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Research Article

THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JUDICIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE UAE AND GCC COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Background: This article examines how the UAE's justice sector has adopted digital transformation to enhance, primarily, the efficiency and accessibility of its judicial system. While the United Arab Emirates has positioned itself as a regional leader in this area, it is drawing on international best practices. We have tried to investigate how the UAE's adoption of electronic justice experience aligns with global trends in judicial modernization. In this context, the judicial transformation serves not only as a governmental asset but also as a legal implication due to its process, data security, and procedural integrity. The purpose of the study is to discover the digital transformation of the UAE as a case study, comparing it with digital legal assets in the world and specifically the Gulf region. This analysis will provide the basis for discussions on technology-driven legal reform and offer guidance for policymakers to integrate technological innovation within the UAE's legal system in the digital era.



Methods: *This article uses qualitative, descriptive-analytical methods to examine the digital transformation of the justice system in the United Arab Emirates and its implications. This study primarily relies on the analysis of secondary sources, including official government publications, peer-reviewed legal scholarship, policy documents, and comparative legal data.*

Results and Conclusions: *The main findings demonstrate that the digitalization of the judicial system is progressing rapidly across the UAE, serving as a regional benchmark for GCC countries. However, due to the unique legal practices and jurisdictional nature in the Middle East, it hits a few benchmarks that differentiate it from the rest of the world. While the legal system in the country serves the united idea within the governmental structure, digitalization brings about its implications.*

The article's conclusions emphasize that successful judicial digital transformation in the United Arab Emirates is achievable through the active participation of the government and a united approach that aligns with the requirements of the local society. The author suggests that centralizing the human-empathetic and inclusive judicial system is necessary. Training among the judges, prosecutors, and judicial bodies is required for the country to align with a digital system that evolves ahead of people's understanding.

1 INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of judicial systems has been extensively studied in jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Singapore; however, the academic analysis of digitalization in justice in the GCC region and the UAE remains under-researched. Present studies mainly focus on either the development of digital government services or government initiatives, but they lack a comparative context of local and regional legal doctrines and engagement with legal doctrines, institutional implications, or comparative regional contexts.

Relevance of the topic. The global justice sector has undergone significant digital transformation over the past years, identifying the need to improve the legal systems. From online dispute resolution platforms to AI-assisted judicial analytics, digital justice has evolved into a cornerstone of modern legal governance.

Within this article, the author will examine the transformation of the UAE judicial system through digitalization, focusing on how the adoption of technology is shaping governance outcomes. The author discusses the key challenges, including the need to ensure data security, protect procedural rights, mitigate bias, and uphold legal certainty, within the context of an increasingly complex and rapidly changing digital landscape.

Research question. By examining the UAE's e-justice developments and aligning them against the best international practices, this article addresses the following key questions:

- How has the UAE's justice system implemented digital technologies at an institutional level?
- What are the legal and procedural implications of this transformation?
- To what extent does the UAE model reflect or diverge from global trends in judicial digitalization?

Through a combination of doctrinal legal analysis and comparative policy review, the article evaluates the effectiveness, limitations, and future directions of digital justice in the UAE context.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research follows the interdisciplinary approach that combines legal analysis, legal studies, and government publications. The analytical method is employed to examine the theoretical foundations of digitalization in the UAE's justice system, including scientific definitions, principles, and international standards that outline the role of digital transformation, transparency, and public dialogue in e-justice. Normative analysis was used to review legislative initiatives and government policies in the United Arab Emirates and global practices (such as the UAE's Digital Government Strategy 2025,¹ Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2031,² and the jurisdictions of the Dubai Courts, Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD), and the Federal Supreme Court).

A limitation of the methodology is the lack of quantitative social data on the direct impact of digitally initiated legal proceedings and digital justice initiatives, which raises ethical considerations, particularly regarding privacy and data protection. Such concerns restrict the scope of data collection and the types of analyses that can be performed. The available data can quickly become outdated, considering the rapid growth of digital initiatives. However, the use of cross-lingual sources and multidisciplinary analysis allowed this author to achieve a holistic understanding of the condition.

1 UAE Government, 'The UAE Digital Government Strategy 2025' (*UAE Government Portal*, 22 November 2023) <<https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/government-services-and-digital-transformation/uae-national-digital-government-strategy>> accessed 10 January 2025.

2 UAE Government, 'UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031' (*UAE Government Portal*, 7 November 2023) <<https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/government-services-and-digital-transformation/uae-strategy-for-artificial-intelligence>> accessed 10 January 2025.



3 IMPLEMENTATION OF E-JUSTICE IN THE UAE

Aiming to speed up litigation before courts, the Ministry of Justice had, as of May 2015, transformed 95 percent of its services into electronic services. Further, the Ministry of Justice launched the legislation ePortal (in Arabic and English), which contains all the general legal texts published in the Official Gazette since the establishment of the UAE in 1971.³

With the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the world had to rapidly adopt remote hearings, which later became a standard component of both civil and criminal proceedings.⁴ Since then, the UAE has emerged as a regional leader in judicial digitalization, demonstrating its commitment to modernizing court systems through advanced digital infrastructure. One of the most effective developments in this digital transformation is the implementation of paperless courtrooms, particularly within the Dubai Courts, which have organized a services laboratory to develop and improve the services provided to customers over two days as part of the first phase of implementing the ‘Services 360’ policy.⁵ These courtrooms have replaced traditional reliance on physical documentation with end-to-end digital filing systems. By 2022, more than 90 percent of court transactions in Dubai were conducted electronically, a change that has significantly reduced administrative delays and physical backlogs. Legal professionals can easily integrate e-filing platforms into their daily routine, allowing for the submission of pleadings and procedural motions entirely online.

According to the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) 2024 statement for H1, it handled 394,800 requests related to court matters, 49,821 for prosecutions, and 69,487 involving notary public and documentation services.⁶

As part of such transformation, the UAE has developed automated case management systems that enable courts to allocate cases, schedule hearings, and track case progress

3 ‘Smart Transformation of the Judicial System’ (UAE Government Portal, 18 July 2024) <<https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/the-federal-judiciary/smart-transformation-of-the-judicial-system>> accessed 10 January 2025; ‘AI Innovations in the Ministry of Justice’ (UAE Ministry of Justice, 2025) <<https://www.moj.gov.ae/ar/artificial-intelligence.aspx>> accessed 10 January 2025.

4 Rozha K Ahmed and others, ‘The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study’ in Savvas Papagiannidis and others (eds), *The Role of Digital Technologies in Shaping the Post-Pandemic World: I3E 2022* (Lecture Notes in Computer Science vol 13454, Springer 2022) 219. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-15342-6_17.

5 Government of Dubai and Dubai Courts, *Annual Report 2023: International Leadership, Innovative and Sustainable Judicial and Digital Solutions* (Dubai Courts 2024) 6 <https://www.dc.gov.ae/PublicServices/websitefiles/DC-Annual_Report-2023-En/Annual%20Report%202023%20Eng%20S.pdf> accessed 10 January 2025.

6 ‘ADJD Processes Over Half Million Electronic Requests in H1 2024’ (WAM Emirates News Agency, 5 August 2024) <<https://www.wam.ae/en/article/141vmgo-adjd-processes-over-half-million-electronic>> accessed 10 January 2025.

with minimal human intervention. These systems rely on workflow algorithms that prioritize urgent matters, enforce deadlines, and eliminate administrative errors. The introduction of self-service kiosks and mobile applications has further streamlined access to justice, allowing individuals to pay fines, access case documents, and request adjournments without visiting court premises.

The UAE adopts a unique, layered approach to digitalizing its judicial system, granting local courts, such as the Dubai Courts and the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD), the autonomy to shape and implement their reforms. At the same time, federal bodies provide overall direction and ensure consistency. This setup encourages innovation at the local level, allowing different emirates to test out new ideas and share what works. For example, Abu Dhabi has focused on using AI tools and making courts more accessible through bilingual interfaces. At the same time, Dubai has led the way in exploring blockchain technology and smart contracts. By striking a balance between local flexibility and national coordination, the UAE can advance judicial innovation in a manner that respects the unique legal traditions and capabilities of each region.

A particularly innovative reform has been the adoption of blockchain technology for judicial documentation. The Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) Courts have partnered with Smart Dubai to create the world's first Court of the Blockchain. Building on existing dispute resolution services, the alliance will initially explore how to aid verification of court judgments for cross-border enforcement.⁷ Under the Dubai Blockchain Strategy, the courts now utilize blockchain ledgers to record judgments, store contracts, and authenticate court orders. This approach guarantees the transparency of legal documents, enhancing their reliability and enforceability. Moreover, early-stage initiatives are exploring the application of smart contracts, which are self-executing legal agreements encoded on blockchain platforms for civil enforcement and debt recovery. While the blockchain technology remains in pilot phases, it raises crucial questions concerning legal accountability and operational oversight, which are highly unpredictable at this stage.

The Dubai Metaverse Strategy serves as a plan to establish Dubai as one of the top metaverse economic powers while making it a global hub for metaverse communities. Dubai's growing interest in enhancing its crypto law is part of its strategy to build a dynamic digital ecosystem.⁸ This transformative plan envisions welcoming over 1,000 companies

7 'DIFC Courts and Smart Dubai Launch Joint Taskforce for World's First Court of the Blockchain' (*Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) Courts*, 30 July 2018) <<https://www.difccourts.ae/media-centre/newsroom/difc-courts-and-smart-dubai-launch-joint-taskforce-worlds-first-court-blockchain>> accessed 10 January 2025.

8 Moatasem El-Gheriani and Adham Hashish, 'Harnessing the Crypto-Horse. Factors Affecting a Friendly Regulator of the Crypto-Industry: Dubai as a 'Test Case' (2025) 34(3) *Information & Communications Technology Law* 241. doi:10.1080/13600834.2025.2452718.



specializing in blockchain and metaverse technologies into Dubai's dynamic ecosystem.⁹ The strategy emphasizes platform safety through the development of global standards, creation of infrastructure, and regulatory development to enhance the speed of metaverse technology adoption. The approach focuses on four primary areas, which include extended reality and augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), mixed reality, and digital twins.

Artificial intelligence continues to expand its influence across the judicial systems of the UAE. The Ministry of Justice has developed predictive analytics tools that help judges make predictions about case outcomes by analysing precedent databases through legal heuristics for standard cases. The tool enables the judiciary to manage large numbers of cases, including traffic violations and minor contractual disputes, while preserving human judgment for complicated legal matters. Virtual legal assistants that operate under human supervision demonstrate the need for transparent algorithmic design and continuous judicial oversight in judicial workflows.

The UAE legal system implements digital tools through a comprehensive legal and strategic framework. The Federal Decree Law No. (38) of 2022 established legal recognition for electronic documents, digital signatures, and remote procedures, which receive the same status as traditional legal procedures.¹⁰ This move supports broader national initiatives, such as the UAE Digital Government Strategy 2025, which focuses on integrated services, cybersecurity, and secure data sharing between agencies. Additionally, it aligns with the UAE Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2031, which aims to make the country a global leader in AI-powered governance, including the application of legal technology. Together, these strategies create a flexible and collaborative policy environment that enables the judicial system to keep pace with technological advancements.

4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UAE AND GLOBAL PRACTICES

The digital transformation of judicial institutions in the United Arab Emirates requires evaluation against multiple global jurisdictions that have led judicial modernization through technological advancements. The UAE shares similarities with Estonia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom in its digital platform implementation and AI service deployment, yet maintains distinct legal frameworks, governance systems, and regional priorities. The analysis of UAE judicial digitalization through a comparative study reveals its distinctive features while demonstrating its applicability for GCC states.

9 Sindhu Kashyap, 'Dubai Forging its Way Ahead as a Metaverse Metropolis' *The Economic Times* (Delhi, 23 October 2023) <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uae/dubai-forging-its-way-ahead-as-a-metaverse-metropolis/articleshow/104651246.cms>> accessed 10 January 2025.

10 Federal Decree Law No (38) of 2022 'Promulgating the Criminal Procedures Law' [2022] UAE Official Gazette 737.

4.1. Systemic Digital Integration Model of Estonia

The digital governance framework of Estonia serves as the primary example of complete digital governance implementation. The X-Road platform¹¹ enables public institutions to exchange data seamlessly through its tight integration with the e-justice system within the broader e-government ecosystem.¹² The court systems of Estonia operate with complete digitalization of documents, require mandatory electronic filing, and conduct all civil case proceedings online.¹³ The Estonian court system enables users to access case materials, procedural timelines, and judgment databases through secure digital portals, which they can access autonomously.

The UAE legal infrastructure demonstrates technological advancement, yet its system operates as separate entities. The UAE's federal structure, with its decentralized nature, has resulted in varying levels of digital transformation among emirates, with Dubai and Abu Dhabi leading the way in digital advancement. The UAE faces ongoing challenges to achieve real-time data exchange between federal courts and emirate-level courts as part of its cross-jurisdictional digital integration process.

The civil law and digital transparency-based legal culture of Estonia enable the establishment of digital services without significant institutional resistance. The UAE's legal framework, which combines civil law with Islamic jurisprudence and local customary practices, demands specific contextual adjustments to achieve social norm compliance and legal legitimacy.

4.2. Judicial Innovation Within a common Singapore Legal Framework

The judiciary of Singapore maintains an active position regarding technological advancements. The Justice 3.0 reform agenda in Singapore has established paperless courts and virtual hearings, along with AI-based legal research tools¹⁴ and the Community Justice and Tribunals System (CJTS), which enables citizens to handle minor disputes independently through an online platform. The success of Singapore's model stems from its

11 *X-Road: The free and open-source data exchange solution* <<https://x-road.global/>> accessed 10 January 2025.

12 Karoline Paide and others, 'On the Systematic Exploitation of the Estonian Data Exchange Layer X-Road for Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships' (ICEGOV'18: Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance, Galway Ireland, 4-6 April 2018) 34. doi:10.1145/3209415.3209441.

13 European Commission, *eGovernment Benchmark 2024 Insight Report: Advancing Pillars in Digital Public Service Delivery* (Publications Office of the European Union 2024); Keith Binley, 'Analysing Estonia's Approach to Digitising Judicial Systems' (*Courts Data Solutions*, 23 March 2024) <<https://courtsdatasolutions.com/analysing-estonias-approach-to-digitising-judicial-systems/>> accessed 10 January 2025.

14 Carrie Menkel-Meadow, 'Mediation 3.0: Merging The Old and The New' [2018] *Asian Journal on Mediation* 1 <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3312971>> accessed 10 January 2025.



strategic combination of legal reform with public administration innovation, underpinned by a solid rule of law framework and digital service trust.

The UAE exhibits multiple organizational patterns that align with Singapore's model, notably through its centralized policymaking structure, a powerful executive branch, and a commitment to digital government strategy to advance public administration.¹⁵ Both nations have dedicated significant funds to public-private partnerships, which enabled them to develop secure judicial applications through collaboration with legal tech firms. The UAE legal system requires a different AI-supported legal analytics design because it is based on written codes and statutory interpretation, rather than Singapore's common law tradition, which supports precedent-based reasoning and detailed judgments.

The UAE needs to handle legal pluralism, judicial authority, and data sovereignty issues within its federal system, which spans different emirates with diverse cultural expectations. At the same time, Singapore implements its innovations through an open data framework that promotes citizen participation.

4.3. Judicial Innovation in the United Kingdom

The legal system of the United Kingdom operates at a high capacity, implementing digital justice tools while maintaining strict legal protection measures. The HMCTS Reform Program introduced online courts, video hearings, and AI-assisted triage systems to enhance access to justice, particularly for self-represented litigants. The United Kingdom's digital justice reform process demonstrates the importance of preserving judicial independence alongside data ethics and procedural fairness.

The UAE implements rapid state-led legal innovation through executive authority-guided legal progress. The fast deployment of digital justice systems through this method raises doubts about judicial autonomy, independent oversight, and system accessibility for all users. The UK primarily considers independent regulatory bodies and stakeholder consultations to evaluate the ethical implications of AI and automation, whereas the UAE continues to develop its corresponding frameworks.

The UK's digital inclusion strategies and legal aid commitments to vulnerable populations serve as essential guidance for the UAE, as its swift digital transformation risks leaving such groups behind, including foreign workers and those with limited digital skills.

15 Alaa Abouahmed, Ahmed Eldakak and Aliaa Zakaria, 'Using Electronic Auctions for Contracting in the UAE Federal Government Procurements' in Bahaaeddin AM Alareeni and Islam Elgedawy (eds), *Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Finance* (Studies in Systems, Decision and Control vol 488, Springer 2023) 884. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-39158-3_82.

5 REGIONAL COMPARISON: GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL STATES

Several GCC countries in the Gulf region have initiated digital transformation initiatives for their judicial systems. The Najiz platform service as a Saudi Arabian initiative that provides digital access to legal documents and court services. The Qatari government established e-litigation procedures for commercial disputes, and Bahrain implemented blockchain technology for notarial services. The UAE stands out as one of the most advanced nations because it excels in institutional maturity, scope of implementation, and alignment with national strategy.

The UAE achieved success by integrating its judicial reforms into a comprehensive digital government framework through official legal frameworks and strategic plans. The UAE has established international partnerships with global legal tech firms and multilateral organizations to achieve platform scalability and security.

The UAE model functions as both a domestic blueprint and a possible regional model for other countries. The Gulf states can learn from this experience about how to merge legal modernization with cultural values and federated governance structures.

5.1. Regional Implications and Policy Diffusion in the Gulf Context

The digital judicial transformation in the UAE has had a notable impact on the Gulf Cooperation Council through its national policy foundation. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) area exhibits three primary characteristics: a shared legal heritage, unification, social and political similarities, and effective governmental coordination among member states. The UAE's digital judicial transformation stands as a regional example of judicial modernization progress beyond its domestic significance. The UAE-led technological, legal, and administrative reforms are now spreading throughout neighboring states through three main channels: policy duplication, joint work, and performance assessment activities.

The GCC region implements e-justice reforms because member countries share common societal and structural needs. Public pressure has been increasing for transparent and efficient legal services that meet the diverse needs of expatriate communities, who require multilingual and accessible judicial systems. National economic transformation plans, such as Saudi Vision 2030 and Bahrain Economic Vision 2030, utilize legal modernization as a vital foundation to attract international investors.¹⁶ This could be of greater importance

16 Mohammad Rashed Albous, Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi and Melodena Stephens, 'AI Governance in the GCC States: A Comparative Analysis of National AI Strategies' (2025) 82 Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research 2389. doi:10.1613/jair.1.17619.



when it comes to investing in digital markets where sanctions play a role in regulating these markets, as is the case in the EU.¹⁷ GCC states have developed horizontal policy diffusion because they share common goals, which enables them to observe and modify each other's reforms. The UAE leads regional policymaking in digital justice through its combination of technological advancements and the implementation of systemic reforms.

The UAE achieves outstanding leadership in digital justice by implementing reforms that demonstrate both technological advancement and complete system alignment. The UAE Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2031 and the Digital Government Strategy 2025, along with Federal Decree-Law No. (10) of 2019,¹⁸ establish a unified national agenda that operates under a legal foundation. The UAE adopts a distinct approach to reform compared to other GCC states, which often employ disorganized or experimental methods. Saudi Arabia's Najiz platform¹⁹ represents a significant development in digital litigation; however, it faces institutional complexity due to the overlapping capacities of different judicial authorities. The virtual courtrooms and e-notarization services of Qatar present innovative solutions that focus on commercial and labor law fields. Kuwait faces additional barriers to development because of constitutional issues and administrative resistance to change.

The UAE's model (Table 1)²⁰ is thus distinctive in its multi-layered integration: central policymaking is harmonized with emirate-level implementation, regulatory reforms support the rollout of technology, and digital modernization aligns with broader national identity and global competitiveness goals. Additionally, the UAE actively disseminates its experiences through regional and international partnerships, including the GCC Judicial Cooperation Committee, the Arab League, and the World Bank.

17 Gehad Mohamed Abdelaziz and Adham Hashish, 'Using Sanctions in Enforcing Digital Markets Act in the EU' in Rim El Khoury and Nohade Nasrallah (eds), *Intelligent Systems, Business, and Innovation Research* (Studies in Systems, Decision and Control vol 489, Springer 2024) 775. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-36895-0_65.

18 Federal Law No (10) of 2019 'On Regulating Judicial Relations Among the Judicial, Federal and Local Authorities' [2019] UAE Official Gazette 669.

19 *Najiz Platform: The Unified Platform for Electronic Justice Services* <<https://najiz.sa/applications/landing>> accessed 10 January 2025.

20 Source: Fozan Fareed and others, *Digital Transformation in the Gulf Cooperation Council Economies* (Departmental Papers no 3, IMF 2025) doi:10.5089/9798400291449.087.

Table 1. Gulf Cooperation Council: Selected National Digitalization Targets

Country	Key Initiatives	Indicator	Baseline	Target
UAE	AI Strategy 2031, Decree-Law No. 10	Digitalization of government services	n/a	100% (2025)
Saudi Arabia	Najiz digital litigation platform	Ranking in the UN E-Government Development Index	31st (2022)	5th (2030)
Qatar	Virtual courts, e-notarization	Digitalization of government services	n/a (2022)	90% (2030)
Kuwait	Preliminary digital reforms	Digitalization of government services	n/a (2023)	90% (2027)
Bahrain	Judicial ICT upgrade under Vision 2030	Digitalization of government services	n/a (2022)	Increase by 200 services (2026)

5.2. Cross-Border Judicial Cooperation

Through its position as a leader in legal modernization in the Gulf region, the UAE faces growing complexity in international commerce and government relations, making it crucial to have a unified legal system for practical judicial cooperation.

Regional harmonization needs to focus on digital judgment recognition standards and service of process procedures between jurisdictions, as well as arbitration evidence exchange systems and standard responses to emerging issues such as cybercrime and data protection in the GCC and Arab countries. Key laws, such as competition law, also require attention to pave the way for greater judicial and economic cooperation.²¹ These domains require both consistent legal standards and technical systems that facilitate seamless judicial collaboration.

The GCC nations have begun developing a unified digital judicial framework, but its actual implementation remains in the future. The UAE presents an ideal opportunity to test interoperable legal technologies in the region because of its superior technological

21 Moatasem El-Gheriani and Adham Hashish, 'Egypt Amends its Competition Law to Establish a Pre-Merger Control System' (2023) 14(2) Journal of European Competition Law and Practice 106. doi:10.1093/jecp/lpad014.



infrastructure, regulatory clarity, and experience with legal system improvements. The dual structure of UAE governance, which combines federal and emirate-specific legal authority, facilitates the conduct of legal experiments and innovations more easily than the unified governance systems of other GCC states.

The UAE model stands as a leader among GCC jurisdictions, but it needs to be tailored to meet the specific needs of each country before implementation. The UAE federal constitutional system allows different emirates to enact laws under the umbrella of constitutional oversight. The institutional flexibility of this system allows it to support the implementation of legal technologies and procedures.

Qatar and Oman operate under centralized governance, which restricts their ability to conduct legal experiments or implement reforms at the regional level. The degree of judicial independence among GCC states affects both the development process and the enforcement of digital reforms.

The Gulf Cooperation Council member states face challenges in legal modernization due to cultural and religious factors that hinder technology integration. The assessment of emerging technologies, which include artificial intelligence, blockchain-based digital ledgers, and predictive analytics, goes beyond their technical efficiency and performance. The innovations need to be aligned with jurisprudential frameworks based on Islamic law (Sharia), as Sharia serves as the primary source of legal legitimacy and normative authority in most GCC jurisdictions. The doctrine of Sharia establishes fundamental principles of justice alongside procedural fairness and authorized legal methodologies. The use of technologies that perform automated decision-making, store permanent records, and predict legal results creates substantive issues about who is accountable, how transparent the processes should be, and whether judicial or quasi-judicial responsibilities can be transferred to non-human entities. The existing normative tensions between the acceptance of legal tech and local governance and design processes affect both societal adoption rates and the methods used to implement and regulate these tools within legal frameworks.

The implementation of uniformity faces significant challenges due to variations in digital infrastructure, as well as differences in legal technological literacy levels and human capital availability across the region. GCC member states exhibit varying degrees of success in implementing e-government platforms, judicial automation, and digital courtrooms, as some nations continue to struggle with outdated systems, inadequate broadband connectivity, and insufficient legal training for professionals. The technological disparities between member states become more complex due to differences in institutional capabilities and administrative skills, which impact the expansion and connectivity potential of digital justice programs. The development of regional harmonization initiatives needs to consider the distinct institutional characteristics, cultural norms, and technological capacities of each member state. A successful approach to uniformity requires detailed knowledge of regional limitations and

national priorities. Sustainable and legitimate outcomes will result from an approach that considers regional integration alongside national sovereignty and cultural particularism.

5.3. Future Directions for Regional Collaboration

The UAE is well-positioned to initiate regional judicial cooperation through the GCC Digital Justice Compact. The compact would establish an official framework for governments to collaborate on developing standardized digital legal frameworks and operational procedures. The compact should establish common technical standards and enable connected digital case management systems and establish unified training initiatives for judicial staff and legal technology specialists.

The UAE should take the initiative to establish institutionalized regional legal research collaborations that focus on Islamic jurisprudence, in conjunction with civil law traditions and digital innovation. Academic and policy-oriented cooperation between entities would create mutual understanding, doctrinal convergence, and practical alignment.

The UAE can establish itself as a regional hub for legal innovation through these initiatives while developing a unified judicial system that is technologically advanced and resilient across the Gulf region. This approach would strengthen the rule of law throughout the region while improving legal predictability and access to justice in an increasingly digital transnational context and emerging fields of law, such as climate law.²² The UAE has advanced judicial modernization and commercial legal reform. Its courts seek to advance their capabilities to meet the challenges using the ordinary court system rather than having specialized courts, as is the case with economic courts in Egypt.²³

6 RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF JUDICIAL DIGITALIZATION IN THE UAE

6.1. Risk of Digital Exclusion

The implementation of judicial digitalization creates a significant obstacle because it risks excluding vulnerable and marginalized groups. These include low-income individuals, non-native Arabic speakers, migrant workers, and persons with disabilities. The digital justice platforms operate under the assumption that users possess fundamental digital

22 Abouelwafa Ibrahim, 'Climate Change and Legal Responsibility for Greenwashing' in Enas Mohammed Alqodsi and Asma Khaleel Abdallah (eds), *Legal Frameworks and Educational Strategies for Sustainable Development* (IGI Global 2025) 67. doi:10.4018/979-8-3693-2987-0.ch005.

23 Moatasem El-Gheriani and Mohamed Salem Abou El Farag, 'The Rise and Fall of Egypt's Code de Commerce: A Critical Examination of the Purpose and Content of Egypt's Commercial Code after the Establishment of the Economic Courts' (2014) 7(2) *International Journal of Private Law* 137. doi:10.1504/IJPL.2014.060087.



competencies, stable internet access, and understand how to operate digital devices and complete legal procedures independently. The requirements for digital justice participation exist at levels that not all members of UAE society can achieve.

This issue is especially acute in the UAE, where expatriates constitute more than 85% of the total population. Many of these individuals interact with the legal system primarily through labor disputes, residency issues, or civil claims. These individuals encounter justice system barriers because there are insufficient support systems, which should include multilingual interfaces, accessible digital portals, legal aid services, and simplified procedural guides. When courts fail to provide inclusive access, it violates the constitutional guarantee of procedural fairness, which Article 14 of the UAE Constitution protects through its principles of legal equality and equal access to justice.

The digital divide between individuals affects their legal participation because they possess varying levels of digital literacy and access to technological resources. Remote hearings and self-service legal tools result in adverse effects on legal outcomes for marginalized groups because of this situation. Limited digital literacy erodes procedural justice by making it difficult for people to exercise their legal rights effectively. This can be illustrated by the weak protection of fundamental rights, such as the right to health, when the court system fails to rely on legal tech in litigation.²⁴

6.2. Data Security and Privacy Concerns

The transition of judicial systems to digital platforms necessitates the handling and storage of extensive amounts of sensitive legal information, as well as personal data. The UAE has developed a data protection framework primarily through Federal Decree-Law No. 45 of 2021, which governs the protection of personal data. Still, the practical application of this framework in judicial settings remains a developing issue.

Unauthorized access to confidential case files represents a significant risk alongside the potential for unintentional data leaks during remote proceedings and cyberattacks on judicial infrastructure. The increasing adoption of cloud-based services managed by international technology providers amplifies these risks due to their cross-border nature. Data sovereignty and jurisdictional accountability issues, along with cross-border data governance problems, emerge as crucial questions.

The lack of judicial-specific data classification and retention policy creates legal uncertainty about digital records. The e-justice system requires robust cybersecurity measures, including encryption and multi-factor authentication protocols, as well as

24 Ayman Mohamed Afify and others, 'Unveiling the Right to Health in Egypt: Exploring the Transformations and Challenges in Egyptian Constitutional Law and Policy' (2023) 12(6) *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 95. doi:10.36941/ajis-2023-0156.

regular audits of digital court platforms, to safeguard public trust.²⁵ Judicial-specific data governance guidelines should be incorporated into legal reforms to ensure alignment between privacy protections and technological advancements, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of these reforms.²⁶

6.3. Legal and Ethical Challenges of AI in Judicial Functions

The UAE judicial system faces significant challenges due to its reliance on artificial intelligence for predictive analytics, legal research, and automated case triage. The implementation of AI systems in legal adjudication poses challenges to the basic principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness in the legal system.²⁷ For example, developing such systems must consider the key pillars of the nation's criminal justice system.²⁸

The lack of transparency in AI decision-making processes stands as a significant problem. AI systems function as "black boxes" because they generate recommendations through methods that are not easily understood. The lack of transparency in automated outcomes renders it impossible for both litigants and judges to review or dispute these results, thereby violating due process principles. The use of historical data sets for AI tool training can lead to algorithmic bias, resulting in unfair treatment of disadvantaged groups.²⁹

The problem of accountability persists without a solution. The lack of clear legal attribution makes it impossible to determine which entity bears responsibility for incorrect legal outputs produced by AI systems. The UAE needs comprehensive legal guidelines to regulate the use of AI systems in judicial and advisory capacities. This would necessitate a thorough parliamentary discussion to establish the framework for such regulation.³⁰ The current judicial system lacks both formal procedures to challenge automated decisions and standards for auditing AI algorithms used in judicial processes.

25 Nataliia Varenia and others, 'Enhancing the Handling of Digital Evidence in Ukraine's Criminal Justice System' (2024) 5(2) Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review e03390. doi:10.47172/2965-730X.SDGsReview.v5.n02.pe03390.

26 Noura H Al-Mutairi, 'The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age as Expressed in a Muslim Country: A Case Study of Kuwait' (2022) 38(1-2) Arab Law Quarterly 110. doi:10.1163/15730255-bja10108.

27 Ihor Zhukevych and others, 'Analysis of the Issues Related to the Legalization of Artificial Intelligence, Its Use in Legal Proceedings, Legal Consultation and Law Enforcement System' (2024) 27 Journal of Law and Social Deviance 1 <<http://www.lsd-journal.net/archives/Volume27/AI.pdf>> accessed 10 January 2025.

28 Adham Hashish, 'Some Observations on the 2021 New Penal Code of the United Arab Emirates' (2024) 10(2) International Journal of Public Law and Policy 145. doi:10.1504/IJPLAP.2024.137774.

29 Enas Mohammed Alqodsi and Dmitry Gura, 'High Tech and Legal Challenges: Artificial Intelligence-Caused Damage Regulation' (2023) 9(2) Cogent Social Sciences 2270751. doi:10.1080/23311886.2023.2270751.

30 Tarek Abo El-Wafa, Ahmed Khalila and Adham Hashish, 'Parliamentary Question: Insights from the Federal National Council in the UAE' (2024) 10(6) Heliyon e27671. doi:10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e27671.



The current situation necessitates the development of regulatory and normative frameworks that ensure transparency, human oversight, and auditability for AI-assisted judicial operations. The deployment of AI systems must adhere to the rule of law through the establishment of legal principles that include algorithmic explainability and fairness by design.³¹

6.4. Institutional Legitimacy and the Human Dimension of Justice

The implementation of judicial digitalization improves administrative efficiency, yet it poses risks to the symbolic and institutional legitimacy of the judiciary. The traditional courtroom environment maintains essential functions that strengthen the authority of the legal system while building public trust through its combination of ritual elements, formal procedures, and personal interactions, including oral argument and deliberation.

The heavy reliance on automated processes in digital courtrooms threatens to eliminate essential human elements, including empathy, discretion, and contextual reasoning, which form the basis of fair adjudication. The issue becomes most critical when legal cases require moral judgment or socio-legal understanding because procedural automation lacks the ability to replace human judgment. The process of developing digital judicial tools between executive entities and private vendors creates a situation where technological support transitions into potential undue influence. Digital systems could lead to judicial outcome manipulation and restricted judicial freedom when institutional safeguards fail to protect them. Such a situation would directly endanger the independence of the judiciary, which serves as the fundamental basis of constitutional governance.

Achieving a balance between innovation and tradition requires careful attention. The implementation of judicial digitalization must follow a specific normative framework that prioritizes human-centered design alongside institutional autonomy and legal integrity at its core. Justice delivery methods that focus on people will maintain public trust in the legal system because they operate transparently and fairly during digital transformation.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The judicial system of the United Arab Emirates continues to undergo digital transformation due to visionary governance and technological advancements in the legal domain. The UAE stands out as a leading regional authority in digital justice transformation, thanks to its implementation of blockchain-based documentation systems and artificial intelligence-driven legal services. The country's forward-thinking approach to innovation

31 Valentina Petrovich and others, 'Regulatory Framework for e-Documentation and cyber Protection Amidst Society's Digital Shift' (2025) 4 Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología: Serie de Conferencias 1336. doi:10.56294/sctconf20251336.

showcases its economic strategy for a knowledge-based economy and transforms the way the judiciary delivers accessible, efficient, and transparent justice.

The reform process demonstrates strong technological foundations and strategic direction, yet it faces ongoing obstacles to achieving equal access, maintaining legal certainty, and sustaining public trust in digital judicial operations. Legal institutions must implement new technologies in conjunction with protective measures that uphold fundamental principles of justice, including procedural fairness, human dignity, and impartiality.

The analysis of global examples reveals many similarities with advanced digital justice systems because of their similar infrastructure readiness and governmental commitment. The UAE requires specific adaptations due to its distinctive legal framework, cultural background, and institutional characteristics. The UAE's complex constitutional framework, along with its civil and Sharia-based legal systems and a significant expatriate population, necessitates a customized approach to legal digitalization.

The following policy recommendations aim to achieve sustainable digital justice through risk mitigation and progress consolidation:

- Universal access to digital justice services requires an inclusive access strategy that includes multiple layers of protection for vulnerable populations. The development of multilingual digital platforms and state-sponsored legal aid for digital literacy training and user support helplines should be established to prevent the marginalization of vulnerable populations. Judicial portals need to be optimized for mobile devices and adjusted to serve non-citizen residents and low-income users, thereby minimizing socio-digital divides.
- The UAE has achieved substantial progress in creating data protection frameworks. Yet, it needs to enhance its judicial data classification system and regulate international data movements during transnational dispute resolution and AI algorithm data management. The implementation of cybersecurity needs to become a fundamental design element of judicial IT architecture, rather than remaining an afterthought or supplementary measure. System resilience, data breach notification, and incident response protocols need to be established with clear enforcement mechanisms.
- The implementation of AI in judicial processes creates three significant risks, which include biased algorithms, unclear decision-making processes, and unaccountable system operations. The legal and regulatory frameworks need to establish specific requirements that enforce rigorous testing and validation, as well as continuous monitoring of AI-assisted decision-making tools. The creation of independent digital ethics committees or oversight bodies for auditing AI applications in the judiciary serves as an essential mechanism to protect fundamental rights while maintaining judicial integrity.



The UAE leads the region in technology and holds a strong position to initiate Gulf Cooperation Council-wide standardization of judicial digitalization practices through the collaborative development of interoperable dispute resolution platforms and regional guidelines for the adoption of legal technology, as well as shared knowledge networks. The GCC Secretariat, as a regional institution, would serve as a foundation for developing digital legal convergence and judicial cooperation through institutional partnerships.

The humanistic elements of justice, including empathy, ethical deliberation, and contextual judgment, should remain central despite the benefits of digital transformation that enhance operational efficiency and administrative precision. Judges and legal professionals, along with prosecutors, require both technical training in digital tools and ethical training to navigate the moral challenges associated with technology use. The human element in adjudication processes maintains both accessibility and efficiency of justice while preserving compassion and principled decision-making.

The UAE digital justice strategy serves as an attractive example of technological legal transformation for worldwide implementation. The long-term success of this strategy depends on integrating human rights principles, social legal inclusion, and institutional accountability throughout its digital transformation plan. Through its focus on essential dimensions, the UAE will establish itself as a global leader in justice innovation while preserving the fundamental principles that underpin its legal system.

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Keywords: *digital justice; UAE judiciary; judicial reform; comparative legal analysis; public service digital transformation.*

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АНОТАЦІЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ

Дослідницька стаття

ЦИФРОВА ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ПРАВОВОЇ СИСТЕМИ В ОБ'ЄДНАНИХ АРАБСЬКИХ ЕМІРАТАХ: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ СУДОВОЇ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ ОАЕ ТА КРАЇН БЛИЗЬКОГО СХОДУ

Римма Топчий*, Абуельвафа Ібрагім та Адхам Хашіш

АНОТАЦІЯ

Вступ. У цій статті розглядається сектор юстиції ОАЕ, який запровадив цифрову трансформацію з метою підвищення, насамперед, ефективності та доступності своєї судової системи. Об'єднані Арабські Емірати позиціонують себе як регіонального лідера у цій сфері, спираючись при цьому на міжнародні найкращі практики. Ми намагалися дослідити, наскільки впровадження електронного правосуддя в ОАЕ відповідає глобальним тенденціям модернізації судової системи. У цьому контексті судова трансформація виступає не лише як урядовий інструмент, а й як юридичне явище, що вимагає дотримання процедур, захисту даних та процесуальної доброчесності.

Методи. Вивчити цифрову трансформацію ОАЕ як приклад, порівнюючи її з цифровими правовими ініціативами у світі, зокрема в регіоні Перської затоки. Такий аналіз стане основою для обговорень щодо технологічно зумовленої правової реформи та надасть рекомендацій для розробників політики щодо інтеграції інноваційних технологій у правову систему ОАЕ в цифрову епоху. У статті застосовано якісні, описово-аналітичні методи для вивчення цифрової трансформації системи правосуддя в Об'єднаних Арабських Еміратах та її наслідків. Дослідження переважно ґрунтується на аналізі вторинних джерел, зокрема офіційних урядових публікацій, рецензованих юридичних наукових праць, політичних документів і порівняльних правових даних.

Результати та висновки. Цифровізація судової системи в ОАЕ стрімко прогресує, слугуючи регіональним орієнтиром для країн Близького Сходу. Однак через унікальні юридичні практики та юрисдикційні особливості Близького Сходу вона має окремі риси, що вирізняють її серед світових аналогів. Незважаючи на уніфікованість державної структури, цифровізація тягне за собою низку юридичних наслідків.

Стаття підкреслює, що успішна цифрова трансформація судової системи в ОАЕ можлива за умови активної участі держави та уніфікованого підходу, який відповідає потребам місцевого суспільства. Автор вважає, що необхідно зосередити увагу на гуманному та інклюзивному правосудді. Для того, щоб країна відповідала цифровій системі, що випереджає рівень розуміння населення, потрібно проводити навчання серед суддів, прокурорів та судових органів.

Ключові слова. цифрове правосуддя; судова система ОАЕ; судова реформа; порівняльно-правовий аналіз; цифрова трансформація державної служби.