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ASSISTANCE TO DOMAIN NAME HOLDERS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: THE UNIFORM DOMAIN NAME DISPUTE RESOLUTION POLICY

Humberto Carrasco-Blanc
José Sánchez-Oyarzún
Kathryn A. Kleiman
American University
Margarita Valdés-Cortés
Javier Maestre-Rodríguez
Chris Reed



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Humberto Carrasco-Blanco 

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1034-7521>

Universidad Católica del Norte - <https://ror.org/02akpm128>

José Sánchez-Oyarzún

Universidad Católica del Norte - <https://ror.org/02akpm128>

Kathryn A. Kleiman 

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8725-0064>

American University - <https://ror.org/052w4zt36>

Margarita Valdés-Cortés

Universidad de Chile - <https://ror.org/047gc3g35>

Javier Maestre-Rodríguez

Maestre Abogados

Chris Reed 

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9124-5489>

Queen Mary University of London - <https://ror.org/026zzn846>

Frequently Asked Questions: The Uniform domain name dispute resolution policy

Work Coordinator:Humberto Carrasco-Blanc


<https://repositorio.ucn.cl/handle/20.500.14729/9315>

Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas



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 Universidad Católica del Norte. <https://ror.org/02akpm128>

Published in Coquimbo, Chile, 2026.

Departamento de Ciencia Abierta y Cultura Científica.

This is a derivative work of: *Domain name disputes: Understanding the problem.*
<https://doi.org/10.22199/ADNH002>

Associated with this work, the following materials are available (please click the links below to access them):

- a detailed study guide
- an audio recording,
- a video presentation,

Acknowledgements:

This work was supported by the ICANN Grant Program through the project “Assistance for Domain Name Holders in ICANN’s Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy Procedures”, implemented by Universidad Católica del Norte.

Abstract

This document presents a FAQ-style overview of the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP), an administrative mechanism designed to combat cybersquatting and protect trademarks in the digital environment. It outlines its origins in the collaborative efforts of ICANN and WIPO and explains its role within a global governance framework. Through a structured question-and-answer format, it details the three essential elements required for a successful complaint: confusing similarity with a trademark, lack of legitimate interest by the registrant, and registration and use in bad faith. It also describes the procedural stages from complaint filing to final decision, emphasizing the system's speed, cost-effectiveness, and international scope. Furthermore, it analyzes the main advantages of the UDRP—such as efficiency and expert decision-making—alongside its limitations, including restricted remedies, absence of internal appeals, and lack of binding precedent. Finally, it situates the UDRP within a broader ecosystem of dispute resolution mechanisms, including URS, traditional litigation, and country-code domain policies, highlighting its role in online intellectual property protection.

Keywords: UDRP; FAQ; internet governance; cybersquatting; domain name disputes; ICANN; WIPO; bad faith; alternative dispute resolution; online intellectual property; digital trademark protection; domain name system; URS.

AI Use Statement

In the preparation of this work, artificial intelligence tools such as Gemini, ChatGPT, and NotebookLM were used to support tasks including the improvement of paragraph drafting, topic research, and the development of summaries, among other uses. These outputs were reviewed more than twice by human beings, who appear as the authors, and therefore all decisions regarding content, legal interpretation, argumentative structure, and conclusions rest entirely with them, who assume full responsibility for the accuracy and rigor of the work. No sensitive or confidential information was entered into the platform used, and each generated response was critically reviewed before being incorporated into the document.

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What is the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) and what is its primary purpose?

The Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) is a standardized legal framework crucial for Internet governance, designed to resolve conflicts related to domain names. Its main purpose is to combat "cybersquatting," which involves the abusive registration and use of domain names that are identical or confusingly similar to existing trademarks. The UDRP provides an expedited and cost-effective administrative alternative to traditional court litigation for trademark owners to reclaim their brand identity in the digital space. It aims to maintain the integrity of brands online, foster user trust in digital authenticity, and prevent the commercial growth of the internet from being hindered by misleading or fraudulent domains.

Who developed the UDRP and what organizations are responsible for its implementation?

The UDRP was primarily developed through a collaborative effort led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a global leader in intellectual property, and the community of the then-young organization, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Name and Numbers (ICANN). It was subsequently adopted by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in 1999. ICANN, a non-profit organization established in 1998, plays a fundamental role in coordinating Internet naming conventions. Its accredited registrars are contractually bound to comply with the UDRP for the domains under their jurisdiction. WIPO, and other organizations accredited by ICANN, act as dispute resolution service providers for UDRP cases, administering a significant volume of these disputes. This "private governance" model allows for consistent and agile responses to domain name abuses globally, transcending traditional jurisdictional complexities.

What are the three essential elements a complainant must prove for a successful UDRP complaint?

For a UDRP complaint to be successful, the complainant bears the burden of proving three cumulative elements, as outlined in Paragraph 4(a) of the UDRP Policy:

1. **Identity or Confusing Similarity with a Trademark:** The disputed domain name must be identical or confusingly similar to a trademark or service mark in which the complainant has rights (whether registered or common law). This assessment typically disregards generic Top-Level Domain (gTLD) extensions (e.g., .com, .net) and focuses on the second-level domain string. Examples include "typosquatting" (minor misspellings) or combining the trademark with generic or negative terms.
2. **Lack of Rights or Legitimate Interests of the Registrant:** The complainant must affirmatively establish that the domain name registrant has no rights or legitimate interests in the domain name. However, the UDRP outlines circumstances where the registrant *can* demonstrate legitimate interests, such as using or preparing to use the domain in good faith for goods/services, being commonly known by the domain name, or making legitimate non-commercial or fair use without intent for commercial gain or misleading consumers.
3. **Registration and Use in Bad Faith:** The complainant must provide convincing evidence that the domain name was both registered and is being used in bad faith. Examples of bad faith include registering the domain primarily to sell/rent it to the trademark owner for profit, preventing the trademark owner from registering the corresponding domain (especially if it's a pattern of conduct), disrupting a competitor's business, or intentionally attracting Internet users for commercial gain by creating confusion with the complainant's mark. The timing of domain registration relative to trademark rights is crucial; generally, if the domain was registered before trademark rights existed, a finding of bad faith is unlikely.

What is "cybersquatting" and how does the UDRP specifically address it?

"Cybersquatting" is the primary target of the UDRP and refers to the abusive practice of registering a domain name that is identical or confusingly similar to an existing trademark with malicious intent. This intent often involves profiting from the trademark, either by demanding payment from the legitimate trademark owner to release the domain, or by diverting consumer traffic to competing or malicious websites. The UDRP addresses cybersquatting directly by requiring the complainant to prove that the domain was registered and is being used in "bad faith," specifically detailing scenarios that constitute such intent, such as seeking to sell the domain for an exorbitant price, preventing the trademark owner from using their mark online, or intentionally confusing consumers for commercial gain.

What are the typical stages of a UDRP proceeding, from complaint to decision?

A UDRP proceeding generally follows five basic and sequential stages:

1. **Complaint Filing:** The trademark owner (complainant) initiates the process by submitting a formal complaint to an approved dispute resolution service provider (like WIPO), adhering strictly to UDRP requirements and including supporting evidence. Filing fees are required.
2. **Notification and Response:** The domain name registrant (respondent) is formally notified and has 20 calendar days (extensions possible) to submit a response. There is no expectation of response in the diverse and global system of the Internet with its myriad of language and legal structures, and a "default" (or failure to respond *is not an automatic loss for the registrant*.) If there is a response, it should aim to refute at least one of the three core elements of the complaint, providing evidence of legitimate interests or good faith registration and use.
3. **Panel Appointment:** After receiving the response (or the response period expires), the dispute resolution provider appoints a Panel, consisting of one or three experts in trademark law and domain name disputes.
4. **Panel Decision:** The appointed Panel rigorously evaluates the case, considering arguments and evidence from both parties in relation to the UDRP requirements. Procedures are based on a single round of written pleadings, with hearings being rare. The Panel typically makes a decision within 14 days of its appointment.
5. **Notification and Implementation:** Once the Panel reaches a conclusion, the decision is notified to all parties and the domain name registrar. The registrar then implements the Panel's decision, which usually involves transferring the disputed domain name to the complainant or canceling it.

What are the key advantages and limitations of the UDRP compared to traditional litigation?

The UDRP offers several key advantages:

- **Speed:** Resolutions are typically achieved in six weeks to two months, significantly faster than court litigation which can take years.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** It's generally much more affordable than filing a lawsuit in a national court.
- **International Scope:** It applies globally, resolving disputes regardless of the parties' geographical locations.
- **Expert Decision-Makers:** Cases are decided by panelists specialized in trademark law and domain disputes.
- **Simplicity:** It involves a single round of written pleadings, simplifying the process.

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- **Direct Remedy:** It allows for the direct transfer or cancellation of an infringing domain via the registrars.

However, it also has limitations:

- **Limited Remedies:** The only available remedies are domain transfer or cancellation; monetary compensation (damages) is not possible, which can be a significant drawback for substantial financial losses.
- **No Internal Appeal Mechanism:** UDRP decisions are final within the administrative system; challenging a decision requires initiating costly court litigation.
- **Non-Binding Precedent:** Panel decisions are not formally binding, leading to potential inconsistencies and less predictability compared to judicial systems.
- **Potential for Abuse/Power Disparities:** Concerns exist about potential abuse, particularly against smaller registrants, noncommercial registrants, or those in countries not bound by the trademark law of another country leading to finding of "Reverse Domain Name Hijacking" (RDNH) where a complainant files a bad-faith UDRP case without legitimate grounds.
- **Limited Scope for Complex IP Issues:** It's designed for abusive domain registrations in the narrow scope of certain types of trademark issues, not broader or more complex intellectual property infringements or misuse of the Internet generally (such as malware or botnets).

How does the UDRP balance efficiency with legal predictability, and what does this mean for parties involved?

The UDRP operates on a deliberate trade-off: it sacrifices a degree of legal predictability and very limited scope for substantial gains in speed and cost-effectiveness. This means:

- **Efficiency over Precedent:** While WIPO works to foster consistency through published summaries and best practices, UDRP panel decisions are not formally binding precedent. Individual panelists have discretion based on unique case circumstances, which can introduce some unpredictability compared to judicial systems where *stare decisis* (binding precedent) is paramount.
- **Limited Remedies for Quick Resolution:** The focus on quick resolution means remedies are limited to domain transfer or cancellation, without the possibility of monetary damages.
- **No Internal Appeals:** To maintain speed, there is no internal appeal mechanism within the UDRP system, meaning a party seeking to challenge a decision must resort to traditional, lengthier, and more expensive court litigation.

For parties involved, this balance requires strategic evaluation. The UDRP is highly effective for and intended for clear-cut cybersquatting cases where the primary goal is rapid domain recovery and monetary damages are not a factor. However, for more intricate disputes, those where the parties have overlapping rights, or requiring financial compensation, or situations where a high degree of legal certainty is crucial, the inherent lack of predictability and limited remedies might make traditional litigation a more appropriate, albeit costlier and slower, choice.

Are there alternatives or complements to the UDRP for resolving domain name disputes?

Yes, the UDRP is part of an ecosystem of tools for domain name dispute resolution. Other significant alternatives and complements include:

- **Traditional Court Litigation:** Disputes can be taken to federal or state courts. While much slower and more expensive than UDRP, litigation allows for a broader range of remedies, including monetary

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damages (e.g., under the Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act - ACPA in the U.S.), offers binding precedent, and provides appeal mechanisms.

- **Uniform Rapid Suspension System (URS):** Introduced by ICANN in 2013, the URS complements the UDRP, especially for new gTLDs. It's even faster and cheaper than the UDRP, but requires a higher threshold of clear and indisputable evidence of bad-faith registration and use. Crucially, the URS only allows for the **suspension** of the domain name until its expiration, not its permanent transfer to the complainant. It's useful for quickly blocking fraudulent domains.
- **Country Code Top-Level Domain (ccTLD) Policies:** Many ccTLDs have adopted the UDRP or their own localized variants. These policies, often administered by WIPO or local entities, can have specific characteristics tailored to their local markets, such as mandatory mediation phases or different bad faith proof requirements. Examples include .MX (Mexico), .CO (Colombia), or local procedures like the UK DRS.

The choice of mechanism depends on the specific objectives of the trademark owner and the circumstances of the dispute. The UDRP is ideal for quick, cost-effective domain recovery in clear cybersquatting cases, while URS is for rapid temporary suspension of obvious infringements ("slam-dunk cases"), and court litigation is suited for complex cases involving monetary damages or a need for greater legal predictability and appeals.