmental Law Reports - K3584.53 1999
- Dispute Settlement Reports - K4600 .A53 W67 2001 (updated regularly; WTO cases)