

Difference Between Law, Act and Bill, Definition, Examples

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While Law, Act, and Bill are closely related terms, they represent different phases in the legislative framework. A Bill is the seed, a proposal that seeks to address a problem or introduce a change. Once it successfully navigates legislative scrutiny, it becomes an Act, which is a specific legal instrument. Over time, as Acts accumulate and operate collectively, they form the body of Law that governs society. Understanding this progression is fundamental to comprehending how policies are shaped, debated, and enforced in a democracy. It underscores the dynamic nature of governance and the essential role legislation plays in maintaining order, protecting rights, and driving social and economic development. In this article, we are going to cover the difference between Law, Act and Bill.

Difference Between Law, Act, and Bill

The legislative process in any democratic country is the backbone of its governance structure. It provides the legal framework that provides the rights and responsibilities of citizens, ensures justice, and maintains public order. Within this legislative framework, three terms- Law, Act, and Bill are regularly used and often used interchangeably by the general public. However, each of these terms represents a different stage in the law-making process and carries a different meaning and function. Having knowledge about the differences between these three is important

for understanding how a proposed idea or policy transforms into a legally binding rule that governs society. It also provides deeper insight into how democratic systems function and how policies, once discussed and debated in the legislature, become enforceable on the ground.

Definition of Law, Act, and Bill

- **Law:** A law is a set of rules and regulations created and enforced by a governing authority. It is binding on all citizens and institutions within a jurisdiction and is backed by the judiciary. Laws define the rights and duties of individuals and organizations and ensure order, justice, and governance.
- **Act:** An Act is a formal legislation that has been passed by the legislature and enacted into law. It is a specific type of law dealing with a particular subject, sector, or issue. Once a Bill is passed by both houses of Parliament and receives presidential assent, it becomes an Act.
- **Bill:** A Bill is a draft or proposal for a new law or for amending an existing law. It is the starting point in the legislative process and is introduced in Parliament or a state legislature for discussion, debate, and approval. Only after it is passed by the legislature and receives assent does it become an Act, which is then implemented as a law.

Major Differences Between Law, Act, and Bill

Here are the differences in between Law, Act and Bill:

Aspect	Law	Act	Bill
Definition	A set of binding rules enforced by the government.	A formal written law passed by the legislature.	A proposed law under consideration by the legislature.
Legal Status	Fully enforceable and binding.	Legally binding after enactment.	Not legally binding until passed.
Stage in Process	Final stage after Bill becomes Act and is enforced.	Final stage of a Bill before becoming law.	Initial stage introduced in legislature.
Application	Applies to all citizens and entities.	Applies once enacted.	Does not apply until passed.
Enactment	Already enacted.	Needs legislative approval.	Not enacted yet.
Scope	Covers wide legal areas.	Specific to a particular subject.	Specific to an issue or problem.

Authority	Derived from the Constitution or legislature.	Derived after being passed by legislature.	Derived from the legislature once passed.
Duration	Indefinite until amended or repealed.	Indefinite until amended or repealed.	Temporary ceases if not passed.
Examples	Indian Penal Code (IPC), Civil Rights Law.	Companies Act, GST Act.	Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

Differences in Between Law, Act and Bill in Detail

The differences in between law, act and bill includes:

- Legal Status and Stage in Legislative Process

A Bill represents the beginning of the legislative journey as it is an idea or proposal that seeks to become law. It is introduced by a minister or a member of Parliament and goes through several stages: introduction, discussion, committee scrutiny, voting, and finally, presidential assent. Once a Bill is approved by both houses and receives assent, it becomes an Act. Over time, the Act, once enforced and implemented, forms part of the larger body of Law.

- Application and Enforceability

A Law applies universally within the jurisdiction of the state that is to individuals, organizations, and government bodies. An Act is applicable once it has been enacted and often addresses a specific subject (e.g., taxation, corporate regulation, social welfare). A Bill holds no legal power unless it successfully completes the legislative process.

- Authority and Origin

All three derive their authority from the Constitution and the legislative powers vested in Parliament or state legislatures. However, their authority grows progressively — a Bill has potential authority, an Act gains authority once passed, and a Law holds the highest legal authority once in force.

- Purpose and Role
 - Law provides the overarching framework for governance and regulation.
 - The Act translates government policies into specific legal instruments.
 - Bill initiates the legal transformation process by proposing changes or new rules.

The Legislative Process From Bill to Law

The journey from Bill becoming an Act finally into a Law follows a structured process:

1. **Introduction of the Bill:** The proposed legislation is introduced in either house of Parliament (Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha).
2. **First Reading:** The Bill's title and objectives are read, and it is published in the official gazette.
3. **Second Reading:** The Bill is examined clause by clause, debated, and possibly amended.
4. **Committee Stage:** A parliamentary committee may scrutinize the Bill in detail and suggest changes.
5. **Third Reading and Voting:** The Bill is put to a final vote.
6. **Other House Consideration:** The Bill undergoes a similar process in the other house.
7. **Presidential Assent:** The Bill is sent to the President for approval.
8. **Becomes an Act:** Upon assent, it is notified in the Gazette and becomes an Act.
9. **Implementation:** Once enforced, it becomes part of the legal system that is a Law.

Revision, Amendment, and Public Involvement

Laws and Acts are not static; they evolve over time to reflect changing societal needs. Legislatures can amend, revise, or repeal them through the same legislative procedure. Public consultation plays an important role during the Bill and Act stages through parliamentary committees, debates, and civil society participation. However, once a law is enacted, it generally does not require public input.

Legal Implications and Enforcement

The violation of a Law or Act carries significant legal consequences, including fines, penalties, or imprisonment. Since a Bill is not yet law, its violation does not entail legal penalties. Enforcement agencies, courts, and government departments are responsible for implementing Acts and ensuring compliance with laws.

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