

## THE LEGAL STATUS AND EVIDENTIARY VALUE OF EXPERT OPINIONS IN CIVIL LITIGATION

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**Abstract.** This thesis examines the legal status and evidentiary value of expert opinions in civil litigation, focusing on their role within modern systems of civil procedure. In contemporary adjudication, the increasing complexity of disputes necessitates the involvement of individuals possessing specialized knowledge beyond the competence of judges. As a result, expert opinions have become a crucial means of proof, directly influencing the establishment of factual circumstances and the delivery of fair and reasoned judgments. The study analyzes the doctrinal foundations of expert participation, including the procedural rights and obligations of experts, their independence, and the legal framework governing their appointment and evaluation. The thesis further explores the discretionary power of judges in assessing expert opinions, emphasizing the principle that no piece of evidence shall have predetermined force. In addition, the research addresses key challenges associated with expert evidence, such as risks to impartiality, methodological deficiencies, and the potential overreliance of courts on expert conclusions.

**Keywords:** *expert opinion; civil litigation; expert evidence; evidentiary value; civil procedure; admissibility of evidence; judicial discretion; expert witness; legal status of experts; burden of proof; procedural law; fair trial.*

In modern civil litigation, the growing complexity of legal disputes has significantly increased the reliance of courts on specialized knowledge. Issues arising in fields such as finance, construction, medicine, and technology often extend beyond the ordinary professional competence of judges, thereby necessitating the involvement of

experts. Within this context, expert opinions have emerged as a pivotal evidentiary tool, assisting courts in the establishment of factual circumstances and contributing to the delivery of reasoned and just decisions.

The institution of expert participation occupies a distinct place in civil procedure, as it lies at the intersection of law and science. Unlike other forms of evidence, expert opinions are grounded in specialized knowledge and professional methodologies, which raises important questions regarding their legal nature, evidentiary weight, and procedural treatment. While experts do not determine legal outcomes, their conclusions may substantially influence judicial reasoning, particularly in technically complex cases. This dynamic underscores the need to clearly define the legal status of experts and to establish robust standards for the admissibility, evaluation, and use of their opinions in court.

According to Article 58 of the Civil Procedure Code of Uzbekistan an individual with special knowledge in science, technology, art, or craft necessary to give an opinion may be appointed as an expert. An expert of a state forensic expert institution, an expert of a non-state forensic expert organization, an employee of another enterprise, institution, organization or other individual can act as an expert. Persons recognized incapable or partially capable in accordance with the established procedure, as well as persons with an outstanding or unexpunged conviction for intentional crimes may not be engaged as experts[1].

Expert: shall have the right to examine case materials related to the subject of the forensic expertise, take notes or make copies of necessary information; participate in on-site inspections and file motions for the submission of additional materials and examination objects required for conducting the expertise; participate in the examination of evidence related to the subject of the forensic expertise during the court hearing and, with the court's permission, pose questions to the parties and witnesses; inspect physical,

written, and digital evidence and documents; in their opinion, express views not only on the questions posed to them but also on other issues related to the subject of the forensic expertise and relevant to the case; make statements to be recorded in the court hearing transcript regarding the misinterpretation of their opinion or testimony by the parties or witnesses; if the expert does not know or sufficiently understand the language of the proceedings, provide their opinion and testimony in their native language and use the services of an interpreter in such cases; appeal, in the manner prescribed by law, against court decisions or judge's actions (inaction) that violate their rights and freedoms; claim reimbursement of expenses incurred in conducting the forensic expertise.

A fundamental principle of civil procedure is that no evidence possesses predetermined force, and all evidence must be assessed by the court based on its inner conviction, guided by law and reason[2]. However, in practice, expert opinions may carry disproportionate persuasive authority, potentially affecting the balance between judicial discretion and scientific expertise. This creates a doctrinal tension between the independence of the judiciary and the reliance on external specialized knowledge.

Consequently, the proper regulation of expert participation becomes essential to safeguarding the principles of fairness, equality of arms, and the integrity of judicial proceedings. It explores the procedural framework governing the appointment, rights, and obligations of experts, and examines the criteria used by courts to assess the reliability and relevance of expert conclusions[3]. Particular attention is devoted to the challenges associated with expert evidence, including issues of impartiality, methodological soundness, and the risk of undue judicial dependence on expert findings. By critically evaluating both theoretical approaches and practical applications, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing development of civil procedural law. It argues that enhancing procedural safeguards, refining evidentiary standards, and strengthening

mechanisms for the critical assessment of expert opinions are necessary steps toward ensuring more consistent, transparent, and equitable civil adjudication.

The role of expert opinions in civil litigation has been extensively examined within the broader framework of procedural law and the law of evidence. Scholars have consistently emphasized that the increasing complexity of modern disputes has transformed expert evidence from a supplementary tool into a central element of judicial fact-finding[4]. As a result, academic discourse has focused on defining the legal nature, procedural status, and evidentiary value of expert opinions, as well as the challenges associated with their use in civil proceedings. A significant body of doctrinal research addresses the legal status of experts, often characterizing them as independent participants in the process who assist the court rather than represent the interests of the parties.

Legal scholars argue that the procedural position of experts must be clearly distinguished from that of witnesses, as experts provide evaluative judgments based on specialized knowledge rather than merely reporting facts[5]. This distinction is essential for determining their rights, obligations, and liability within civil proceedings. Another major area of scholarly debate concerns the evidentiary value of expert opinions. Traditional legal theory maintains that no evidence has predetermined force and that expert conclusions should be assessed alongside other forms of evidence. However, many researchers have observed that, in practice, courts tend to accord significant weight to expert findings, particularly in technically complex cases. This has led to concerns about the potential erosion of judicial independence and the risk of “delegated decision-making,” whereby judges rely excessively on expert conclusions without sufficient critical evaluation[6].

Comparative legal studies further enrich this discourse by examining different models of expert participation across jurisdictions. In adversarial systems, experts are

often engaged by the parties, which may raise questions about impartiality and bias[7]. In contrast, inquisitorial systems typically rely on court-appointed experts, emphasizing neutrality but potentially limiting the parties' ability to challenge expert conclusions effectively. Scholars highlight that each model presents distinct advantages and risks, and many advocate for hybrid approaches that combine procedural safeguards with adversarial scrutiny.

Interdisciplinary studies, particularly those influenced by developments in forensic science and evidence law, stress the importance of establishing clear standards for admissibility and evaluation. Concepts such as reliability, relevance, and scientific validity have become central to discussions on improving the quality of expert testimony and minimizing the risk of erroneous judicial outcomes. Despite the substantial progress in this field, several unresolved issues remain. Among them are the lack of uniform standards for expert qualification, inconsistencies in judicial approaches to evaluating expert opinions, and insufficient mechanisms to ensure accountability and independence. This article builds upon these scholarly contributions by offering a critical analysis of the legal status and evidentiary value of expert opinions, with the aim of identifying avenues for improving their regulation and application in civil justice systems.

The analysis conducted in this article demonstrates that expert opinions occupy a central and increasingly influential position within modern civil litigation. As disputes become more complex and technically sophisticated, the reliance of courts on specialized knowledge is not only inevitable but also essential for ensuring accurate fact-finding and the delivery of well-reasoned judicial decisions.

In this context, the legal status of experts as independent participants in the proceedings, combined with the evidentiary value of their conclusions, forms a critical component of the civil justice system. At the same time, the study confirms that expert

evidence presents a number of doctrinal and practical challenges. Although the fundamental principle of civil procedure requires that no evidence has predetermined force, in practice expert opinions often exert significant persuasive influence on judicial decision-making. This creates a delicate balance between judicial discretion and scientific authority, raising concerns about potential overreliance on expert conclusions and the risk of undermining the autonomy of the court[8]. The examination of the procedural framework, including the rights, duties, and responsibilities of experts, highlights the importance of ensuring both their independence and accountability.

Legal provisions governing expert participation—such as access to case materials, the obligation to provide objective and reasoned opinions, and liability for false conclusions—serve as essential safeguards for maintaining the integrity of the process. However, the effectiveness of these safeguards ultimately depends on their consistent and rigorous application in judicial practice. In light of these findings, it is evident that further development of the legal regulation of expert evidence is necessary. This includes the refinement of criteria for the admissibility and evaluation of expert opinions, the establishment of higher standards for expert qualification and methodological transparency, and the strengthening of procedural mechanisms that enable courts to critically assess expert conclusions.

Additionally, promoting a more active and analytically engaged role of judges in evaluating expert evidence is crucial to preserving the balance between legal reasoning and scientific input.

In conclusion, while expert opinions significantly enhance the capacity of courts to resolve complex disputes, their proper use requires a carefully structured legal framework that ensures fairness, objectivity, and judicial independence. Strengthening such a framework will contribute to greater consistency and credibility in civil

adjudication, ultimately reinforcing the fundamental principles of justice and the rule of law.

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