



## OVERVIEW

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The rule of law is a cornerstone of the democratic system. In Canada, civil law is used to settle private disputes between individuals and other private parties. Criminal law deals with crimes and their punishment.

In a civil case, basically, a court determines the relative rights of two opposing parties. In a criminal case a court is asked to decide the guilt or innocence of a person charged with an offence.

Prosecutions may be carried out by the police or by lawyers, depending on the practice of the attorney general responsible. Lawyers represent persons appearing before the courts in both civil and criminal proceedings.

Offenders sentenced to custody for two years or more are sent to federal institutions. Provincial governments have authority over persons given less than a two-year sentence or placed under court orders.

In recent years, criminal justice agencies have taken initiatives to compensate the victims of crime.