



## **REGULATING AI JUDGES IN INDIA: CAN MACHINES ENSURE PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS?**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the legal sphere is no longer a matter of speculation—it is increasingly becoming a global reality. Judicial systems worldwide are integrating AI not only to enhance administrative efficiency but also to assist, and in some cases, substitute human decision-makers. For instance, China has introduced AI-powered platforms to resolve common legal disputes through “smart courts” operating in multiple provinces, significantly accelerating the disposal of high-volume cases. Similarly, Estonia has piloted a fully automated AI judge to adjudicate small claims disputes. These developments signal a transformative shift in how justice is conceptualised, delivered, and experienced.

India, too, is cautiously advancing in this domain. The judiciary has adopted digital tools such as SUPACE (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Courts’ Efficiency) and SUVAAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software), designed to assist judges in legal research and translation. Although these systems currently function in a supportive capacity, they mark the early stages of AI integration into the judicial ecosystem. The prospect of entrusting AI with core adjudicative responsibilities, however, raises pressing constitutional, ethical, and procedural questions.

This paper explores whether AI, if deployed in a judicial role in India, can adhere to the principle of procedural fairness, a constitutional guarantee firmly rooted in Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. Procedural fairness encompasses fundamental tenets such as the right to be heard (*audi alteram partem*), impartiality, reasoned decision-making, and transparency. These principles are not mere formalities but are essential to preserving public trust and institutional legitimacy in the justice system. The inquiry is grounded in global

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developments, jurisprudential theories, and technological assessments, including the experimental study by Posner and Saran (2025), which evaluated the performance of GPT-4 in judicial reasoning. While the study found AI capable of consistently applying precedent, it also revealed deficiencies in contextual sensitivity and human empathy elements vital to delivering substantive justice.

**This paper pursues three core objectives:**

1. To evaluate the extent to which AI can ensure procedural fairness in judicial decision-making.
2. To critically assess the legal and ethical preparedness of the Indian judiciary for AI-based adjudication.
3. To propose a regulatory framework that harmonises technological advancement with constitutional safeguards.

The paper is structured as follows: Part II outlines the conceptual foundation of AI adjudication and defines procedural fairness; Part III reviews international experiences with AI in the courtroom; Part IV examines India's digital judicial initiatives; Part V identifies challenges to fairness posed by AI adjudication; Part VI presents comparative studies and empirical insights; Part VII analyses the legal framework governing the judiciary in India; Part VIII proposes policy and legislative recommendations; and Part IX concludes with reflections on the permissible and prudent role of AI in India's future justice system.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

To evaluate the feasibility and legitimacy of AI in judicial decision-making, it is essential first to define what constitutes an "AI judge" and how this concept interfaces with the constitutional principle of procedural fairness in India.

**Defining an AI Judge:** An AI judge refers to a machine learning system or algorithm capable of making, assisting in, or automating legal judgments and outcomes. These systems range from decision-support tools used to assist judges in analyzing legal texts, precedents, or case law to fully autonomous decision-makers who can independently deliver legal rulings, as seen in certain experimental legal contexts abroad. The key distinction lies in the degree of discretion and autonomy delegated to the AI. Assistive AI systems operate under continuous human supervision, functioning as analytical aids. In contrast, autonomous AI adjudicators

function without direct human oversight, raising concerns regarding accountability, legal reasoning, and judicial discretion.

Although India has not yet deployed autonomous AI systems in a judicial capacity, global developments such as China's smart courts and Estonia's early-stage automation initiatives indicate that the transition from assistive to autonomous AI adjudication is no longer a distant prospect. As AI systems become increasingly sophisticated, the legal, ethical, and institutional implications of conferring them with adjudicative authority demand immediate and careful scrutiny.

### **PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS IN THE INDIAN LEGAL CONTEXT**

Procedural fairness, interchangeably referred to as the principles of natural justice, is a constitutionally protected doctrine in India, primarily under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. It comprises four core principles:

- The right to a fair hearing (*audi alteram partem*);
- Decision-making by an impartial and unbiased authority;
- Delivery of reasoned and intelligible judgments;
- Transparency and openness in judicial processes.

These elements are not mere procedural formalities but are intrinsic to the legitimacy and credibility of adjudicative institutions. A breach of procedural fairness renders decisions liable to appeal or judicial review, and in extreme cases, invalidation.

**Integrating AI into the judicial process challenges these constitutional safeguards. Critical questions emerge:**

1. Can an algorithm facilitate a meaningful hearing or respond to nuanced legal argumentation?
2. How can impartiality be ensured in AI systems trained on potentially biased or unrepresentative datasets?
3. Can litigants appeal decisions generated by a system whose internal logic is proprietary or opaque (the "black box" problem)?
4. These questions lie at the heart of any attempt to align AI adjudication with constitutional guarantees.

**The Need for a Conceptual Baseline:** A key regulatory challenge in AI adjudication is the lack of a universally accepted definition. Most jurisdictions, including India, have not yet legally acknowledged the concept of an “AI judge” or formulated statutory frameworks governing their use. This conceptual ambiguity presents a barrier to legal reform and responsible innovation. Without a coherent definitional and normative baseline, India risks adopting AI systems in ways that inadvertently erode constitutional values or undermine public trust in the judiciary. Thus, the intersection of AI capability and procedural fairness forms the normative foundation of this study. Establishing a clear conceptual framework is essential before examining comparative jurisdictions or proposing regulatory models.

**Global Use of AI in the Judicial Systems:** The integration of Artificial Intelligence into judicial systems is no longer hypothetical. Across several jurisdictions, courts are experimenting with AI tools not just for administrative functions, but for tasks that involve legal reasoning, pattern recognition, and controversial decision-making. These international examples offer useful insights into both the potential and the perils of using AI in adjudication.

**China: The Most Advanced Implementation:** China has emerged as a global pioneer in judicial automation. Through its “smart courts” initiative, AI is now used to handle a wide range of civil, administrative, and enforcement matters. In many lower courts, AI systems assist with evidence evaluation, document analysis, and even deliver verdicts in routine cases. These systems are integrated with facial recognition, blockchain evidence chains, and legal databases. While this has improved speed and efficiency, critics have raised concerns about due process and lack of transparency, especially given the limited scope for appealing AI-led decisions.

**Estonia: AI for Small Claims:** Estonia has taken a measured approach by deploying AI in small claims courts. The Ministry of Justice began developing a system in 2019 that automates judgments in low-value, uncontested matters. The idea is to free up human judges to focus on more complex disputes. While maintaining oversight through a built-in appeal mechanism. Estonia’s model has been noted for its careful balancing of innovation with legal safeguards.

## **UNITED STATES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: DECISION-AIDING AI**

In the United States, AI is largely used for decision support rather than autonomous judgment. Tools like COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions) are employed to predict recidivism and assist in bail or sentencing decisions. However, cases have emerged where these tools were shown to be biased, especially against African-American

defendants, sparking debate about the fairness of algorithmic justice. The European Union, meanwhile, has taken a regulatory-first approach. The proposed EU AI Act classifies AI systems used in legal adjudication as “high-risk,” thereby subjecting them to strict transparency, audit, and human oversight requirements. The EU framework reflects a cautious but structured strategy that recognizes both the promise and dangers of AI in sensitive areas like justice.

**Key Takeaways for India:** These comparative models reveal that while AI has clear efficiency benefits, its role in adjudication demands stringent safeguards. The Chinese approach shows how AI can scale but risks fairness and transparency; Estonia’s model underscores the value of keeping AI.

**India’s AI Journey in the Judiciary:** India’s engagement with Artificial Intelligence in the judicial context reflects a measured yet forward-looking approach. While AI has not yet been entrusted with the authority to deliver judgments independently, the Indian judiciary has made notable progress by integrating AI tools that support judicial functions.

**Supportive Tools: SUPACE and SUVAAS:** Two key technological developments demonstrate India’s initial steps toward AI integration: SUPACE and SUVAAS. SUPACE (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Courts’ Efficiency) is designed to enhance judicial productivity by automating research tasks, helping judges identify relevant precedents, and organising case materials. SUVAAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software) facilitates the translation of legal documents into various Indian languages using AI, improving access to justice for non-English-speaking litigants. While these tools are not involved in actual decision-making, they indicate the judiciary’s willingness to adopt digital innovation to increase efficiency and accessibility.

**A Philosophy of Caution and Opportunity:** India’s legal system, with its foundational emphasis on fairness, access to justice, and constitutional values, has embraced AI with both optimism and restraint. Judicial leaders have acknowledged AI’s potential in processing voluminous data and expediting routine tasks. However, they have also stressed that the interpretative and discretionary aspects of judging, especially in a socially diverse country like India, must remain under human control. This cautious approach is validated by empirical work, such as the 2025 study by Posner and Saran, which found that while advanced AI systems like GPT-4o can reliably apply legal precedents, they fail to account for human elements like

empathy or moral judgment. Such deficiencies raise legitimate concerns about AI's suitability for judicial functions that require a holistic and humane understanding of the law.

**Structural and Regulatory Gaps:** Despite progress, India does not currently have a clear legislative or regulatory structure governing the use of AI in the judiciary. Unlike the European Union, which proposes risk-based classifications and mandatory oversight for AI used in legal settings, India has not yet outlined similar standards. The absence of such frameworks becomes particularly concerning as the scope of AI expands from administrative support to potentially influencing or rendering judicial outcomes. The study by Posner and Saran underscores this concern. It highlights that AI systems display a rigid adherence to legal formalism, prioritising precedent over contextual judgment. In a country where equity often demands nuanced, context-sensitive interpretation, such formalism could conflict with the ideals of substantive justice guaranteed under the Constitution. Within tightly defined boundaries, the US-EU experience illustrates the importance of regulation, especially regarding bias and explainability. India, as it explores AI in its judiciary, must learn from these examples. Efficiency alone cannot justify deployment without a legal and ethical framework that protects constitutional rights and procedural fairness.

## **PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS: CHALLENGES POSED BY AI JUDGES**

The central concern with integrating Artificial Intelligence into judicial decision-making is whether such systems can respect and uphold the principle of procedural fairness, a constitutional cornerstone under Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. As AI transitions from a supportive tool to a potential adjudicator, several tensions arise between technological efficiency and legal legitimacy.

**The Human Element in Justice:** Procedural fairness is not only about following rules but ensuring that the process by which a decision is made is fair, participatory, and transparent. This includes the right to be heard, the right to receive a reasoned decision, and the assurance that the adjudicator is impartial. While AI can replicate certain procedural formalities, it cannot replicate empathy, discretion, or ethical judgment elements that are intrinsic to human justice. Studies such as that by Posner and Saran (2025) demonstrate that even sophisticated AI models like GPT-4o apply legal precedent with remarkable consistency but fail to engage with contextual cues or moral nuances that often shape judicial reasoning. In their experiment, while human judges were influenced by the perceived remorse or background of a defendant, the AI

system rigidly followed precedent, disregarding such considerations. This reflects a form of “legal formalism” that may produce technically accurate but substantively unjust outcomes.

**The “Black Box” Problem:** A significant concern is the opacity of AI algorithms, often referred to as the “black box” issue. Unlike human judges who are expected to provide reasoned judgments, AI systems, especially those driven by complex neural networks, may arrive at conclusions that even their developers struggle to fully explain. This raises critical issues regarding accountability and transparency, both of which are foundational to procedural fairness. If litigants cannot understand the rationale behind a judgment, or if the court itself cannot audit the decision-making process of the AI, then the legitimacy of that decision is undermined. This is especially troubling in criminal or constitutional matters, where liberty and rights are at stake.

**Bias and Discrimination in Data:** AI systems are only as far as the data they are trained on. If historical judicial data contains systemic biases, whether based on caste, religion, gender, or class, an AI model trained on such data may unintentionally replicate or even reinforce those biases. In contexts like India, where social stratification affects access to justice, the risk of automated injustice becomes particularly acute. The U.S. experience with the COMPAS system, which demonstrated racial bias in predicting recidivism, serves as a cautionary example. In the Indian context, the lack of robust datasets and the risk of using incomplete or skewed case law further amplify these concerns.

**Absence of Remedies:** One of the defining features of human-led justice is the availability of appellate review. In an AI-led system, especially if the decision-making process is non-transparent, the scope for effective review or appeal becomes uncertain. Would a higher court be able to scrutinise or overturn an algorithmic judgment without understanding its logic? This challenge strikes at the heart of legal accountability.

**Erosion of Judicial Trust:** Lastly, the increasing reliance on algorithmic decision-making may erode public trust in the judiciary. Courts are not merely service providers; they are symbols of justice. If people begin to perceive the judicial process as automated, impersonal, or disconnected from human values, the legitimacy of the entire legal system could suffer.

**Comparative Study & Lessons:** To evaluate the viability of AI in judicial functions, it is essential to draw comparisons between human judicial behaviour and AI-based decision-making. Empirical research, particularly the 2025 study by Posner and Saran, provides a robust



basis for such analysis. Their experimental framework replicated a real-world legal scenario to assess a large language model (LLM). Like GPT-4o performs relative to human judges and law students. The results shed light on key differences that are instructive for India as it contemplates the future of AI in the judiciary.

### **EXPERIMENTAL INSIGHTS: AI VS. HUMAN JUDGES**

The Posner–Saran study tasked GPT-4o with deciding simulated appeals in a war crimes case, using a controlled 2x2 factorial design to test sensitivity to legal precedent and emotional factors (like the defendant’s sympathy). Human judges were previously found to be influenced by the defendant’s persona and more likely to favour sympathetic defendants, even when legal doctrine was constant. In contrast, GPT-4o, like student participants in an earlier version of the study, consistently followed precedent and displayed no variation in outcome based on emotional context. This suggests that LLMs are formalist adjudicators, applying rules predictably but lacking human-like discretion or empathy. While this enhances consistency and neutrality, it may also result in rigid decisions that overlook the social and moral dimensions of justice.

**Error and Explanation:** One striking result from the study was the relative accuracy and internal consistency of GPT’s decisions. Unlike some human judges, who occasionally provided reasoning inconsistent with their verdicts, GPT’s judgments were aligned with its stated rationale 100% of the time. This suggests that, at least in terms of procedural structure, AI may outperform humans in eliminating clerical or logical inconsistencies. However, this strength comes at a cost. GPT’s explanations, while legally sound, were limited to statutory interpretation and precedent. The model largely ignored policy reasoning and broader jurisprudential considerations, which are often integral to constitutional and human rights adjudication.

**Precedent Adherence vs. Moral Judgment:** The comparative data from the study demonstrate that AI, much like inexperienced legal minds (e.g., students), excels at following precedent but falters in moral reasoning. For example, GPT affirmed a conviction even when the precedent was ambiguous and the defendant was portrayed as sympathetic, an outcome at odds with most human judges in the experiment. This raises a fundamental question: Should justice be rule-bound or context-sensitive? While consistency is a hallmark of legal integrity, excessive formalism can produce injustices in cases requiring discretion, especially in a jurisdiction like India, where social and economic disparities demand nuanced interpretation.



**Implications for India:** India's judicial system, often criticized for delay and backlog, may benefit from the predictability and speed that AI offers. However, the Posner–Saran findings caution against adopting AI without embedding mechanisms for empathy, interpretative reasoning, and review. Without these, AI may produce technically correct but socially unjust decisions. Moreover, the study indicates that prompt engineering and philosophical framing had little effect on altering AI outcomes. Even when instructed to act like a “realist judge” or to consider sympathy explicitly, GPT reverted to formalist logic. This implies that current LLMs are not responsive to normative cues that are essential in constitutional and humanitarian adjudication.

**Regulatory Landscape in India:** The regulatory framework governing the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India, especially within the judiciary, remains embryonic and fragmented. While India has emerged as a major hub for AI development and deployment in sectors such as healthcare, finance, and governance, the specific application of AI technologies to judicial decision-making has yet to receive focused legal attention. The existing legislative instruments and policy initiatives provide a broad foundation but fall short of directly addressing the constitutional and procedural implications of AI judges.

## CURRENT LEGAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The Government of India's approach to AI regulation is primarily articulated through policy documents like the NITI Aayog's “National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence” (2018) and the “Responsible AI for All” discussion paper (2020). These documents emphasize AI's potential for social good, innovation, and economic growth, alongside the need for ethical AI that respects privacy, fairness, and accountability. However, these strategies lack binding legal force and do not specifically cover the judiciary or the sensitive issue of automated adjudication.

India's primary statute for cyber and IT governance, the Information Technology Act 2000, regulates aspects related to data security, electronic records, and cybercrimes, but does not provide any framework for AI decision-making or adjudicatory authority. Meanwhile, the pending Personal Data Protection Bill (2023) seeks to protect individual data rights, which is crucial given that AI systems heavily rely on data inputs. However, it is too silent on judicial AI systems and does not clarify mechanisms for oversight of AI-based judicial processes.

**Judicial Technology Adoption:** The Supreme Court and various High Courts have embraced digital tools aimed at improving efficiency, transparency, and access to justice. Notable initiatives include SUPACE (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Courts' Efficiency), which uses AI to aid judges in legal research, and SUVAAS, a legal translation tool designed to bridge linguistic barriers in Indian courts. These programs demonstrate a positive attitude toward integrating AI as an auxiliary aid rather than as an independent decision-maker. However, these AI tools operate strictly under human supervision and serve to enhance human decision-making rather than replace it. The judiciary has not yet sanctioned or experimented. AI systems that exercise autonomous judicial authority reflect an implicit recognition of the risks such systems pose to fundamental legal principles.

**Challenges in Regulating AI Judges:** Regulating AI judges in India raises complex legal and ethical questions.

First, the constitutional mandate of procedural fairness under Articles 14 and 21 requires that every party is given a fair hearing by an impartial adjudicator and that judicial decisions are reasoned and transparent. Current AI systems function as “black boxes,” wherein the algorithmic logic and training data remain proprietary or opaque. This opacity undermines transparency and accountability, key pillars of judicial legitimacy.

Second, AI systems are vulnerable to biases embedded in the training data, which may replicate or even amplify social and systemic biases existing in India. Without robust regulatory safeguards, such biases could lead to unfair or discriminatory outcomes, violating constitutional guarantees of equality and due process.

Third, India's lack of a formal mechanism to audit, certify, or oversee AI algorithms intended for judicial use presents a significant regulatory gap. Unlike other jurisdictions, such as the European Union, which has established comprehensive AI regulatory proposals prioritising human oversight and accountability, India lacks comparable frameworks that specifically govern AI adjudication.

**Need for a Tailored Regulatory Framework:** Given these challenges, there is an urgent need for India to develop a dedicated regulatory framework that addresses the unique risks posed by AI judges while harnessing their potential to enhance judicial efficiency. This framework should incorporate:

- Clear definitions distinguishing assistive AI from autonomous adjudication;

- Mandatory standards for transparency, explainability, and bias mitigation;
- Mechanisms for human oversight and intervention at every stage of the AI decision-making process;
- Robust appeal and review procedures that allow parties to challenge AI- AI-generated rulings;
- Data protection safeguards are aligned with privacy rights under Indian law.

Such a framework must balance innovation with constitutional protections, ensuring that AI tools serve to complement judicial capacity rather than undermine fundamental rights.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in judicial decision-making offers both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges. To harness AI's potential while safeguarding constitutional values of procedural fairness, India must adopt a nuanced and forward-looking regulatory framework. The following recommendations aim to balance innovation with legal and ethical imperatives.

**Establish Clear Legal Definitions and Boundaries:** India's legal system should first articulate clear definitions of what constitutes AI adjudication, distinguishing between assistive tools and autonomous AI judges. This clarity will provide a foundation for tailored regulation and judicial oversight. Legislation must explicitly specify the permissible scope of AI involvement in judicial processes to prevent ambiguity and misuse.

**Mandate Transparency and Explainability:** AI systems deployed in the judiciary should be designed to ensure transparency in their functioning and decision-making rationale. Given the 'black box' nature of many machine learning models, mechanisms such as explainable AI (XAI) are essential. This transparency is critical to allow litigants to understand and, if necessary, challenge AI-driven decisions, preserving the right to a fair hearing.

**Uphold Human Oversight and Accountability:** AI should not replace human judges but serve as a supplementary tool under robust human supervision. Human judges must retain ultimate decision-making authority to ensure contextual sensitivity, empathy, and ethical judgment. Furthermore, clear accountability frameworks must be developed, assigning responsibility for errors or bias to identifiable actors, whether judicial authorities, software developers, or regulators.

**Address Bias and Data Integrity:** AI systems learn from data that may contain historical biases, which could perpetuate or exacerbate systemic injustices. India must enforce stringent standards for data quality, diversity, and audibility in AI training datasets. Independent audits and impact assessments should be mandatory to detect and mitigate bias before deployment.

**Protect Procedural Fairness Rights:** Legal safeguards must be incorporated to preserve the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. This includes ensuring the right to a meaningful hearing, impartial adjudication, and the ability to appeal AI-generated decisions. Special procedural rules may be needed to address the novel challenges posed by AI judges.

**Foster Multi-stakeholder Collaboration:** Regulating AI judges demands collaboration between technologists, legal scholars, policymakers, and civil society. Establishing a dedicated regulatory body or task force with multidisciplinary expertise can oversee AI implementation, promote best practices, and revise policies dynamically as technology evolves.

**Promote Public Awareness and Digital Literacy:** For AI in the judiciary to be accepted and trusted, the public must be informed about its role, limitations, and safeguards. Educational initiatives and transparent communication strategies are essential to foster confidence and reduce misconceptions about AI's function in legal processes.

## CONCLUSION

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence in judicial decision-making presents a paradigm shift with the potential to enhance efficiency and accessibility within India's justice system. However, this technological innovation simultaneously raises profound constitutional, ethical, and practical questions, particularly regarding the preservation of procedural fairness as enshrined in Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.

This paper has examined the conceptual foundations of AI adjudication, analysed international precedents, and assessed India's current judicial technologies alongside the unique challenges posed by algorithmic decision-making. While AI offers promise in streamlining case management and augmenting judicial capacities, it currently falls short in replicating the nuanced human qualities essential for fair adjudication, such as empathy, contextual understanding, and moral reasoning.

A critical takeaway is that AI should function as a supportive tool under rigorous human oversight, rather than as an autonomous decision-maker. Legal frameworks must evolve to clearly define AI's role, mandate transparency, address bias, and uphold litigants' fundamental rights to fair hearings and impartial judgment. India stands at a crossroads: embracing AI's transformative potential while simultaneously safeguarding the constitutional ethos of justice. Developing a balanced, adaptive regulatory regime informed by multidisciplinary expertise and international best practices is imperative.

Ultimately, the question is not merely whether machines can ensure procedural fairness, but how humans can responsibly integrate AI into the judicial process without compromising the foundational principles of justice. As India navigates this complex terrain, it must prioritise a vision of technology that enhances, rather than diminishes, the dignity and fairness at the heart of its judiciary.

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