

KEY NUMBER SYSTEM ON WESTLAW

The most widely used classification system for American law on the world's most advanced legal research system

The Key Number System is the master classification system of U.S. law and widely regarded as the cornerstone of effective legal research. For over 100 years, West Topic and Key Numbers have offered legal researchers a convenient way to zero in on a particular legal issue and quickly find on-point cases.

Why use the Key Number System?

Comprehensive and precise. Thomson Reuters attorney-editors identify, summarize, and assign a Topic and Key Number from the Key Number System to each legal issue in a published opinion. You can search by Key Number or use one found in a relevant case to retrieve other cases discussing the same legal issue.

Search for legal concepts. Legal research is often a hunt for principles or concepts not easily retrieved with literal word searches. The Key Number System identifies and indexes legal concepts so you can find cases stating or applying a legal concept, even if those terms aren't in the opinion.

Find what you need faster. Easily identify on-point Key Numbers by browsing or searching the outline on Westlaw®. Or, click on Key Numbers inside documents to quickly locate cases with the same or similar legal concepts and principles.

Current and accurate. As the law evolves, so does the Key Number System. Each year, we make hundreds or even thousands of changes, including adding new Key Numbers for emerging topics and reclassifying expanding areas of the law. Plus, it's completely integrated with KeyCite®, so you'll know the cases you rely on are still good law.

How the Key Number component works:

Identifies the legal topics. The Key Number System is the foundation of WestSearch®. Because attorney-editors have summarized and classified the law going back over 100 years, WestSearch identifies the legal topics best represented by your search terms and returns relevant documents for those topics – even if the documents don't have the terms you put into the search box!

Delivers relevant cases from other jurisdictions. WestSearch also finds the terms in other jurisdictions and identifies the Key Numbers associated with those headnotes. WestSearch delivers cases from other jurisdictions with those same Key Numbers, giving you the most on-point results.

FIND SIMILAR CASES ON A LEGAL ISSUE

Each legal issue in a case published by Thomson Reuters is identified, summarized in a headnote, and assigned a Topic and Key Number in the Key Number System. This arrangement of breaking a court opinion into distinct points of law and then classifying each point with a number has made the Key Number System the de facto classification system for all American law. Finding one case on point leads you directly to others – in your jurisdiction or any other – so you'll be confident that you haven't missed anything.

The screenshot shows the Westlaw homepage with a search bar at the top. Below it, a search result for 'Bush v. Gore' is displayed, showing the Supreme Court of the United States decision from December 12, 2000, with page numbers 531 U.S. 98, 121 S.Ct. 525, 148 L.Ed.2d 388. The result includes links for 'Filings (28)', 'Negative Treatment (67)', 'History (32)', 'Citing References (4,987)', 'Table of Authorities', and 'Powered by KeyCite®'. Below the search result, a section titled 'West Headnotes (10)' lists two entries: 'United States' and 'Election Law'. The 'United States' entry has a note '28 Cases that cite this headnote' with a circled '3' over it. The 'Election Law' entry has a note '27 Cases that cite this headnote' with a circled '3' over it. To the right, there's a sidebar with 'Change View' and a 'Key Number' search interface.

The screenshot shows the Westlaw search results for the key number '42 Right to vote effectively'. The search bar at the top contains '42 Right to vote effectively'. The results page shows a 'NARROW' section with filters for 'Select Multiple Filters', 'Search within results', and 'Key Number' (set to '42'). It also shows 'Jurisdiction' (set to 'Supreme Ct.') and 'Date' (set to 'All'). On the right, a list of cases is shown, starting with '1. Bush v. Gore' (Supreme Court of the United States, December 12, 2000, 531 U.S. 98). Each case entry includes a circled number: '1' over the case name, '2' over the jurisdiction, '3' over the date, '4' over the headnote, '5' over the document preview, and '6' over the citation. There are also 'Add to Favorites' and 'Sort by' buttons.

1. Find similar cases on a legal issue or point of law by clicking a Topic or Key Number in the classification hierarchy next to the headnote.
2. Find similar cases on a broad topic by clicking the topic above the headnote.
3. Find cases that cite to your case for the legal issue or point of law in the headnote by clicking the link below the headnote.

4. View headnote results for your Key Number.
5. View summaries of the decisions.
6. Navigate up or down the topic hierarchy to retrieve additional results.
7. Change the jurisdiction of your headnote results at any time.

FIND RELEVANT CASES USING THE KEY NUMBER DIGEST

The Key Number Digest contains the complete Topic and Key Number outline used by our attorney-editors to classify headnotes. Use the Digest to locate Topic and Key Numbers related to your issue and to retrieve headnotes classified under those Topic and Key Numbers.

To access the Key Number Digest on Westlaw, click Key Numbers in the All Content section in the Browse pane on the homepage. The Key Number System page, which lists all of the Key Number topics, is displayed.

The screenshot shows the 'West Key Number System' page on Westlaw. At the top, there's a search bar with 'Search Key Numbers relevant to your issue' and a 'Jurisdiction selected: All Federal | Change Jurisdiction' button. Below the search bar, a list of Key Numbers is shown in a grid format. One item, '142T ELECTION LAW', is highlighted with a circled '3' over it. Other items include '1 ABANDONED AND LOST PROPERTY', '2 ABATEMENT AND REVIVAL', '4 ABORTION AND BIRTH CONTROL', '5 ABSENTEES', '6 ABSTRACTS OF TITLE', '7 ACCESSION', '8 ACCORD AND SATISFACTION', '9 ACCOUNT', '10 ACCOUNT, ACTION ON', '11 ACCOUNT STATED', '11A ACCOUNTANTS', '12 ACKNOWLEDGMENT', '135H DOUBLE JEOPARDY', '138 DOWER AND CURTESY', '141 EASEMENTS', '141E EDUCATION', '142 EJECTMENT', '143 ELECTION OF REMEDIES', '145 ELECTRICITY', '146 EMBEZZLEMENT', '148 EMINENT DOMAIN', '149 ENTRY, WRIT OF', and '149E ENVIRONMENTAL LAW'. There are also 'Add to Favorites' and 'Search Key Number titles' buttons.

1. Add to Favorites ★ for direct access from your home page.
2. Search Key Number titles to find an on-point Key Number.
3. Browse topics to familiarize yourself with an issue or area of law, or to locate specific Key Numbers. Then, search for headnotes classified under a particular Topic or Key Number, or view headnotes by clicking on a Key Number.

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