

DIGITAL JUSTICE IN CRIMINAL PROCEDURE: IMPLEMENTING AI FOR EVIDENCE HANDLING AND SUPPORT OF UNREPRESENTED DEFENDANTS IN UZBEKISTAN BASED ON SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE.**Sabirova Sabrina Sabirovna**3rd-year student of the University
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Annotation: The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into judicial systems has emerged as a defining feature of 21st century digital justice reform. Beyond mere digitalization of case files and remote access to hearings, modern justice systems increasingly deploy AI to support analytical tasks, evidence management, and improve procedural efficiency. Singapore's Smart Courts initiative offers one of the most mature real-world examples of AI application in judiciary systems, incorporating advanced technologies into civil and tribunal processes while maintaining strict human oversight and ethical safeguards.

For Uzbekistan, the adoption of Presidential Decree No. UP-140 (2025) "On Additional Measures to Improve the Level of Access to Justice through the Introduction of Artificial Intelligence Technologies into Court Activities and to Enhance the Material and Technical Support of the Judicial System" signals a strategic commitment to AI-assisted adjudication and broader digital transformation of governance and justice. While current Uzbek regulatory frameworks remain at a formative stage, there is a compelling opportunity to leverage Singapore's experience in shaping an AI-enabled not only in the court system but also in criminal procedural process that enhances evidence handling, supports unrepresented litigants, and upholds due process. This article explores how AI tools can be responsibly incorporated into Uzbekistan's criminal justice system for evidence gathering and assistance to unrepresented defendants, drawing on Singaporean practices and global principles of transparency, fairness, and judicial independence.

Key words: artificial intelligence, smart courts, information technologies, evidence gathering, investigation, Singapore, law (right).

Introduction

The digital transformation of judicial systems has become a central element of legal reform agendas across the world. Courts increasingly face complex challenges arising from growing caseloads, the expansion of digital evidence, and heightened expectations for transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in the administration of justice. In response, many jurisdictions have begun to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into court operations, not as

substitutes for judicial decision-making, but as supportive tools designed to enhance procedural effectiveness and improve access to justice. Uzbekistan has embarked on a significant reform of its judicial system aimed at accelerating digitalisation and introducing artificial intelligence technologies into court activities. The adoption of Presidential Decree No. PF-140 of 21 August 2025, entitled “On Additional Measures to Improve the Level of Access to Justice through the Introduction of Artificial Intelligence Technologies into Court Activities and to Enhance the Material and Technical Support of the Judicial System,” marks a decisive step toward the implementation of the “Digital Court” concept. The Decree sets out key priorities, including the transition to fully electronic case management, the creation of technical infrastructure for AI deployment, and the modernisation of judicial processes to improve the quality and efficiency of justice. According to the Decree, the following priorities have been identified for the introduction of artificial intelligence technologies into court activities and for accelerating digitalisation processes, inter alia:

- the gradual transition to a fully electronic format of case management based on the “Digital Court” concept, with the aim of abandoning paper-based proceedings in the administration of justice;
- the creation of the necessary technical infrastructure for the introduction and effective use of artificial intelligence technologies in court activities.

While current Uzbek regulatory frameworks remain at a formative stage, there is a compelling opportunity to leverage Singapore’s experience in shaping an AI-enabled not only in the court system but also in criminal procedural process that enhances evidence handling, supports unrepresented litigants, and upholds due process. A similar approach could be gradually implemented within the criminal procedural process of the Republic of Uzbekistan, especially in light of the recent Presidential Decree on the introduction of artificial intelligence technologies in court activities and the implementation of the “Digital Court” concept. In criminal proceedings, investigators, prosecutors, judges, and defense counsel often face extensive volumes of documentary, digital, and multimedia evidence, including interrogation records, expert reports, electronic correspondence, and surveillance materials. AI-assisted summarisation tools could be employed to generate neutral, factual overviews of case files, identify key procedural stages, and highlight issues in dispute, thereby significantly reducing the time required for preliminary familiarisation with case materials.

For judges, such tools could enhance trial preparation by providing structured summaries of indictments, evidentiary submissions, and procedural motions, enabling greater focus on the assessment of evidence, protection of procedural rights, and legal reasoning. For defendants and their legal representatives, particularly in cases involving complex factual matrices, AI-generated summaries could improve understanding of the charges, evidence presented by the prosecution, and available procedural options, thus strengthening the principle of equality of arms. Importantly, as in the Singapore model, these tools should be expressly limited to informational and organisational functions, without generating legal advice, evaluating guilt, or predicting judicial outcomes.

1. AI in Evidence Gathering: Conceptual and Practical Foundations

Since the beginning of the year in 2025, it has been reported that 1,300 decisions adopted by investigative bodies in Uzbekistan were issued in violation of procedural requirements. As a

result of these shortcomings, materials from 637 criminal cases were returned by the courts for further investigation.

In this regard, the task has been set to digitise all stages of the criminal process, from the receipt of a crime report to the enforcement of the court's decision, and to introduce artificial intelligence technologies into investigative activities. Such a system would accelerate investigative procedures, reduce the influence of the human factor, and enhance accountability.

Moreover, the introduction of artificial intelligence at the evidence-gathering stage could significantly reduce procedural deficiencies, thereby contributing to a decrease in procedural violations and errors during the investigative process.

1.1 The Evolving Nature of Digital Evidence

Criminal investigations increasingly involve vast volumes of digital data — including CCTV footage, mobile phone records, internet communications, financial transactions, and geolocation metadata. Traditional manual review of such data strains court and prosecutorial resources, prolongs procedural timelines, and risks inconsistent treatment of evidence. AI offers analytical support to manage, organise, and summarise complex digital evidence quickly and reliably without replacing human decision-making.

Evidence gathering supported by AI focuses on four core capabilities:

- Extraction of relevant information from unstructured datasets;
- Summarisation of key evidence points and patterns;
- Identification of links between disparate data sources; and
- Visualisation or organisation that assists judges and litigants in understanding case contours.

1.2 Singapore's Approach: Summarisation and Verification

Singapore's Smart Courts strategy does not permit AI to generate or fabricate evidence. Rather, generative AI tools are used to compile and summarise records, allowing lawyers to comprehend large evidence sets efficiently. These tools are integrated into systems such as e-Litigation, where AI can assist in organising testimony, document exchanges, and supporting materials. According to Singapore's guide on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence tools by court users, AI outputs must be independently verified; courts must not rely on unverified or unexamined AI narratives. This represents a decision-support model, where the judiciary retains ultimate responsibility for evidentiary assessment. By contrast, AI tools reduce clerical burden and facilitate quicker identification of material facts in digital evidence.

For Uzbekistan, AI's role in criminal evidence gathering should mirror the Singaporean paradigm of support, not substitution:

–Pre-trial analysis: AI can assist prosecutors and investigators in scanning digital evidence for relevance to charged offences, flagging key communications and patterns (e.g., timelines, message threads, financial flows).

–Court summarisation tools: Judges and defence counsel (where applicable) can use AI to generate neutral summaries of evidentiary files, mitigating workload and improving procedural clarity.

However, implementation requires careful legal scaffolding:

–Legal definition of permissible AI use: The Uzbek Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) or other normative legal act should define the scope of AI only for summarisation and organisation, not production of evidence.

–Certification and audit requirements: AI tools used in evidence handling must be certified and subject to regular integrity audits (including data protection and algorithmic transparency).

–Human verification protocols: Any AI summary entering the record must be verified by authorised users (prosecutors, defence, or court clerks) and annotated as AI-assisted.

2. AI and Access to Justice: Supporting Unrepresented Litigants

2.1 Challenges Faced by Unrepresented Defendants

A significant barrier to justice is the absence of legal representation. Unrepresented defendants often struggle to: understand procedural requirements; organise evidence coherently; draft written submissions; anticipate court expectations.

These difficulties contribute to procedural inefficiencies and may undermine equitable access to justice. AI’s potential to provide guided assistance in case preparation — particularly for unrepresented litigants — represents a noteworthy innovation.

2.2 Singapore’s Exploration of AI-Based Assistance

In Singapore, the new generative AI tool is designed to support the individual’s journey through the justice process in the SCT (Small Claims Tribunals).

The tool assists individuals by helping them better understand a case and the next steps. The parties may negotiate and come to an amicable resolution of the dispute with the benefit of a better understanding of each other’s situation.

The tool will be rolled out in phases, starting with Tribunal Magistrates today. Individuals who represent themselves at the SCT will be able to use the tool from November 2025 onwards, with the specific launch date to be announced in due course. The tool has been tested extensively, and robust measures are in place to safeguard all information. Case details are securely stored, and confidentiality is maintained at every step. Furthermore, the generative AI tool is carefully designed to provide factual summaries without offering case-specific “legal advice” to a court user. Singaporean judicial officials, including Mr. Tan (a Singapore justice official), have publicly acknowledged the value of AI in helping underrepresented litigants organise thoughts, documents, and procedural materials for hearings. The underlying premise is not to supplant legal counsel but to empower individuals to produce coherent and structured case submissions. These tools can suggest organisational frameworks, highlight missing materials, summarise arguments, and even help draft procedural statements under human supervision.

The Singapore judiciary emphasises that such tools are particularly beneficial where individuals lack resources to secure legal representation, thereby enhancing procedural fairness.

2.3 Designing Support Tools for Uzbekistan's Criminal Courts

To adapt Singapore's approach within Uzbekistan's criminal justice framework:

2.3.1 Regulatory Basis for AI Support Tools

Current Uzbek decree UP-140 should be supplemented by criminal procedural regulations that establish:

- The right to access AI assistance for self-represented defendants;
- Clear usage boundaries (no automated legal advice, no evidence fabrication);
- User verification responsibilities (defendants must review and confirm all AI-drafted submissions).
- Estimated costs of the court proceedings.

2.3.2 Functional Capabilities for AI Support

A suite of AI tools for unrepresented criminal defendants may include:

- Document organisation modules: enabling users to upload files and generate structured case material.
- Summarisation engines: presenting key elements of evidence in neutral language.
- Procedure checklists: guiding users through recognised stages of criminal proceedings under the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedural Codes.
- Draft procedural statements: generating templates for defence submissions, subject to human editing.

2.3.3 Safeguards and Human Oversight

For criminal cases, which inherently involve liberty interests, robust safeguards are non-negotiable:

- AI outputs should be labelled clearly as AI-generated summaries or templates.
- Judges and clerks should retain discretion to approve the use of any AI-assisted material.
- Defendants must certify the accuracy of any AI-generated text they submit.

A central tenet of both Singaporean and international standards is that AI must not supersede judicial discretion. Even with AI summarisation for evidence or case organisation, judges — not algorithms — must determine factual findings and legal conclusions. This preserves core rule-of-law principles and ensures accountability. AI systems, especially in high-stakes contexts like criminal justice, must be transparent and explainable:

- Regular algorithm audits should be mandated by law.
 - Certifications should be required before deployment in any justice setting.
- Such safeguards mitigate “black-box” risk and ensure procedural fairness.

2.3.4 Data Protection and Privacy

Evidence summarised by AI often includes sensitive personal data. Therefore:

- Data protection regulations must govern the collection, processing, storage, and deletion of such material.
- Access controls, encryption, and anonymisation protocols should be mandatory.

These protections align with fundamental rights and international best practices.

Conclusion

AI has transformative potential for evidence gathering and supporting unrepresented litigants in criminal proceedings, but its integration must be carefully regulated. Singapore’s Smart Courts offer a valuable benchmark: AI as decision support rather than decision maker, robust ethical oversight, mandatory verification, and clear human responsibility.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the adoption of Presidential Decree No. PF-140 and the implementation of the “Digital Court” concept provide a strong legal and institutional foundation for the introduction of AI technologies across criminal procedural processes. Digitisation of case files, AI-assisted evidence analysis, and predictive tools for estimating procedural timelines and court-related expenses can significantly reduce human error, enhance accountability, and accelerate investigative and trial procedures. Such technologies, if implemented with appropriate safeguards, will contribute to improved compliance with procedural norms, better protection of defendants’ rights, and overall efficiency of the judicial system. By adopting Singapore-inspired practices — tailored to local legal culture and procedural safeguards — Uzbekistan can enhance judicial efficiency, improve access to justice, and ensure that AI serves as a lawful, transparent, and equitable instrument within its criminal procedural law.

Ultimately, the careful and responsible application of AI in Uzbekistan’s criminal justice system has the potential to strengthen the rule of law, modernize investigative and adjudicative practices, and bring tangible benefits to both judicial authorities and litigants, while ensuring that human oversight and ethical standards remain central to all judicial decisions.

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