The practice of U.S. law can be divided into two categories—public law and private law.

**There are four main types of public law**

- **Constitutional Law**
  Laws that are derived from the U.S. Constitution and the State Constitutions and the interpretation of these laws by the U.S. Supreme Court and the State Supreme Courts.

- **International Law**
  International law consists of a set of rules and principles that enable nations or sovereign states to deal with one another. It also includes laws regarding the treatment of foreign nationals, whether private persons or groups. Sources of international law are treaties, custom, and the decisions of international courts of law.

- **Administrative Law**
  Government agencies make many laws that govern our everyday lives. For example, Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management has many regulations regarding hunting and fishing. The Agriculture Department (USDA) requires that all meat be inspected.

- **Criminal Law**
  Criminal law deals with offenses against the public or society as a whole. A crime is a “public wrong,” even though only one person may have been victimized. There are two main types of criminal offenses: crimes against persons and crimes against property.

**There are four main types of private law**

- **Contract Law**
  A contract is a binding agreement between two or more persons or organizations. These persons or organizations are referred to as “parties.” In a contract, each party has rights and responsibilities that are enforceable by law.

- **Tort Law**
  A tort is a wrongful act or failure to act in a situation that is not covered by a contract, and that results in injury or loss. When unreasonable conduct has resulted in an injury or loss, a tort action may be sought. Evidence of injury or damage must be present for a tort action to go forward. An example is a personal-injury lawsuit.

- **Family Law**
  Family laws are those dealing with family matters, such as marriage, divorce, and parent-child relationships. Many court proceedings involving family matters are not open to the public, nor are public transcripts made of the hearings.

- **Property Law**
  Laws involving the ownership of property and the rights conferred by that ownership. The sale and purchase of property, as well as inheritance rights, are included in this area.