

THE
CARTER CENTER



Carrots, Sticks, and Our Right of Expression: How Executive Pressure Shapes Judicial Decisions and the Limits of Legal Text

The Carter Center Research Report

September 1, 2026

Authors: Emily Adams, Hannah Kesner, Hans-Inge Langø, Raúl Pérez,
Anthony J. DeMattee

Executive Summary

In this paper, we seek to address the gap between our previous work on formal legal frameworks for freedom of expression and the de facto environment created through interpretation and enforcement. To do this, we examine judicial behavior in practice to understand the conditions under which courts protect freedom of expression versus when they restrict it. Legislatures define the de jure expression environment through bills and laws, but courts decide how those rules operate in concrete disputes. We ask to what extent judicial decisions on expression are shaped by the legal text itself and by the broader political context in which judges operate, especially executive pressure on the judiciary.

We combine case-level judicial decision data from the Columbia Global Freedom of Expression project (*Global Freedom of Expression Case Law Dataset*, 2026) with country-year de jure freedom of expression from the Laws of Expression (LEX) dataset (Adams, Xu and DeMattee, 2026) and de facto indicators from V-Dem. We model judicial decisions that expand, contract, or have a mixed effect on freedom of expression using multinomial logistic models.

The results suggest that broad de jure measures of expression protections do not consistently predict judicial outcomes. However, we do find evidence suggesting that stronger press-related protections are associated with a greater likelihood of clearly directional rulings, both contractive and expansive, relative to mixed outcomes. Our findings suggest that regarding court packing, less politically motivated packing is associated with more rulings that clearly contract expression relative to ambiguous outcomes. Additionally, we find that judicial reform matters in direct comparisons between constrictive and expansive decisions.

Formal legal protections alone do not explain how expression rights operate in practice. Courts translate legal text into concrete outcomes, and that translation varies by the type of dispute, actor involved, and the institutional context surrounding the judiciary. The results are exploratory and associational, but they show why case-level judicial behavior is essential for understanding the practical limits of freedom of expression.

1 Introduction

Courts sit at the center of any serious account of expression rights. Legislatures write the laws that define what speech is permitted, but courts decide what those laws actually mean in practice. When a journalist is prosecuted for criticizing the president, when a protester is charged under a vague public-order statute, when a social media post triggers a defamation suit, it is judges who decide whether the speech in question is protected or punishable. Their rulings can widen the gap between a country's formal protections and its citizens' lived freedom, or narrow it. A constitution that promises robust expression rights means little if courts routinely uphold restrictions on disfavored speech. Similarly, a country with weak formal protections can still see meaningful expressive freedom if its judges consistently rule against the state, expanding our expressive rights. The puzzle of when courts protect expression and when they restrict it is, in this sense, a puzzle about how much formal rights actually matter.

2 Theoretical Overview

We next review research studying when courts protect democratic rights, when they are agents of autocratic legalism that restrict fundamental freedoms, and what they have not yet explained. We organize the discussion around three points: the doctrinal and institutional landscape within which courts operate, the competing accounts of how courts respond to executive pressure, and the case for examining judicial decisions on expression specifically.

2.1 Courts as institutional shapers of the expression environment

Courts decide expression cases inside doctrinal frameworks that vary substantially across legal traditions, and those frameworks shape what judges can plausibly do. Pech (2006) and Cordy (2019) draw the sharpest contrast between US and European approaches. In the US, freedom of expression is provided absolute protection, with narrow exceptions for incitement, true threats, and defamation. The European tradition embeds expression within proportionality frameworks balancing dignity, security, and public order. Courts in proportional systems therefore have doctrinal cover to uphold restrictions in cases where US courts would not.

Proportionality is not confined to Europe. Buyse (2014) and Pech (2006) show that it is the dominant framework in both European and international jurisprudence, including the ICCPR United Nations (1966). But the framework leaves substantial room for variation.

Krotoszynski, Koltay and Garden (2025, Chapter 3) documents how courts across jurisdictions operationalize the same balancing test in very different ways, producing different outcomes from nominally similar legal tools.

International courts add a second institutional layer. The Inter-American and European systems generate jurisprudence that can constrain domestic governments and, in some cases, push domestic courts to expand protections for expression (Bertoni, 2009; Grossman, 2012; Pasqualucci, 2006; Flauss, 2009). Enforcement is uneven because supranational courts lack direct coercive authority. Still, these international actors can generate political pressure and offer domestic courts an external authority to cite when resisting executive preferences.

Doctrinal frameworks and supranational pressure define the menu of moves available to judges deciding expression cases. But they stop short of determining which move a court selects. A judge operating under strong proportionality doctrine can uphold or strike down the same restriction depending on how the balance is struck; a judge with access to supranational precedent can invoke it or ignore it. The comparative literature on judicial behavior addresses when courts use these tools to protect expression and when they use them to restrict it.

2.2 Expectations about judicial behavior under executive pressure

The comparative judicial literature offers two competing accounts of how courts respond to executive pressure. One strand treats courts as instruments that legitimize executive power; the other treats them as guardrails that resist it. Both strands have substantial empirical support, and the puzzle for our inquiry is identifying the conditions under which each prediction holds.

The first strand — courts as enablers — draws heavily on the literature on authoritarian and backsliding regimes. Ginsburg and Moustafa (2008) describe in their edited volume that authoritarian regimes often build and maintain courts precisely because compliant judiciaries are useful: they legitimate state action, manage elite conflict, and signal commitment to property rights. When executives in backsliding democracies attack courts directly — through purges, packing, or jurisdiction-stripping — courts often comply rather than resist (Holgado and Urribarri, 2023). The implication is that judicial behavior tracks executive preferences, either by design or by coercion.

The second strand — courts as resisters — points to cases where judges have pushed back against executive encroachment, sometimes at substantial personal and institutional cost. Researchers have observed “vanguard judges” who actively resist executive encroachment and expand rights in undemocratic spaces. Garcia-Holgado (2025) shows Argentine

judges resisted democratic erosion through strategic use of judicial review. Gamboa, García-Holgado and González-Ocantos (2024) extends the argument across Latin America, identifying conditions under which “vanguard” courts have successfully blocked authoritarian projects. Staton et al. (2022) offer the most systematic theoretical account, distinguishing courts that actively defend democratic institutions from courts that merely fail to obstruct their erosion. Across these works, resistance is conditional. It depends on judicial cohesion, opposition coalitions, the timing of executive attacks, and whether courts can mobilize external support.

Helmke (2002, 2004) provides the strategic logic underlying both strands. Judges anticipate executive reactions and adjust their rulings accordingly. When executives are powerful and likely to retaliate, courts comply. But when executives are weak, leaving office, or facing organized opposition, courts defect. Vanberg (2004) stresses that the audience of these actions adds an important condition: courts resist when they expect public backing to make defiance politically costly for the executive. Public support, in this framework, is a judicial resource that converts formal independence into actual capacity to resist (see also Staton, 2010). Most of this literature focuses on apex courts, where stakes are highest and public visibility is greatest. Lower courts face different career incentives and less external scrutiny, and their behavior under executive pressure may diverge from what apex-court studies suggest (Kapiszewski, 2012).

Prior researchers have established that courts both enable and resist executives. Which behavior emerges depends on strategic calculation under conditions of varying independence, executive strength, and external support. Judicial decisions ruling on expression are a particularly relevant case because they directly alter the gap between formal protections and lived political freedom: a restrictive ruling under strong *de jure* protections widens the gap (shutdown); a protective ruling under weak protections narrows it (vanguard).

2.3 A case for examining how executive carrots and sticks shape outcomes across *de jure* environments

Judicial politics scholars have established three points. First, courts operate within doctrinal frameworks that structure but not determine their rulings. Second, courts both enable and resist executive pressure, and which behavior emerges depends on strategic calculation under varying conditions of independence and support. Finally, executives have a menu of tools for influencing judicial behavior, including reforms, attacks, and appointments.

What researchers have not yet done is systematically examine the conditions under which these dynamics influence expression rulings across countries and over time. Such a study

makes novel contributions to two important audiences. The comparative judicial behavior literature examines courts as institutions that defend or fail to defend democracy in the aggregate. This approach generally treats judicial decisions as inputs to a broader regime-level outcome rather than as substantive policy choices worth explaining in their own right. The free-expression and press-freedom literature, in turn, studies expression environments at the country level — typically using aggregate indices of *de facto* press freedom or expression rights (e.g., Whitten-Woodring, 2009) — without disaggregating to the case level where judicial behavior actually happens. Neither approach can tell us when individual courts choose to expand expression, restrict it, or hedge.

The disaggregation missing in the expression literature matters because coarse country-level measures conceal the very variation we seek to explain. A country may score well on aggregate expression freedom while its courts routinely uphold restrictions on disfavored speech; a country with weak *de jure* protection may have courts that consistently rule in favor of expression freedom. These off-diagonal cases — restrictive rulings under strong *de jure* protections, protective rulings under weak ones — carry heavy real-world implications and are theoretically interesting because they reveal the judicial choice that aggregate measures wash out. They are also the cases where the carrots-and-sticks framework should have the most analytical purchase, since executive pressure becomes most visible when judicial behavior departs from what the legal environment alone would predict.

We address the gap by analyzing case-level expression rulings across countries, examining how the recent application of executive action — institutional judicial reforms, attacks on judges, and favorable appointments — influences judicial decisions to expand, restrict, or hedge on expression. Central to work is the *de jure* environment, coded from statutory laws (Adams, Xu and DeMattee, 2026), which defines the legal terrain on which courts operate and decide legal matters. We expect the executive’s recent treatment of the judiciary shapes the incentives judges face when ruling. By measuring outcomes at the case level and predictors at the country-year level, our analysis can identify when courts act as shutdown institutions, when they act as vanguards, and when they hedge, as well as the conditions that make each outcome more likely.

3 Executives, Legislatures, and Judge Types

3.1 Executive versus Legislature Influence on Judges

Both executives and legislatures shape the conditions under which courts decide expression cases, but the two branches do so through different means. We consider the executive as the

primary source of judicial pressure. The reasoning is both theoretical and practical.

Legislatures shape judicial behavior primarily by writing the statutes that define the *de jure* environment. They draft the speech laws, defamation provisions, public-order statutes, and constitutional amendments that courts then interpret and apply. In this sense, legislative influence enters judicial behavior through the *de jure* measure itself: the legal terrain on which courts operate is a legislative product. Legislatures can also affect courts directly through confirmation votes, impeachment proceedings, jurisdiction-stripping legislation, and budget decisions. In most systems, however, these powers require sustained legislative majorities and are deployed less frequently than executive tools.

Executives operate on a different timescale and through more flexible instruments. They appoint judges, often with substantial discretion. They enforce (or decline to enforce) judicial rulings, which gives them an effective veto over judicial outputs courts cannot achieve through doctrine alone. They can attack courts publicly, withdraw institutional support, and propose reforms that reshape judicial authority. In democratic-backsliding contexts, the executive is typically the prime mover behind anti-court actions, even when those actions require legislative cooperation to formalize. Co-partisan legislatures often act as executive instruments rather than independent veto players, particularly in presidential and semi-presidential systems with strong party discipline or weak opposition.

Two implications follow. First, we view executive carrots and sticks — reforms, attacks, appointments — as our primary interest, while treating the legislative environment as the *de jure* context in which executive pressure operates. Second, we acknowledge that this focus on executive action will understate the role of legislatures in systems where they act with genuine independence from the executive.

3.2 Judge Types

Table 1 maps the six combinations of judicial decision and *de jure* environment that our data allow us to observe. The two diagonals — on-diagonal and off-diagonal — and the two mixed-outcome cells each carry different analytical and theoretical importance.

The on-diagonal cells — aligned rulings — represent cases in which judicial decisions track the *de jure* environment. A court in a high-protection environment that rules to expand expression, or a court in a low-protection environment that rules to restrict it, is doing what the laws-on-the-books would predict. We do not treat these cases as theoretically uninteresting. Even an aligned ruling reflects a judicial choice: a court in a high-protection environment could have carved out exceptions, and a court in a low-protection environment could have invoked international law or constitutional principles to push back. But because

the ruling aligns with preexisting legal rules, executive pressure becomes harder to identify as the driver. These cases serve as the baseline against which the off-diagonal and mixed cases stand out.

		De Jure FOE	
		Low	High
Judicial Decisions	Expand Expression	Vanguard Judge	Aligned Judge
	Constrict Expression	Aligned Judge	Shutdown Judge
	Mixed Outcome	Ambiguous	Ambiguous

Table 1: Judicial Decisions and De Jure FOE

The off-diagonal cells — shutdown and vanguard — are where the puzzle of judicial choice becomes most visible. Shutdown judges rule to restrict expression in environments with strong statutory protections. Courts in this position help undemocratic governments manage opposition, legitimate state action, and justify restrictive policies, often in ways the formal legal environment does not require. The literature on authoritarian and backsliding regimes (Ginsburg and Moustafa, 2008; Holgado and Urribarri, 2023) suggests these courts comply with executive preferences either by design, through prior court-packing or purges, or through anticipated retaliation. Vanguard judges occupy the opposite cell: their decisions protect and expand expression in environments where statutory law gives them little to work with. Drawing on judicial independence, opposition coalitions, and external support, these courts act as guardrails against democratic backsliding (Garcia-Holgado, 2025; Gamboa, García-Holgado and González-Ocantos, 2024; Staton et al., 2022). Both off-diagonal types reveal the limits of *de jure* measures as predictors of expression outcomes; and both should respond most clearly to the executive carrots and sticks our framework theorizes.

The mixed-outcome cells require more care. We label these ambiguous because the underlying judicial logic varies in ways our data cannot fully adjudicate. At least two distinct interpretations from the existing literature could apply. Some mixed rulings may reflect what Sunstein (1999, pp. 3–5, 10–11) calls *decisional minimalism*: judges deciding the case on narrow grounds, leaving broader doctrinal questions undecided, and avoiding rules that would foreclose future deliberation. A court that narrowly protects expression in a particular case while declining to disturb the broader statutory framework may be exercising restraint as a deliberate strategy and committing only as much as the case requires. Other mixed rulings may be better understood through Staton et al. (2022, pp. 10–11) account of the second face of judicial power. They argue that courts shape regime outcomes less through dramatic interventions than through the political costs they impose on actors who push

against regime rules. Through their lens, a narrow protection paired with affirmation of restrictive principles can transmit a low-cost signal: the executive’s behavior was visible enough to draw a partial judicial response, but the court has not closed off the policy space. These two interpretations are substantially different — Sunstein’s minimalism is a doctrinal posture about scope; the second face is a mechanism of regime-level deterrence — and the cases producing mixed rulings come from a wide range of courts, apex and lower, constitutional and ordinary, across regimes that vary substantially in their political and legal environments. Additional mechanisms may also apply, including internal disagreement on multi-member panels, compromise across factional lines, or judicial uncertainty about how the law applies. Given these challenges, we retain mixed as our outcome label and ambiguous as the judge-type label precisely because the data show rulings that neither fully protect nor fully restrict, without committing us to a theoretical mechanism that the data cannot adjudicate.

4 Methodology

4.1 Court Level

Judicial behavior varies systematically across court levels, and our analysis accounts for the differences. Apex courts — supreme, constitutional, or other courts of final instance — is where prestige, power, and pressure concentrates. These judges typically hold long tenure and enjoy public visibility that converts into a political resource. Public support as a judicial resource makes apex courts more capable of vanguard behavior when they resist. But the same visibility makes them targets for executives who want to move against the judiciary.

Lower courts face the opposite incentive structure. Shorter terms, promotion decisions controlled by the executive or its allies, and lower public visibility should make lower courts more responsive to executive preferences, particularly through anticipation effects. But lower courts also attract less concentrated executive attention, leaving them room to issue rulings the executive dislikes in cases the executive is not watching.

These cross-pressures point in opposite directions and do not generate a clean prediction. We treat court level as a substantive feature of the analysis: our main models include it as a covariate, and we report subset regressions for apex and lower courts to document any differences in how each level responds to executive pressure.

4.2 Carrots and Sticks

Executives use a menu of tools to shape judicial behavior, and we organize these tools into carrots and sticks. Carrots reward judicial alignment with the executive by expanding judges’ power or prestige. Favorable appointments are the most consequential carrot: an executive who controls appointments can reshape a court for decades.

Sticks punish judicial resistance. Public attacks on judges or courts are the most visible form, but executives also deploy restrictive reforms that strip jurisdiction, cut budgets, or constrain the bench’s decision-making authority. Purges sit at the extreme end of this menu.

Judicial reform is Janus-faced depending on whether the reform expands or contracts judicial authority. We code reforms separately by direction, treating expansive reforms as carrots and restrictive reforms as sticks. Lumping them into a single variable would mask the theoretical mechanism and produce noise in the estimates.

[Tony stopped reading and writing here](#)

4.3 Data

Country selection

The analysis focuses on countries and years that can be linked across the Columbia Global Freedom of Expression case data, the Laws of Expression (Adams, Xu and DeMattee, 2026) dataset, and relevant institutional indicators from the Varieties of Democracy (Coppedge et al., 2025).

The unit of analysis is the judicial decision. Each decision is matched to country-year de jure expression score and its institutional context. The baseline models include 1,074 judicial decisions for which a main outcome and relevant country-year indicators are available. The extended models include 825 decisions after adding political, institutional, court-level, and lagged control variables.

This design intends to study comparative patterns across countries and different legal systems in how courts expand, constrict, or issue mixed rulings on expression.

LLMs for Standardization

The Columbia GFOE data contains rich textual descriptions, but the relevant actor in a case is not always recorded in a form that can be used directly in statistical models. We also consider appellate or constitutional review cases, where an explicit defendant may not always be the actor at issue.

We utilize large language models (LLMs) to standardize textual case attributes into a set of predefined categories. Specifically, we identify the defendant, respondent, or accused actor in each case and classify that actor as a citizen, press, intermediary, or government actor.

The risks of using LLMs are worth noting, persistent hallucination rates can result in fabricated or misattributed legal authorities, and can be present even in specialized legal AI tools. LLMs have also shown to generate legally plausible but invalid reasoning, due to irrelevant citations when asked to perform open-ended judicial analysis (Magesh et al., 2024; Han et al., 2025).

However, recent advances allow guarding against its risks. LLMs can extract case outcomes from full judicial decisions with high accuracy when tasks are prompt-engineered, well defined and outputs are constrained. Approaches that separate identification, extraction, and validation along with human oversight are able to mitigate hallucinations (Zambrano, 2024; de Faria, Xie and Steffek, 2024; Socol de la Osa and Remolina, 2024).

The LLM task implemented is focused on identifying the actor whose conduct, prosecution, or legal position was being challenged, and then classifying that actor according to its role in the dispute.

The model is given a two-step fixed classification schema and explicit decision rules. For each case, the model identified the defendant and classified it within a list of actor types. The model also provided evidence and justification at each step to reduce the hallucination rate (Bench-Capon, 1997; Savelka and Ashley, 2023).

We then manually reviewed cases with unclear, or missing classifications. After review, we reduced the number of unclear classifications from 114 cases (10.6%) to 68 cases (6.33%). The final distribution of defendant types was 391 government cases, 259 citizen cases, 163 press cases, 94 intermediary cases, 100 other class, and 68 unclear cases.

4.4 Modeling Judicial Decisions

We estimate a series of statistical models to assess whether de jure expression environments and executive context affect judicial decision-making in cases related to freedom of expression. Because we have a categorical outcome, we use multinomial logistic regression to estimate our regression coefficients. We estimate models using different versions of our explanatory variables in order to explore whether these relationships differ by actors and to assess robustness across similar measures. We also employ other measures to account for temporal trends.

Judicial decisions vary in complexity and coverage, so to enable cross-case comparison,

We must rely on simplified measures of how decisions affect freedom of expression. The Columbia data captures how a specific decision affected freedom of expression in the court’s jurisdiction, with three discrete outcomes:

- **Constrictive:** The decision narrowed the scope of free expression.
- **Mixed:** The decision did not have a clear constrictive or expressive net effect on free expression.
- **Expansive:** The decision expanded the scope of free expression.

We use the Laws of Expression (LEX) dataset from Adams, Xu and DeMattee (2026) to measure the *de jure* expression environment. LEX catalogs and measures statutory legal rules that regulate freedom of expression, allowing us to compare formal legal institutions across countries and over time. Using institutional grammar (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995; Ostrom, 2005), LEX codes legal texts as institutional statements that identify the actor regulated, the expected or prohibited behavior, the type of expression at issue, the condition under which the rule applies, and the institutional sanction. The dataset contains 722 institutional-statement items grounded in international human rights standards and organized across actors, expression types, topics, and conditions. Following a two-step approach modified from DeMattee (2023), LEX aggregates these coded legal rules into country-year measures and constructs several *de jure* freedom of expression indices. These indices range from more normatively undemocratic or restrictive formal legal environments to more normatively democratic or protective ones (Adams, Xu and DeMattee, 2026).

We construct the explanatory variables at the country-year level to match the country-year of each judicial decision. Judicial decisions may reflect the cumulative effects of multiple legislative and executive changes, and those effects may take time to appear because cases move through courts with procedural lags. For this reason, it is difficult to explicitly trace any single legal change to a specific judicial outcome. To measure the formal expression-law environment facing courts, we use the following explanatory variables, estimated one at a time across model iterations:

- **Weighted De Jure Expression:** Measured using our constructed country-year *De Jure* score, which is generated using a weighted sums across normatively democratic and undemocratic institutional statements to provide a single representative measure of the *De Jure* expression environment.
- **WDJ Citizen:** Citizen-specific index measuring the *De Jure* expression environment.

- **WDJ Intermediaries:** Intermediary-specific index (e.g., internet service providers) measuring the *De Jure* expression environment.
- **WDJ Press:** Press-specific index measuring the *De Jure* expression environment.
- **WDJ Gov. Protection:** Index measuring the *De Jure* expression environment related to government protections.

We also include measures of executive actions aimed at curtailing the independence of the judiciary. These explanatory variables are (one per model iteration):

- **Judicial Reform:** Measures whether the judiciary’s formal powers altered in ways that affect its ability to control the arbitrary use of state authority. High values indicate increased ability to control arbitrary power and use of state authority. Middle values indicate no change, and low values indicate reductions in ability to control arbitrary power. (V-Dem: v2_jureform)
- **Government attacks on the judiciary:** Measures to what extent the government attacked the judiciary’s integrity in public through media or the press, a lower score indicates more attacks (V-Dem: v2_jupoatck).
- **Judicial Purges:** Measures to what extent the executive removed judges from their posts for political reasons, a lower score means larger purges (V-Dem: v2_jupurge).
- **Court Packing:** Measures to what extent the executive conducted politically motivated court packing. Lower values indicate higher levels of politically motivated court packing (V-Dem: v2_jupack).

To account for potentially confounding relationships, we include multiple RHS variables that may affect *de jure* or *de facto* changes while also affecting specific decisions.

- **Polyarchy:** Measures the degree to which liberal democracy is achieved in a given country-year (V-Dem: v2x_polyarchy)
- **Judicial Review:** Measures whether any court in the judiciary has the legal authority to invalidate governmental policies (e.g. statutes, regulations, decrees, administrative actions) on the grounds that they violate a constitutional provision (V-Dem: v2_jureview).
- **Legal Common:** Measures whether the legal system in the country is based on common law.

- **Legal Civil:** Measures whether the legal system in the country is based on civil law.
- **High Court:** Measures whether the court making the decision is a final court of appeal.
- **Judicial Independence:** Measures the extent to which the court in question makes decisions based on the government’s wishes regardless of its sincere review of the legal record (V-Dem v2juhcind/v2juncind).
- **Defendant type:** Examines whether judicial decisions vary depending on the type of actor whose conduct or legal position is being challenged. Government defendants may often reflect direct state action; press defendants may involve conflicts over media or journalistic liability; intermediary defendants capture disputes over platforms and/or internet service providers; and citizen defendants often involve protest activity or individual speakers.
- **Mode of Expression:** Classifies the mode(s) of expression relevant to the case. These include electronic content, press, public speeches, public documents, broadcast media, public assemblies, written speech, and other non-verbal expression.

In addition to the country- and court-level covariates, we also include a battery of controls at the decision level. We generate categorical variables for the mode of expression relevant to the court case (**mode_***) and the type of defendant (**defendant_***).

We expect judicial decisions to affect both the legislature and the executive branch. Therefore, we lag all RHS variables to reduce the risk of endogeneity. Our candidate regression function to estimate $Y_{it} \in \{\text{Constrictive, Mixed, Expansive}\}$ is therefore:

$$Y_{it} \sim \text{Multinomial Logit}(\beta_{-j}'\mathbf{X}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{-j}'\mathbf{Z}_{i,t-1} + \delta_{-j}'(\mathbf{X}_{i,t-1} \times \mathbf{Z}_{i,t-1})), \quad (1)$$

where $j \in \{\text{Constrictive, Mixed, Expansive}\}$, X is a vector of explanatory variables, and Z is a vector of control variables.

Lastly, we should expect that judicial decision-making and political systems to change over time due to broader political developments and the spread of norms related to freedom of expression. To account for temporal trends, we include sample-wide time splines in some iterations of the model. Furthermore, these trends might affect countries differently. For instance, democracies might be more receptive to changing norms than autocracies. We therefore estimate one model where we interact **Polyarchy** with the time splines.

Our analysis is exploratory in nature because we lack strong theoretical expectations. As discussed above, the judiciary can play different roles depending on context, and the executive and legislative branches have a range of tools at their disposal to curtail or coerce the judiciary. Therefore, we estimate a wide range of model iterations, using the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) as a guide to determine which variables best fit our data. When model iterations are close in BIC value, we separate them by the generalizability of the variables (i.e., is this dimension likely to apply to a wide range of cases?). For instance, we should expect judicial reform to be more common than attacks on the judiciary. Furthermore, we also have normative concerns. Rules that apply to all citizens are more important than rules specifically written for smaller groups, such as the press or internet service providers.

5 Results and Analysis

Our analysis models judicial decisions as a three-category outcome: decisions that expand expression, decisions that contract expression, and mixed outcomes. We use mixed outcomes as our reference category because it distinguishes clearly directional versus ambiguous judicial decisions, as mixed outcomes includes rulings that are qualified, ambiguous, or split across contracting and expanding claims.

Because the outcome has three categories, we estimate multinomial logit models with mixed outcomes as the reference category. The coefficients compare the likelihood of a constrictive or expansive decision relative to a mixed decision. A positive coefficient means that higher values of a variable are associated with a greater likelihood of that outcome relative to a mixed outcome; while a negative coefficient means that higher values are associated with a lower likelihood of that outcome relative to a mixed outcome. We focus on the direction, consistency, and statistical significance of patterns across model specifications for our analysis. We interpret our results as associations, not predictive or causal explanations.

We focus on specifications without splines because the spline-based models do not improve fit enough to justify their added complexity. Although the spline and spline-by-polyarchy specifications achieve lower AIC values than their simpler counterparts, their BIC values are substantially higher. This pattern indicates that the added flexibility produces some gains in likelihood, but not enough to offset the additional parameters under a more conservative complexity penalty. Because our goal is to prioritize parsimonious specifications that are less likely to overfit, we focus on the non-spline models in the main analysis.

Overall, we find that the models do not fully explain judicial decision outcomes, but they do reveal consistent patterns in how broader judicial and political conditions are associated with whether courts contract or expand expression. The broad de jure expression

environment has little explanatory power on its own; but actor-specific legal environments, especially press-related expression protections, show stronger associations.

We find that the baseline models offer little explanatory power with pseudo- R^2 scores near zero. This suggests that on their own, executive pressures on the judiciary do not predict judicial decision directions. However, the extended models show improvements in model performance, with lower AIC and BIC scores, especially with the addition of control variables.

Table 2: Main Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Judicial Decisions

Variable	Judicial reform			Judicial attack			Judicial packing		
	Base	Controls	Spline	Base	Controls	Spline	Base	Controls	Spline
Panel A: Contracts Expression									
Prior expression decision, lagged	-0.173	0.093	0.380	-0.183	0.317	0.613	-0.070	0.173	0.454
	(0.289)	(0.241)	(0.420)	(0.323)	(0.264)	(0.473)	(0.287)	(0.214)	(0.395)
Judicial reform, lagged	0.028	0.184	0.156						
	(0.180)	(0.250)	(0.238)						
Judicial attack, lagged				-0.022	0.233*	0.227			
				(0.142)	(0.128)	(0.146)			
Judicial packing, lagged							-0.256	0.569**	0.522**
							(0.193)	(0.240)	(0.228)
Panel B: Expands Expression									
Prior expression decision, lagged	-0.068	0.012	0.225	-0.141	0.038	0.137	0.005	0.036	0.186
	(0.188)	(0.222)	(0.292)	(0.237)	(0.236)	(0.360)	(0.214)	(0.193)	(0.286)
Judicial reform, lagged	-0.184	-0.151	-0.209						
	(0.122)	(0.183)	(0.180)						
Judicial attack, lagged				-0.141	0.040	-0.039			
				(0.105)	(0.112)	(0.134)			
Judicial packing, lagged							-0.224**	0.313	0.282
							(0.088)	(0.208)	(0.209)
Controls included	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Year spline terms	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1,074	825	825	1,074	825	825	1,074	825	825
AIC	2122.16	1565.58	1556.58	2124.26	1566.69	1556.69	2118.92	1564.03	1557.02
BIC	2152.03	1650.45	1679.18	2154.13	1651.57	1679.29	2148.80	1648.90	1679.62
Pseudo- R^2	0.004	0.097	0.112	0.003	0.096	0.111	0.006	0.098	0.111

Notes: Coefficients are multinomial logit estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses. The base outcome category is Mixed Outcome. Control specifications include polyarchy, judicial review, legal system, high court, and judicial independence controls. Year spline terms are included in spline specifications but omitted from the table for readability. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The overall De Jure freedom of expression environment does not appear to affect whether judges issue decisions contracting or expanding freedom of expression. The coefficient for weighted de jure expression is not statistically significant for any of the outcomes across the various specifications (Table 2). One potential explanation for this null result is that the overall statutory environment conflates multiple factors that affect judicial decision-making. In democratic countries, judges might be less inclined to further expand freedom of expression due to existing protections, so they issue mixed rulings. Conversely, in less

democratic countries, the combination of enablers, resisters, and vanguard judges respond differently to external incentives, resulting in an indeterminate aggregate effect.

The results for our measures of legislative and executive actions towards the judiciary are more ambiguous. We find no consistent evidence of any relationship between either Judicial Reform or Judicial Attacks and the direction of judicial decisions. Again, these null results might indicate countervailing effects, as judges might respond differently to these legislative sticks depending on their broader environment.

We do find consistent and statistically significant results for Judicial Packing. As Judicial Packing goes up (i.e., there is less packing), courts are more likely to contract expression relative to mixed outcomes. While we do not have strong theoretical priors to inform our analysis of this result, it is possible that we are dealing with selection effects. Countries where judicial packing rarely happens might also have less of a need for court intervention to expand expression. In those circumstances, judges might issue opinions contracting freedom of expression due to public safety concern, for instance, but they are starting from a higher baseline of freedom.

We also estimate a series of models using the actor-specific indices for freedom of expression (Table 3), while varying the executive and legislative action variables. The models using either the citizen- or press-specific indices perform the best, so we focus on them in our analysis. Citizen Expression Environment is never statistically significant. Press Expression Environment, however, is highly statistically significant for predicting contraction and expansion of freedom of expression. In short, as press protections increase, judicial decisions are more likely to either contract or expand freedom of expression relative to being mixed. One potential explanation for this counter-intuitive result is that in countries with more press protections, there could be less statutory uncertainty about freedom of expression, making it less likely that judges will issue a mixed ruling relative to making an unambiguous ruling.

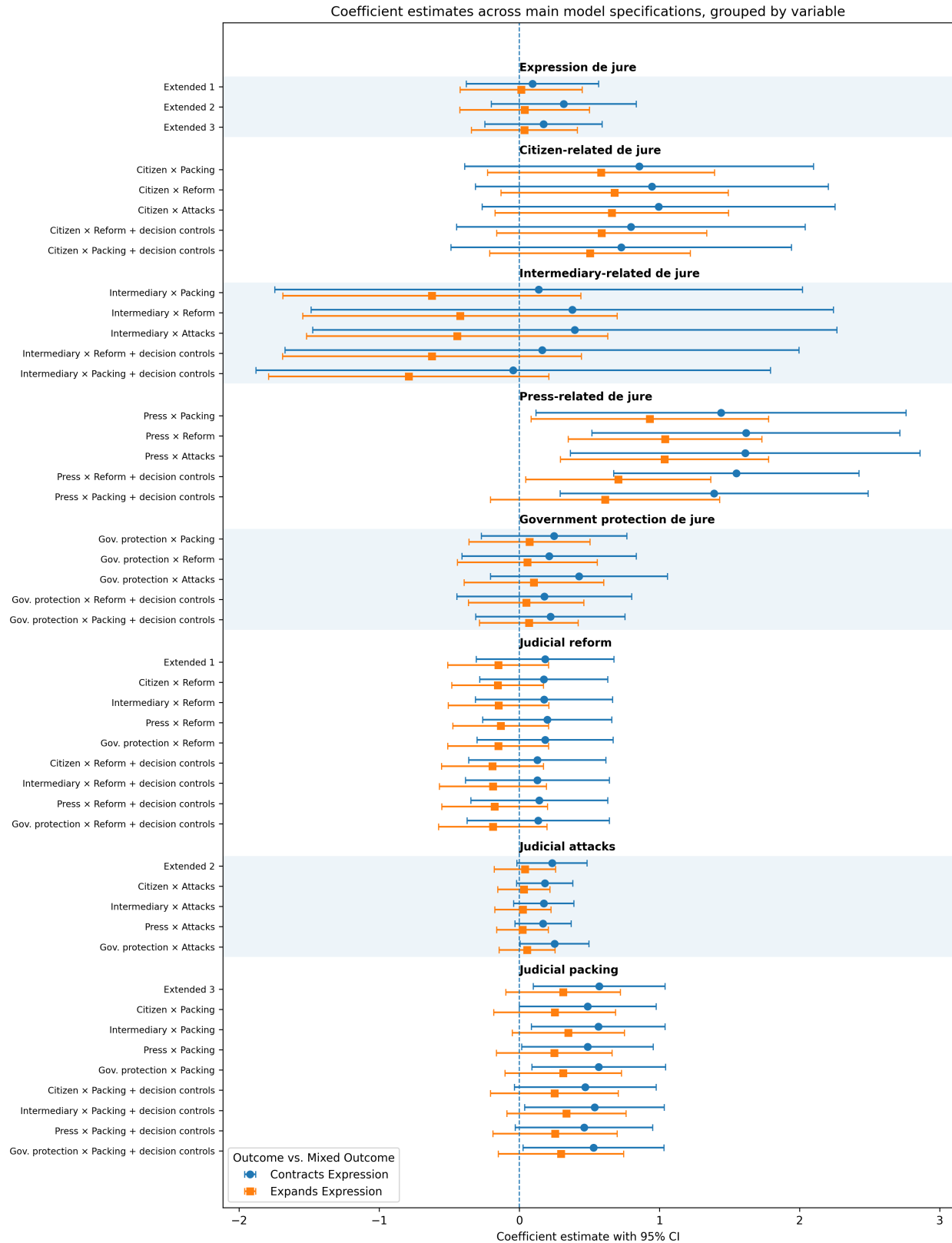


Figure 1: Coefficient plot for the main multinomial logit specifications. Points report coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals for decisions contracting or expanding freedom of expression, relative to mixed outcomes. The dashed vertical line marks zero.

Table 3: Press-Specific Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Judicial Decisions

Institutional predictor	Contracts Expression					
	(1) Reform	(2) Packing	(3) Attacks	(4) Reform	(5) Packing	(6) Attacks
De Jure Expression: Press, lag	1.617*** (0.560)	1.440** (0.674)	1.612** (0.637)	1.548*** (0.446)	1.390** (0.561)	1.519*** (0.507)
Judicial Reform, lag	0.199 (0.235)			0.142 (0.249)		
Judicial Packing, lag		0.486** (0.239)			0.461* (0.250)	
Judicial Political Attacks, lag			0.169* (0.102)			0.167* (0.100)
Country-level controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decision-level controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Expands Expression					
	(1) Reform	(2) Packing	(3) Attacks	(4) Reform	(5) Packing	(6) Attacks
De Jure Expression: Press, lag	1.040*** (0.353)	0.931** (0.432)	1.037*** (0.379)	0.705** (0.337)	0.612 (0.417)	0.700* (0.373)
Judicial Reform, lag	-0.132 (0.174)			-0.176 (0.192)		
Judicial Packing, lag		0.249 (0.211)			0.255 (0.226)	
Judicial Political Attacks, lag			0.023 (0.094)			0.053 (0.082)
Country-level controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decision-level controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	825	825	825	825	825	825
Log Likelihood	-761.83	-761.94	-763.18	-734.10	-734.29	-735.41
AIC	1559.67	1559.88	1562.37	1552.20	1552.59	1554.83
BIC	1644.54	1644.76	1647.25	1750.25	1750.64	1752.87
Pseudo- R^2	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.133	0.133	0.131

Notes: Table reports multinomial logistic regression coefficients from press-specific models predicting whether judicial decisions contract or expand freedom of expression relative to the omitted baseline outcome category of mixed outcome. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Models separately include judicial reform, judicial packing, and judicial political attacks alongside the lagged press-specific de jure expression measure. Actor-only models include institutional, regime-level, legal-system, and court-level controls. Decision-control models additionally include expression-mode and defendant-type indicators. Expression-mode indicators are relative to electronic/internet expression. Defendant indicators are relative to government defendants. Legal system indicators are relative to mixed or other legal systems. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

We also estimate models that include decision-level controls for the mode of expression and the type of defendant. These specifications help assess whether the main relationships persist after accounting for case-level differences in the form of expression and the actor whose conduct or legal position is at issue.¹ These models improve descriptive fit as measured by AIC and pseudo-(R²), but they perform worse under BIC because they introduce many additional parameters.

The decision-level models reinforce the actor-specific result. stronger press protections are associated with a higher likelihood of both constrictive and expansive rulings relative to mixed outcomes.

Broad de jure expression protections do not consistently predict judicial outcomes, but press-specific legal environments are associated with clearer directional rulings relative to mixed outcomes.

Executive-judicial variables matter unevenly. Judicial reform is not a consistent predictor of directional rulings, although the robustness summary suggests it is significant in direct comparisons between constrictive and expansive decisions. Similarly, government attacks do not follow a simple pattern. Court packing is the clearest executive result as higher values, which indicate less politically motivated packing, are associated with a greater likelihood of constrictive rulings relative to mixed outcomes in several specifications.

These findings suggest that executive and legislative pressure matters, but not through one simple mechanism. Reform, attacks, and packing appear to capture different institutional pressures, and their associations vary depending on the comparison against mixed outcomes or directly between constrictive and expansive rulings.

6 Discussion

Ultimately, the results of our analysis bring us back to a key point: de jure freedom of expression, what is explicitly written in statutes, is just the starting point. Courts play an essential role in determining how these laws play out in practice. It follows naturally then that understanding the motivations of judges in making certain decisions is an important part of understanding why courts rule the way they do.

Our results suggest that that these motivations, what we have described as carrots and sticks, are not as straightforward as they may seem. Actions by the executive such as judicial reform and judicial attacks do not lead to clear rulings from courts explicitly expanding or constricting expression. Undeniably, these actions have an effect on courts and how they

¹We iterate over models with Citizen and Press Expression Environment variables and Judicial Reform and Packing variables, because those versions perform the best in the simpler iterations.

make decisions. However, the effects and the ways in which they interact are not clearly understood from our analysis. While we see a relationship between decreases in judicial packing and increases in opinions constricting expression, further exploration is needed to determine why this result may emerge.

What is more clear is the significance of press-related expression laws. Our results show that an increase in statutory protections for the press leads to increases in clear directional rulings going both ways. One of these results seems intuitive for a society with a robust environment for freedom of expression. As press protections increase, a court may increase rulings expanding freedom of expression. However, these results also go the other way. As press protections increase, we also see an increase in rulings contracting expression. While we can't make concrete determinations from these results, the duality that results from increased press protections is one worth considering and continuing to explore in the future.

Further, even without statistically significant our results demonstrate the complexities of the judicial system. The sheer volume of factors at play reinforces the importance of considering their interconnectedness and the ways in which they can be used to expand and restrict fundamental freedoms like freedom of expression.

7 Conclusion

This paper explores whether courts respond differently in cases addressing freedom of expression depending on the legal and political conditions. Taking a global perspective, our results include 1,074 cases consequential for freedom of expression from 47 countries, spanning 1927-2025. The analysis focuses on executive and legislative actions including judicial reforms, court packing, and attacks on the judiciary as well as the overall expression environment and actor-specific expression environment.

The findings are mixed by design. Broad de jure protections show little consistent association with how courts rule. Press-specific protections do, predicting clearer directional rulings, contractive and expansive alike, relative to mixed outcomes. Among the executive variables, court packing is the most consistent predictor of constrictive rulings relative to mixed outcomes. Judicial reform appears mainly in direct comparisons between constrictive and expansive decisions, while attacks show less stable patterns across specifications.

These results speak directly to the strands of judicial politics we opened with. Courts as enablers and resisters both assume executive pressure pushes judicial behavior in a predictable direction. Our findings sit awkwardly with that assumption, the pressure variables that should most cleanly separate vanguard from shutdown behavior, reform and attacks, are the noisiest in our data, while a variable with a less obvious theoretical story, court packing,

is the most consistent.

The analysis has real limits worth mentioning. The baseline models explain little variance on their own; explanatory power comes mostly from country-level controls like polyarchy and legal system. Lagging the right-hand-side variables reduces but does not eliminate concerns about reverse causality between judicial rulings and subsequent executive behavior. The mixed-outcome category, treated here as a single reference group, almost certainly contains qualitatively different judicial logics, Sunstein’s minimalism and Staton et al.’s second-face deterrence chief among them, that our coding cannot distinguish. Given the sample is built from cases the Columbia GFOE project selected as consequential for expression rights, it likely represents high visibility disputes relative to the universe of expression rulings world-wide.

For future analyses, diving into mixed outcome decisions would let us test whether minimalism or deterrence better explains that category. Executive pressure is not a single lever; court packing, reform, and attacks do not move judicial behavior the same way or on the same timeline, and future work would do well to build into this design.

References

- Adams, Emily, Anthony Xu and Anthony DeMattee. 2026. “Laws of EXpression (LEX) Dataset.”
URL: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ITKWZW>
- Bench-Capon, Trevor. 1997. “Argument in Artificial Intelligence and Law.” *Artificial Intelligence and Law* 5(4):249–261.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1008242417011>
- Bertoni, Eduardo Andres. 2009. “The Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights: A Dialogue on Freedom of Expression Standards.” *European Human Law Review* .
URL: <https://www.palermo.edu/derecho/pdf/publicaciones/Paper-Bertoni.pdf>
- Buyse, Antoine. 2014. “Dangerous Expressions: The Echr, Violence and Free Speech.” *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 63(2):491–503. Publisher: [Cambridge University Press, British Institute of International and Comparative Law].
URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43301613>
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Sandra Grahm, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Kyle Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning and Aksel Sundström. 2025. “V-Dem Dataset v15.”
URL: <https://v-dem.net/data/dataset-archive/>
- Cordy, Robert J. 2019. “The Interdependent Relationship of a Free Press and an Independent Judiciary in a Constitutional Democracy.”
- Crawford, Sue E. S. and Elinor Ostrom. 1995. “A Grammar of Institutions.” *The American Political Science Review* 89(3):582–600. Journal article. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2082975>.
- de Faria, Joana Ribeiro, Huiyuan Xie and Felix Steffek. 2024. “Automatic Information Extraction From Employment Tribunal Judgements Using Large Language Models.”
URL: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2403.12936>

- DeMattee, Anthony J. 2023. “To Manipulate and Legitimise: Government Officials Explain Why Non-Democracies Enact and Enforce Permissive Civil Society Laws.” *Democratization* 30(8):1476–1502.
- Flauss, Jean-François. 2009. “The European Court of Human Rights and the Freedom of Expression.” *INDIANA LA WJOURNAL* 84.
- Gamboa, Laura, Benjamín García-Holgado and Ezequiel González-Ocantos. 2024. “Courts against backsliding: Lessons from Latin America.” *Law & Policy* 46(4):358–379. _eprint: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/lapo.12246>.
URL: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/lapo.12246>
- Garcia-Holgado, Benjamin. 2025. “Overruling the Executive: Judicial Strategies to Resist Democratic Erosion.” *Journal of Law and Courts* 13(1):274–303.
- Ginsburg, Tom and Tamir Moustafa, eds. 2008. *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511814822>
- Global Freedom of Expression Case Law Dataset*. 2026.
URL: <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/>
- Grossman, Claudio. 2012. “Challenges to Freedom of Expression Within the Inter-American System: A Jurisprudential Analysis.” *Human Rights Quarterly* 34(2):361–403.
URL: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/475691>
- Han, Sophia Simeng, Yoshiki Takashima, Shannon Zejiang Shen, Chen Liu, Yixin Liu, Roque K. Thuo, Sonia Knowlton, Ruzica Piskac, Scott J Shapiro and Arman Cohan. 2025. CourtReasoner: Can LLM Agents Reason Like Judges? In *Proceedings of the 2025 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, ed. Christos Christodoulopoulos, Tanmoy Chakraborty, Carolyn Rose and Violet Peng. Suzhou, China: Association for Computational Linguistics pp. 35291–35306.
URL: <https://aclanthology.org/2025.emnlp-main.1787/>
- Helmke, Gretchen. 2002. “The logic of strategic defection: Court–executive relations in Argentina under dictatorship and democracy.” *American Political Science Review* 96(2):291–303.
- Helmke, Gretchen. 2004. *Courts under constraints: judges, generals, and presidents in Argentina*. Cambridge University Press.

- Holgado, Benjamin Garcia and Raúl Sánchez Urribarri. 2023. “Court-packing and democratic decay: A necessary relationship?” *Global Constitutionalism* 12(2):350–377.
URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/global-constitutionalism/article/courtpacking-and-democratic-decay-a-necessary-relationship/8E3F2FE612BED68683A49AB9BF67FE27>
- Kapiszewski, Diana. 2012. *High courts and economic governance in Argentina and Brazil*. Cambridge University Press.
- Krotoszynski, Ronald J, András Koltay and Charlotte Garden. 2025. *Disinformation, Misinformation, and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Magesh, Varun, Faiz Surani, Matthew Dahl, Mirac Suzgun, Christopher D. Manning and Daniel E. Ho. 2024. “Hallucination-Free? Assessing the Reliability of Leading AI Legal Research Tools.”
URL: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2405.20362>
- Ostrom, Elinor. 2005. *Understanding Institutional Diversity*. Princeton University Press.
- Pasqualucci, Jo. 2006. “Criminal Defamation and the Evolution of the Doctrine of Freedom of Expression in International Law: Comparative Jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.”
- Pech, Laurent. 2006. “Balancing Freedom of the Press with Competing Rights and Interests: A Comparative Perspective.”
URL: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=909507>
- Savelka, Jaromir and Kevin D. Ashley. 2023. “The unreasonable effectiveness of large language models in zero-shot semantic annotation of legal texts.” *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence* 6. Publisher: Frontiers.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2023.1279794>
- Socol de la Osa, David Uriel and Nydia Remolina. 2024. “Artificial intelligence at the bench: Legal and ethical challenges of informing—or misinforming—judicial decision-making through generative AI.” *Data 38; Policy* 6:e59.
- Staton, Jeffrey K. 2010. *Judicial power and strategic communication in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.
- Staton, Jeffrey K, Christopher Reenock, Jordan Holsinger et al. 2022. *Can Courts be Bulwarks of Democracy?* Cambridge University Press.

- Sunstein, Cass R. 1999. *One case at a time: judicial minimalism on the Supreme Court*. Harvard University Press.
- United Nations. 1966. “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” <https://treaties.un.org>. Adopted by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), December 16, 1966. Entered into force March 23, 1976.
- Vanberg, Georg. 2004. *The politics of constitutional review in Germany*. Cambridge University Press.
- Whitten-Woodring, Jenifer. 2009. “Watchdog or lapdog? Media freedom, regime type, and government respect for human rights.” *International Studies Quarterly* 53(3):595–625.
- Zambrano, Guillaume. 2024. “Case Law as Data : Prompt Engineering Strategies for Case Outcome Extraction with Large Language Models in a Zero-Shot Setting.” *Law, Technology and Humans* 6(3):80–101.
URL: <https://lthj.qut.edu.au/article/view/3623>

Table 4: Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Judicial Decisions that Contract or Expand Freedom of Expression

	Contracts Expression								Expands Expression							
	Base			Extended			Spline		Base			Extended			Spline	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
De Jure Expression, lag	-0.173 (0.289)	-0.183 (0.323)	-0.070 (0.287)	0.093 (0.241)	0.317 (0.264)	0.173 (0.214)	0.380 (0.420)	0.517 (0.507)	-0.068 (0.188)	-0.141 (0.237)	0.005 (0.214)	0.012 (0.222)	0.038 (0.236)	0.036 (0.193)	0.225 (0.292)	0.391 (0.305)
Judicial Reform, lag	0.028 (0.180)			0.184 (0.250)			0.156 (0.238)	0.205 (0.233)	-0.184 (0.122)			-0.151 (0.183)			-0.209 (0.180)	-0.202 (0.180)
Judicial Political Attacks, lag		-0.022 (0.142)			0.233* (0.128)					-0.141 (0.105)			0.040 (0.112)			
Judicial Packing, lag			-0.256 (0.193)			0.569** (0.240)					-0.224** (0.088)			0.313 (0.208)		
High Court				-0.456* (0.275)	-0.537** (0.273)	-0.402 (0.266)	-0.481* (0.278)	-0.431 (0.281)				-0.038 (0.146)	-0.024 (0.157)	0.020 (0.140)	-0.212 (0.175)	-0.210 (0.172)
Judicial Independence, lag				0.138 (0.267)	0.178 (0.253)	0.196 (0.264)	0.040 (0.281)	0.052 (0.279)				0.387* (0.204)	0.359* (0.200)	0.357* (0.202)	0.361* (0.198)	0.402* (0.208)
Polyarchy, lag				-5.182*** (1.440)	-5.515*** (1.298)	-7.051*** (1.773)	-4.428*** (1.533)	181.404 (166.633)				-1.695* (0.873)	-2.123** (0.913)	-3.221** (1.262)	-1.255 (0.973)	27.033 (95.068)
Legal System: Civil				0.349 (0.486)	0.199 (0.426)	0.383 (0.425)	0.286 (0.450)	0.332 (0.442)				-0.322 (0.375)	-0.153 (0.361)	-0.040 (0.376)	-0.409 (0.345)	-0.392 (0.384)
Legal System: Common				0.853 (0.540)	0.530 (0.477)	0.622 (0.480)	0.636 (0.514)	0.612 (0.490)				-1.337*** (0.459)	-1.182*** (0.390)	-1.166*** (0.392)	-1.565*** (0.427)	-1.676*** (0.434)
Spline Terms Included	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Spline x Polyarchy Interaction	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	1,074	1,074	1,074	825	825	825	825	825	1,074	1,074	1,074	825	825	825	825	825
Log Likelihood	-1055.08	-1056.13	-1053.46	-764.79	-765.35	-764.01	-752.29	-742.70	-1055.08	-1056.13	-1053.46	-764.79	-765.35	-764.01	-752.29	-742.70
AIC	2122.16	2124.26	2118.92	1565.58	1566.69	1564.03	1556.58	1553.40	2122.16	2124.26	2118.92	1565.58	1566.69	1564.03	1556.58	1553.40
BIC	2152.03	2154.13	2148.80	1650.45	1651.57	1648.90	1679.18	1713.72	2152.03	2154.13	2148.80	1650.45	1651.57	1648.90	1679.18	1713.72
Pseudo-R ²	0.004	0.003	0.006	0.097	0.096	0.098	0.112	0.123	0.004	0.003	0.006	0.097	0.096	0.098	0.112	0.123

Notes: Table reports multinomial logistic regression coefficients predicting whether judicial decisions contract or expand freedom of expression relative to the omitted baseline category. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. All substantive predictors are lagged one year. Extended models include institutional and regime-level controls. Spline specifications model non-linear temporal dynamics using cubic B-splines over year; interaction specifications additionally interact spline terms with lagged polyarchy scores. Legal system indicators are relative to the omitted reference category of mixed or other legal systems. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table 5: Actor-Specific Model Fit Statistics

Model	N	AIC	BIC	Pseudo- R^2
Citizen $\times$ judicial packing	825	1560.66	1645.53	0.100
Intermediary $\times$ judicial packing	825	1561.63	1646.51	0.099
Press $\times$ judicial packing	825	1559.88	1644.76	0.100
Gov.-protected actor $\times$ judicial packing	825	1563.51	1648.39	0.098
Citizen $\times$ judicial reform	825	1560.65	1645.53	0.100
Intermediary $\times$ judicial reform	825	1562.91	1647.78	0.098
Press $\times$ judicial reform	825	1559.67	1644.54	0.100
Gov.-protected actor $\times$ judicial reform	825	1564.95	1649.83	0.097
Citizen $\times$ judicial attack	825	1562.93	1647.81	0.098
Intermediary $\times$ judicial attack	825	1565.31	1650.19	0.097
Press $\times$ judicial attack	825	1562.37	1647.25	0.099
Gov.-protected actor $\times$ judicial attack	825	1565.64	1650.52	0.097
Citizen $\times$ judicial reform $\times$ decision outcome	825	1553.81	1751.85	0.132
Intermediary $\times$ judicial reform $\times$ decision outcome	825	1554.42	1752.47	0.132
Press $\times$ judicial reform $\times$ decision outcome	825	1552.20	1750.25	0.133
Gov.-protected actor $\times$ judicial reform $\times$ decision outcome	825	1556.75	1754.79	0.130
Citizen $\times$ judicial packing $\times$ decision outcome	825	1553.96	1752.00	0.132
Intermediary $\times$ judicial packing $\times$ decision outcome	825	1553.57	1751.61	0.132
Press $\times$ judicial packing $\times$ decision outcome	825	1552.59	1750.64	0.133
Gov.-protected actor $\times$ judicial packing $\times$ decision outcome	825	1555.87	1753.92	0.131
Citizen $\times$ judicial attack $\times$ decision outcome	825	1556.03	1754.07	0.131
Intermediary $\times$ judicial attack $\times$ decision outcome	825	1556.81	1754.86	0.130
Press $\times$ judicial attack $\times$ decision outcome	825	1554.83	1752.87	0.131
Gov.-protected actor $\times$ judicial attack $\times$ decision outcome	825	1557.60	1755.65	0.130

Note: Actor-specific models estimate whether the relationship between judicial context and decision outcomes varies across defendant or actor categories. The decision-outcome interaction models have lower AIC and higher pseudo- R^2 values than the simpler actor-specific specifications, but their larger BIC values reflect the additional model complexity.

Table 6: Actor-Specific Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Judicial Decisions

Institutional predictor	Contracts Expression											
	Citizen			Intermediary			Press			Gov./Prot.		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	Reform	Packing	Attacks	Reform	Packing	Attacks	Reform	Packing	Attacks	Reform	Packing	Attacks
De Jure Expression: Citizens, lag	0.945 (0.643)	0.855 (0.635)	0.994 (0.642)									
De Jure Expression: Intermediaries, lag				0.378 (0.950)	0.138 (0.961)	0.396 (0.955)						
De Jure Expression: Press, lag							1.617*** (0.560)	1.440** (0.674)	1.612** (0.637)			
De Jure Expression: Gov./Prot., lag										0.213 (0.318)	0.248 (0.265)	0.425 (0.322)
Judicial Reform, lag	0.173 (0.233)			0.177 (0.250)			0.199 (0.235)			0.185 (0.248)		
Judicial Packing, lag		0.488* (0.249)			0.563** (0.244)			0.486** (0.239)			0.566** (0.243)	
Judicial Political Attacks, lag			0.181* (0.103)			0.174 (0.110)			0.169* (0.102)			0.251** (0.125)
Country-level controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decision-level controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Observations	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825
Log Likelihood	-762.32	-762.33	-763.46	-763.45	-762.82	-764.66	-761.83	-761.94	-763.18	-764.48	-763.76	-764.82
AIC	1560.65	1560.66	1562.93	1562.91	1561.63	1565.31	1559.67	1559.88	1562.37	1564.95	1563.51	1565.64
BIC	1645.53	1645.53	1647.81	1647.78	1646.51	1650.19	1644.54	1644.76	1647.25	1649.83	1648.39	1650.52
Pseudo- R^2	0.100	0.100	0.098	0.098	0.099	0.097	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.097	0.098	0.097

Institutional predictor	Expands Expression											
	Citizen			Intermed.			Press			Gov./Prot.		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	Reform	Packing	Attacks	Reform	Packing	Attacks	Reform	Packing	Attacks	Reform	Packing	Attacks
De Jure Expression: Citizens, lag	0.680 (0.414)	0.583 (0.413)	0.660 (0.425)									
De Jure Expression: Intermediaries, lag				-0.423 (0.572)	-0.624 (0.542)	-0.443 (0.548)						
De Jure Expression: Press, lag							1.040*** (0.353)	0.931** (0.432)	1.037*** (0.379)			
De Jure Expression: Gov./Protected Actors, lag										0.057 (0.254)	0.073 (0.220)	0.104 (0.254)
Judicial Reform, lag	-0.154 (0.167)			-0.147 (0.183)			-0.132 (0.174)			-0.151 (0.183)		
Judicial Packing, lag		0.252 (0.222)			0.350* (0.204)			0.249 (0.211)			0.313 (0.212)	
Judicial Political Attacks, lag			0.032 (0.095)			0.025 (0.102)			0.023 (0.094)			0.055 (0.102)
Country-level controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decision-level controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Observations	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825
Log Likelihood	-762.32	-762.33	-763.46	-763.45	-762.82	-764.66	-761.83	-761.94	-763.18	-764.48	-763.76	-764.82
AIC	1560.65	1560.66	1562.93	1562.91	1561.63	1565.31	1559.67	1559.88	1562.37	1564.95	1563.51	1565.64
BIC	1645.53	1645.53	1647.81	1647.78	1646.51	1650.19	1644.54	1644.76	1647.25	1649.83	1648.39	1650.52
Pseudo- R^2	0.100	0.100	0.098	0.098	0.099	0.097	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.097	0.098	0.097

Notes: Table reports multinomial logistic regression coefficients predicting whether judicial decisions contract or expand freedom of expression relative to the omitted baseline outcome category of mixed outcome. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Columns are grouped by actor-specific de jure expression measure; within each actor group, models separately include judicial reform, judicial packing, and judicial political attacks. Actor-specific de jure expression measures and judicial institutional predictors are lagged one year. Models include institutional, regime-level, legal-system, and court-level controls. Legal system indicators are relative to mixed or other legal systems. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table 7: Actor-Specific Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Judicial Decisions with Decision-Level Controls

Actor	Contracts Expression											
	Reform				Packing				Attacks			
	(1) Citizen	(2) Intermed.	(3) Press	(4) Gov./Prot.	(5) Citizen	(6) Intermed.	(7) Press	(8) Gov./Prot.	(9) Citizen	(10) Intermed.	(11) Press	(12) Gov./Prot.
De Jure Expression: Citizens, lag	0.797 (0.635)				0.727 (0.620)				0.843 (0.630)			
De Jure Expression: Intermediaries, lag		0.162 (0.936)				-0.044 (0.936)				0.164 (0.936)		
De Jure Expression: Press, lag			1.548*** (0.446)				1.390** (0.561)				1.519*** (0.507)	
De Jure Expression: Gov./Protected Actors, lag				0.178 (0.318)				0.222 (0.272)				0.397 (0.325)
Judicial Reform, lag	0.128 (0.250)	0.129 (0.261)	0.142 (0.249)	0.134 (0.259)								
Judicial Packing, lag					0.471* (0.258)	0.536** (0.254)	0.461* (0.250)	0.530** (0.257)				
Judicial Political Attacks, lag									0.184* (0.098)	0.178* (0.106)	0.167* (0.100)	0.252** (0.121)
Polyarchy, lag	-5.199*** (1.292)	-5.173*** (1.342)	-5.544*** (1.197)	-4.951*** (1.410)	-6.845*** (1.770)	-7.007*** (1.778)	-7.108*** (1.639)	-6.776*** (1.807)	-5.668*** (1.291)	-5.569*** (1.369)	-5.922*** (1.296)	-5.469*** (1.292)
Judicial Review, lag	-0.336 (0.342)	-0.341 (0.358)	-0.389 (0.369)	-0.369 (0.366)	-0.396 (0.351)	-0.416 (0.373)	-0.444 (0.378)	-0.438 (0.377)	-0.248 (0.333)	-0.262 (0.356)	-0.315 (0.375)	-0.254 (0.364)
High Court	-0.484 (0.313)	-0.478 (0.312)	-0.492 (0.312)	-0.455 (0.300)	-0.451 (0.297)	-0.448 (0.294)	-0.466 (0.299)	-0.410 (0.295)	-0.586** (0.299)	-0.581* (0.305)	-0.594* (0.303)	-0.544* (0.290)
Judicial Independence, lag	0.183 (0.233)	0.172 (0.243)	0.180 (0.227)	0.121 (0.268)	0.240 (0.230)	0.214 (0.231)	0.240 (0.223)	0.174 (0.258)	0.234 (0.225)	0.214 (0.233)	0.229 (0.219)	0.143 (0.248)
Legal System: Civil	-0.104 (0.443)	0.109 (0.484)	-0.068 (0.443)	0.033 (0.456)	0.002 (0.408)	0.260 (0.461)	0.016 (0.408)	0.134 (0.414)	-0.151 (0.381)	0.064 (0.438)	-0.127 (0.391)	-0.031 (0.394)
Legal System: Common	0.747 (0.518)	0.701 (0.543)	0.870* (0.509)	0.656 (0.533)	0.570 (0.496)	0.523 (0.515)	0.677 (0.457)	0.474 (0.491)	0.568 (0.488)	0.524 (0.496)	0.684 (0.453)	0.417 (0.487)
Mode: Press/Newspapers	-0.546 (0.472)	-0.581 (0.470)	-0.578 (0.468)	-0.573 (0.463)	-0.549 (0.470)	-0.579 (0.473)	-0.579 (0.471)	-0.564 (0.470)	-0.577 (0.469)	-0.616 (0.471)	-0.613 (0.468)	-0.594 (0.468)
Mode: Public Speech	0.285 (0.227)	0.286 (0.217)	0.299 (0.215)	0.289 (0.220)	0.284 (0.217)	0.291 (0.211)	0.302 (0.210)	0.294 (0.214)	0.260 (0.227)	0.264 (0.219)	0.279 (0.217)	0.262 (0.226)
Mode: Public Documents	0.299 (0.364)	0.326 (0.351)	0.214 (0.355)	0.313 (0.351)	0.275 (0.349)	0.293 (0.339)	0.204 (0.341)	0.281 (0.344)	0.353 (0.338)	0.383 (0.337)	0.275 (0.339)	0.370 (0.333)
Mode: Audio/Visual Broadcasting	-0.600 (0.401)	-0.585 (0.392)	-0.651 (0.408)	-0.599 (0.395)	-0.627* (0.381)	-0.617* (0.369)	-0.667* (0.385)	-0.630* (0.376)	-0.552 (0.397)	-0.543 (0.386)	-0.603 (0.400)	-0.539 (0.394)
Mode: Public Assembly	-0.306 (0.200)	-0.337* (0.188)	-0.351* (0.186)	-0.361* (0.192)	-0.375* (0.209)	-0.406** (0.201)	-0.413** (0.197)	-0.427** (0.204)	-0.380* (0.221)	-0.411* (0.217)	-0.423** (0.231)	-0.454** (0.231)
Mode: Written Speech	0.078 (0.341)	0.082 (0.326)	0.025 (0.317)	0.066 (0.324)	0.090 (0.339)	0.100 (0.330)	0.037 (0.317)	0.089 (0.325)	0.061 (0.342)	0.062 (0.326)	0.001 (0.318)	0.064 (0.331)
Mode: Non-Verbal Expression	-0.357 (0.297)	-0.350 (0.287)	-0.350 (0.284)	-0.333 (0.288)	-0.393 (0.290)	-0.383 (0.277)	-0.383 (0.278)	-0.367 (0.284)	-0.397 (0.311)	-0.384 (0.299)	-0.384 (0.298)	-0.368 (0.309)
Defendant: Citizen	0.294 (0.328)	0.323 (0.328)	0.356 (0.349)	0.334 (0.337)	0.277 (0.316)	0.298 (0.313)	0.337 (0.338)	0.313 (0.321)	0.280 (0.316)	0.312 (0.316)	0.349 (0.337)	0.326 (0.321)
Defendant: Press	0.349 (0.416)	0.371 (0.417)	0.345 (0.413)	0.362 (0.420)	0.349 (0.423)	0.366 (0.423)	0.347 (0.421)	0.362 (0.428)	0.331 (0.402)	0.356 (0.404)	0.332 (0.402)	0.341 (0.407)
Defendant: Intermediary	0.531 (0.361)	0.475 (0.382)	0.520 (0.358)	0.467 (0.371)	0.516 (0.358)	0.464 (0.383)	0.511 (0.355)	0.455 (0.370)	0.496 (0.372)	0.438 (0.403)	0.490 (0.370)	0.401 (0.390)
Defendant: Other	-0.387 (0.544)	-0.401 (0.549)	-0.388 (0.560)	-0.413 (0.554)	-0.411 (0.520)	-0.426 (0.522)	-0.405 (0.538)	-0.433 (0.530)	-0.426 (0.507)	-0.438 (0.512)	-0.419 (0.527)	-0.467 (0.516)
Defendant: Unclear	1.391*** (0.480)	1.396*** (0.461)	1.409*** (0.485)	1.432*** (0.480)	1.321*** (0.444)	1.324*** (0.421)	1.355*** (0.456)	1.365*** (0.444)	1.368*** (0.449)	1.386*** (0.437)	1.406*** (0.465)	1.426*** (0.449)
Expression mode controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Defendant controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825
Log Likelihood	-734.90	-735.21	-734.10	-736.37	-734.98	-734.78	-734.29	-735.94	-736.01	-736.41	-735.41	-736.80
AIC	1553.81	1554.42	1552.20	1556.75	1553.96	1553.57	1552.59	1555.87	1556.03	1556.81	1554.83	1557.60
BIC	1751.85	1752.47	1750.25	1754.79	1752.00	1751.61	1750.64	1753.92	1754.07	1754.86	1752.87	1755.65
Pseudo- R^2	0.132	0.132	0.133	0.130	0.132	0.132	0.133	0.131	0.131	0.130	0.131	0.130

Notes: Table reports multinomial logistic regression coefficients predicting whether judicial decisions contract or expand freedom of expression relative to the omitted baseline outcome category of mixed outcome. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Actor-specific de jure expression measures and judicial institutional predictors are lagged one year. All models include institutional, regime-level, legal-system, court-level, expression-mode, and defendant-type controls. Expression-mode indicators are relative to electronic/internet expression. Defendant indicators are relative to government defendants. Legal system indicators are relative to mixed or other legal systems. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table 8: Actor-Specific Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Judicial Decisions with Decision-Level Controls (continued)

Actor	Expands Expression											
	Reform				Packing				Attacks			
	(1) Citizen	(2) Intermed.	(3) Press	(4) Gov./Prot.	(5) Citizen	(6) Intermed.	(7) Press	(8) Gov./Prot.	(9) Citizen	(10) Intermed.	(11) Press	(12) Gov./Prot.
De Jure Expression: Citizens, lag	0.588 (0.382)				0.504 (0.365)				0.569 (0.390)			
De Jure Expression: Intermediaries, lag		-0.623 (0.544)				-0.790 (0.510)				-0.634 (0.513)		
De Jure Expression: Press, lag			0.705** (0.337)				0.612 (0.417)				0.700* (0.373)	
De Jure Expression: Gov./Protected Actors, lag				0.049 (0.210)				0.068 (0.179)				0.127 (0.216)
Judicial Reform, lag	-0.191 (0.186)	-0.188 (0.195)	-0.176 (0.192)	-0.189 (0.197)								
Judicial Packing, lag					0.250 (0.233)	0.336 (0.217)	0.255 (0.226)	0.297 (0.228)				
Judicial Political Attacks, lag									0.061 (0.082)	0.057 (0.081)	0.053 (0.082)	0.091 (0.093)
Polyarchy, lag	-1.931** (0.791)	-1.823** (0.812)	-2.070*** (0.789)	-1.787** (0.887)	-3.316*** (1.274)	-3.478*** (1.266)	-3.435*** (1.193)	-3.331** (1.321)	-2.566*** (0.916)	-2.396*** (0.929)	-2.654*** (0.886)	-2.436*** (0.936)
Judicial Review, lag	0.277 (0.357)	0.272 (0.357)	0.266 (0.352)	0.267 (0.352)	0.298 (0.355)	0.283 (0.363)	0.291 (0.352)	0.278 (0.352)	0.366 (0.364)	0.360 (0.362)	0.350 (0.363)	0.366 (0.354)
High Court	-0.107 (0.157)	-0.113 (0.158)	-0.110 (0.157)	-0.095 (0.148)	-0.053 (0.144)	-0.053 (0.145)	-0.058 (0.145)	-0.034 (0.138)	-0.096 (0.152)	-0.100 (0.155)	-0.099 (0.153)	-0.081 (0.146)
Judicial Independence, lag	0.421** (0.175)	0.395** (0.177)	0.406** (0.171)	0.385** (0.195)	0.395** (0.183)	0.359** (0.173)	0.386** (0.178)	0.357* (0.200)	0.393** (0.179)	0.364** (0.175)	0.382** (0.174)	0.342* (0.197)
Legal System: Civil	-0.454 (0.291)	-0.134 (0.332)	-0.381 (0.307)	-0.315 (0.293)	-0.108 (0.291)	0.253 (0.344)	-0.053 (0.299)	0.019 (0.290)	-0.221 (0.270)	0.087 (0.302)	-0.169 (0.276)	-0.107 (0.277)
Legal System: Common	-1.065** (0.434)	-1.164*** (0.435)	-1.027** (0.443)	-1.108** (0.441)	-0.888** (0.386)	-0.990** (0.404)	-0.864** (0.382)	-0.921** (0.388)	-0.888** (0.378)	-0.994** (0.386)	-0.861** (0.376)	-0.945** (0.378)
Mode: Press/Newspapers	0.331 (0.338)	0.297 (0.333)	0.307 (0.332)	0.311 (0.325)	0.340 (0.331)	0.315 (0.327)	0.321 (0.328)	0.331 (0.322)	0.333 (0.328)	0.302 (0.323)	0.310 (0.323)	0.318 (0.318)
Mode: Public Speech	-0.057 (0.211)	-0.056 (0.204)	-0.050 (0.215)	-0.053 (0.212)	-0.061 (0.219)	-0.056 (0.217)	-0.049 (0.226)	-0.052 (0.224)	-0.061 (0.216)	-0.057 (0.211)	-0.051 (0.222)	-0.056 (0.214)
Mode: Public Documents	0.740 (0.614)	0.781 (0.610)	0.717 (0.614)	0.761 (0.607)	0.650 (0.590)	0.682 (0.585)	0.638 (0.589)	0.663 (0.587)	0.696 (0.581)	0.741 (0.583)	0.677 (0.582)	0.720 (0.578)
Mode: Audio/Visual Broadcasting	-0.078 (0.253)	-0.043 (0.220)	-0.098 (0.251)	-0.058 (0.232)	-0.106 (0.250)	-0.081 (0.217)	-0.120 (0.249)	-0.091 (0.234)	-0.084 (0.254)	-0.054 (0.221)	-0.104 (0.254)	-0.064 (0.237)
Mode: Public Assembly	-0.211 (0.508)	-0.246 (0.485)	-0.236 (0.500)	-0.234 (0.491)	-0.233 (0.510)	-0.265 (0.487)	-0.251 (0.502)	-0.252 (0.496)	-0.219 (0.512)	-0.251 (0.490)	-0.241 (0.505)	-0.247 (0.490)
Mode: Written Speech	0.363** (0.172)	0.357** (0.176)	0.335* (0.171)	0.361** (0.180)	0.385** (0.190)	0.389** (0.196)	0.356* (0.185)	0.390** (0.198)	0.377** (0.187)	0.371** (0.189)	0.346* (0.181)	0.380* (0.195)
Mode: Non-Verbal Expression	-0.265* (0.145)	-0.243* (0.140)	-0.266* (0.147)	-0.256* (0.142)	-0.301** (0.140)	-0.280** (0.135)	-0.298** (0.142)	-0.292** (0.138)	-0.285** (0.142)	-0.261* (0.139)	-0.282* (0.145)	-0.273* (0.145)
Defendant: Citizen	-0.601*** (0.160)	-0.595*** (0.152)	-0.557*** (0.167)	-0.579*** (0.157)	-0.632*** (0.158)	-0.633*** (0.150)	-0.587*** (0.164)	-0.612*** (0.154)	-0.626*** (0.161)	-0.620*** (0.154)	-0.577*** (0.169)	-0.599*** (0.157)
Defendant: Press	-0.465 (0.346)	-0.465 (0.357)	-0.462 (0.345)	-0.454 (0.344)	-0.487 (0.351)	-0.490 (0.359)	-0.483 (0.347)	-0.477 (0.345)	-0.483 (0.357)	-0.483 (0.367)	-0.478 (0.354)	-0.473 (0.356)
Defendant: Intermediary	-0.767 (0.541)	-0.821 (0.561)	-0.780 (0.546)	-0.811 (0.559)	-0.813 (0.555)	-0.858 (0.579)	-0.820 (0.559)	-0.849 (0.574)	-0.805 (0.545)	-0.849 (0.564)	-0.811 (0.545)	-0.850 (0.568)
Defendant: Other	-0.477*** (0.171)	-0.509*** (0.177)	-0.477*** (0.176)	-0.491*** (0.177)	-0.500*** (0.165)	-0.534*** (0.173)	-0.495*** (0.168)	-0.511*** (0.171)	-0.501*** (0.163)	-0.532*** (0.171)	-0.496*** (0.167)	-0.518*** (0.166)
Defendant: Unclear	0.835** (0.392)	0.831** (0.361)	0.858** (0.399)	0.851** (0.392)	0.749** (0.375)	0.736** (0.335)	0.781** (0.385)	0.770** (0.375)	0.770** (0.375)	0.772** (0.346)	0.802** (0.388)	0.800** (0.377)
Expression mode controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Defendant controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825	825
Log Likelihood	-734.90	-735.21	-734.10	-736.37	-734.98	-734.78	-734.29	-735.94	-736.01	-736.41	-735.41	-736.80
AIC	1553.81	1554.42	1552.20	1556.75	1553.96	1553.57	1552.59	1555.87	1556.03	1556.81	1554.83	1557.60
BIC	1751.85	1752.47	1750.25	1754.79	1752.00	1751.61	1750.64	1753.92	1754.07	1754.86	1752.87	1755.65
Pseudo- R^2	0.132	0.132	0.133	0.130	0.132	0.132	0.133	0.131	0.131	0.130	0.131	0.130

Notes: Table reports multinomial logistic regression coefficients predicting whether judicial decisions contract or expand freedom of expression relative to the omitted baseline outcome category of mixed outcome. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Actor-specific de jure expression measures and judicial institutional predictors are lagged one year. All models include institutional, regime-level, legal-system, court-level, expression-mode, and defendant-type controls. Expression-mode indicators are relative to electronic/internet expression. Defendant indicators are relative to government defendants. Legal system indicators are relative to mixed or other legal systems. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table 9: Direction and Significance of Results Across Main Specifications

Variable	Judicial reform		Judicial attack		Judicial packing	
	Contracts	Expands	Contracts	Expands	Contracts	Expands
<i>Panel A: Extended models</i>						
Prior expression decision, lagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Focal judicial-context variable	0	0	+	0	+	0
Polyarchy, lagged	—***	—*	—***	—**	—***	—**
Judicial review, lagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common law system	0	—***	0	—***	0	—***
Civil law system	0	0	0	0	0	0
High court	—*	0	—**	0	0	0
Judicial independence, lagged	0	+	0	+	0	+
<i>Panel B: Extended models with year splines</i>						
Prior expression decision, lagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Focal judicial-context variable	0	0	0	0	+	0
Polyarchy, lagged	—***	0	—***	0	—***	—**
Judicial review, lagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common law system	0	—***	0	—***	0	—***
Civil law system	0	0	0	0	0	0
High court	—*	0	—*	0	0	0
Judicial independence, lagged	0	+	0	0	0	0
<i>Panel C: Extended spline interaction models</i>						
Prior expression decision, lagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Focal judicial-context variable	0	0	0	0	+	0
Polyarchy terms	Mixed, n.s.	Mixed, n.s.	Mixed, n.s.	Mixed, n.s.	Mixed, n.s.	Mixed, n.s.
Judicial review, lagged	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common law system	0	—***	0	—***	0	—***
Civil law system	0	0	0	0	0	0
High court	0	0	—*	0	0	0
Judicial independence, lagged	0	+	0	+	0	0

Notes: Entries summarize the direction and statistical significance of coefficients across the main multinomial logit specifications. The base outcome category is “Mixed Outcome.” A + indicates a positive coefficient, a — indicates a negative coefficient, and 0 indicates that the coefficient is not statistically significant at conventional levels. The focal judicial-context variable is judicial reform in the reform models, judicial attack in the attack models, and judicial packing in the packing models. “Mixed, n.s.” indicates that the spline-by-polyarchy interaction specification includes multiple polyarchy and spline-by-polyarchy terms with varying signs, none of which are statistically significant at conventional levels. Coefficients and significance levels are drawn from the parameter table.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 10: Robustness Summary: Significant Coefficient Direction Across Specifications

Variable	Contracts vs. Mixed	Expands vs. Mixed	Contracts vs. Expands	Summary
<i>Judicial-context variables</i>				
Judicial reform, lagged	–	–	+ (11)	Significant mainly in the direct contrast between contractionary and expansionary outcomes.
Judicial attack, lagged	+ (8)	–	+ (4)	Some evidence of association with contractionary outcomes.
Judicial packing, lagged	+ (11)	Mixed (2)	+ (1)	Most consistently significant judicial-context predictor for contractionary outcomes.
<i>Actor-specific expression variables</i>				
Press-specific de jure expression, lagged	+ (6)	+ (5)	+ (3)	Press-specific models show the clearest actor-level pattern.
General de jure expression, lagged	–	–	+ (1)	Little evidence of a robust association in the general models.
<i>Institutional, regime, and legal-system controls</i>				
Polyarchy, lagged	– (30)	– (28)	Mostly – (32)	Most consistently significant control across specifications.
Common law system	+ (6)	– (33)	+ (33)	Strong and consistent association with lower likelihood of expansionary outcomes.
Judicial review, lagged	–	–	– (33)	Significant mainly when comparing contractionary and expansionary outcomes directly.
High court	– (17)	–	– (14)	Some evidence that high court cases are less likely to be contractionary.
Judicial independence, lagged	–	+ (29)	–	Consistently associated with expansionary outcomes.
Civil law system	–	–	+ (6)	Limited evidence, mostly in direct contrast models.

Notes: Cells report the number of robustness specifications in which a variable is statistically significant at the 10 percent level or below, summarized by coefficient direction. A + indicates positive significant coefficients; a – indicates negative significant coefficients; “Mixed” indicates significant coefficients in both directions across specifications; “–” indicates no repeated significant pattern. Counts are based on the significant coefficient summary across model specifications. The base outcome category is Mixed Outcome.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.