



Thomson Reuters Institute &  
National Center for State Courts AI Policy Consortium for Law and Courts

# Staffing, Operations and Technology.

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A 2025 survey of State Courts

# Executive summary

In this third annual *survey of State Courts*, published by the Thomson Reuters® Institute with assistance from the National Center for State Courts AI Policy Consortium on Law and Courts, we surveyed judges and court professionals from State, County and Municipal courts to gather views on the current state of court operations, as well as challenges and opportunities. This report is a comprehensive analysis of how digital transformation and technological advancements can improve court operations and access to justice and in addition, address workforce and future professional trends. This includes insights about the impact that generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is having on how respondents conduct the business of the court, as well as the opportunities, challenges and outlook for AI adoption.

Courts are by no means insulated from the transformational changes sweeping across the entire legal ecosystem as law firms, legal departments and others race to adopt GenAI. While the recent report, *The Future of the Law Firm*,<sup>1</sup> focused primarily on the impact of GenAI on law firms, its overarching conclusion was that no organization within the legal system “can afford to sit on the sidelines or be an idle bystander as the legal world revolutionizes around them.”

The upcoming 2025 *Future of Professionals Report* will examine how GenAI is impacting the role of professionals across the legal industry.

Meanwhile, this report provides deep analysis on the major trends that are currently driving change within the court system.

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**As courts consider these transformational and high-impact changes expected over the next five years, their immediate needs continue to manage current day-to-day operations**

<sup>1</sup> <https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/en/insights/white-papers/future-of-law-firm-amid-ai-increasing-influence>

# Top findings

- Courts face significant staffing shortages and operational inefficiencies, with many court professionals working long hours, yet struggling to manage their workloads.
- Caseload, complexity and variety of issues are more likely to have increased than decreased over the past two years. For the next 12 months, courts are prioritizing addressing case delays and continuances to help address these issues.
- Staffing shortages are widespread and expected to continue over the next year, particularly in court clerk and clerk staff roles. State courts have been more heavily impacted than County/Municipal courts, and judicial operations are more likely to expect shortages in the coming year than court operations.
- While judges and court staff tend to work long hours, working extra hours doesn't necessarily lead to feeling that they have enough time to meet the respective needs of their roles.
- Most courts participate in virtual hearings. However, there are concerns about the digital divide hampering litigants' ability to participate.
- The majority of courts have adopted many key automated tools, but technology gaps remain and budgets for additional investments may be limited, even as AI and GenAI increasingly take hold across the legal landscape.
- Despite the potential for significant efficiency improvements and time savings, courts have generally been slow to adopt AI and GenAI.

## METHODOLOGY

Thomson Reuters Institute annual survey of State Courts surveys are conducted via an online questionnaire with judges and court professionals to better understand challenges in the judicial system, specifically around hearings, evidence, caseload and technology as it quickly evolves.

This year's online survey was conducted with 443 State, County and Municipal court judges and court professionals, between March 26 and April 15, 2025. Statistical significance testing was conducted at the 95% confidence level.

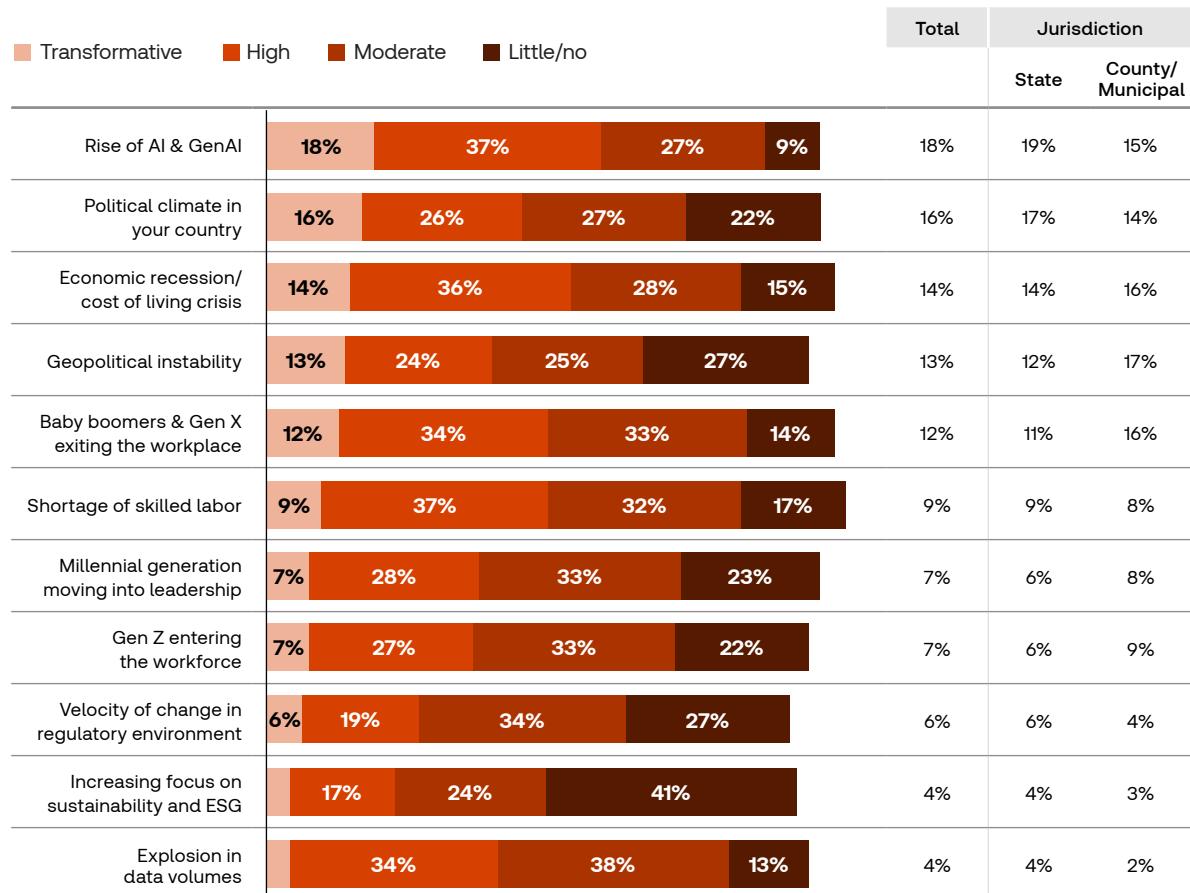
# Challenges that courts are facing

Artificial intelligence (AI), along with politics, economics and demographic workforce shifts, are all expected to bring significant pressures on courts over the next five years. While the rise of AI and GenAI is the most significant trend – rated as transformational or high impact by 55% of respondents – it is followed closely by recession risks and cost of living (50%), shortage of skilled workers (46%) and Baby Boomers and Gen Xers exiting the workplace (46%).

One interesting outlier is the exploding growth of data volumes. Although only 4% of respondents consider it transformative, 34% believe it is a high-impact issue – combining those results ranks it one of the most impactful trends.

With 41% of respondents rating sustainability and ESG as little or no impact, those issues are viewed as significantly less critical compared to technology, economic and workforce drivers.

**FIGURE 1:**  
**Rise of AI & GenAI is the highest-ranking impactful trend**



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

## Courts are facing significant strain from staffing shortages and inefficiencies

As courts consider these transformational and high-impact changes expected over the next five years, their immediate needs continue to manage current day-to-day operations. And the daily reality is that courts are facing significant strain from workloads, staffing shortages and inefficiencies.

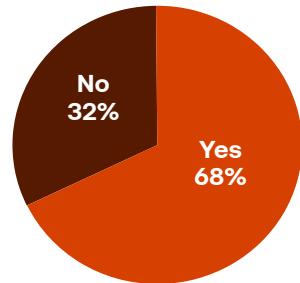
Most courts experienced a staff shortage over the past 12 months. The problem was particularly acute for State courts (71%), although 56% of respondents at County/Municipal courts also reported they experienced staff shortages. By role, roughly two-thirds of those in judicial operations (68%) and court operations (64%) reported staff shortages.

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, all groups expect staff shortages to ease somewhat. However, 61% of respondents still expect to experience staff shortages.

FIGURE 2:

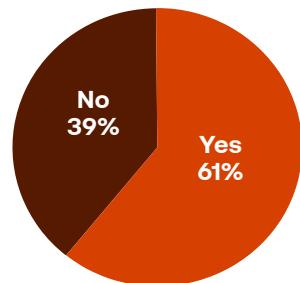
### Most courts experienced staff shortages in the last year

Staffing shortages past 12 months



	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
Past 12 months	Yes	68%	71%	56%	68% 64%
	No	32%	29%	44%	32% 36%

Anticipated staffing shortages next 12 months



	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
Next 12 months	Yes	61%	65%	49%	65% 53%
	No	39%	35%	51%	36% 47%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

In future projections, workforce issues are a consistent topic. Nearly half (46%) of respondents feel that shortages of skilled workers will have a transformational or high impact on courts over the next five years.

In addition, the generational shifts of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers leaving the workforce, Gen Zers entering the workforce and Millennials moving into leadership positions are also trends frequently ranked as transformational or high impact.

## Efficiency of operations a key focus

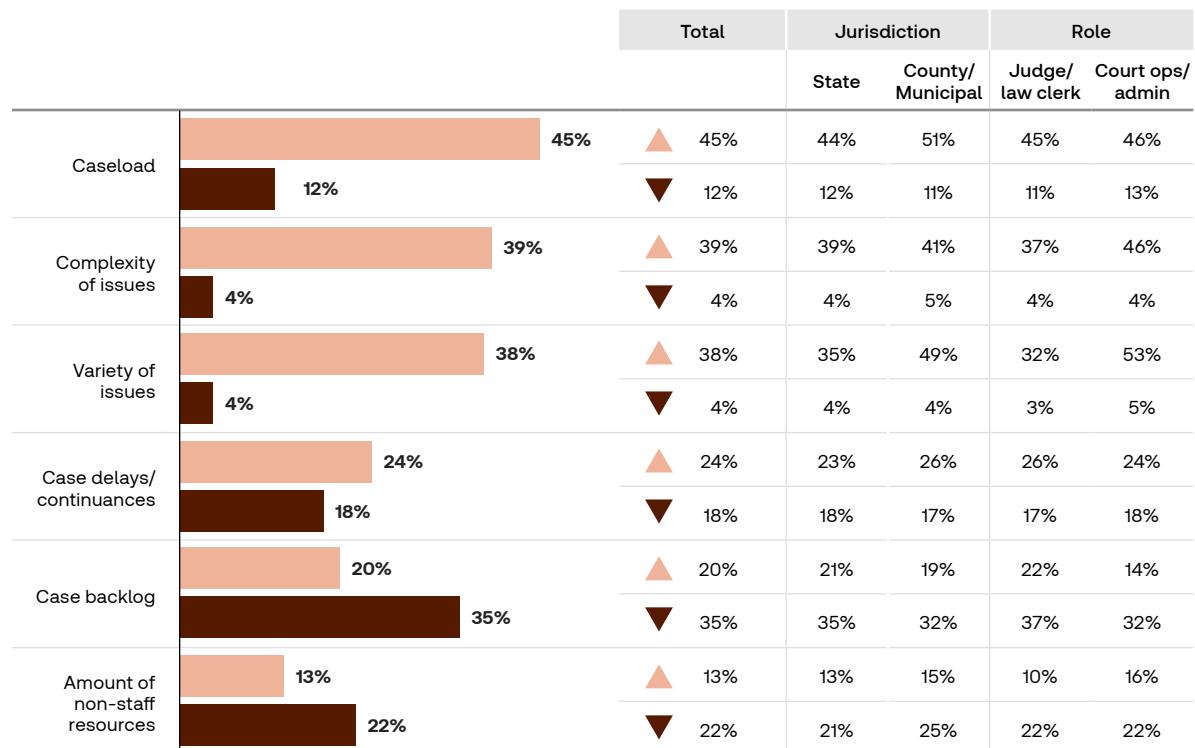
Improving efficiency is essential for smooth court operations and can help ease problems with staff shortages. On this front, there is some good news: Despite the frequent staff shortages, there are indications that efficiency improved over the past two years.

Respondents were far more likely than not to report they were able to manage a higher volume of caseloads, more complex issues and a wider variety of issues. In addition, respondents were more likely than not to report decreases in case backlogs and use of non-staff resources.

However, slightly more respondents reported increases in case delays and continuances (24%) than decreases (18%).

FIGURE 3:

### Higher caseloads, lower backlogs, but more delays



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

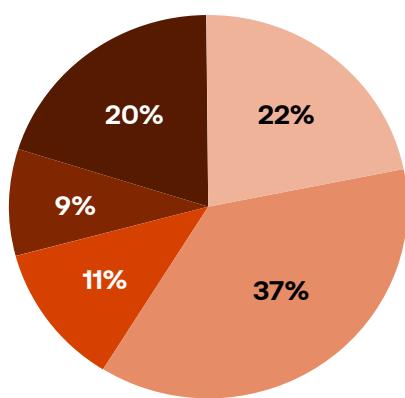
More than three-quarters of respondents (77%) said that they encounter delays of 15 minutes or more for hearings in a typical week. Four out of 10 said that the delays impact more than 10% of hearings.

FIGURE 4:

## 78% Of respondents encounter hearing delays weekly

Percent of hearings with +15 minute delay

0% 1-10% 11%-20% 21-30% Over 30%



	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
0%	22%	24%	16%	21%	16%
1-10%	37%	36%	41%	37%	39%
11-20%	11%	11%	12%	11%	14%
21-30%	9%	10%	6%	9%	14%
Over 30%	20%	19%	25%	22%	18%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

### Not all efficiency gains are equal

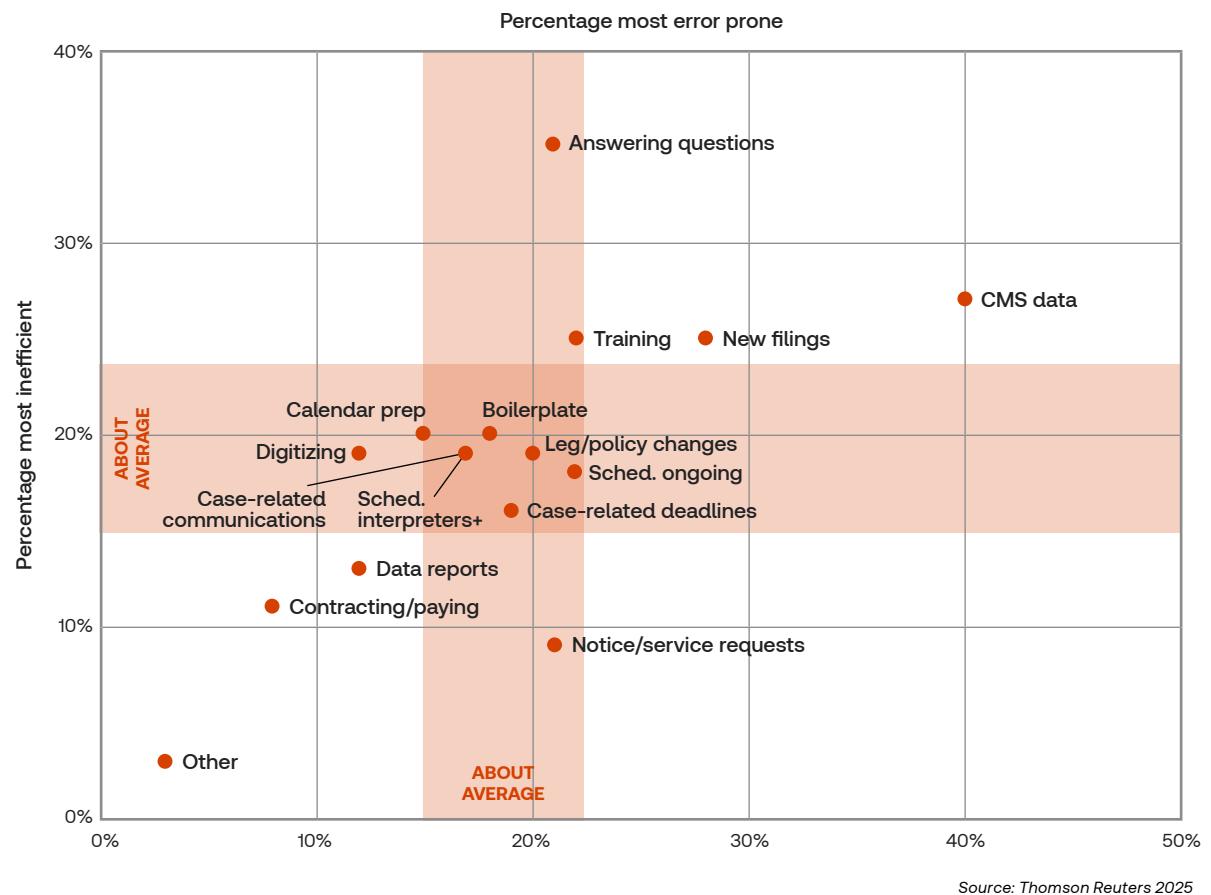
It's also useful to take a closer look at the efficiency of specific tasks; overall efficiency is not necessarily a goal in and of itself.

For example, our results found a strong correlation between the inefficiency of a task and how error-prone it is – that is, the more inefficient a task is considered to be, the more likely it is also prone to errors – and vice versa.

This suggests that courts should identify and target specific tasks for efficiency gains, reduction in errors or preferably both. As such, courts need trackable metrics for both efficiency and errors in order to measure true progress. Focusing solely on efficiency or throughput without considering errors may not yield the desired or meaningful improvements in court operations.

In particular, entering and updating data in the court management system(s), and receiving and processing new case filings were ranked above average in terms of being both inefficient and error-prone. Looking specifically at entering and updating data in the court management system(s), this was rated as both the most error-prone task by a wide margin and also as the second-most inefficient task. Being one of the most repetitive and labor-intensive manual tasks, greater use of automation in CMS entry could yield major improvements in both efficiency and error rates.

**FIGURE 5:**  
**Inefficiency of tasks is correlated with errors**



Over the next 12 months, respondents said that their courts are most likely to prioritize case delays and continuances (26%) and caseloads (20%), followed by case backlogs (19%) and amount of non-staff resources (14%). These specific prioritizations are understandable, as they are all related to improving workflows, and only 2% of respondents said their courts had no backlog whatsoever.

**FIGURE 6:**  
**Court priorities for next 12 months**

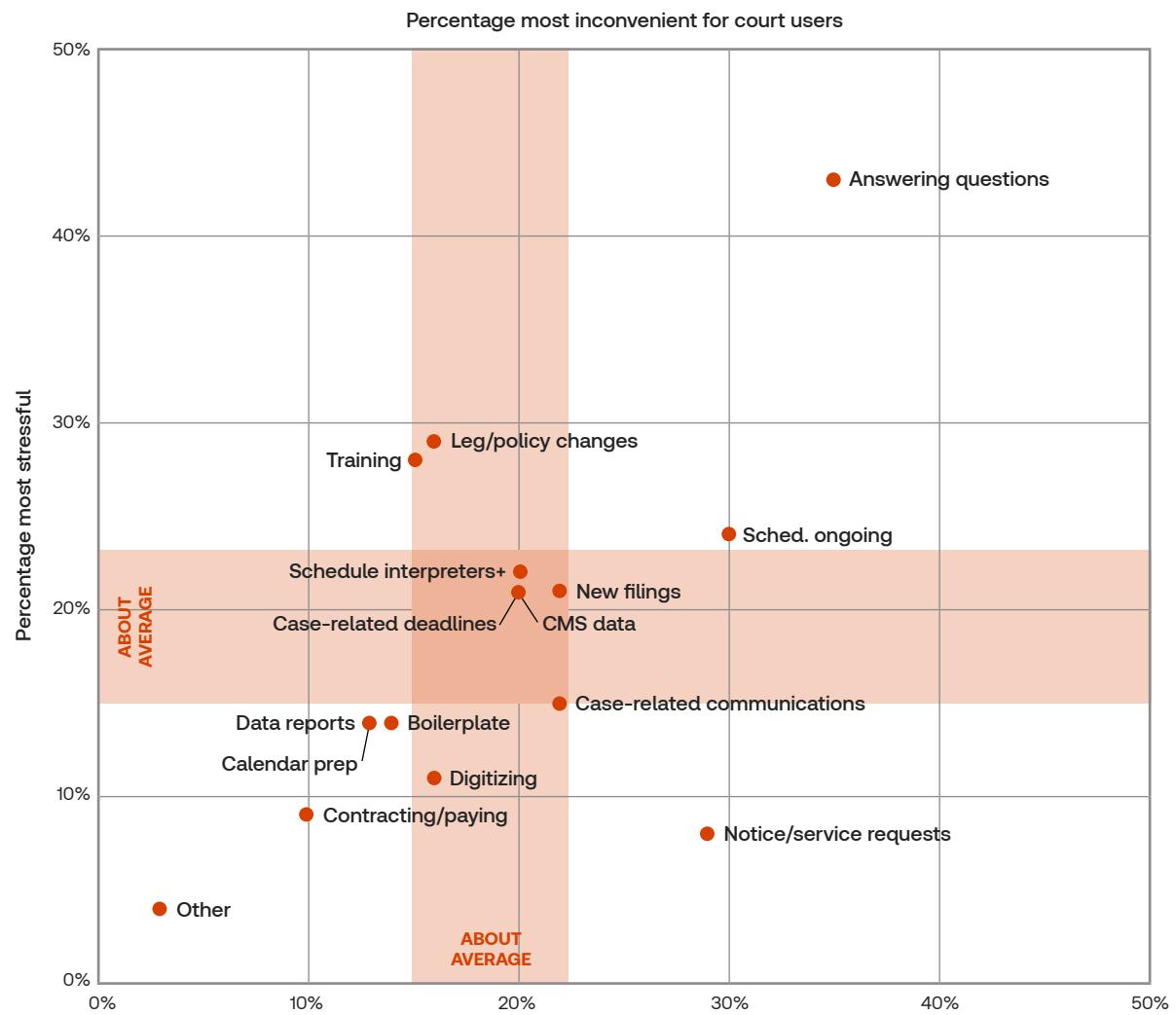
	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
Case delays/ continuances	26%	26%	26%	27%	24%
Caseload	20%	20%	20%	20%	15%
Case backlog	19%	19%	20%	15%	16%
Amount of non-staff resources	14%	14%	14%	12%	18%
Complexity of issues you work on	8%	8%	8%	7%	9%
Variety of issues you work on	6%	6%	5%	3%	12%
Having adequate staff	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%
Something else	5%	5%	5%	7%	3%
There is no backlog	2%	1%	3%	3%	1%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Tasks that are more stressful are also correlated with causing inconvenience for court users. Answering questions from court users – whether by phone or at a desk – and scheduling or calendaring events for ongoing cases ranked above average in both categories. Such tasks thus both tax staff members – potentially contributing to everything from decreased efficiency to higher burnout and turnover – while simultaneously inconveniencing court users, potentially impacting access to justice.

FIGURE 7:

## Stressful tasks correlate with being more inconvenient for court users



## Workloads vs. Time: Is there ever enough time?

The majority of respondents (53%) work between 40 and 45 hours a week on average. An additional 25% work 46 to 50 hours a week. And one in eight respondents (13%) work more than 50 hours per week. Only 10% work fewer than 40 hours a week. Judges and law clerks are more likely than court operations and administrative personnel to work more than 45 hours per week.

FIGURE 8:

### Most judges/law clerks and operations staff work about 40-45 hours per week

Hours worked per week	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
<32	4%	4%	5%	4%	3%
32-39	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%
40-45	53%	53%	54%	50%	47% 59%
46-50	25%	24%	28%	26%	22%
50+	13%	13%	11%	17%	11%
Average	44.7	44.7	44.6	45.5	44.3

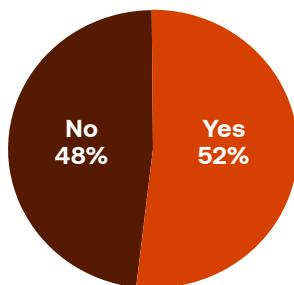
Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

The more important question may be whether that is enough time. Respondents were almost evenly split on whether they have enough time to achieve everything they would like to in their role: 52% said yes and 48% said no. Judges were more likely than court operations and administrative workers to say that they have enough time. And State court respondents were slightly more likely than County/Municipal court respondents to report having enough time.

FIGURE 9:

### Only about half of court professionals say they have enough time

Do you have enough time?



	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
Yes	52%	54%	47%	55%	43%
No	48%	46%	53%	45%	57%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

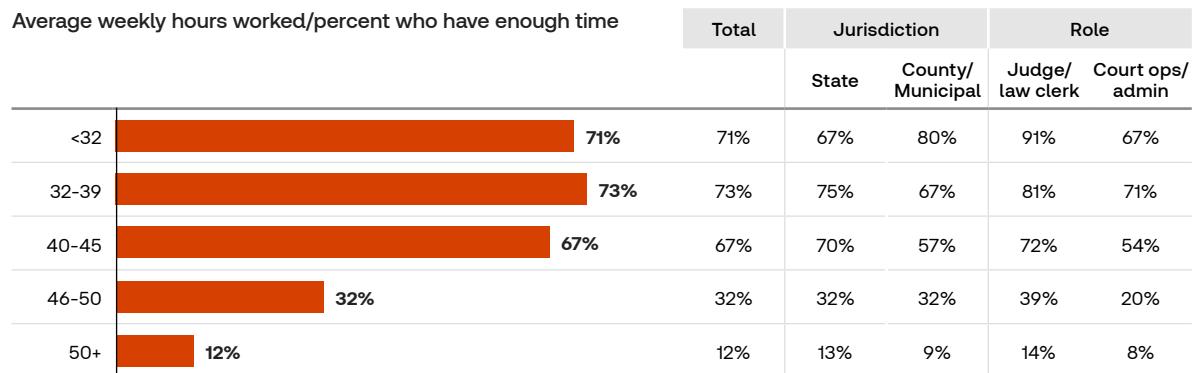
However, longer hours at work do not necessarily translate into keeping up with workloads. Those working fewer hours are more likely to feel that they have enough time. Conversely, those working longer hours are less likely to feel that they have enough time to achieve everything that they would like to.

And the differences are dramatic. More than two-thirds of respondents working 45 or fewer hours a week say they have enough time. But less than one-third (32%) of those working 46 to 50 hours feel the same. And only 12% working more than 50 hours say they have enough time.

The reasons are unclear. Respondents who work fewer hours may be working in courts that have lower caseloads and/or have highly automated workflows for greater efficiency. Conversely, longer hours could be a reflection of courts that are more prone to delays, errors and other inefficiencies.

FIGURE 10:

## More hours worked means less likelihood of enough time



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Regardless of whether a court has efficient or inefficient workflows, respondents discussed what they would do if extra time were available. The results point out both bottlenecks and tasks that are likely to be delayed because of insufficient time.

If extra work time were available, respondents said they would be most likely to spend it on case management or case preparation (19%). This certainly raises questions as to whether they feel that they currently have sufficient time to adequately prepare and manage cases.

Extra time to manage required to-do lists and other job-related tasks, legal research/writing/analysis, drafting orders/documents and reviewing documents/updating files are also on the wish lists. Meanwhile, roughly one in seven say they would spend any available extra time on personal, non-work-related activities, or that they wouldn't use the extra time for anything in particular.

When asked for more details on tasks where more time would be helpful, many respondents used descriptions such as “doing more substantive work” or even “doing my actual job,” suggesting frustration with tasks that may be repetitive, mundane or unnecessarily time-consuming.

Meanwhile, some court professionals are clearly overwhelmed. When asked what they would do if more time were available, one respondent simply said, “I would just spend more time doing everything.”

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**“[If more time were available] I would just spend more time doing everything.”**

FIGURE 11:

## Extra time would be spent on case management and preparation

If you were no longer doing that task, how would you spend the extra time that you'd gain?	Total	Jurisdiction		Role	
		State	County/ Municipal	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin
Case management/ case preparation	19%	19%	20%	15%	22% 14%
Doing other job-related tasks/required to-do lists	11%	11%	10%	16%	11% 16%
Legal research/ writing/analysis	11%	11%	12%	8%	13% 4%
Drafting orders/ documents	10%	10%	11%	6%	14% 3%
Reviewing documents/ updating files	10%	10%	10%	9%	10% 8%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

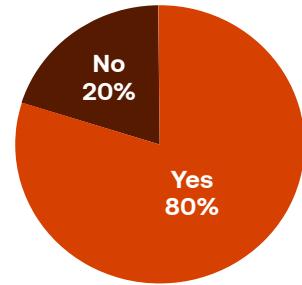
## Virtual hearings & the digital divide

Use of virtual hearings continues to proliferate. Fully 80% of respondents say that their court conducts or participates in virtual hearings. In more than 40% of all jurisdictions, virtual hearings are available for first/initial appearances, preliminary/status hearings and/or motion hearings.

However, there are opportunities to increase the use of virtual hearings. Fewer than one in five respondents say their court uses virtual hearings for sentencing hearings, omnibus hearings, or appellate or trial cases.

**FIGURE 12:**  
**Most courts use virtual hearings**

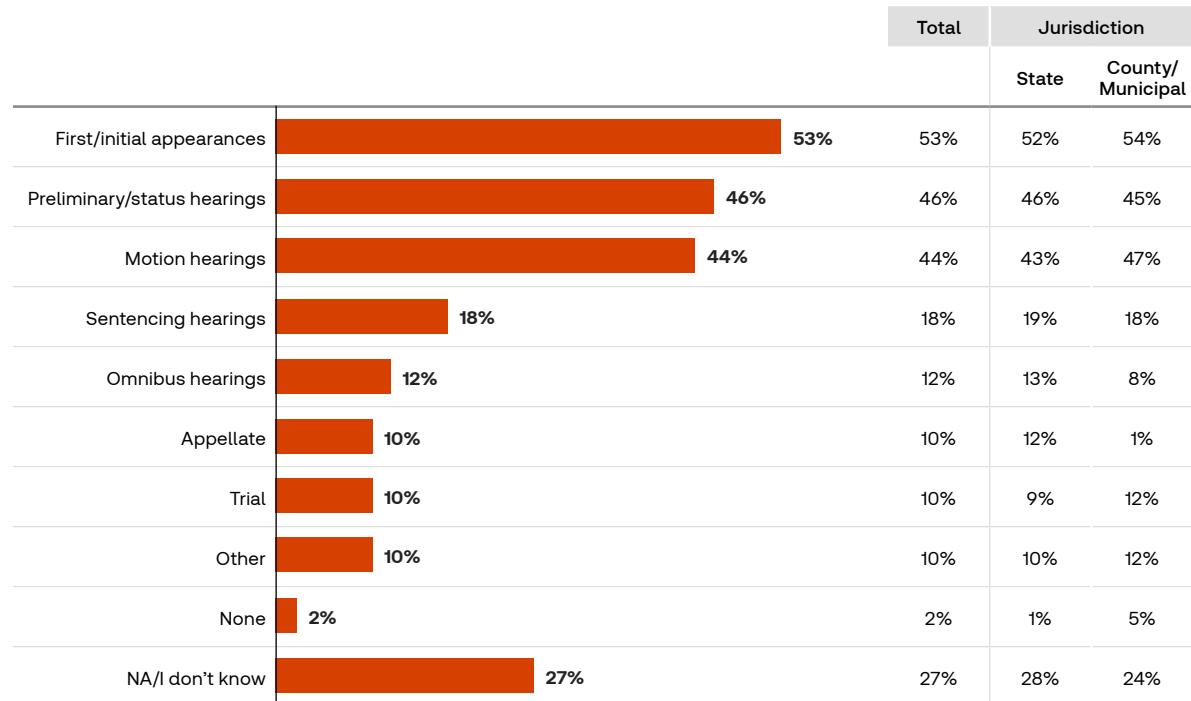
Virtual hearings?



	Total	Jurisdiction	
		State	County/ Municipal
Yes	80%	80%	77%
No	20%	20%	23%

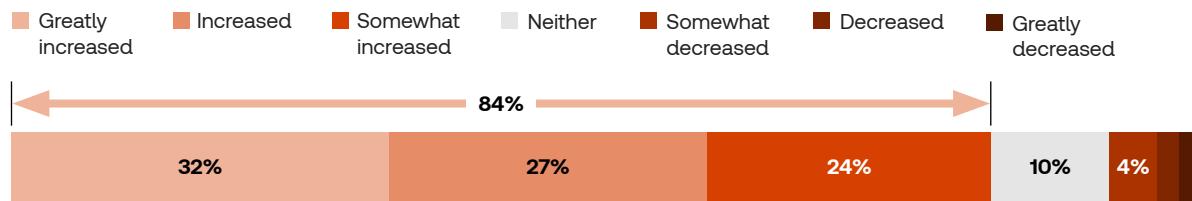
Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

**FIGURE 13:**  
**For which types of court hearings are virtual hearings available**



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

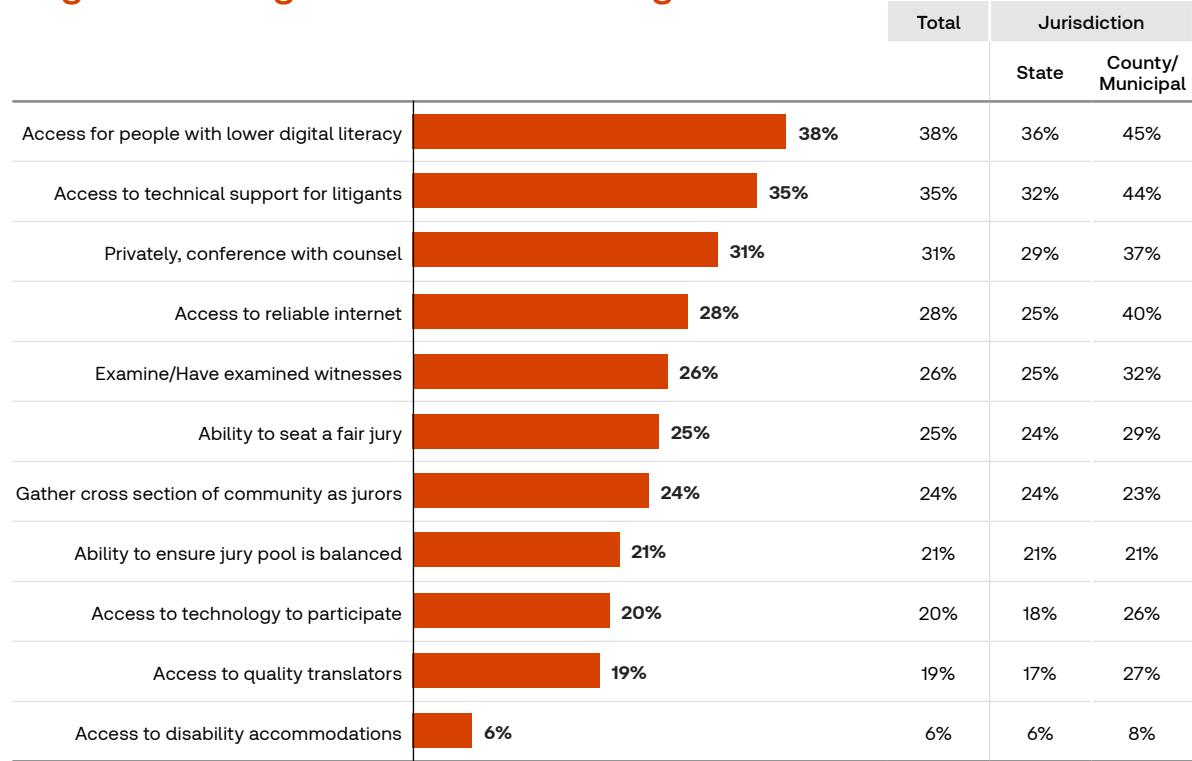
**FIGURE 14:**  
**Virtual courts increase access to justice**



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

However, it is important to note that nearly one in five respondents (19%) feel that the majority of litigants are experiencing decreased access to justice because they lack strong technology skills. This is particularly the case with County/Municipal courts. Respondents in County/Municipal courts were more likely to report court disruptions because of technology equipment challenges or other limitations from self-represented litigants.

**FIGURE 15:**  
**Litigant challenges with virtual hearings**

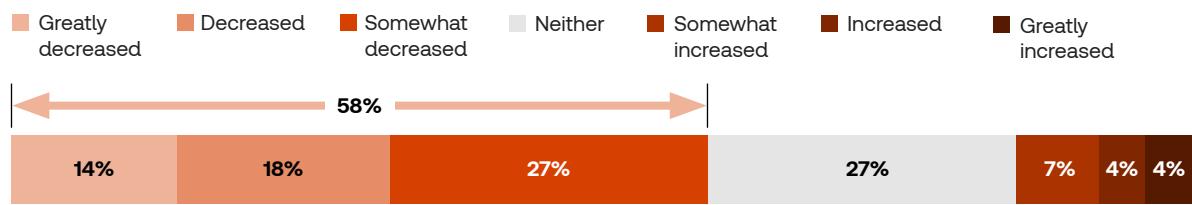


Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

As a result, court access for people with lower digital literacy and fewer technical support resources were ranked as the top challenges for litigants involved in virtual hearings. Those factors were ranked above other challenges such as inability to conference privately with counsel, examine witnesses and seat a fair and balanced jury.

FIGURE 16:

### Virtual courts decrease failure to appear



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

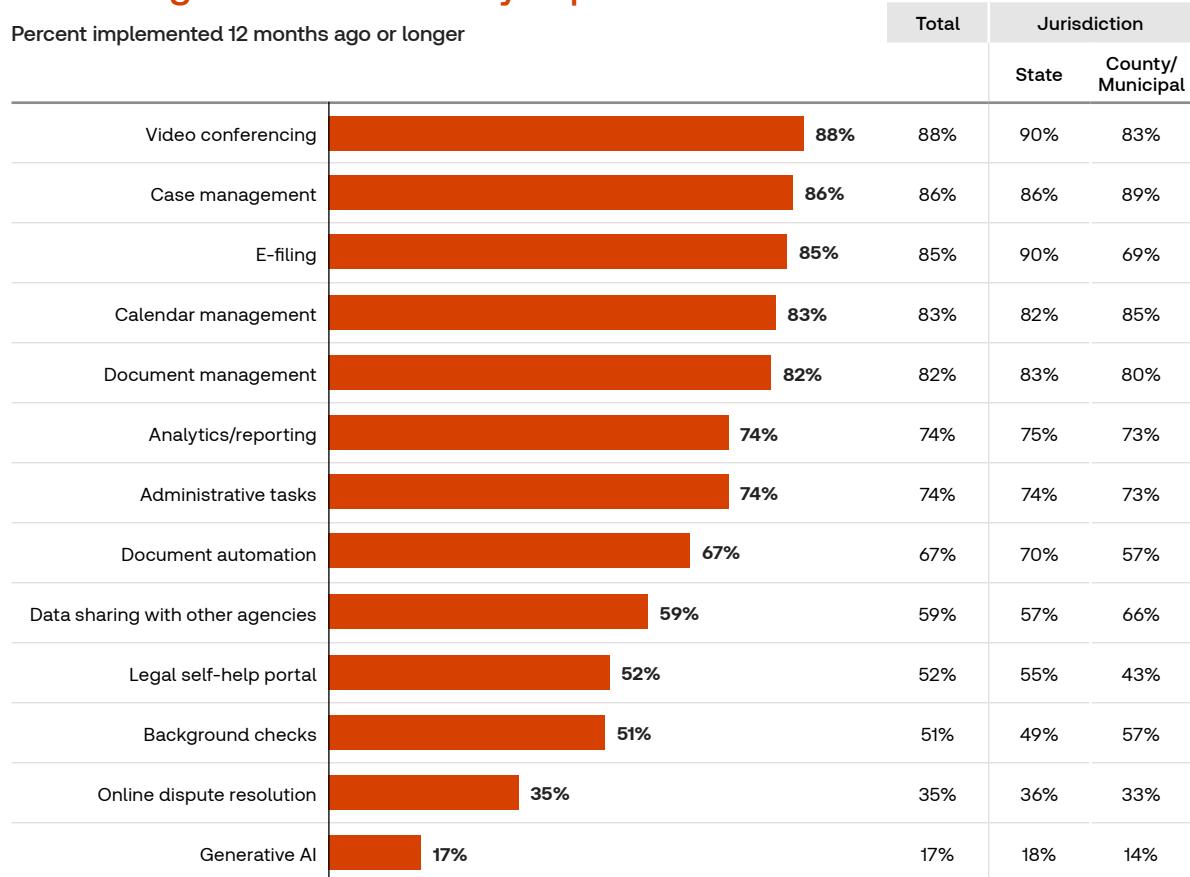
# Use of technology

Looking at the broader picture regarding use of technology, courts continue to make progress in many areas. However, it is an increasingly complex picture with a myriad of challenges and opportunities, particularly involving the growing use of AI, including GenAI.

Most courts have by now adopted a number of key technologies, including case management, e-filing, calendar and document management and more.

FIGURE 17:

## Technologies that are already implemented



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Perhaps because these technology tools are already in widespread use, many courts do not have extensive plans to implement additional new technologies in the next 12 months. Beyond GenAI, the most common technologies set to be adopted next are legal self-help portals, online dispute resolution and document automation.

FIGURE 18:

## Technologies implementations planned for next 12 months

Plan to implement in the next 12 months

		Total	Jurisdiction	
			State	County/ Municipal
Generative AI	17%	17%	17%	15%
Legal self-help portal	8%	8%	7%	10%
Online dispute resolution	8%	8%	7%	9%
Document automation	7%	7%	5%	15%
E-filing	6%	6%	3%	15%
Analytics/reporting	6%	6%	5%	9%
Data sharing with other agencies	5%	5%	4%	8%
Document management	4%	4%	4%	5%
Admin tasks	4%	4%	4%	4%
Case management	4%	4%	4%	3%
Background checks	3%	3%	3%	2%
Calendar management	3%	3%	3%	2%
Video conferencing	2%	2%	2%	2%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

One factor may be that respondents were split on the direction of budgets for the next year. Twenty-two percent say their budget for the next year increased, while 30% said budgets decreased, and 30% say budgets stayed the same.

FIGURE 19:

## IT/technology budgets for the next 12 months



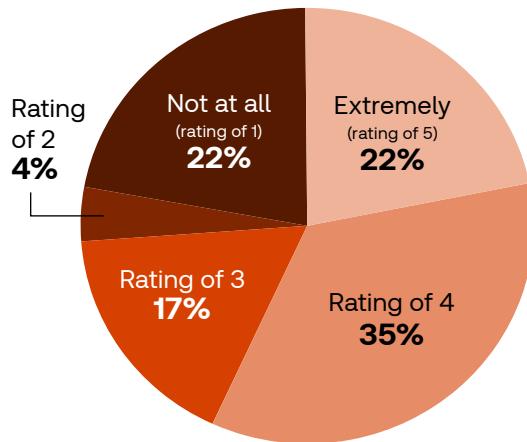
Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

The lack of urgency in implementing new technologies may enable courts to use limited budgets to address other IT needs.

One is cybersecurity. There is wide variation in confidence levels that court IT systems are up-to-date and fully secure against cybersecurity threats. While it is encouraging that 57% of respondents feel highly confident, an alarming 22% of respondents – nearly a quarter – say they are “not at all confident” in the security of their IT systems.

**FIGURE 20:**  
**Confidence in IT system security**

Confidence in system security



	Total	Jurisdiction	
	State	County/ Municipal	
Extremely	22%	25%	14%
Rating of 4	35%	38%	29%
Rating of 3	17%	6%	43%
Rating of 2	4%	6%	0%
Not at all	22%	25%	14%
Mean	3.3	3.3	3.3

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

## AI & GenAI adoption

AI is, without a doubt, dominating the discussion about technology across the entire legal system, including courts. The majority of respondents (55%) in this survey rated AI and GenAI as having a transformational or high impact on courts over the next five years. Only 9% believe it will have little or no impact during that time span.

However, currently, only 17% of respondents said their court was using GenAI. An additional 17% said their court was planning to adopt GenAI over the next year. This means that one year from now, barely a third of respondents' courts will be using GenAI.

This further suggests that the vast majority of courts may not have plans or strategies to evaluate or implement GenAI. Given the transformational impact of GenAI, we strongly advocate that courts develop plans for how they will deal with GenAI. In addition to its potential to significantly streamline many aspects of court operations and improve efficiency, it also impacts expectations of defendants, litigants, prosecution and counsel.

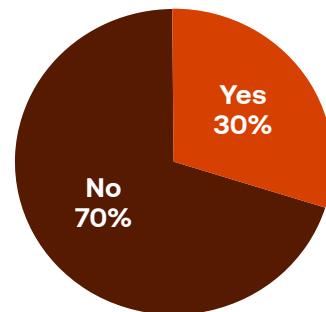
However, implementation of GenAI presents neither a clear nor easy path.

The vast majority of respondents (70%) said their courts are currently not allowing employees to use AI-based tools for court business. This is particularly the case in County/Municipal courts. Additionally, three-quarters of respondents said their court has not yet provided any AI training.

FIGURE 21:

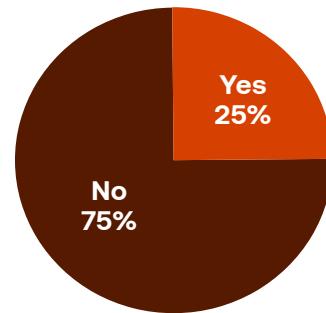
### Most courts are not allowing AI use for court business

Court allows AI?



	Total		Jurisdiction	
	Allows AI	Yes	State	
County/Municipal				
No	70%	30%	66%	83%
Yes	30%	34%	17%	

AI training provided?



	Total		Jurisdiction	
	AI training provided	Yes	State	
County/Municipal				
No	75%	25%	73%	81%
Yes	25%	27%	19%	

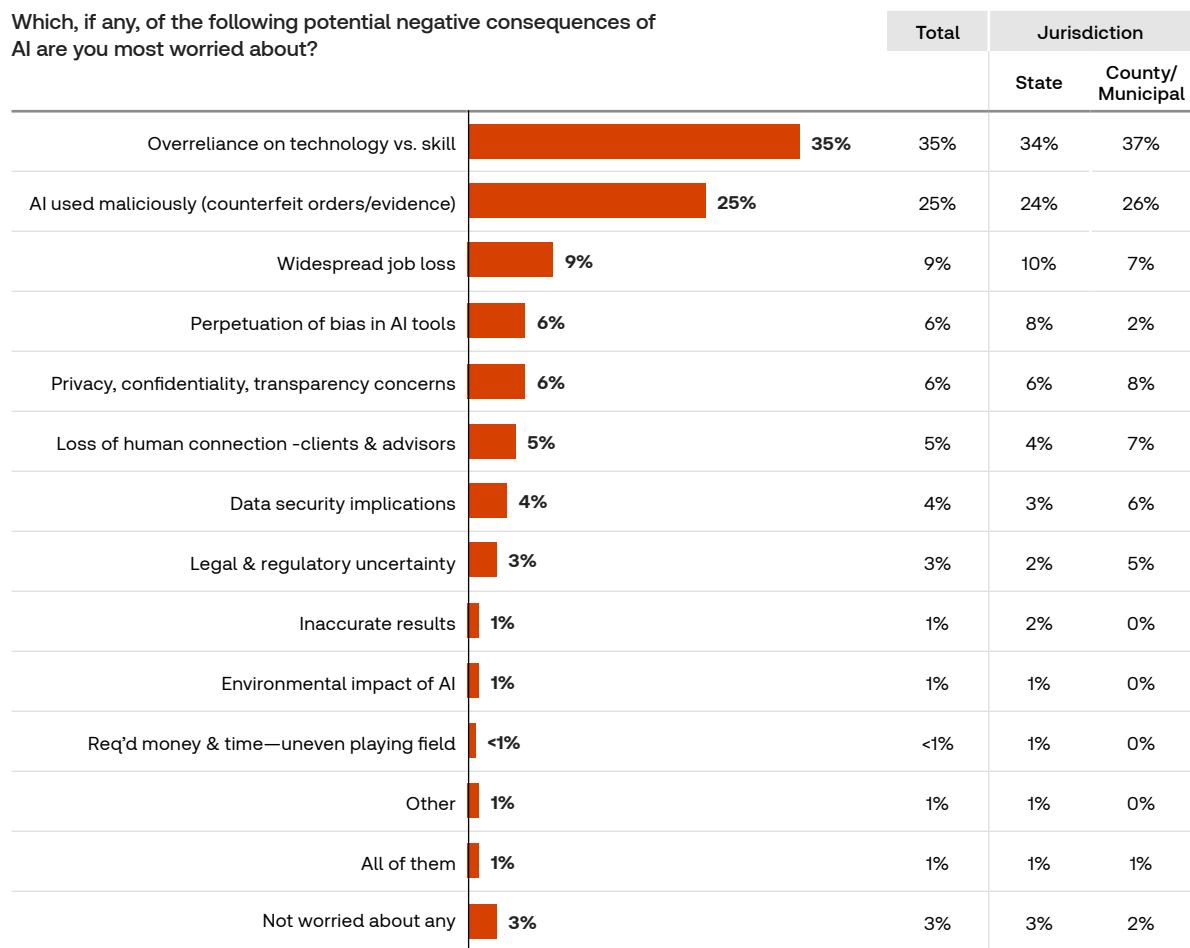
Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Respondents have several concerns about the use of AI. More than a third (35%) are worried that it will lead to an overreliance on technology rather than skill. A quarter have concerns about malicious use of AI, such as counterfeit orders and evidence. Only 9% are worried about widespread job loss resulting from AI. Other concerns including bias, privacy and data security.

FIGURE 22:

## Concerns about AI

Which, if any, of the following potential negative consequences of AI are you most worried about?



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

At the same time, respondents recognize the potential efficiency gains from AI. Respondents estimate, even with the often-low pace of AI adoption by their own court, that in the next year they will save an average of nearly three hours every week. And time savings will grow to nearly six hours each week within three years. Within five years, they expect to save 8.8 hours each week – more than a standard workday.

Interestingly, estimated time savings are much higher for County/Municipal court employees as compared with State court employees even though AI adoption –currently and projected for the next year – are roughly equal in both jurisdictions.

FIGURE 23:

## AI projected to save almost 9 hours per week per employee

Personal hours per week saved

Next year



3 years



5.8 HOURS

8 years



8.8 HOURS

	Total	Jurisdiction	
		State	County/ Municipal
This time next year	2.8	2.3	4.9
In 3 years	5.8	5.3	8.2
In 5 years	8.8	7.7	13.1

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

## The intersection of technology and generational workforce shifts

As mentioned earlier, generational shifts in the workforce and leadership are seen as among the top transformational or high-impact changes taking place in courts. This includes Baby Boomers and Gen Xers leaving the workforce, Gen Zers entering the workforce and Millennials moving into leadership positions.

This carries major implications for technology adoption, including GenAI. Because Gen Zers are digital natives — people who grew up after the birth of Internet — they are very comfortable using technology and may find it easier to manage automated workflows. In addition, they are likely to transition faster and require less training in transitioning from manual to automated workflows.

At the same time, they may be resistant to jobs and tasks that still rely heavily on manual tasks, such as entering and managing case information and other data. High levels of manual tasks could hinder talent recruitment and retention.

These factors provide additional reasons for courts to continue, if not accelerate, their adoption of technology.

At the same time, Millennials can also be considered digital natives. As they increasingly move into leadership positions, their understanding and comfort level with technology will likely be positive factors assisting courts in their adoption of technology.

## Looking ahead

Courts are facing an unprecedented convergence of major waves of change: the far-reaching impacts of both GenAI and generational shifts in workforce and leadership populations. And courts must deal with these changes while in the midst of continuing challenges with managing through staff shortages and case backlogs. It is essential that courts look beyond the challenges of managing day-to-day operations, and plan strategies for dealing with these sweeping changes. In a time of budget growth that is limited at best, resource allocation must be strategically balanced between current operations and investments in technology.

These transformational changes mean that within a few years, courts will likely look and operate much differently than they do today. If courts are not able to successfully deal with these changes, they could face increasing struggles with workloads, staffing, backlogs, and delays.

At the same time, the hope is that courts will emerge on the other side of these changes with more efficient, technology-driven court operations that will facilitate faster handling of cases and improved access to justice.

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**Looking at the broader picture regarding use of technology, courts continue to make progress in many areas.**

# Demographics

	Total	State	County/ municipal	Time in current position			Role		
				<5 years	5-10 years	10+ years	Judge/ law clerk	Court ops/ admin/ clerk	Other
Base	443	342	101	125	107	211	260	116	67
<b>Jurisdiction</b>									
State	77%	100%	0%	82%	77%	75%	87%	57%	75%
County	19%	0%	83%	18%	19%	20%	10%	35%	24%
Municipal	4%	0%	17%	1%	5%	5%	3%	8%	1%
<b># Judges</b>									
Mean	109.3	127.0	49.5	97.0	110.4	116.1	139.4	55.6	85.5
Median	17.0	30.0	8.0	15.0	13.0	22.0	22.5	12.5	22.0
<b>Job title/function</b>									
Judge or law clerk	59%	66%	34%	63%	59%	56%	100%	0%	0%
Court administrator	12%	9%	22%	10%	13%	13%	0%	47%	0%
Court clerk/clerk staff	10%	6%	24%	6%	8%	13%	0%	38%	0%
Court operations	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	5%	0%	16%	0%
Court security/ law enforcement	<1%	<1%	1%	0%	1%	<1%	0%	0%	3%
Another staff role	15%	15%	17%	18%	16%	13%	0%	0%	100%
<b>Length of service</b>									
Less than 1 year	3%	3%	3%	10%	0%	0%	2%	3%	6%
1 to less than 5 years	25%	27%	20%	90%	0%	0%	28%	17%	28%
5 to less than 10 years	24%	24%	25%	0%	100%	0%	24%	23%	25%
10 years or more	48%	46%	52%	0%	0%	100%	45%	57%	40%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

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