

The Legal System

New Thinkers Colloquium, March 2026

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Pavithra Manivannan

{X}KDA

Why a talk on the legal system?

The legal system is crucial for economic growth.

1. A complex private economy requires the public goods of *resolving private disputes*.
2. The fear of expropriation by the State hinders private investment.

We at XKDR Forum are trying to help improve the legal system through three pathways:

1. Build datasets and research
2. Hands-on building systems for courts
3. Enhancing quality of private decision-making

Our choice of these three paths embeds our theory of change.

Pathway 1: Datasets and Research

Data and Measurement as the Foundation of Change

- ▶ Measures of the economy such as GDP, inflation, and employment rate, took decades to be built. In the legal system, this is still nascent.
- ▶ We have been building this foundation.



Finance Research Group



Traditional Indian legal system datasets

- ▶ Many such exist (e.g. SHRUG).
- ▶ Statistical data limited to numbers of cases filed, pending.
- ▶ Final orders are visible but not the path that was taken.

Our innovations

- ▶ Capture the full case life-cycle
Filing → Registration → Hearings → Orders → Disposal.
- ▶ Exhaustive and on-going coverage of 21 courts.
- ▶ At present, 1.3M cases, 6.6M hearings.
- ▶ Currently adding 400,000 cases and 2M hearings per week.
- ▶ Structured extraction of order text, metadata, and LLM extraction of case characteristics.
- ▶ We think this is the best database on the Indian legal system in existence, ahead of other academic researchers, ahead of the legal tech firms.

Opens up new lines of inquiry

- ▶ When does a case get its first hearing?
- ▶ How many hearings does a case take?
- ▶ What is the extent of scheduling failure in courts?
- ▶ How are cases getting resolved?
- ▶ Substantive vs. non-substantive hearings
- ▶ We are able to study court operations in detail, identify chokepoints, and plan the most effective areas for improvement.
- ▶ LSD supercharges our research program.

Five Important Discoveries

1. Measuring efficiency as estimated time to completion

- ▶ Traditional measures concern pendency or disposal rate (disposed cases $\div$ total cases).
- ▶ What people really care about is the time to completion.
- ▶ With our dataset we are able to measure this.
- ▶ But there is censoring: many cases start but don't finish.
- ▶ We brought the correct censored estimators into this.

Pratik Datta, Surya Prakash, and Renuka Sane (2017). “Understanding Judicial Delay at the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal in India”. In: *NIPFP Working Paper No. 208*.

Pavithra Manivannan, Susan Thomas, and Bhargavi Zaveri-Shah (2023). “Helping litigants make informed choices in resolving debt disputes”. In: *The Leap Blog*.



Five Important Discoveries

2. Inflated pendency: Counting cases correctly

- ▶ A case progresses through multiple sub-cases.
- ▶ Procedural. Doesn't get heard or listed separately.
- ▶ Inflates backlog by 66%.

Pavithra Manivannan, Siddarth Raman, and Bhargavi Zaveri-Shah (2025). “Beyond Pendency: Counting Cases Correctly”. In: *The Leap Blog*.

Five Important Discoveries

3. Debunking widely held beliefs like adding judges

- ▶ 1 out of 5 news articles will tell you the solution to the woes of the legal system is more judges.
- ▶ But,
 - ▶ Cases are getting stuck because parties don't come to court.
 - ▶ Judges sit in court for less than 50% of the prescribed session time.

Mugdha Mohapatra, Siddarth Raman, and Susan Thomas (July 2025). “Get them to the court on time: bumps in the road to justice”. In: *The Leap Blog*.



Five Important Discoveries

4. Separation of administrative from judicial functions: ICTS

- ▶ Judges do everything from procurement to case scheduling.
- ▶ They have to file massive reports to higher courts.
- ▶ Judges should only judge.
- ▶ Need for an Indian Courts and Tribunals Service.

Pratik Datta, Mehtab Hans, et al. (2019). “How to Modernise the Working of Courts and Tribunals in India”. In: *NIPFP Working paper No. 258*.

Five Important Discoveries

5. The Afterlife: Delays after judgement day

- ▶ A case does not get done with a judgment.
- ▶ People do not immediately pay up!
- ▶ It adds 2+ years to the resolution of a case.

Pavithra Manivannan, Gokul K Sunoj, and Bhargavi Zaveri-Shah (2025). “What comes after Judgement Day: A survey of decree enforcement proceedings in India”. In: *XKDR Working Paper No. 46*.



Pathway 2: Hands-on building systems for courts



PUCAR: 24x7 OnCourts

- ▶ Most computerisation efforts merely scales existing inefficiencies:
 - ▶ Replicates paper workflows on a screen.
 - ▶ Develops 'portals' and 'dashboards'.
- ▶ OnCourts is the first public-private partnership to help a court redesign its systems and processes.
- ▶ Ability to communicate with systems outside the court: police, post, treasury.
- ▶ Trackable workflows that allows breakdown of cases into micro steps:
 - ▶ can identify which step causes bottlenecks.
 - ▶ can make iterative process changes.

OnCourts worked on process redesign

- ▶ Everything is modular. Small tweaks are possible.
- ▶ Everything is measurable. Feedback on what works.
- ▶ Everything is managed. Weekly reviews with staff, and judges.
- ▶ Examples of process changes:
 - ▶ Payments as a point of friction.
 - ▶ Long wait between two hearings.
 - ▶ Expecting parties to appear for all hearings.



OnCourts is delivering measurable gains

Nov 2024 to Mar 2025

Improved Efficiency

Stage	Baseline	OnCourts
Filing	10 days	0 days
Cognizance	150 days	7 days
Summons	300 days	62 days
Trial	350 days	48 days
Total	600 days	140 days

Increased Predictability

	Baseline	OnCourts
Time between hearings	60 days	14 days
Hearings per schedule	40%	98%
Effective hearings	19%	25%

Where we are in this journey

We began this journey in 2022.

Launch of OnCourts in one court in Kollam district	Nov 2024
Expansion of OnCourts to all of Kollam district	Dec 2025
Expansion of OnCourts to Thrissur district	Dec 2025
MoU to implement OnCourts in district courts of Punjab, Haryana & Chandigarh	Feb 2026

Pathway 3: Enhancing quality of private decision-making

Litigants as decision-makers of the legal system

- ▶ Outcomes of the legal system are not only made out of laws, lawyers, judges, courts.
- ▶ The people (litigants) are an equally critical part of this.
- ▶ They make key decisions:
To sue, or not to sue?
What is the opportunity cost of settling at Rs.X?
How to pick a lawyer?
- ▶ We are working on ways to improve the quality of this decision-making by litigants and lawyers.
- ▶ By delivering facts about the working of the Indian legal system that today's lawyers and litigants do not know.

The right organisation structure to deliver this into the world was to fork a new {X} for-profit firm.



We bring method to the madness.

TheProfesseeer provides business intelligence about courts to bring structure to your litigation strategy.



Courts are unpredictable.

Know Your Case Trajectory



Don't pick the wrong lawyer.

Know your Counsel



Litigation is adversarial.

Know your Competition



Winning a case is expensive.

Know your Costs

The Long Road to Change

- ▶ **Legal system reform is not possible without legal system research.**
Research is slow, technical, and unglamorous.
Funders prefer: Government engagement, technology, AI, press releases.
- ▶ **No one research & reform org in India has the range of capabilities required to solve the problems.**
PUCAR worked as it brought together different organisations with varying capabilities.
Research, process re-engineering, tech-deployment, liaison with courts.
- ▶ **Economic growth requires better thinking by private persons.**
Better information changes litigants' behaviour. Better behaviour improves the economy.



Thank you.

<https://www.xkdr.org/field/legal-system>

