Methodology for Data Project

Primary Data Set: Denial rates and work experience

Data on the denial rates for each judge during the 2019 - 2024 Fiscal Years is obtained from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Clearinghouse. This data was published on November 7, 2024.

This data set included: The judge's name, their five-year asylum denial rate, the total number of cases they adjudicated in that time period, the percentage of asylum seekers who had representation in the cases they adjudicated, the percentage of asylum seekers who weren't approved but instead given alternate forms of relief.

After importing data from their Judge-by-Judge Asylum Decisions in Immigration Courts database, I cross referenced all the judges listed with staff directories from the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to identify which judges were still practicing, and which court they practiced in.

I chose to only include judges who were still serving in the 290 Broadway and Federal Plaza courts. The third court (Varick Street) adjudicates cases in which asylum seekers have already been detained, which would likely result in significantly higher denial rates and skew the data set.

Assigning work experience

Using biographies published for each judge on the EOIR website, I sorted the remaining 55 judges into three categories based on their previous work experience: Represented Immigrants, ICE, or Unrelated. There was rarely a mix of background, and I counted any experience either representing immigrants or working for ICE, no matter the length of time. For example, if a judge adjudicated in a different court, and then joined a private practice to defend immigrants in immigration court, I counted them in the representing migrants section. Unrelated work experience included working for the Judge Advocate Generals (in the army), which was common.

Second Data Set: Long-term overview

Data on denial rates for judges between 2011 and 2024 in New York is from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Clearinghouse. TRAC calculates denial rates for each judge in five year periods. This means that each judge is given a number for the year 2011-2016, and then a new number for 2012-2017. In order to track whether the gap between denial rates was increasing or decreasing, the standard deviation was calculated for every four year period.

It should be noted that there were only 31 judges in the 2011-2016 period, and 55 in the 2019-2024 period. There is a complex relationship between sample size and standard deviation, but that was not taken into account in this analysis.

Data Analysis

This data analysis intended to investigate the state of immigration court in New York, using two different data sets. I used different data analysis methods including finding the mean and standard deviation to determine whether patterns were increasing or decreasing over time.

In order to do this, I used TRACs data from 2011 to 2024 to track whether the five year average denial rates were increasing or decreasing, using a mean calculation. I did the same thing for standard deviation.

One large caveat of this data set is that I did not complete the same checks of government websites, as it would have been impossible to do so fairly across each period of time. Therefore, in each period of time, Judges who joined or left the bench at any point during the 5 years are included in the data analysis. This is not the case for the in depth analysis of the 2019-2024 data, which is why the mean and STD are different in these two analyses for that period. This slight difference is acceptable because the secondary analysis was intended to show general trends over time, whereas the primary analysis is a precise snapshot of the judges sitting on the bench right now.

Again, the sample sizes markedly different for each period of time, as more judges are now serving in immigration court, which likely impacts the mean and STD in complex ways.

Information from sources that contributes to understanding of data

According to Raisa Cohen, the ex-immigration court judge I interviewed, cases are assigned entirely randomly. Additionally, there is no difference between which cases get assigned to which court location, so any patterns there are entirely coincidental.