

Friday, May 22, 2026

Judicial Independence: What does it mean? Why is it important? How can we protect it?

As the independence of the judiciary has come increasingly under threat, many have begun to use and misuse the phrase “judicial independence” to comment on growing disharmony among the branches of a democratic government. In this session, speakers will explore the varied understandings of the term. Bound by the canons of judicial ethics, judges are limited in their ability to speak to the political ramifications. This session will explore various strategies employed to undermine judicial independence focused on education, awareness, and ethical strategies that protect the judiciary.

Speakers:

Hon. Maria Salas Mendoza



Chief Justice Salas Mendoza began her career at the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law in Los Angeles, where she trained volunteers to assist low-income clients representing themselves in family law matters. She was a staff attorney at the El Paso Legal Assistance Society (later TRLA), then served as Assistant County Attorney focusing on civil defense work. In 2006, Chief Salas was elected judge of the 120th District Court where she served for 18 years.

Chief Salas is past chair of the Hispanic Lawyers Section, founder of Texas Latinx Judges, and former District 11 Director of the NAWJ. She also serves on the Supreme Court Advisory Committee, Pattern Jury Charge Committee (Business) and ABA Standing Committee on Diversity in the Judiciary.

Born and raised in El Paso, Texas, she graduated from Harvard College and the UCLA School of Law. She is the proud mother of Michael, Austin, Melina and Dillon.

Hon. Selena Solis