97% of Cases Never See a Jury

The justice system’s greatest flaw isn’t bias—it’s absence.

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THE DATA

97%

Plea rates in criminal cases

The overwhelming majority of criminal cases in the U.S. end in plea deals, not jury trials.

This figure, drawn from legal scholar Suja Thomas's documentary, reveals a system where the constitutional right to a jury trial is functionally obsolete. The data reflects not just procedural inefficiency but systemic coercion: defendants face threats of dramatically longer sentences if they exercise their right to trial. This creates a de facto penalty for seeking justice through a jury, undermining the foundational principle of peer judgment.



Source: University of Illinois News Bureau · Published November 14, 2026
https://news.illinois.edu/documentary-skewers-us-justice-system/

01

Jury Trials Are a Performance, Not a Process

In the U.S. justice system, the jury trial is more myth than mechanism. The film reveals that the system is designed to prevent trials, not to conduct them. The 97% plea rate is not a sign of efficiency but of institutional design—where the threat of trial is weaponized to extract compliance. This has profound implications for AgTech AI: if our legal frameworks are already skewed by coercion, how can we trust them to govern autonomous systems in agriculture, where accountability is non-negotiable?



02

AI Justice Requires Transparent Decision Pathways

The absence of jury trials mirrors the opacity of many AI-driven decisions in agriculture—where outcomes are determined by algorithms with no appeal. Just as 97% of criminal cases bypass juries, many farm-level AI systems make irreversible decisions (e.g., pesticide application, harvest timing) without human oversight. The documentary's critique of coercive plea bargaining offers a parallel: if a farmer's livelihood is at stake, and the AI's logic is unreviewable, we risk a new form of digital coercion. Transparency in AI decision-making is not a feature—it's a constitutional necessity.

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