Home politics affects anyone who lives with other people, because transforming a space into a home involves negotiations of various sorts. Wherever people live together, there is bound to be a regime for gaining power and advantage or agreeing to share them. ‘Home politics’ outlines how the boundaries between public and private life are blurred by utilities and electronic technologies and also considers how roles in the home are negotiated and how they have changed over time. Reconciliation of interests and harmonious cohabitation are challenging projects. The issue of domestic abuse is discussed along with the lasting effects of colonization and the politics relating to homelands and home occupancy.

In court and on trial

‘In court and on trial’ outlines the procedures once a trial date has been set. There is considerable variation in terms of the nature of the decision-maker—judge or jury—as well as the ways that the adjudicator is appointed. In almost all countries, prosecutors and judges are appointed, but in many US states they are elected. The jury decides questions of fact, whereas the judge decides matters of law. There are now specialist courts, such as drug treatment courts and juvenile courts, which focus on one particular form of offending and adopt a ‘problem-solving’ approach. What happens when criminal justice fails? Wrongful convictions and wrongful acquittals are also discussed.

Domestic violence

‘Domestic violence’ outlines the procedures once a trial date has been set. There is considerable variation in terms of the nature of the decision-maker—judge or jury—as well as the ways that the adjudicator is appointed. In almost all countries, prosecutors and judges are appointed, but in many US states they are elected. The jury decides questions of fact, whereas the judge decides matters of law. There are now specialist courts, such as drug treatment courts and juvenile courts, which focus on one particular form of offending and adopt a ‘problem-solving’ approach. What happens when criminal justice fails? Wrongful convictions and wrongful acquittals are also discussed.
‘Domestic violence’ looks at the view of domestic abuse in family law. The law in all jurisdictions has been reluctant to interfere in cases of domestic violence. In the last few decades, the law has begun to accept that this issue is a major social problem that needs a legal reaction. There is no solid definition of domestic violence. A definition should include emotional and financial abuse. Domestic violence is not restricted to a cohabiting couple, but includes all those who live in an intimate relationship. The notion of inequality in a relationship is an important consideration in defining domestic violence.

4. How do we measure crime?
Tim Newburn

‘How do we measure crime?’ considers the two main measures that are generally used for counting crime—information from law enforcement bodies and victimization surveys—looking at the pros and cons of different approaches and outlining a series of provisos or caveats. Law enforcement statistics do not include all crimes, they are not consistent, not all crime is reported, and not all reported crime is recorded. Despite crime surveys indicating that fewer than one in two crimes are reported to law enforcement, it is thought that they also under-report. Other issues with crime surveys concern their sampling procedures and targeting of individuals only and not businesses.

8. How do we prevent crime?
Tim Newburn

It is often assumed that the criminal justice system is crucial in determining crime levels, but the available evidence does not bear this out. In fact, it is the processes of socialization underpinned and reinforced by informal social control that play a vital role in controlling crime. ‘How do we prevent crime?’ considers the various crime prevention techniques that have contributed substantially to recent apparent reductions in crime. It describes the distinction between social crime prevention, which tends to focus on fairly broad and deep issues, and situational crime prevention, which is narrower in focus, is pre-emptive, and seeks, through a variety of means, to reduce the opportunities for crime.

2. What is crime?
Tim Newburn
‘What is crime?’ considers the definitions of crime. Should the focus be simply on violations of legal codes or should we extend it to violations of moral and social codes? The relativity of crime is also discussed: not everything that was once criminal remains so, and vice versa, and not everything considered criminal in one place is treated as criminal everywhere else. Is criminal justice effective? Through the process of criminal justice, criminals are constructed, but asking questions about what and who becomes labelled as a ‘crime’ or a ‘criminal’ necessarily invites one to contemplate the importance of power. Who makes the rules? Who do the rules affect, or protect?

2. Social constructions

Steve Bruce

Sociology could be described as the study of social structures and social institutions, and sociological work is often divided into topics such as class structure, the family, crime and deviance, and religion. But how is sociology distinctive? ‘Social constructions’ examines what constitutes sociology. Biology provides a useful starting point because if we can understand the extent to which the biology of most animals determines their lives, and then appreciate the extent to which it fails to do so for humans, we can see the importance of culture. It concludes that reality is socially constructed, our behaviour has hidden social causes, and much of social life is profoundly ironic.

Family Law: A Very Short Introduction

Jonathan Herring

Family Law: A Very Short Introduction provides insight not only into what family law is, but why it is the way it is. How have laws had to respond to social changes in family life? The last few decades have seen rising divorce rates and an increase in the use of surrogate mothers. How do family courts deal with the chaos of modern family life? Family law has recently been challenged to keep up-to-date with the social and scientific changes which affect it. What is a family? What makes someone a parent? What rights should children have? What will families look like in the years ahead? What new dilemmas will the courts face?