



Editorial: Reflecting on Innovation and Integrity in Court Administration

EDITORIAL

LUIS MARÍA PALMA 



As the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) celebrated its 20th Anniversary on the occasion of the Conference held in Singapore in November 2024, the global community of judicial administration marked a significant milestone in the advancement of court innovation, international cooperation, and the rule of law.

The Conference provided an inspiring and forward-looking platform to reflect on two decades of achievements, and to chart a path forward in the face of transformative technological and institutional change.

It was with great honour and humility that I completed the handing over of my duties and my term as President of IACA during this landmark gathering.

The forum offered a critical lens on the evolving role of technology in justice systems worldwide, particularly the growing application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in judicial decision-making and court administration.

While AI holds immense promise to enhance efficiency, transparency, and access to justice, it simultaneously raises profound questions regarding privacy, fairness, and institutional legitimacy. AI's capabilities to detect patterns, predict outcomes, and automate tasks are already reshaping the administrative backbones of judiciaries. However, these benefits come with significant risks, including the amplification of bias, lack of explainability, and potential infringement of fundamental rights, particularly the right to privacy.

We must remain vigilant about the use of AI in the judiciary. While these tools can enhance productivity, streamline case management, and even assist in legal research or risk assessment, their deployment must be governed by strict ethical standards. There is a growing consensus that AI cannot replace the human element of justice—namely, the discretion, empathy, and contextual judgment of a judge. Risks include biased outcomes stemming from flawed training data, the opacity of decision-making in so-called “black box” algorithms, and the inadvertent exposure of sensitive personal data.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Prof. Dr. Luis María Palma

Executive Journal Editor,
International Association
for Court Administration
(IACA) – Chair of the
Advisory Council/
Immediate Past President,
Argentina

luismariapalma@gmail.com

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Whilst facing all the former, the judiciary must ensure that the adoption of such tools includes safeguards for transparency, oversight mechanisms, and avenues for contesting automated decisions.

Strengthening judicial institutions globally also requires sustained investments. A well-structured court administration enhances institutional performance by delineating jurisdictional functions from administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities. This separation allows judges to focus on adjudication whilst empowering professionals in administrative roles to optimize resource allocation, caseload management, and technological innovation.

Across the world, we see promising examples of how professional court administration contributes to a more effective judiciary. In Latin America, recent reforms underscore this trend. Argentina, for instance, has advanced institutional autonomy in some provincial courts by professionalizing administrative staff and adopting strategic planning practices. Brazil has invested in judicial councils and management systems to improve transparency and accountability. In Chile, efforts to introduce digital court platforms and administrative modernization have also gained traction. These developments reinforce the notion that sound administration is foundational to judicial independence and public trust.

This issue of the *International Journal for Court Administration* (IJCA) brings together a rich and diverse collection of academic and professional contributions that reflect the spirit of critical inquiry, cross-jurisdictional learning, and innovation that defines IACA's mission.

The first contribution of this issue is a professional article on "Lessons from China's Smart Court Reform," by Dory Reiling et al.

In this unique professional article, Dory Reiling engages in a probing conversation with Straton Papageannias, based on his PhD research defended in September 2024 at Leiden University on China's Smart Court Reform. The piece delves into the ideological underpinnings and practical implications of China's digital transformation of its judiciary. The conversation highlights how the Smart Court initiative is deeply aligned with China's central governance approach and explores its implications for liberal democracies. The authors emphasize the need for critical scrutiny when importing or adapting such models in contexts that value judicial independence and fundamental rights. Their dialogue brings forward nuanced insights about automation, state control, and the balance between efficiency and integrity in court processes.

Then, a number of academic articles tackle several pressing issues of justice administration as follows:

"Bias in AI(Supported) Decision Making: Old Problems, New Technologies," by Andrej Kríštofik

The author presents a comprehensive examination of algorithmic bias in AI-supported judicial systems. Drawing upon landmark cases like *ProPublica's* analysis of COMPAS and the ECtHR's jurisprudence on judicial impartiality, the article provides a comparative study of human versus machine biases. It underscores that bias in AI is not merely a technical flaw but a societal one, rooted in the data we feed and the systems we design. The article challenges readers to consider regulatory responses,

such as those proposed by the EU's AI Act, and asks whether AI-based decisions can ever fully align with the normative expectations of justice in liberal democracies.

“Chambers or Panels? (Un)Ambiguity in the Administration of Hungarian Courts,” by Marcell Fényes and Krisztina F. Rozsnyai

This paper brings to light the structural ambiguities and procedural weaknesses in Hungary's case allocation system. The authors meticulously analyse whether current allocation schemes satisfy the right to a “natural judge,” a foundational principle under the European Convention on Human Rights. Their research identifies systemic shortcomings and emphasizes the importance of transparent administrative processes in preserving judicial impartiality. Particularly striking is their call for judicial leaders to be more accountable to users of justice, positioning court users not merely as passive recipients but as stakeholders.

“Occupational Stress Among India's District Judges: An Empirical Study,” by Shivaraj Huchhanavar, Shamim Mohammad, and Vikas Vaibhav

This empirical study is a rare and valuable addition to the global literature on judicial well-being. Based on data collected from judges across 13 Indian High Court jurisdictions, the article identifies the key stressors affecting the judiciary: overwhelming workloads, hierarchical interference, and the ever-present scrutiny from the Bar and media. Notably, the authors conclude that occupational stress cuts across tenure and seniority, underscoring the need for systemic interventions and support structures. In highlighting this human dimension of judicial administration, the article urges reform efforts to consider not only institutional efficiency but also judicial resilience.

“Open Court Principle and Respecting Privacy: Granting Anonymity and Restricting Access to Case Files in Constitutional Court Review Procedure,” by Aleksandrs Potaičuks and Kristaps Tamužs

The authors explore the delicate tension between transparency and privacy in the context of Latvia's Constitutional Court. The article is a timely contribution to debates around the open court principle in an era where digital access can easily compromise individual anonymity. It advances the conversation by discussing how courts can navigate between visibility and confidentiality, particularly in high-profile constitutional cases. Their analysis underscores the need for procedural safeguards that uphold trust in the judiciary without undermining the dignity and privacy of litigants.

“Polish Administrative Judiciary After 20 Years of Current Law on Administrative Court Proceedings,” by Andrzej Paduch

Andrzej Paduch reflects on the evolution of Poland's administrative judiciary, two decades after the enactment of its procedural law. While he acknowledges its achievements—especially the establishment of a two-tier administrative court system—he calls for modern reforms to tackle issues of procedural complexity, digitization, and access. This retrospective analysis serves as a critical resource for reform-minded scholars and practitioners who seek to balance continuity with innovation in judicial procedure.

The contributions to the present issue are concluded by a review of the recently published book of Alan Carlson and John Greacen dedicated to U.S. State Trial Courts.

What is Happening to State Trial Court Civil Filings? by Alan Carlson and John Greacen.
Review by Marcus W. Reinkensmeyer

In this thought-provoking book review, Marcus W. Reinkensmeyer distills the major findings of the authors' research on the declining trends in U.S. state civil court filings. The counterintuitive results—showing that civil case filings are decreasing despite population growth and technological innovation—invite us to revisit the assumptions underpinning court planning. Importantly, the review highlights concern about a growing justice gap, suggesting that decreased filings may reflect systemic inaccessibility rather than improved dispute resolution. The review concludes with a call to rethink metrics of court performance and to embrace user-centred reforms.

This issue of the IJCA stands as a testimony of the global dialogue that IACA has fostered over the past two decades. As Executive Editor, I extend my deepest thanks to our authors, peer reviewers, the dedicated co-managing editors, and our editorial board for their tireless commitment to excellence. Their contributions ensure that the Journal remains a vital platform for advancing knowledge and inspiring reform in the field of court administration.

Looking forward, the *International Journal for Court Administration* will launch a series of webinars to accompany future issues, providing a dynamic forum for discussion and engagement with authors. These online events will offer readers the opportunity to delve deeper into the research, ask questions, and contribute to the evolving conversation around court administration worldwide. We believe these webinars will foster a vibrant intellectual exchange that continues beyond the printed page.

We invite our readers to explore, reflect, and engage with the diverse perspectives presented in this issue—and to join us as we continue building a more responsive, resilient, and inclusive global justice system.

Prof. Dr. Luis María Palma
Executive Journal Editor

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Prof. Dr. Luis María Palma  orcid.org/0000-0002-4862-0642

Executive Journal Editor, International Association for Court Administration (IACA) – Chair of the Advisory Council/Immediate Past President, Argentina

Palma
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