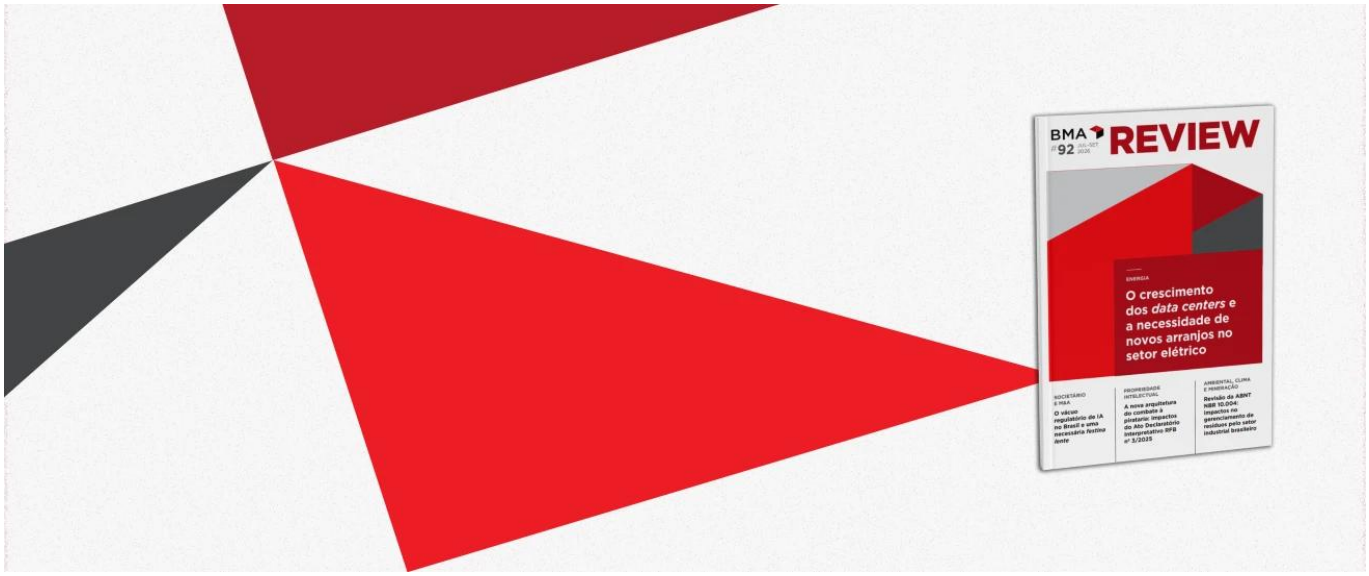
A More Selective STJ: What Brazil's New Reforms Mean for Litigants

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Brazil's Superior Court of Justice (STJ – Superior Tribunal de Justiça), the country's highest court for non-constitutional matters, is undergoing one of its most significant procedural transformations in recent years. Recent legislative and institutional reforms are making access to the Court more selective while reinforcing its role as the principal interpreter of federal legislation, including most private, commercial, procedural, administrative, and criminal law.

At the center of those changes is Law 15.484, enacted on 4 August 2026, which implemented the significance requirement introduced by Constitutional Amendment 125/2022 as a new admissibility threshold for appeals to the STJ. Combined with Amendment 53 to the Rules of Court, issued by the STJ on 1 July 2026, the legislation marks the beginning of a broader reform agenda that is likely to have a significant impact on litigants and practitioners appearing before the Court.

The new "significance filter" reflects a shift toward a more selective approach to appellate review. Parties seeking review by the STJ must now show not only that the lower court may have erred, but also that the legal issue has broader economic, political, social, or legal importance, going beyond the interests of the parties themselves. Although inspired by the "general repercussion" requirement for appeals to Brazil's constitutional court, the Supreme Federal Court (STF – Supremo Tribunal Federal), the new mechanism retains distinctive features of its own, including categories of cases in which significance is presumed.

The legislative reform has been accompanied by equally significant changes to the STJ's Rules of Court. Adopted in July 2026, the new Rules of Court introduce a range of procedural reforms, including changes to filing requirements, virtual hearings, case assignment, and the allocation of matters among the Court's panels and sections.

Viewed together, the legislative and procedural reforms represent more than a series of technical adjustments. They form part of a broader effort to improve how the STJ selects, manages, and decides cases. For litigants, the changes will affect both access to the Court and the conduct of appeals. For the STJ, they reinforce an institutional shift toward a more selective and structured model of adjudication.

At an institutional level, the reforms strengthen the STJ's role as the principal interpreter of Brazil's federal legislation. The significance filter, however, remains a concept rather than a settled test. The STJ will have to define its practical contours through its decisions, much as the STF did with the general repercussion requirement.

For litigants and their counsel, the implications are equally significant. Demonstrating legal error will remain essential, but it will no longer be sufficient. Parties will also have to explain why a particular dispute warrants review by the STJ and why its importance extends beyond the interests of the litigants themselves. As a result, compliance with the new requirements will need to be built into litigation strategy well before an appeal reaches the Court. Taken together, the reforms point to a more selective and structured approach by the STJ and require an equally strategic approach from those seeking its review.

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