

CAN ONLINE COURTS LOWER LITIGATION BARRIERS? EVIDENCE FROM CHINA'S INTERNET COURT PILOT

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① Motivation and Question

② Data and Methodology

③ Empirical Results

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Research Motivation

Criticism and distrust towards traditional courts and litigations

- Spatio-temporal limitations
- Long queues and delays
- High costs and fees

With the help of digital technologies, in such an “online court” ...

- Sue on your mobile phone
- Anytime, anywhere
- Online hearing and trial
- No more offline trips to the court

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Research Question

Can online courts lower litigation barriers and enhance access to justice?

- Increase related litigation volumes
- Maintain judicial quality

Empirical Example: China's internet court pilot

- August 2017 in Hangzhou, August 2018 in Beijing and Guangzhou
- Fully online operation for all internet-related cases
- Constitute a sudden and fundamental quasi-experiment

Intuitive Comparison

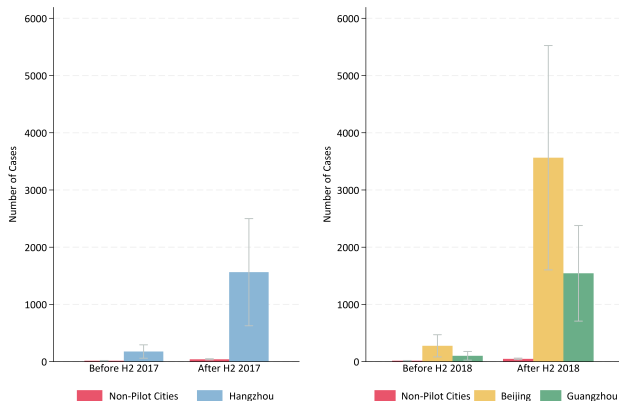


Figure 1: Caseloads in Pilot and Non-pilot Cities

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A novel dataset

Raw Data

- 114,118 judgments (full text) from *China Judgement Online*
- Identify key information using regular expressions¹

Convert to panel data

- 321 Chinese cities, semi-annual from H1 2010 to H2 2020
- Macro control variables² from *China City Statistical Yearbook*

¹The court of adjudication, case filing date, judgment date, word count, whether the case was decided under substantive or procedural law, whether it was an appeal, and so on.

²The log of GDP, total population, and the number of mobile phone users.

Identification Strategy

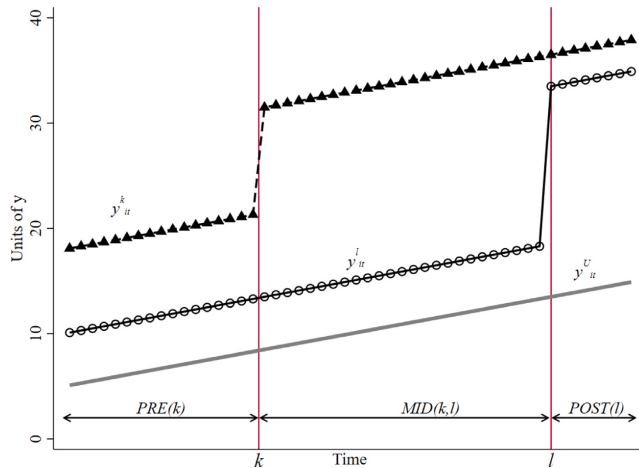


Figure 2: Staggered Difference-in-Differences

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Case Volume

Baseline Results

- On average, the pilot increased the number of relevant cases in the three pilot cities by 1,694.55 per half year
- Robustness checks further support the credibility of this finding

Heterogeneity Analyses

- Increase is more pronounced in cases adjudicated under procedural law than substantive law → benefits not only trial, but also mediation
- And in cases with legal representation compared to those without → benefits not only litigants, but lawyers

Judicial Quality

Mixed results

- Trial durations are shorter
- Appeal rates are lower
- Quality scores (by large language model) increase in Hangzhou (2017), but decrease in Beijing and Guangzhou (2018)

Inspiration

- The “impossible trinity” of fiscal and technology input, accessibility, and quality
- The internet court pilot → propelled by technological advancement, has improved access to justice without causing a significant deterioration in adjudicative quality

Thanks for your listening and comments!



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