

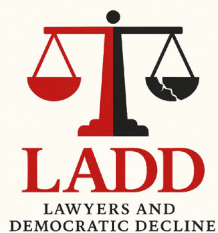


2026 WISCONSIN INTERNATIONAL LAW
JOURNAL SYMPOSIUM
FEB. 12-13 | MADISON, WI



**CHALLENGES POSED TO JUDGES AND LAWYERS
BY CREEPING AUTHORITARIANISM**

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SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW

The erosion of the underpinnings of democratic institutions and ideals is an inescapable worldwide trend. The front pages of U.S. newspapers and law-related websites have been inundated with stories about how lawyers and law firms are coping with efforts by the new administration to bring the legal profession to heel. Sadly, the U.S. has joined a host of other countries where lawyers have long been subject to prosecution and persecution by governmental leaders. Some of these countries are full-fledged authoritarian systems, such as Russia, China, and Iran. Other countries are arguably moving away from democracy toward authoritarianism. These are often referred to as backsliding democracies. Within this category would be the U.S., Brazil, Israel, and others. Yet other countries, such as Poland, are moving away from authoritarianism toward democracy.

The symposium, which is cosponsored by the project on Lawyers and Democratic Decline, brings together leading scholars who are studying this critical question of the roles being played by lawyers and judges in the U.S. and other countries that have struggled with preserving democracy. The goal is to map experiences and unpack the reasons behind lawyers' behavior and attitudes.

SCHEDULE

Thursday, FEB. 12, 2026

Location: UW Law School, Room 2260



TIME	SESSION	ROOM
3:15–3:30 P.M.	Welcome Dan Tokaji , Fred W. & Vi Miller Dean and Professor of Law, University of Wisconsin Law School David Trubek , Co-Founder of Lawyers and Democratic Decline (LADD), University of Wisconsin Law School	
3:30–4:40 P.M.	Opening Plenary Panel Discussion Panel 1: Judges Under Stress (Part 1) <i>(approved for 1.5 LAU credit by the Wisconsin BBE)</i> CHAIR: Kathryn Hendley , Law School & Political Science Department, University of Wisconsin / Director, LADD PARTICIPANTS: Richard Abel , UCLA School of Law "Will Federal Courts Save American Democracy?" Heba Khalil , Nebraska Wesleyan University, Department of Sociology and Criminology "Unconstitutional Reforms: Legal Professionals and Democratic Decline in Egypt" DISCUSSANT: Heinz Klug , University of Wisconsin Law School	
4:45–5:50 P.M.	Reception	Atrium
6–8 P.M.	Dinner for Participants KEYNOTE: Galina Arapova , NGO Mass Media Defence Centre	Fluno Center, Skyview Room

SCHEDULE (continued)

Friday, FEB. 13, 2026

All sessions will be held at University of Wisconsin Law School.

TIME	SESSION	ROOM
8:30-9:15 A.M.	Breakfast	Atrium
9:15-10:30 A.M.	Panel 2: Judges Under Stress (Part 2) <i>(approved for 1.5 LAU credit by the Wisconsin BBE)</i> CHAIR: Kathryn Hendley , University of Wisconsin PARTICIPANTS: Agnieszka Kubal , University of Oxford Faculty of Law <i>"Inter Arma, Judicialis: Legal Bricolage and the Agency of Ukrainian Judiciary in Wartime"</i> Qin Ma , Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law (MPI-CSL) <i>"Judges within Governance: Compliance, Evasion, and Constraint in China's Court System"</i> DISCUSSANT: John Ohnesorge , University of Wisconsin Law School	2260
10:30-10:45 A.M.	Break <i>(Light snacks and coffee will be available.)</i>	Atrium
10:45 A.M.-12 P.M.	Panel 3: Activist Lawyers (Part 1) <i>(approved for 1.5 CLE credit by the Wisconsin BBE)</i> CHAIR: Sumudu Atapattu , University of Wisconsin Law School PARTICIPANTS: Oscar Vilhena Vieira , FGV São Paulo Law School <i>"Political Litigation To Contain Autocratization in Brazil"</i> Vitor Dias , Butler University, Department of Sociology and Criminology <i>"Legal Storms in the Shadow of Autocracy: Climate Lawyering in Brazil and the U.S."</i> DISCUSSANT: Alexandra Huneus , University of Wisconsin Law School	2260
12-1 P.M.	Lunch <i>(Vegetarian and gluten-free meal options are available and will be clearly labeled for your convenience.)</i>	Atrium

SCHEDULE (continued)

TIME	SESSION	ROOM
1-2:30 P.M.	<p>Panel 4: Criminal Justice System <i>(approved for 1.5 CLE credit by the Wisconsin BBE)</i></p> <p>CHAIR: Tatiana Cruz, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Department of Political Science</p> <p>PARTICIPANTS: Maria Fatima Santos, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Department of Sociology “Legal Aid in Virtual Space: The Transformation of Public Defender Work in São Paulo”</p> <p>Renata Mustafina, Columbia University, Harriman Institute “A Measure of Justice: Citizen Legal Advocates, Law Lawyering, and Access to Justice in Russia”</p> <p>Whitney Taylor, San Francisco State University, Department of Political Science “Local Prosecutors Amidst Democratic Decline”</p> <p>DISCUSSANT: Cecelia Klingele, University of Wisconsin Law School / Director, Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy (CSLD)</p>	2260
2:30-2:45 P.M.	Break <i>(Light snacks and coffee will be available.)</i>	Atrium
2:45-4:15 P.M.	<p>Activist Lawyers (Part 2) <i>(approved for 1.5 CLE credit by the Wisconsin BBE)</i></p> <p>CHAIR: Laura Beth Nielsen, Northwestern University, Department of Sociology / American Bar Foundation</p> <p>PARTICIPANTS: Kathryn Hendley, University of Wisconsin “Rethinking the Usefulness of the Legal Complex When Studying Lawyers in Authoritarian Settings: The Russian Case”</p> <p>Ann Southworth, UC Irvine School of Law “Can Lawyers Bridge Divides to Protect the Rule of Law?”</p> <p>Eszter Kirs, Corvinus University of Budapest, Department of International Relations “Movement Lawyers in the Electoral Autocracy of Hungary Related to Pro-Pride Protests in 2025”</p> <p>DISCUSSANT: Jay Krishnan, Indiana University Maurer School of Law</p>	2260
4:15-5 P.M.	<p>Summing Up</p> <p>Robert Nelson, Northwestern University, Department of Sociology / American Bar Foundation</p>	2260

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

Richard Abel – UCLA School of Law

Richard Abel is an internationally recognized scholar focusing on law from a social scientific perspective, with extensive work on legal professions and institutions in the U.S., England, South Africa, and Kenya. His current research examines how autocrats seek, abuse, and are held accountable for power, with particular focus on resistance to democratic decline. He holds a Ph.D. and J.D. and is Michael J. Connell Distinguished Professor of Law Emeritus and Distinguished Research Professor at UCLA. He has received honors from universities worldwide and major academic associations. He taught at UCLA for 35 years and has served as president of the Law and Society Association and editor of *Law & Society Review*.

Galina Arapova – NGO Mass Media Defence Centre

Galina Arapova is director and senior media lawyer of the NGO Mass Media Defence Centre, working on media rights protection and freedom of expression in Russia. Her practice focuses on freedom of expression, defamation, privacy, and media law. She holds a law degree with post-graduate studies from the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations and is a graduate of the European Law Institute in human rights law. She is a trustee of ARTICLE 19 and member of the International Media Lawyers Association. She has brought numerous cases to the European Court of Human Rights and provides extensive training on defamation, freedom of expression, and Article 10 case law to journalists, lawyers, and judges internationally.

Sumudu Atapattu – University of Wisconsin Law School

Sumudu Atapattu is teaching professor and director of the Global Legal Studies Center at University of Wisconsin Law School. She is also the executive director of the Human Rights Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research examines the link between human rights and the environment, especially climate change, climate migration, and small island states. She holds an LL.M. and Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and is an attorney-at-law in Sri Lanka. She has received numerous awards including a senior Fulbright scholarship and has served as visiting professor at universities in Japan, Germany, Spain, and Chile. She serves as affiliated faculty at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute and Lead Counsel for Human Rights at the Center for International Sustainable Development Law.

Tatiana Cruz – University of Wisconsin–Madison, Department of Political Science

Tatiana Cruz is the project assistant for Lawyers and Democratic Decline (LADD) and a Ph.D. student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, specializing in comparative politics. Her research focuses on citizen's trust in political institutions under authoritarian populist leadership, comparative political institutions, judicial politics, and democratic erosion, with a regional emphasis on Latin America. She holds a J.D. from the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, a Master in Laws from the State University of Rio de Janeiro, and a Ph.D. in Law from the University of Brasília. She previously served as legal advisor to the Brazilian Air Force Chief Commander and taught criminal procedure.

Vitor Martins Dias – Butler University, Department of Sociology and Criminology

Vitor Martins Dias is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology at Butler University. His research focuses on how legal, political, and social actors influence global and local institutions, producing social change and reproducing structural inequalities, with emphasis on climate change governance, legal mobilization, and inequality in the legal profession. He holds law degrees from Brazil and earned his LL.M. and Ph.D. from Indiana University–Bloomington. He was a visiting postdoctoral fellow at Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute and has affiliations with Harvard Law School's Center on the Legal Profession. He is co-editing a special issue of *Law & Society Review* on "Law in a Changing Climate."

Kathryn Hendley – University of Wisconsin–Madison

Kathryn Hendley is co-founder and director of Lawyers and Democratic Decline (LADD) as well as Roman Z. Livshits & Theodore W. Brazeau Professor of Law and Political Science at University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research focuses on legal reform in the former Soviet Union and how ordinary Russians experience law. Her current work examines the Russian legal profession through a 2016 National Science Foundation-funded survey of over 2,000 law students, resulting in more than 10 publications. She holds degrees from University of California, Berkeley (Ph.D.), UCLA School of Law (J.D.), and Georgetown University (M.A.). At the University of Wisconsin, she teaches contracts, comparative

law, and Russian law, holds a joint appointment in Political Science, and has consulted for USAID and the World Bank.

Alex Huneeus – University of Wisconsin Law School

Alexandra Huneeus' scholarship focuses on international law and human rights, with emphasis on Latin America. Her work has appeared in the *American Journal of International Law*, *Harvard International Law Journal*, *Law and Social Inquiry*, *Yale Journal of International Law*, *Leiden International Law Journal*, and by Cambridge University Press. She is Evjue Bascom Professor of Law and Director of the Center for Law, Society and Justice at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She received her PhD, JD and BA from University of California, Berkeley, and was a post-doc at Stanford University's Center on Development, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

Heba Khalil – Nebraska Wesleyan University, Department of Sociology and Criminology

Heba Khalil is assistant professor of Sociology/Criminology and chair of the Sociology and Criminology Department at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Her research focuses on law and society, social inequality, race relations, women and crime, and the criminal justice system. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in sociology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, an LL.M. in international human rights law from the University of York, UK, and a B.A. in political science from the American University in Cairo, Egypt. At Nebraska Wesleyan University, she teaches courses including race relations, women and crime, social inequality, law and society, criminology, and prison outreach.

Eszter Kirs – Corvinus University of Budapest

Eszter Kirs is an associate professor of International Relations at Corvinus University of Budapest whose research focuses on protest movements and human rights under illiberal political systems. She has taught international law and human rights at several institutions and has extensive practitioner experience, including serving as a legal officer at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (2013–2021) and working with a defense team at the ICTY (2010–15). Kirs has held visiting positions at Columbia Law School and the University of Minnesota Law School. She has authored two monographs and numerous academic articles on transitional justice, international criminal law, and civil society resistance in Hungary's illiberal context.

Cecelia Klingele – University of Wisconsin–Madison

Cecelia Klingele is professor of law at the University of Wisconsin Law School and director of the Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy (CSLD). Her research focuses on structuring and managing human behavior within the criminal legal system, examining community corrections, correctional programming, and the treatment of violence. She holds a J.D. from UW Law School and is a faculty associate of the La Follette School of Public Affairs. She served as associate reporter for the American Law Institute's Model Penal Code: Sentencing revision and has been a member of the Catholic Criminal Justice Reform Network since 2020. She teaches criminal law, constitutional criminal procedure, policing, and sentencing, and clerked for Associate Justice John Paul Stevens.

Heinz Klug – University of Wisconsin Law School

Heinz Klug is the John and Rylla Bosshard Professor of Law at University of Wisconsin Law School. His research focuses on constitutional transitions, constitution-building, human rights, and natural resources, with expertise in South Africa's democratic transition. Growing up in Durban, he participated in the anti-apartheid struggle, spent 11 years in exile, and returned in 1990 as a member of the ANC Land Commission and Constitutional Committee researcher. He holds an S.J.D. from UW Law, a J.D. from UC Hastings, and a B.A. from the University of Natal. He teaches constitutional law, human rights, and natural resources law, and has lectured internationally across multiple continents.

Jay Krishnan – Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Jay Krishnan is the Milt and Judi Stewart Professor of Law at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law and director of the Milt and Judi Stewart Center on the Global Legal Profession. His research focuses on the legal profession, immigration, law and globalization, access to justice, and legal education, with emphasis on the U.S., India, Anglophonic Africa, Brazil, the Middle East, and Asia. He holds a B.A. and J.D. from The Ohio State University and a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He has received numerous teaching awards and was elected to the American Law Institute in 2019. He teaches property, legal ethics, immigration, and comparative law.

Agneszka Kubal – University of Oxford Faculty of Law

Agneszka Kubal is associate professor of Socio-Legal Studies at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, law faculty, and research fellow at Green Templeton College, University of Oxford. Her research focuses on immigration and refugee law, human rights mobilization, and justice systems

in Central Eastern Europe and Russia. She completed her DPhil at Oxford and held positions at Harvard and UCL. She is principal investigator on a UKRI/ERC Starter Grant (2022–2027) ‘Who are the humans behind Human Rights in Eastern Europe and Russia?’ examining human rights mobilization under authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. Her research with Syrian asylum seekers contributed to a European Court of Human Rights judgment protecting Syrians from deportation across Europe.

Qin Ma – Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law (MPI-CSL)

Qin Ma is a postdoctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law (MPI-CSL) in Freiburg, Germany. Her research focuses on comparative criminal procedure, law and technology, the legal profession, and evidence law, with particular emphasis on defense lawyers and criminal justice systems. She holds an S.J.D. from UCLA School of Law and a Ph.D. in law from Tsinghua University. She was a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute and a Hulse Global Fellow at New York University School of Law. She worked at China’s Supreme People’s Court and is currently principal investigator on research projects examining law and technology and criminal defense lawyers’ movements.

Renata Mustafina – Columbia University, Harriman Institute

Renata Mustafina is postdoctoral research scholar in Russian politics, with research interests in authoritarian legality, legal mobilization, defense lawyering in repressive settings, and critical approaches to human rights. Her research ethnographically studies the legal aftermath of opposition protests in Russia, exploring how laypeople and legal professionals – defendants, lawyers, and human rights activists – navigate repressive legality in police precincts, courtrooms, and beyond. Her other research examines the production of legal truth by the prosecution through studying a legal archive. She holds a Ph.D. in political science from Sciences Po, an M.A. in sociology from École Normale Supérieure, and an undergraduate degree in international relations from Moscow State University.

Robert Nelson – Northwestern University, Department of Sociology/American Bar Foundation

Robert Nelson is professor of sociology at Northwestern University and MacCrate Research Chair at the American Bar Foundation. His research focuses on the sociology of law, with particular emphasis on the legal profession and anti-discrimination law, examining inequality and opportunity in lawyer careers and workplace discrimination. He has held significant administrative positions including director of the American Bar Foundation, founding director of the Center for Legal Studies, and chair of the Department of Sociology at Northwestern. He has been recognized with a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences and membership in the Sociological Research Association. He currently directs the After the J.D. Study of Lawyer Careers.

Laura Beth Nielsen – Northwestern University, Department of Sociology/American Bar Foundation

Laura Beth Nielsen is Board of Lady Managers of the Columbian Exposition Chair and professor of sociology at Northwestern University, and a research professor at the American Bar Foundation. Her research focuses on law’s capacity for social change, with interests in the sociology of law, legal consciousness, and the relationship between law and inequalities of race, gender, and class. She holds degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, including both a law degree and a sociology degree. She is an expert in topics including sexual harassment, employment civil rights, and the legal profession. She has received grants from the National Science Foundation, Ford Foundation, and MacArthur Foundation.

John Ohnesorge – University of Wisconsin Law School

John Ohnesorge is George Young and Bascom Professor of Law and director for East Asian Legal Studies at University of Wisconsin Law School. His research focuses on comparative law, law and development, Chinese law, business organizations, administrative law, and compliance. He is founder and director of the Law School’s Compliance Initiative. He holds a B.A. from St. Olaf College, a J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School, and an S.J.D. from Harvard Law School. He has spent extensive time in East Asia, including as a 2023 Fulbright Distinguished Scholar at Yonsei University in Seoul, and teaches business organizations, administrative law, and seminars in compliance and Chinese law.

Ann Southworth – UC Irvine School of Law

Ann Southworth is professor of law, Raymond Pryke Endowed Chair in First Amendment Law, and co-director of the Center for Empirical Research on the Legal Profession at UC Irvine School of Law, with a joint appointment in Criminology, Law & Society. Her research focuses on

the legal profession, professional responsibility, public interest law, the conservative legal movement, cause lawyers, and law and social movements. She holds a B.A. and J.D. from Stanford University and is an affiliate at Harvard Law School's Center on the Legal Profession. She has published articles on civil rights and poverty lawyers, the conservative legal movement, and transnational conservative lawyer networks. She previously clerked for Judge Stanley Weigel and practiced at Morrison & Foerster.

Maria Fatima Santos – University of Wisconsin–Madison, Department of Sociology

Maria Fatima Santos is assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and affiliated with the Center for Law, Society & Justice. Her research examines legal and penal state power, their relationship to social organization, forms of exclusion, and mechanisms of transformation. Her current research focuses on public defenders in Brazil's penal courts, clarifying dynamics that shape legal aid professions, including their relationship to inequality, racialized violence, and state transformation. She also examines how carceral administration connects to social conflict and political legitimacy. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. Her research interests include political sociology, law and society, race and ethnic studies, and social inequality in Latin America.

Whitney Taylor – San Francisco State University, Department of Political Science

Whitney Taylor is an associate professor of political science at San Francisco State University, where she teaches courses in comparative politics. Her research focuses on the intersection of rights, law, and contentious politics, with particular emphasis on social constitutionalism, legal mobilization, and social movements. She holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University. Her research has appeared in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, *Global Constitutionalism*, *Government & Opposition*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, *Law & Society Review*, *Law & Social Inquiry*, and *Sociological Perspectives*.

David Trubek – University of Wisconsin Law School

David Trubek is co-founder of Lawyers and Democratic Decline (LADD). He is Voss-Bascom Professor of Law and dean of International Studies emeritus at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and a senior global fellow at FGV Direito SP in São Paulo. His research focuses on international and comparative law, law and development, human rights, European integration, the legal profession, and globalization's impact on legal systems. He holds an LL.B. from Yale Law School and has received the Kalven Prize and France's Chevalier des Palmes Academiques. He currently coordinates GRAD, the Project on Global Resistance to Authoritarian Diffusion, and has taught at Yale, Harvard, and leading Brazilian law schools.

Oscar Vilhena Vieira – FGV São Paulo Law School

Oscar Vilhena Vieira is founding professor and dean of the FGV São Paulo Law School, where he teaches constitutional law, human rights, and law and development. His research focuses on constitutional theory, human rights, rule of law, democracy, and law and development in Brazil and Latin America. He holds a law degree from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, an LL.M. from Columbia University, a Ph.D. in political science from the University of São Paulo, and a postdoctoral degree from Oxford. He is a founding member of Conectas Human Rights and Instituto Pro Bono, a columnist for Folha de S. Paulo, and an active pro bono lawyer in public interest cases.

CLE INFORMATION

This symposium has been approved for up to 3.0 LAU credits and 4.5 CLE credits by the Wisconsin BBE. To receive CLE credits, please be sure to sign in using the QR code provided for each session. To apply for credit outside of Wisconsin, please email clew@law.wisc.edu to request a certificate of attendance.

SHUTTLE *(For participants only.)*

The hotel is a short walk from the Law School, but a shuttle will be available for conference participants needing assistance during the conference. Please find a schedule below.

Thursday, Feb. 12

DoubleTree Hotel to UW Law School, 2:55 p.m.

UW Law School to Fluno Center, 5:50 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 13

DoubleTree Hotel to UW Law School, 8:15 a.m.

UW Law School to DoubleTree Hotel, 5:10 p.m.

DoubleTree Hotel to Taste of India, 5:45 p.m.

Taste of India to DoubleTree Hotel, 8 p.m.