Overview of Eviction Court Cases

Douglas & Lancaster Counties, Nebraska

May 7, 2023

Contents

1 Documentation, Code and Data Repository

This is a formal documentation of the efforts to collect eviction court cases in Lancaster and Douglas Counties in the state of Nebraska. The code and data repositories are stored in the links below

1. Code Repository
2. Data Repository

2 Case Information

The scraped court cases from nebraska.gov/justice/case.cgi are stored in the Data Repository as `clean_all_cases.csv`, where the data is cleaned and extracted. Specifically, we were interested in the

1. Case Summary
2. Parties/Attornies to the Case
3. Judgement Information
4. Register of Actions

From the given fields, we were able to extract relevant information that include but not limited to

1. Case Name
2. Plaintiff
3. Defendant
4. Judge
5. Classification
6. Attorneys
7. Defendant's Address
8. Decision

Note that the information is extracted via regular expression, and hence is not guaranteed to be accurate for all cases. We would only further discuss some aspects of the case information where certain choices were made due to the nature of the data.

2.1 Classification

We were interested in the Classification of the court cases due to our efforts in scrape all court cases in both Lancaster and Douglas Counties as described in Section 5. However, since we are only interested in eviction cases, we need some methods of filtering the scraped cases.

Based on comprehensive list of eviction cases compiled by Professor Sullivan, which is simplified to a csv that can be found in here, we get the following frequency table for classifications of court cases in Table 1.

Classification	**Frequency**
Contract-Unspecified	1
Real Property-Forcible Entry/Det-Damages	2,652
Real Property-Forcible Entry/Detainer	23,391
Real Property-Landlord/Tenant	34,055
Real Property-Landlord/Tenant-Damages	808
Real Property-Unspecified	2

Table 1: Classification of Cases

While I am not entirely certain that the **Contract-Unspecified** is an error or otherwise, we are going to only include cases that specficy that it is **Real-Property** related. We also do not distinguish the type of Real-Property cases.

2.2 Classification and Judgement of Restitution

For classification of cases and the outcomes in terms of the Judgement of Restitution, we can see how different classes of cases (excluding Contract-Unspecified and Real Property-Unspecified) have different proportions of being handed a Judgement of Restitution.

Classification	**Evicted**	**Not Evicted**
Real Property-Forcible Entry/Det-Damages	0.72	0.28
Real Property-Forcible Entry/Detainer	0.74	0.26
Real Property-Landlord/Tenant	0.71	0.29
Real Property-Landlord/Tenant-Damages	0.59	0.41

Table 2: Proportion of Evicted and Non-Evicted for Different Classification and Cases

Specifically, note that in Table 2, we see that for *Real Property-Landlord/Tenant-Damages*, the rates of eviction is significantly lower than the other cases.

2.3 Writ and Judgement of Restitution

We wish to identify cases where writ of restitution was issued as an indicator if the eviction process was carried out. The information is obtained from the **Register of Actions** tab in the court case.

However, we were informed by Professor Sullivan that the **Register of Actions** tab is manually entered. There were cases were *restitution* were misspelled, and hence the initial strategy of performing a regex search on

```
writ of restitution
```

yielded quite a few false negatives. Hence, the current (as of May 7, 2023) approach is to search for the term

```
writ
```

though this might introduce false positives as a result.

Nevertheless, there is a corresponding Judgement of Restitution under the **Judgement Information** tab, which is automated and *perhaps* more consistent. However, a point to note is that the issuance of writ of restitution under **Register of Actions** and Judgement of Restitution under **Judgement Information** can be a different. Table 3 shows the difference in terms of their joint distributions.

	Judgement	**NO** Judgement	
Writ of Restitution	0.609	0.004	0.613
NO Writ of Restitution	0.113	0.275	0.387
	0.722	0.278	

Table 3: Joint Probabilities of Judgement and Writ of Restitution

2.4 Continuance

We are interested if the court case is continued, which prolongs the case which theoretically, would allow the defendant to adjust in the event of an eviction. We obtain the data from the **Register of Actions** tab, and some of the observed words used are

'... A writ of restitution shall issue forthwith. Case continued to ... '
'... Order-Continuance ... This action initiated by ... Motion-Continuance ... '

Due to the ambiguity of words, as for now, we consider the case *continued* if

`continuance`

appears in the **Register of Actions** tab to capture both Order-Continuance and Motion-Continuance. However, there might be words that reflect is continuance but is not captured by the algorithm.

	Has Attorney	**NO** Attorney	
Continued	0.004	0.026	0.03
NOT Continued	0.025	0.945	0.97
	0.03	0.97	

Table 4: Joint Probabilities of Defendant Being Represented by an Attorney and Obtaining Continuance

The resulting conditional probabilities calculated from Table 4

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(Continued \,|\, Has\ Attorney) &= 0.128 \\ \Pr(Continued \,|\, No\ Attorney) &= 0.025 \end{aligned}$$

Furthermore, I calculated the length of case in terms of days by counting the number of days between the filing date and the closing date of the case D_i, and estimated the following regression

$$D_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 1\{Case\ i\ is\ Continued\} + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where β_1 is the difference in the expected length of case between cases that are continued as compared to those that are not. The result of estimates are shown in 5 and $\hat{\beta}_1 \approx 52.3$, which means cases that obtained an Order-Continuance has on average more than double the case length from the filing date to the closing date as compared to those who did not receive an an Order-Continuance.

2.5 Court Attendance

TODO

Table 5: Estimates of the Regression Specification in Equation 1

	Dependent variable:
	D_i
$1\{$*Case i is Continued*$\}$	52.315***
	(2.794)
Constant	35.564***
	(0.477)
Observations	60,816
Adjusted R^2	0.006
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2.6 Limited Representation Attorney

TODO

3 Defendant Demographics

We are interested in the demographics of the defendant of the eviction case. Nevertheless, we are not given the demographic information from the court cases. However, using the R-package `predictrace`, we predict demographic information by looking at the named defendant in the case *(there can be multiple defendants for a given case)*.

Gender	**Frequency**
female	30,262
female, male	6
male	26,672

Table 6: Predicted Gender Based on First Name

The algorithm is trained based on Census Data, where ethnicity and race is reported whereas gender is trained on Social Security Administration data.

Table 7 shows the frequency table for each of the race. Note that last names and first names are separately estimated. Also note that the categories are different. There is an alternative specification of the algorithm, where the probability is provided instead. However, due to the differences in categories, I do not want to assume how to recategorize the demographic information.

First Name	Last Name				
	native	asian	black	hispanic	white
asian	0	93	6	16	62
asian, hispanic	0	0	0	0	1
asian, white	0	0	1	2	3
black	0	10	101	15	610
black, white	0	0	1	0	10
hispanic	3	18	58	1,546	510
hispanic, white	0	0	0	3	0
white	53	218	1,920	2,051	30,412

Table 7: Predicted Race Distribution Based on First Name and Last Name

3.1 Disambiguated Demographics

TODO

3.2 Defendant(s) of Case

TODO

4 Geocoding

For most of the cases scraped, the defendant's address is stated in the **Parties/Attorneys to the Case** tab. Using this stated address, we use the Census Geocoder to map the given address and match it to the Census Tracts based on the 2020 Census.

Exactness of Match	Frequency	Proportion
Exact	47,279	0.85
Not Exact	8,600	0.15

Table 8: Exactness of Match for Addresses

We were able to match 55,879 addresses out of 60,909 cases, which gives us a matching rate of 91.74%. The frequency and proportion of exactness for those which are matched can be seen in Table 8. I would not be concerned with the exactness since the differences are usually due to

1. Short forms - street and st, avenue and ave, N and North etc.

2. Apartment Numbers
3. Difference in ZIP Code by a number

5 Brute Force Scraping

TODO