Laura Quilter’s Guide to Policy & Legal Research in Three Easy Steps
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Example: US Federal Government. Most state governments and national governments have similar resources, with better or worse systems of access.

I. Know Your Government (a.k.a., Civics 101)
Example: US federal government. Tripartite structure, with bicameral legislative branch (Congress: House of Representatives and Senate); executive branch; and judicial branch. Any given law will show up first in the legislative branch, and then the executive branch, and then finally, be litigated in the judicial branch. The process is iterative, as Congress responds to the Executive or Judicial Branches.

Research resources: http://loc.gov/law/

II. Identify Your Law or Policy
“I’m just a bill, on Capitol Hill ...” How a Bill Becomes a Law:
Legislative sausage:
Key primary resources: Congressional Record, Congress.gov

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How a law is implemented and translated into regulations:
Agencies implement rulemakings, with public comment processes, leading to rules that are published in the Federal Register (FR) and codified in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

Primary resources: Federal Register, CFR, agency rulemaking proceedings.
http://ecfr.gov

III. The Law in the World
Once the regulations are passed, the agencies begin to implement the laws. Legal and other scholars will write about the law and its effects. And, inevitably, aspects of the law will be heard in court – interpretations of the law, or challenges to the law or regulations by persons affected.

Primary Resources: Agency enforcement proceedings, Executive oversight (GAO reports, etc.), Judicial actions (PACER, RECAP, various legal databases including Lexis, Westlaw, and FindLaw), Legislative oversight hearings, etc.

Research Resources: The legal aspects will be covered in law review articles, indexed by Lexis and WestLaw, and in public policy research literature, and in the relevant subject-based literature—such as economics, natural sciences, medicine, etc.

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AND RELEVANT SUBJECT DISCIPLINES