TRIALWATCH HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE
COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

FAIRTRIAL & AI HACKATHON

fight authoritarianism

OCTOBER 9-10, 2026

JEROME GREENE ANNEX
NEW YORK, NY

Columbia Law School | HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE

TRIALWATCH®

TRIALWATCH X
AI HACKATHON

Executive Summary

The TrialWatch Fair Trial & AI Hackathon, held at Columbia Law School on October 9–10, 2026, brought together 32 students from nine schools across the university to use technology to develop practical responses to challenges that arise in TrialWatch's work. The Hackathon created a space for students from legal, human rights, and technology backgrounds to work in interdisciplinary teams on these problems and test new approaches that could make TrialWatch's work more efficient and responsive.

Hackathon Snapshot

50 students applied

32 students participated

9 schools

48 hours

8 projects

About TrialWatch



About TrialWatch and its challenges

TrialWatch exposes injustice, supports people unjustly detained or prosecuted, and pushes for reform of unfair laws and practices against journalists and other public interest voices. The project works in three steps: identifying relevant cases and monitoring a trial, assessing potential violations of rights, and advocating for defendants. Doing this work properly requires legal experts to read potentially hundreds of pages of documentation.

The Hackathon's challenge: build tools that help TrialWatch identify important cases earlier, analyze trials more effectively, and turn monitoring into stronger advocacy.

OPENING PANEL



How can technology help with fair trial rights & freedom of expression ?

The Hackathon opened with a conversation on how technology can help protect fair trial rights and freedom of expression. The panel featured:
Tejal Jesrani, Director of the TrialWatch Project at Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute;
Kate Berry, Senior Corporate Counsel for Human Rights Law at Microsoft, and
Anna Diakun, Senior Staff Attorney and Managing Attorney of the Fellowship Program at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University,

The speakers brought perspectives from human rights, law, and technology to discuss both the opportunities and risks of using new tools in this space. The discussion was open to anyone interested on campus. Broad participation pointed to real community interest in the problem itself, not just in the competition built around it.

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Every team picked one of three problems to solve

TRACK 1

IDENTIFYING EMBLEMATIC CASES AND EARLY WARNING

How can we make sure to find cases where defendants need us most?

TRACK 2

OBSERVATION TO LEGAL EVALUATION

How can we turn raw monitoring notes into legal analysis?

TRACK 3

ADVOCACY AND IMPACT

How can we turn individual cases into change and systemic insight.

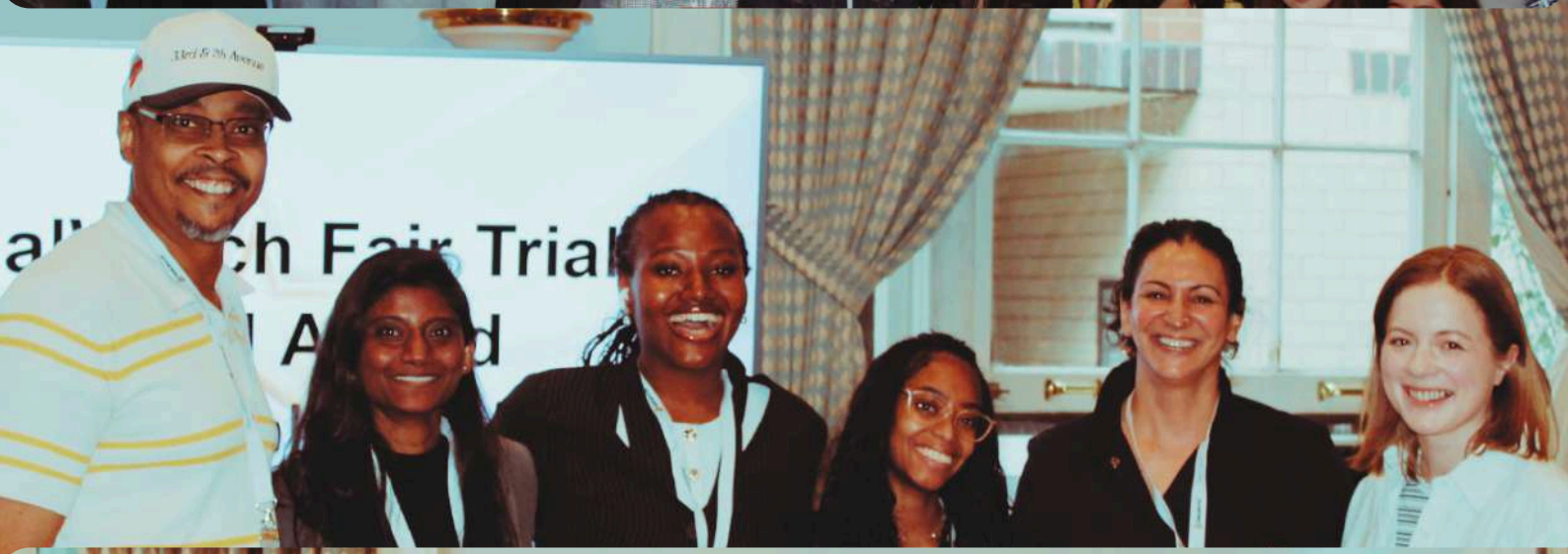
Participating schools

Columbia College
Columbia GS School of General Studies
Columbia University School of Professional Studies
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Columbia University
IEOR Industrial Engineering & Operations Research Columbia Engineering
QMSS Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences
NYU
Columbia University Data Science Institute
Columbia Law School

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Orientation, building, and the room in between



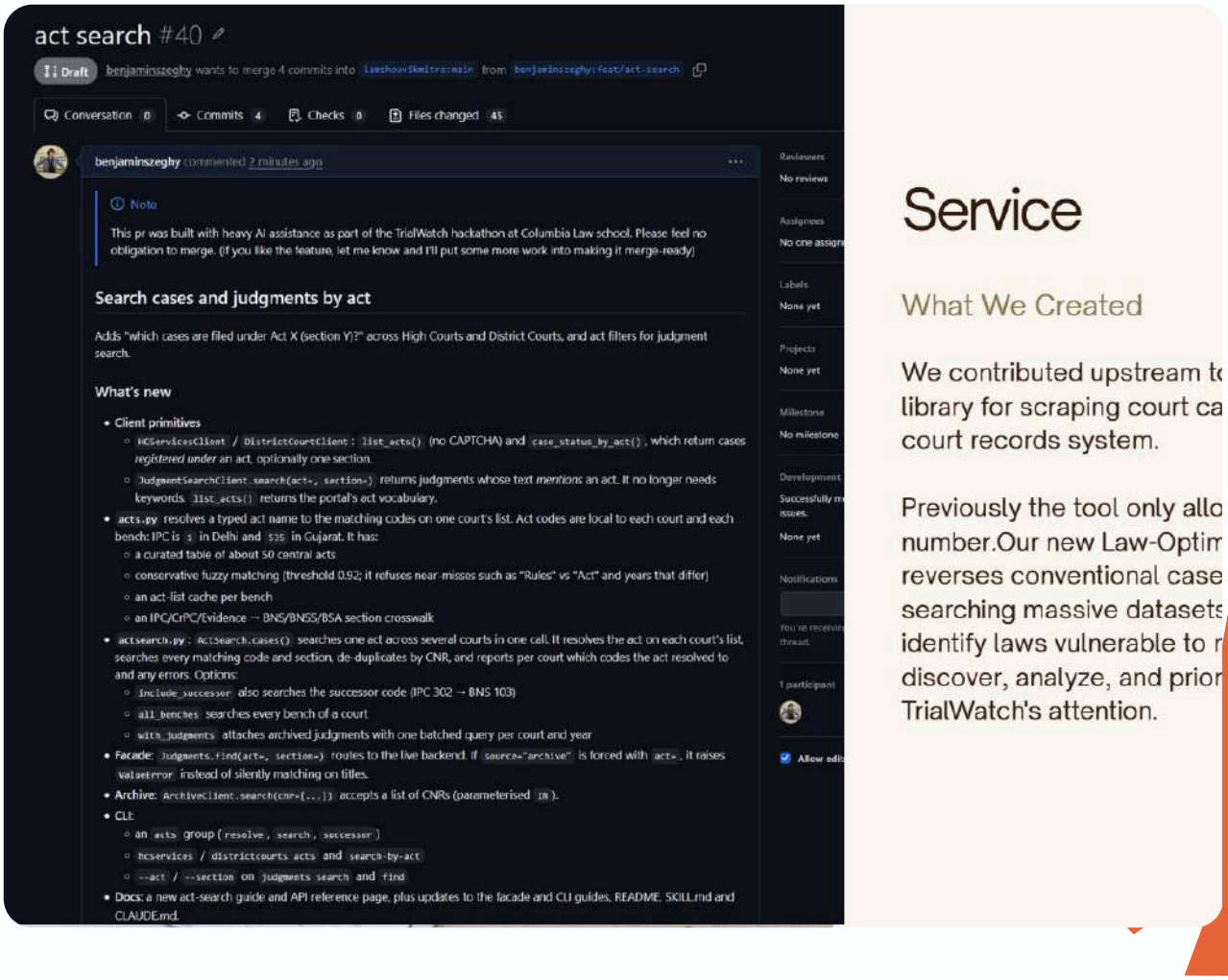




MEET THE TEAMS

TRACK 1

IDENTIFYING EMBLEMATIC CASES AND EARLY WARNING



Legal Tripwire

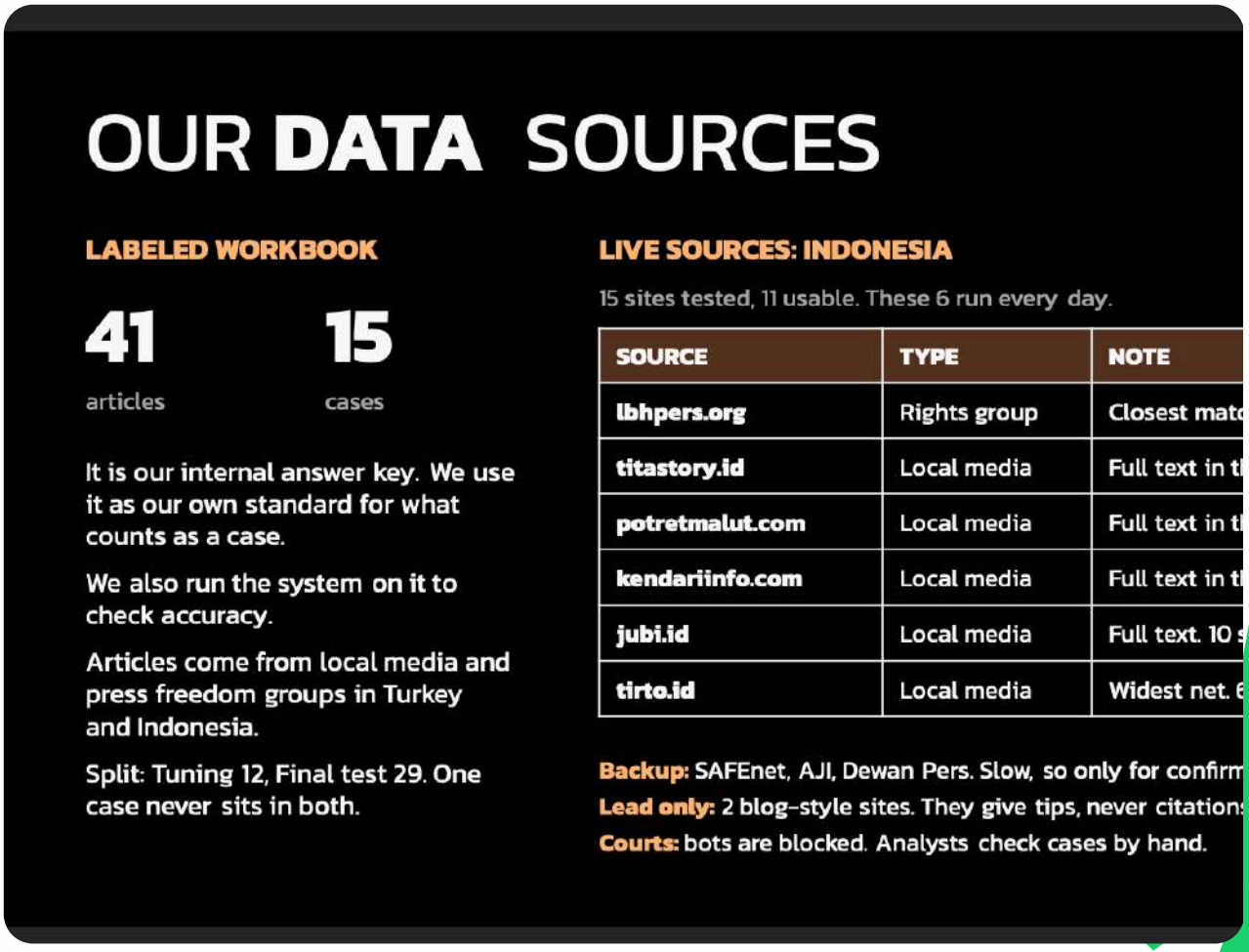
Benny Szeghy, Jiwon Lee, Saarth Vardhan, Zhang Kai

Instead of searching for cases after the fact, Legal Tripwire flips the order. It first scores which legal provisions in India are most often misused against journalists, then uses that ranked list to scrape, organize, and prioritize new court filings that may need TrialWatch's attention. The team contributed their scraping method upstream to bharat-courts, an existing open source Python library for searching India's eCourts system, adding a new law first research feature that lets a reviewer start from a risky provision instead of a mountain of case files.

Highlight: Contributed a new Law-Optimized Research feature upstream to bharat-courts, an open source library for India's court records.

TRACK 1

IDENTIFYING EMBLEMATIC CASES AND EARLY WARNING



Indonesia Early Warning Tracker

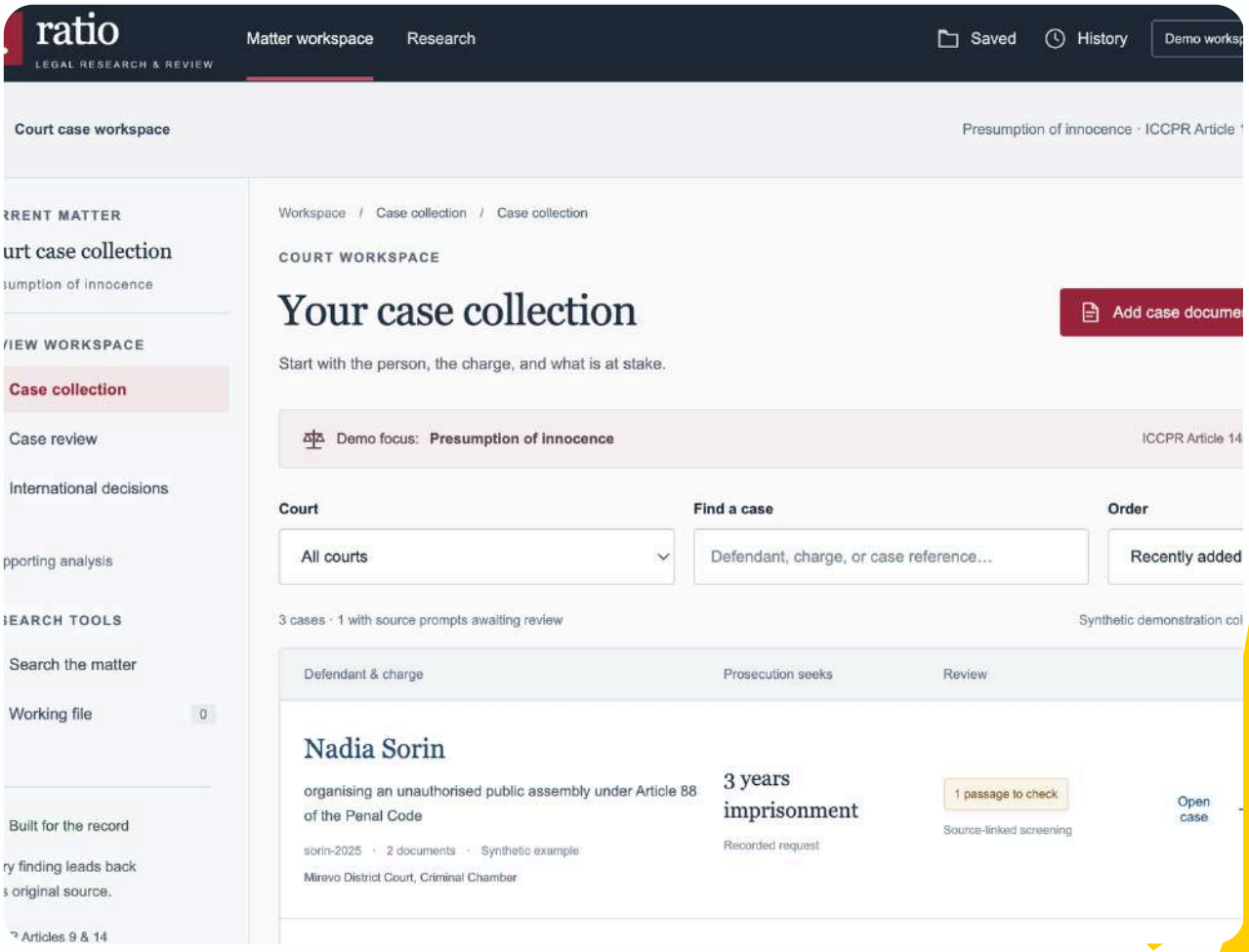
Qianxun Li, Xiangxinrui Shan, Olivia He

An AI powered monitoring and screening platform that reads Indonesian, Turkish, and English news as it's published, filters out noise, and flags early signs of a criminal case against a journalist. Every extracted fact, a name, a charge, a date, is checked back against its original source before a human reviewer ever sees it, and the team was candid in their own evaluation about where the system still misses things.

Highlight: In a live run on Hackathon day, the system scanned 136 articles from 6 Indonesian sources in about 10 minutes and surfaced a real case on its own: three journalists reported to police in North Maluku, just two days earlier.

TRACK 2

OBSERVATION TO LEGAL EVALUATION



Ratio

Emeric Chang, Hardik Kafle, Komal Neupane, Sahil Kharel

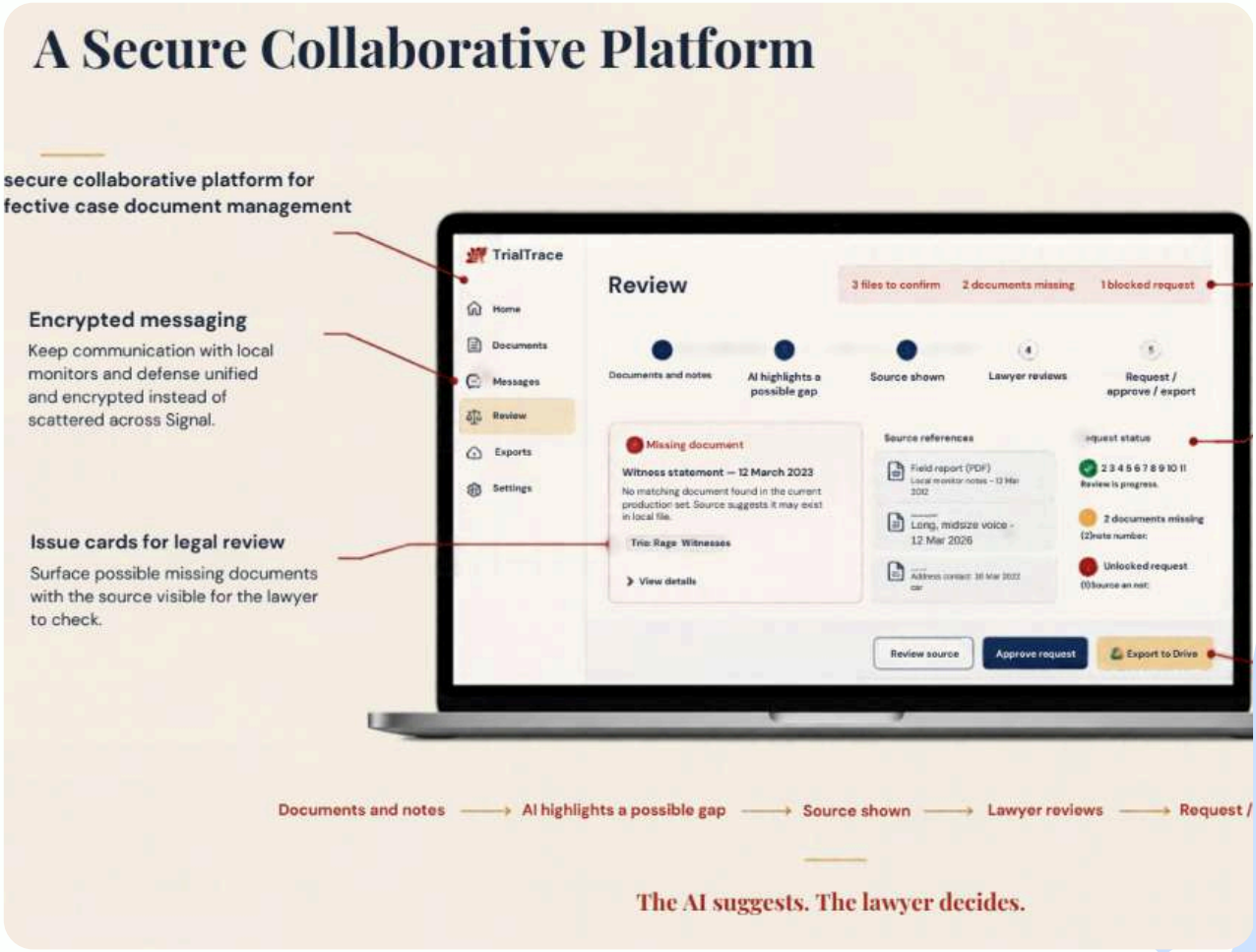
Ratio, named for *ratio decidendi* (the reasoning behind a legal decision), helps lawyers turn trial-monitoring records into structured legal findings. It links each finding directly to the supporting passage in the record and connects the case to relevant international jurisprudence, making it easier to verify the analysis and identify useful precedent. It is designed to run locally, it keeps sensitive case materials on the lawyer's computer and removes findings that cannot be traced back to the source.

Highlight: Every finding is one click from its source, and the tool also compares a case's facts against a library of past international rulings to help a lawyer find relevant precedent faster.

Project: https://ratio-trial-review-preview.vercel.app/

TRACK 2

OBSERVATION TO LEGAL EVALUATION



TrialTrace

Brooklynn Fergerson, Ashvini Meshram, Rita Osi, Kenan Weaver

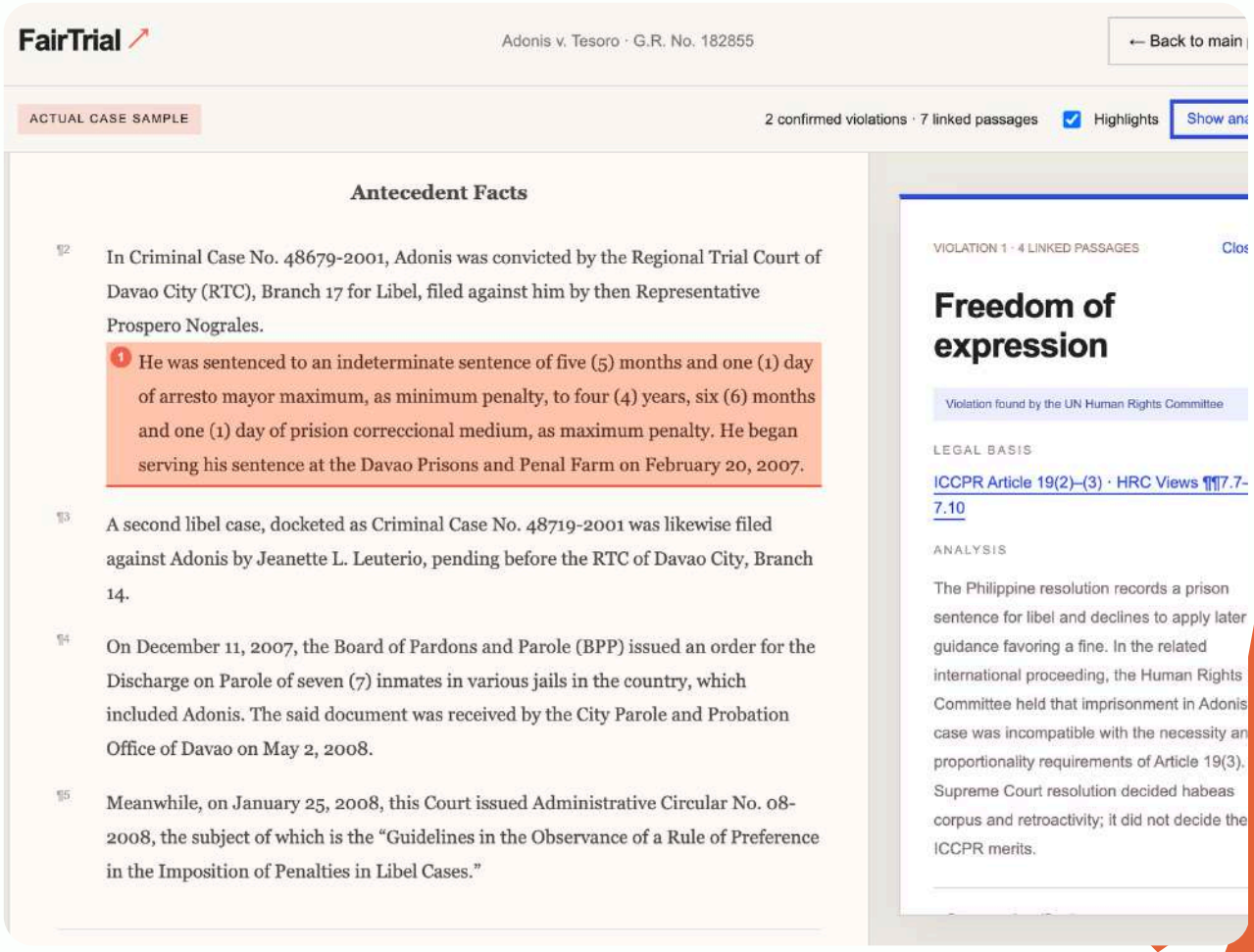
Local monitors and defense counsel often coordinate over Signal, so case notes, requests, and documents end up scattered across a separate channel, and it can take weeks to even notice what's missing. TrialTrace brings that communication into one secure, encrypted record, an AI layer flags likely gaps in the document set, and the lawyer stays in control of every request, approval, and export.

Highlight: Brings case communications and documents into one secure record and flags what may be missing.

Project: https://trialtrace-three.vercel.app/

TRACK 2

OBSERVATION TO LEGAL EVALUATION



FairTrial: AI-Assisted Human Rights Review

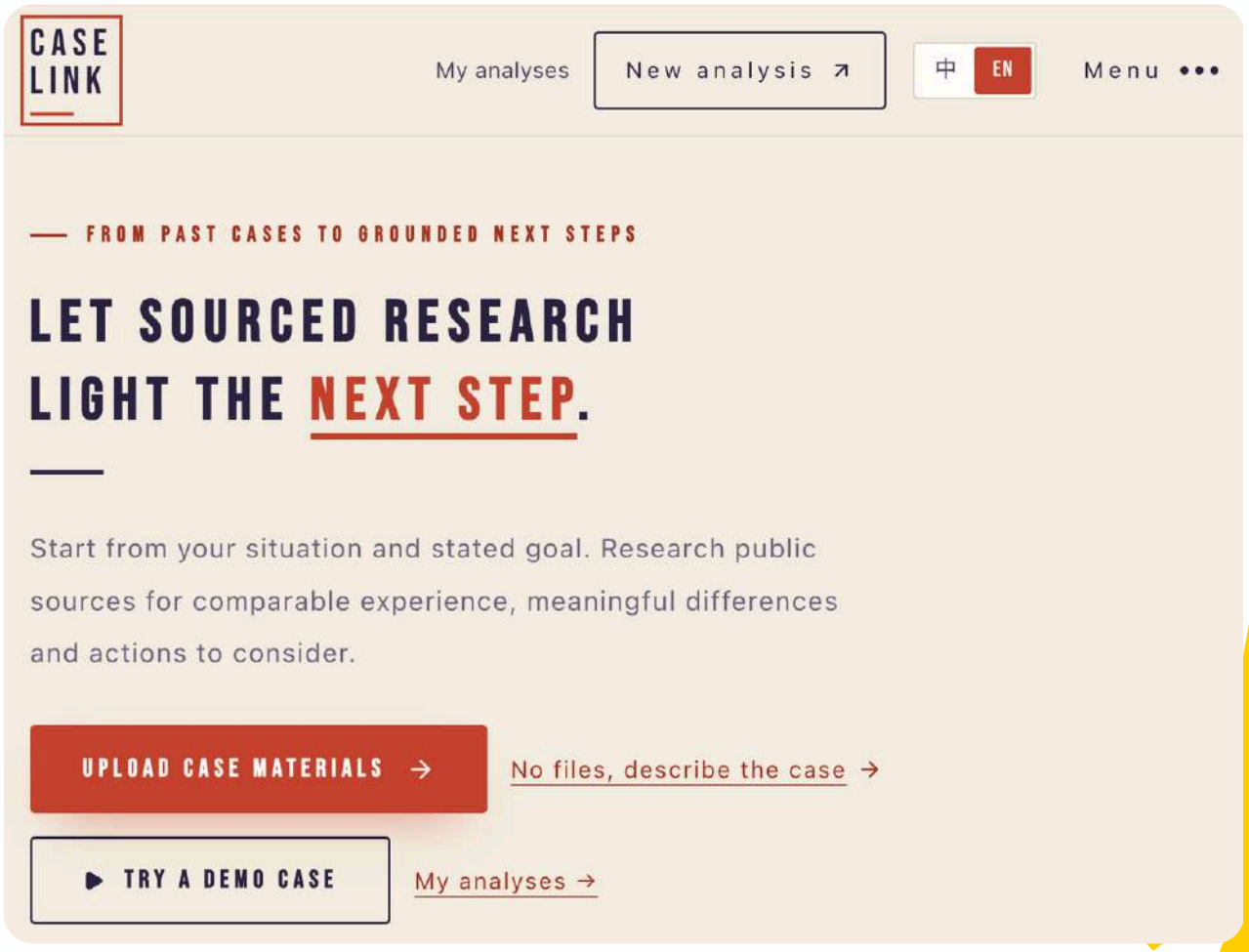
Armani Cheng, Chris Huang, Nanjing Lin

A first pass review tool, fine-tuned on a legal language model, Saul-7B, that highlights passages in long court records which may point to a human rights violation and links each one to the relevant ICCPR article. The team was careful to frame it as a starting point for a lawyer's own review, not a replacement for one, and were transparent in their own presentation about the limits of a model trained on so few examples.

Highlight: Links potential human rights violations in court records directly to relevant ICCPR protections, giving lawyers a focused starting point for their own human rights review.

Project: https://chrishuang7260.github.io/TrialWatchAIHackathon_Track2/

TRACK 3 **ADVOCACY, IMPACT**



CaseLink

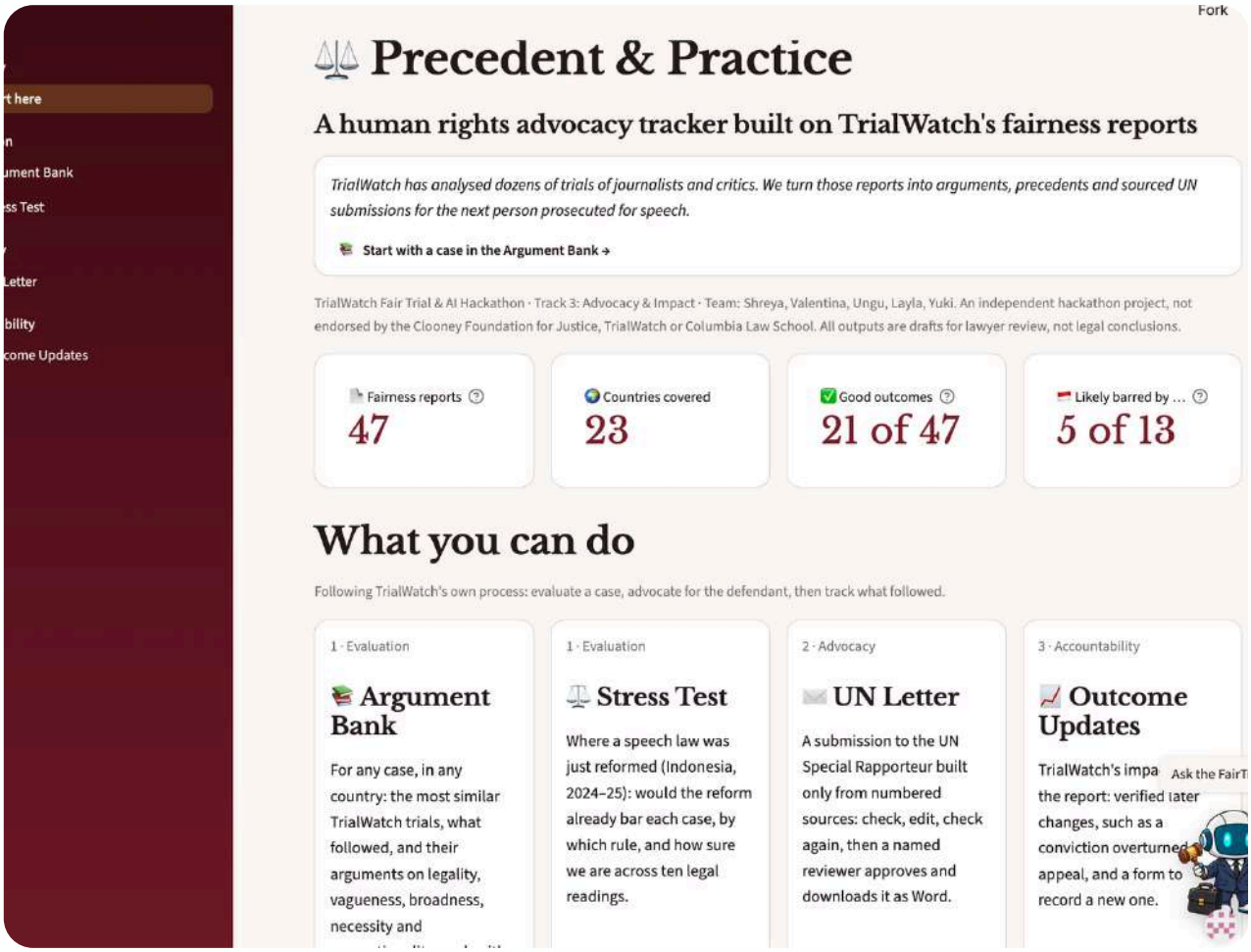
Eva Wang, Feng Hao, Oliva Song, Polly Zhang

CaseLink matches a new case against a library of past TrialWatch and ABA Fairness Reports to surface what actions worked before, who got involved, and how similar situations played out, helping an advocate build a better informed action plan instead of starting from scratch every time. The team built it for public interest lawyers, human rights organizations, and advocates working directly on journalist cases.

Highlight: Uses past TrialWatch Fairness Reports to show what advocacy approaches were used in similar situations to build an informed action plan.

Project: https://caselink-eight.vercel.app/

TRACK 3 **ADVOCACY, IMPACT**



Precedent & Practice

Shreya Shetty, Valentina Torres da Silva, Ungu Maharunti, Yuki Tang, and Changyang Zhu

Precedent & Practice is an argument bank built from TrialWatch's own case history, 47 trials across 23 countries. For any case, it surfaces the closest past trials, good outcomes first, and organizes arguments under five standard legal categories, vagueness, overbreadth, legality, necessity, and proportionality, each traceable to its source. From there it can draft a Special Rapporteur submission where every sentence cites its source, quotes are checked word for word, and a lawyer signs off before anything goes out. The team stress tested their own tool against 13 past Indonesian cases. Under the current law, 5 would likely be barred outright.

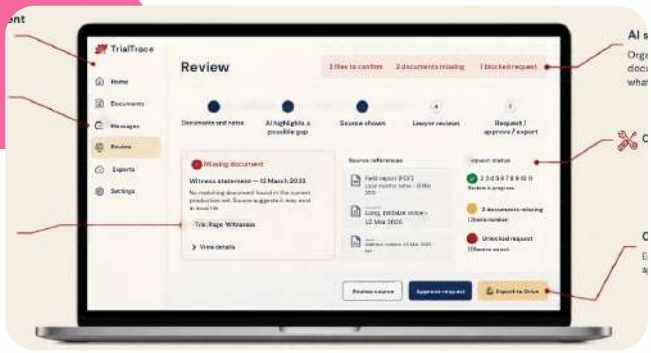
Highlight: Built an argument bank from TrialWatch cases with every argument traceable to its source, and tested the tool against 13 past Indonesian cases.

Project: https://fairtrial-ai-hackathongit-cyvqxeqekcqd4hjsqr7b5w.streamlit.app/

MEET THE WINNERS!

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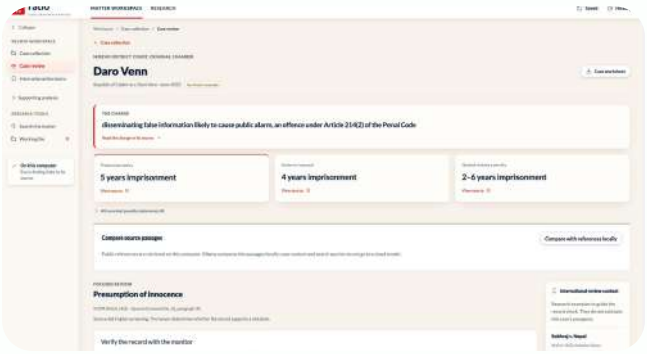
AWARDEES



✦ TrialWatch Fair Trial Grand Award 1st place

Team TrialTrace (Ashvini Meshram, Kenan Weaver, Rita Osi, Brooklynn Fergerson)

TrialTrace brings communication into one secure, encrypted record, an AI layer flags likely gaps in the document set, and the lawyer stays in control of every request, approval, and export.



✦ Best Technical Innovation Award 2nd place

Team Ratio (Komal Neupane, Sahil Kharel, Hardik Kafle, Emeric Chang)

Every finding is one click from its source, and compares a case's facts against a library of past international rulings to help a lawyer find relevant precedent faster.



✦ Best Human Rights Impact Award 3rd place

Team FairTrial (Nanjing Lin, Chris Huang, Armani Cheng)

A first pass review tool, fine-tuned on a legal language model, Saul-7B, that highlights passages in long court records that point to a human rights violation and links to the relevant ICCPR article.

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Post Hackathon Recap

We surveyed participants before and after the hackathon to see how their knowledge and confidence shifted.* Across nearly every measure tracked, the hackathon moved the needle, with real gains in participants' understanding of fair trial rights, human rights, and AI.

56%

Participants' understanding of the AI and fair trial rights intersection improved

44%

Participants' confidence with international human rights law and fair trial standards improved

24%

Participants' confidence in translating a real world problem into a technical solution improved

18%

Participants' confidence in communicating non-technical ideas to technical audiences improved



* 17 participants completed the pre and post hackathon surveys, anonymously, and were asked about general skills and goals for the hackathon.
** Pink represents before the Hackathon, green after the Hackathon












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