1. HOME

The Supreme Court affects millions of lives every day in very tangible ways. It has the ability to change the course of our history, granting rights and retracting them almost overnight with any given decision. Since only a handful of people wield this superpower, it’s important to understand how the Court votes.

1. INSIGHTS

The first question I sought to answer was whether each justice’s vote is skewed by his or her political philosophy. A cursory look at the data suggests that with varying degrees of severity, some Justices do vote in favor of either liberal or conservative ideologies.

1. PROCESS

With that in mind, I introduced new features to see if the Justices could be influenced by outside political powers like the president or senate majority. Thankfully, this doesn’t seem to be the case.

1. INSIGHTS

Furthermore, if we take a step back, we can see that each natural Court, as defined by the specific 9 justice cohort, generally tends to vote in a more balanced way together than individually.

1. PROCESS

Though this finding does not preclude the possibility of a highly imbalanced court changing this delicate equilibrium, I moved on to the next area of concern, which is to then find out what factors do in fact impact Court decisions overall. I took the top features and created several models to see if it is possible to predict court decisions using just a handful of variables.

1. PREDICTIONS

Turns out, it is possible. Here, even though the petitioner is the majority class with a 62% win rate, we can change just a few variables to tip the scales in the respondent’s favor.

1. INSIGHTS

We can even look at the pdp plots to see how each variable, individually or in conjunction, may impact the predicted outcome. Even though my extremely high accuracy score is super suspect, each model I trained performed better than baseline. I’m not ready to pack my bags and start a legal consultancy yet, but maybe more data and research will help corroborate the findings I’ve made here.

The final point I want to make is that these models assume a balanced court, which, once again, may change if a vast majority of the justices share one extreme ideology or another.