



Quinquennial Report on Asylum Decision Trends and Factors

October 23, 2017

Fiscal Year 2016 Report to Congress



Homeland
Security

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Message from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

October 23, 2017

I am pleased to present the following “Quinquennial Report on Asylum Decision Trends and Factors,” which has been prepared by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

This report was compiled pursuant to language set forth in Senate Report 114-68 accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113).

Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable John R. Carter
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I am pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 272-1000 or the Department’s Acting Chief Financial Officer, Stacy Marcott, at (202) 447-5751.

Sincerely,



L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services



Executive Summary

The enclosed report provides information on affirmative asylum applications adjudicated by the USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations' Asylum Division from FYs 2010–2014. This report endeavors to analyze different factors in asylum cases and their relationship to approval odds. The factors analyzed include the Asylum Office handling the case, the applicant's home country, whether the applicant was represented, whether the applicant had dependents, and whether the applicant applied within 1 year after arriving in the United States. The report also analyzes demographic characteristics of the Asylum Officer adjudicating the case, including the officer's asylum adjudication experience, gender, and age. Of the factors measured, timeliness in filing for asylum, geographic subregion of nationality, and freedom score of an applicant's country of nationality were the most statistically significant factors in accounting for differences in case approvals. Statistical analysis also indicates that personal characteristics of the asylum officers like gender, age, and experience had a small-to-negligible effect on case approval odds.



Quinquennial Report on Asylum Decision Trends and Factors

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I. Legislative Language

This report has been compiled in response to language included in Senate Report 114-68, which accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113).

Senate Report 114-68 states as follows:

GAO ASYLUM REPORTS

In fiscal year 2015, the Committee directed GAO to update two reports related to the asylum process: “Agencies Have Taken Actions to Help Ensure Quality in the Asylum Adjudication Process but Challenges Remain” (GAO-08-935) and “The U.S. Asylum System: Significant Variation Existed in Asylum Outcomes across Immigration Courts and Judges” (GAO-08-940). In order to provide continuing data streams for additional analysis by this Committee and others, the Committee directs USCIS to report annual statistics on affirmative asylum applications and asylum officers’ decisions on the applications. The Committee also directs USCIS and the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to analyze and report every five years on trends and factors associated with asylum decisions made by asylum offices and officers, and immigration courts and judges, respectively. These analyses should utilize consistent methodologies over time and include statistical analysis that examines trends and associated factors in asylum outcomes, including the extent and nature of outcome variability across asylum offices and officers, and immigration courts and judges. The Committee further directs GAO to review the validity and reliability of the methodologies used in the statistical analyses performed by USCIS and EOIR every five years.

II. Asylum Statutory Authority

Asylum is a form of protection from removal to a country of feared persecution that allows qualified individuals to remain in the United States and, if certain conditions are met, the opportunity to become a lawful permanent resident and eventually a citizen of the United States. For an individual to be granted asylum, he or she must (1) be physically present in the United States; (2) meet the definition of a refugee; and (3) not be otherwise barred from applying for or being granted asylum.

Generally, non-U.S. citizens who are present physically in or who arrive in the United States, whether or not at a designated port of arrival, may apply for asylum. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) gives DHS authority to grant asylum to aliens who meet the definition of a refugee.¹ A refugee is defined as:

... any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion ... [forced abortion, involuntary sterilization, or persecution for resistance to coercive population control programs constitute persecution on account of political opinion].²

A non-U.S. citizen may be barred from applying for asylum if he or she previously applied for asylum and was denied by an immigration judge or the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), did not apply within 1 year of arrival in the United States, or could be removed to a safe third country. There are exceptions to these bars for "changed circumstances" or "extraordinary circumstances."³

Moreover, a non-U.S. citizen who otherwise meets the definition of a refugee may not be granted asylum if he or she:

1. Participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion;
2. Has been convicted of a particularly serious crime;
3. Has committed a serious nonpolitical crime outside the United States;
4. Poses a danger to the security of the United States;
5. Is described in particular inadmissibility or removability grounds relating to terrorism; or
6. Was firmly resettled in another country prior to arriving in the United States.⁴

¹ INA § 208(b)(1)

² INA § 101(a)(42)

³ INA § 208(a)(2); 8 CFR § 208.4

⁴ INA § 208(b)(2)

Once an individual is granted asylum, he or she may not be returned to his or her country of nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, the country of the individual's last residence.^{5 6}

⁵ INA § 208(c)(1)(A)

⁶ Note, the grant of asylum may be terminated for reasons stated in section 208(c)(2) of the INA.

III. USCIS Asylum Division and the Asylum Application Process

A. Affirmative Asylum Application Process

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a component of DHS, has jurisdiction over affirmative asylum applications. An individual affirmatively seeking asylum may file Form I-589, *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal*, directly with USCIS if the individual is currently in the United States and has not been placed in removal proceedings.⁷ USCIS' Asylum Division adjudicates all affirmative asylum applications.⁸

In most cases, the affirmative asylum process begins when an asylum applicant files an application by mail with USCIS. The applicant later receives a notice to report to a designated USCIS location to have his or her biometrics taken. Next, the applicant receives a notice stating the date, location, and time of the asylum interview. An asylum applicant may apply for employment authorization if 150 days have passed since submitting a complete asylum application, excluding any delays caused by the applicant, and no decision has been made on the application.

An asylum office's jurisdiction to adjudicate a particular asylum applicant's case is determined by the applicant's place of residence. Most applicants within an asylum office's jurisdiction are interviewed at the asylum office's principal office. There are currently eight principal Asylum Offices located in Arlington, Virginia; Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; Newark, New Jersey; New York, New York; and San Francisco, California. Those applicants who live far from the principal office are scheduled to be interviewed at an Asylum suboffice or another USCIS location closer to the applicant's residence. There are currently two Asylum suboffices located in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Boston, Massachusetts, as well as numerous circuit ride locations throughout the United States.

Asylum officers conduct confidential, nonadversarial interviews of each applicant. USCIS conducts background and security checks at several stages throughout the affirmative asylum process, including before the day of the interview. On the day of the interview, USCIS verifies the applicant's fingerprints. During the interview, the Asylum Officer places the applicant under oath, confirms the applicant's identity, confirms the applicant's biographical information, reviews evidence (if any) submitted in support of the asylum claim, and elicits information regarding the applicant's reasons for applying for asylum. After the interview, the Asylum

⁷ As an exception, under the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, the Asylum Division accepts and adjudicates the asylum applications of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) in removal proceedings. This report focuses on statistics related to the Asylum Division's adjudication of asylum applications, including UACs.

⁸ "Defensive" asylum applications refer to requests for asylum initially filed with an immigration court after an individual has been placed in removal proceedings. EOIR's immigration judges generally adjudicate defensive asylum applications. This report does not analyze data or trends associated with decisions on defensive asylum applications.

Officer prepares a written assessment evaluating whether the applicant meets the legal definition of a refugee and is not subject to a bar from a grant of asylum, enters a decision into the Refugees, Asylum, and Parole System (RAPS), and submits the case to a Supervisory Asylum Officer for review. A Supervisory Asylum Officer must concur with the Asylum Officer's finding before USCIS issues a final decision. Generally, USCIS creates and serves decision notices on the applicant 2 weeks after the interview or, in limited circumstances, mails notices to the applicant's home address.

If USCIS finds an applicant ineligible for asylum and the individual holds a valid immigration status or is qualified to remain in the United States (e.g., based on temporary protected status (TPS) or, in some cases, parole), USCIS issues the applicant a notice of intent to deny (NOID) explaining the reasons that USCIS found the applicant ineligible. The applicant then has the opportunity to contest the reasons and to provide additional evidence in support of the application. The asylum office may receive additional evidence and make a final determination either to grant or to deny the application. If USCIS issues a final denial, the applicant remains in valid immigration status, TPS, or parole until its expiration or termination.

If USCIS finds an applicant ineligible for asylum and the individual does not hold a valid immigration status or is not qualified to remain in the United States, the asylum office issues a referral notice, notifying the applicant that USCIS has sent the case to a Department of Justice ([DOJ], EOIR) immigration court. The asylum office also will serve a notice to appear (NTA), placing the applicant in removal proceedings before an immigration judge. The applicant then has the opportunity to apply for asylum before an immigration judge, who evaluates the application *de novo*.

If USCIS finds an applicant eligible for asylum, the asylum office issues an asylum approval notice explaining the benefits associated with asylum and the procedures for applying for subsequent immigration benefits for which the applicant may be eligible.⁹ The asylum office also issues an I-94 card, *Arrival/Departure Record*, for the principal applicant and each dependent endorsed with an asylum approval stamp that bears the date of the asylum approval, signature, Asylum Office code, and officer identification.

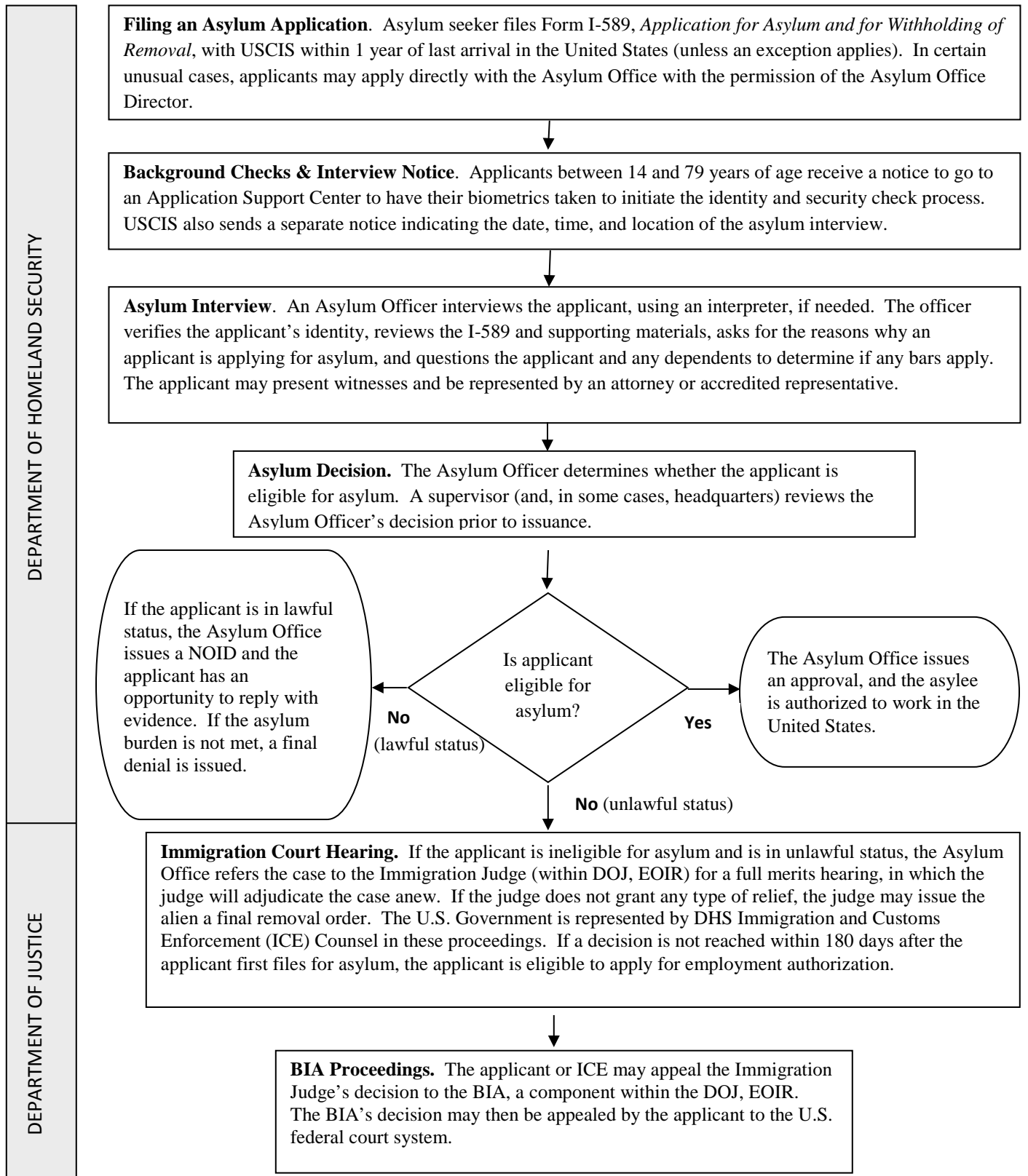
The principal applicant is the individual within the case who is claiming to be a refugee eligible for asylum.¹⁰ The applicant's spouse and children who are physically present in the United States may be included in the request for asylum as dependents. To be included, a child must be younger than 21 years of age and unmarried at the time of filing. The dependent spouse and children of an alien granted asylum may be granted the same status, even if the spouse and children are not eligible for asylum. However, a spouse or child cannot be granted asylum if he or she is subject to one of the mandatory bars listed in the section titled *Asylum Statutory Authority*, with the exception of firm resettlement.¹¹

⁹ In limited situations if certain security checks are pending, the applicant receives a recommended approval notice until the security checks are complete. 8 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) § 208.14(b).

¹⁰ INA § 208(a)

¹¹ 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.3(a); 208.21(a); INA § 208(b)(3). Spouse and child are defined in INA §§ 101(a)(35) and 101(b)(1).

Figure 1: Steps in the Affirmative Asylum Process



B. Asylum Division Caseload and Staffing in FYs 2010–2014

The Asylum Division received or reopened 212,989 affirmative asylum applications from FYs 2010 through 2014. During this period, the Asylum Division scheduled 203,835 interviews. In addition to its affirmative asylum workload, the Asylum Division has jurisdiction over credible fear and reasonable fear cases, which involve screening interviews of certain individuals subject to expedited removal proceedings that express individuals' fear of return to their home countries. The credible fear and reasonable fear screening process commonly is referred to as the Asylum Pre-Screening Officer (APSO) program. Notably, over these 5 years, the division faced tremendous growth in its credible fear and reasonable fear workloads. In FY 2010, the Asylum Division received 11,019 APSO referrals. In FY 2014, the Asylum Division received 60,085 APSO referrals, a 445-percent workload increase since FY 2010. Because Asylum Officers interview APSO cases, the Asylum Division had to ramp up Asylum Officer hiring in response to the APSO workload increase. The number of authorized Asylum Officers was increased from 283 in FY 2010 to 450 by the end of FY 2014 to meet the growing demand.

C. Asylum Officer Hiring

Asylum Officers are federal employees under Title 5 of the U.S. Code. Asylum Officers must either (1) possess 1 year of experience “assisting individuals applying for immigration benefits by examining supporting documentation for authenticity and relevance, as well as researching and analyzing appropriate information for eligibility; and interpreting and applying immigration laws, policies and procedures as they relate to an individual’s eligibility for immigration benefits” or (2) possess a Master’s degree or 2 full years of graduate education or a Juris Doctor (JD) or Legum Baccalaureus degree from an accredited college or university.

Prospective candidates apply for these positions through merit promotion vacancy announcements, public job notices, and noncompetitive hiring authorities.¹² Top candidates are identified and interviewed on the basis of the qualifications detailed in their resumes. USCIS regularly requires writing samples from applicants. Hiring managers make decisions after considering an individual’s experience, qualifications, writing skills, interview responses, and reference checks. After the hiring manager makes a selection and a human resource specialist confirms it, USCIS makes a tentative job offer to the candidate. USCIS makes a final job offer after the individual passes a background investigation and USCIS grants a security clearance. The minimum clearance required for an Asylum Officer is Secret.

D. Asylum Officer Training

All Asylum Officers must successfully complete a Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Combined Training Course (RAIO CT) and an Asylum Division Officer Training

¹² A detailed description of the hiring process and special hiring authorities can be found on the USCIS website: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/careers/how-apply> and <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/careers/special-hiring-programs>.

Course (ADOTC) as part of the training program. These courses include residential, face-to-face training and about 42 training days.

RAIO CT is a course that the USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate (RAIO) developed to serve as part of the basic training of new RAIO officers. RAIO requires all of its officers to attend the course prior to adjudicating cases. The RAIO CT is a rigorous course that covers legal topics, interviewing techniques, decision making and analytical skills, legal writing, research, and procedural issues. The training materials consist of training modules that include lesson plans, numerous accompanying memoranda, procedures manuals, precedent BIA decisions, federal court decisions, and other documents. Instructors include USCIS attorneys and subject matter experts in international protection. RAIO conducts two exams to evaluate students' comprehension of the content of the course. RAIO CT includes 11 days of distance training and 13 days of residential training.

ADOTC builds on the material covered at RAIO CT with a focus on the Asylum Division's specific procedural guidance and topics unique to asylum adjudications. Successful completion of both RAIO CT and ADOTC is a mandatory job requirement for all asylum officers. The Asylum Division administers evaluation instruments throughout the course to measure student learning. Students must pass one written exam and a practical exercise exam (mock interview and analytical writing exercise) to evaluate their comprehension of the content of the course. ADOTC includes 5 days of distance training and 13 days of residential training.

E. Asylum Applicant Representatives

An asylum applicant may be represented by an attorney or an accredited representative of a recognized organization.¹³ There is no right to government-funded representation. Applicants must provide for their own representation if they wish to be represented. The representative must file a properly completed Form G-28, Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative, which the applicant must sign. Because of the nonadversarial nature of the affirmative asylum process, the role of the representative during the interview is limited. The asylum officer controls the interview and asks most of the questions. The asylum officer may allow the representative to comment or ask questions during the course of the interview to clarify specific points. At the end of the interview, asylum officers give the attorney or representative an opportunity to offer a closing statement. Asylum Officers have the discretion to limit the length of the closing statement or, in rare circumstances, require that a statement be submitted in writing instead.¹⁴

¹³ 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(a)(3).

¹⁴ 8 C.F.R. § 208.9(d).

IV. Statistical Report Background

Prior published statistical models on asylum adjudications informed this report's methodological and analytical framework. These models included two reports by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, formerly known as the General Accounting Office) which analyzed decision-making in the defensive asylum context, as well as an academic study of affirmative asylum case outcomes.

The first of these studies, released by the GAO in September 2008, was entitled “The U.S. Asylum System: Significant Variation Existed in Asylum Outcomes across Immigration Courts and Judges” (GAO-08-940). In that study, GAO analyzed DOJ, EOIR asylum data on immigration judge asylum adjudications. GAO found that in the 19 immigration courts that handled almost 90 percent of asylum cases from October 1994 through April 2007, seven factors significantly affected asylum outcomes: (1) whether the asylum application had first been filed affirmatively with USCIS or its predecessor agency, the former Immigration and Naturalization Service; (2) the applicant's nationality; (3) the time period in which the asylum decision was made; (4) whether the applicant had representation; (5) whether the applicant filed the application within 1 year of entry to the United States; (6) whether the applicant claimed dependents on an asylum application; and (7) whether the applicant had ever been detained. Across immigration judges, in addition to these seven factors, two other factors significantly affected asylum outcomes: (1) the immigration judge's gender and (2) the immigration judge's length of experience. The seven factors that did not significantly affect applicants' likelihood of being granted asylum were the following immigration judge characteristics: (1) age, (2) caseload, (3) race/ethnicity, (4) veteran status, (5) prior government immigration experience, (6) prior experience doing immigration work for a nonprofit organization, and (7) the presidential administration that appointed the judge. The study also concluded that the likelihood of being granted asylum varied across and within the 19 large immigration courts included in the review.

The second study, entitled Lives in the Balance: Asylum Adjudication by the Department of Homeland Security, was published in 2014 and was authored by Andrew I. Schoenholtz, Philip G. Schrag, and Jaya Ramji-Nogales.¹⁵ The authors performed a statistical analysis on 383,480 affirmative asylum applications between October 1, 1996, and June 8, 2009, to analyze the effect of the 1-year filing deadline on asylum applications. The study separately analyzed 303,000 of those cases in which the applicant met the deadline or qualified for an exception to the deadline. The study also analyzed biographical data of 221 asylum officers who decided 31,635 of the cases, and correlated these personal characteristics with case outcomes. The biographical data analyzed included (1) officer ethnicity, (2) gender, (3) experience, (4) prior government experience, (5) marital status, and (6) region of birth. The study found that applicants with dependents were granted asylum 18 percent more often than applicants without dependents¹⁶, applicants who entered the U.S. with inspection were granted asylum 45 percent more often than

¹⁵ Andrew I. Schoenholtz, Philip G. Schrag & Jaya Ramji-Nogales, Lives in the Balance: Asylum Adjudication by the Department of Homeland Security (New York: New York University Press 2014).

¹⁶ *Id.* at 121

applicants who entered without inspection¹⁷, and applicants who were represented were granted asylum 19 percent more often than applicants who were not represented.¹⁸ The study also found that the grant rates for applicants from countries with the most abusive human rights conditions, i.e., those with high (12-14) mean Freedom House scores, varied among the eight asylum offices from 32 percent to 82 percent.¹⁹ Across asylum officers, the study found that asylum officers with a JD degree have a grant rate of 12.5 percent higher than officers without a JD,²⁰ asylum officer grant rates increase steadily with adjudication experience,²¹ and there was little difference in grant rates among male and female officers.²²

The third study, entitled “ASYLUM: Variation Exists in Outcomes of Applications across Immigration Courts and Judges” (GAO-17-72) was released by the GAO in November 2016. In that study, GAO again analyzed DOJ, EOIR asylum data on immigration judge asylum adjudications. GAO found that asylum grant rates varied by immigration court. For example, from May 2007 through September 2014, the asylum grant rate in the New York City immigration courts was 66 percent for applicants who first filed for asylum affirmatively with USCIS and 52 percent for applicants who filed for asylum after being put into removal proceedings, while the grant rate was less than 5 percent (affirmative and defensive) in the Omaha and Atlanta immigration courts. Asylum grant rates also varied depending on applicant nationality and the individual immigration judge deciding each case. The GAO also found that after controlling for other factors, three factors significantly affected both affirmative and defensive asylum outcomes, including whether the applicant: (1) was represented by legal counsel; (2) had at least one dependent; and (3) filed the application within 1 year of entry to the United States. For applicants who first filed affirmative applications with USCIS, the presidential administration that appointed the presiding judge and the presiding judge’s years of experience were also statistically significant factors affecting asylum grant rates. Statistically insignificant factors included whether the presiding judge was male or female, the size of each judge’s and court’s asylum caseload, and, with a few exceptions, the federal circuit where the case took place. For defensive cases, the judge’s gender was a statistically significant factor. Judge experience and the presidential administration that appointed judges had no statistically distinguishable associations with defensive asylum grant rates.

A. Data Sources

The Asylum Division collected and analyzed asylum officer and asylum adjudication data from FYs 2010-2014 (October 1, 2009, to September 30, 2014). The Asylum Division relied on two main sources to obtain this data: reports generated by RAPS and human resources (HR) reports generated by the USCIS Human Resources Operations Center (HROC) using its system of

¹⁷ *Id.* at 128

¹⁸ *Id.* at. 133

¹⁹ *Id.* at. 145; Freedom House is an independent nongovernment organization focused on advocating for the expansion of democracy across the world. The organization carries out its mission by analyzing the progression or regression of democracy trends in nearly every country across the world, publishing research findings to promote greater political rights and civil liberties. More about Freedom House can be found at: <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us>.

²⁰ *Id.* at. 185

²¹ *Id.* at. 189

²² *Id.* at. 178

records hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Finance Center (NFC). NFC is the DHS civilian payroll and HR systems shared service provider.

RAPS is the Asylum Division's case management system for adjudicating affirmative asylum applications.²³ RAPS tracks case status, and facilitates the scheduling of appointments and interviews and the issuance of notices. RAPS also generates reports that the Asylum Division uses to assist with workflow management and productivity monitoring. Each asylum officer is assigned a unique asylum officer identification number. USCIS enters individual asylum case information into RAPS at different stages of the adjudication process. Officers must enter a decision code into RAPS for each completed asylum case.

NFC has multiple applications for the processing and retrieval of different types of employee data. The Asylum Division requested NFC data for this report because USCIS and DHS no longer collect the same biographic asylum officer data in a machine-readable format that was collected during the earlier *Lives in the Balance* study.²⁴

B. Data Collection

The Asylum Division generated a RAPS report of all final affirmative asylum decisions from FYs 2010-2014. During that time, Asylum Officers entered approximately 135,536 final decisions into the RAPS case management system. To refine the data set, the Asylum Division excluded certain types of cases to ensure that the data included only those in which an Asylum Officer rendered a decision after conducting an interview. For example, the Asylum Division filtered out those cases that were administratively closed or that the applicant abandoned. The Asylum Division used the RAPS decision code to filter out such cases. For the remaining cases, the Asylum Division extracted additional case information from RAPS including the asylum office location, the unique officer ID of the individual that entered the final decision on the case, the applicant's country of nationality, whether the applicant was represented by counsel or an accredited representative, whether the applicant included dependents on the application, and whether the applicant applied for asylum within 1 year after arriving in the United States.

The Asylum Division then grouped these decisions by the unique asylum officer ID number. The Asylum Division excluded decisions by officers who made 35 or fewer final adjudications during FYs 2010-2014²⁵. The Asylum Division excluded these decisions in order to ensure that each officer grant rate was based on a reasonable sample size of cases, as well as ensuring that

²³ See DHS/USCIS-101 Asylum Information and Pre-Screening System of Records, Nov. 30, 2015, 80 FR 74781 and DHS/USCIS/PIA-027 Refugees, Asylum and Parole System and the Asylum Pre-Screening System, Nov. 24, 2009 at <https://www.dhs.gov/uscis-pias-and-sorns>.

²⁴ During the timeframe of the *Lives in the Balance* study, the Asylum Officer Basic Training Course was held at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC). FLETC required all students (regardless of agency or course enrollment) to provide detailed information on their backgrounds. The Asylum Division later moved its training to a different facility that did not require this information.

²⁵ Excluding officers who made 35 or fewer final adjudications reduced the total number of officers measured from 695 to 461.

the overall data set was of a sufficient size to analyze.²⁶ This practice is consistent with the GAO's 2008 and 2016 reports, which excluded immigration judges who heard fewer than 50 affirmative cases and fewer than 50 defensive cases. The Asylum Division also excluded two asylum officers that were on temporary assignment when adjudicating. The dataset excludes these officers so that the grant rate comparison included only permanent officers that would have been assigned a typical asylum officer workload.

After excluding these officers, 461 officers and 101,103 decisions remained. The Asylum Division requested biographic information from NFC for each of these asylum officers. Biographic information provided by HROC included each officer's gender and date of birth. The Asylum Division calculated an officer's adjudication experience by using the first and last dates that the individual entered a final decision in one of the case management systems.

The Asylum Division then organized and analyzed the case decision and biographic data for the effects of demographic factors on asylum decision outcomes. The remainder of this report outlines the primary findings of those analyses, as well as general trends of Asylum Division decisions as a whole.

²⁶ Setting the adjudication threshold at 36 or more adjudications provided the sample with the required amount of data typically required to form a normal distribution (Central Limit Theorem) and allowed statistical comparisons between groups. Increasing the threshold to higher than 36 adjudications, however, would dilute the sample's statistical value.

V. Statistical Models

A. Overview of Statistical Models

A three-level hierarchical (nested) model was used to estimate asylum approval outcome ratios of individual asylum applicants assigned to individual asylum officers and to individual asylum officers situated within the context of their respective offices. The models utilized in this study measured how different asylum officer and asylum applicant characteristics affected case approval odds during the relevant 5-year period. The asylum officer characteristics measured included officer: (1) age; (2) sex; (3) asylum adjudication experience in years; and (4) total asylum cases adjudicated. The applicant characteristics measured included: (1) whether the applicant's case included dependents; (2) whether the applicant had legal representation; (3) the freedom rating of the applicant's country of nationality; (4) whether the applicant filed before the 1-year deadline; and (5) the applicant's nationality subregion.²⁷ The analysis also measured how approval odds differed depending on which asylum office adjudicated the application.²⁸

In order to ensure that final models were as accurate as possible, the Asylum Division processed the data in four stages. The first stage systematically analyzed asylum officers, asylum offices, and applicant nationality subregion data to ascertain how each factor influenced approval odds and to select variables for final models. The second stage analyzed asylum offices separately in order to uncover trends unique to particular offices. The third stage analyzed asylum officers separately to determine their demographic characteristics' influence on approval odds and to inform final model data structuring. The final stage modeled individual asylum officer and applicant characteristics, accounting for how any officer and asylum office characteristics not included in the analysis may affect case approval odds.²⁹

These final models indicate that filing on time, geographic subregion of the applicant's nationality, and freedom levels of the applicant's country of nationality were the most influential factors in accounting for differences in case approvals when compared to the other characteristics of the asylum officers and applicants. Not having legal representation was also influential, but less influential than other applicant characteristics. The following sections address the extent that each factor influenced asylum case approval odds.

²⁷ See, Appendix: "Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014," Figure 16 Table: Final Model Approval Odds Ratios.

²⁸ See, Appendix: "Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014," Figure 15 Table: Final Model Approval Odds Ratios.

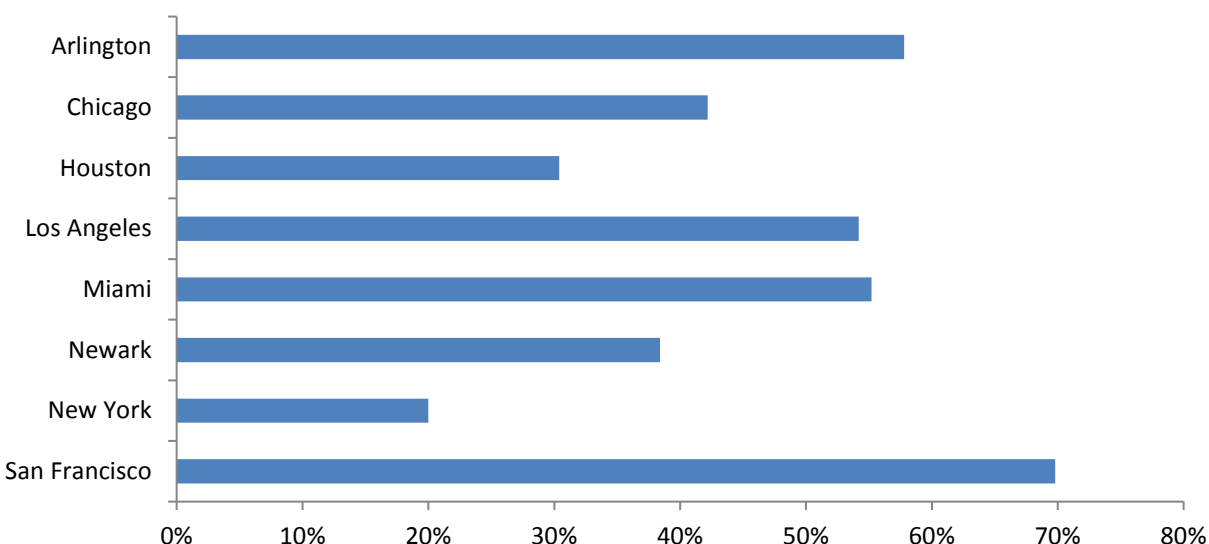
²⁹ More information on the stages of the statistical analysis can be found in this report's Appendix: "Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014."

B. Detailed Analysis of the Findings

1. Asylum Offices and Approval Odds

For all asylum applications, asylum offices exhibited a range of grant (i.e., approval) rates from FYs 2010-2014. During that timeframe, the San Francisco Asylum Office had the highest grant rate, at 69 percent of all applications, and the New York Asylum Office had the lowest grant rate, at 20 percent of all applications.

Figure 2: Average Office Grant Rate FYs 2011-2015



These variations can be explained to some degree by the fact that these offices receive applications from different nationality pools because some nationalities may seek to settle in areas of the country in which significant populations of individuals of the same national origin or group are already established. If an office receives a large number of applications from a particular nationality pool, it is possible that the office's grant rate may be significantly higher than that of another office that primarily services a different nationality pool if conditions in that second country are not as strong for an asylum grant.

Consistent with previous studies, the final model identified a range of approval odds among asylum offices.³⁰ Model results indicate that there are factors that either cannot be measured or that are simply unknown at the time of the analysis, which are influencing case approval odds at five out of eight asylum offices when compared to the office with the lowest approval rate, the New York Asylum Office. Results indicate that at the Houston and Newark offices, unobserved factors did not exert a statistically significant influence on case approval odds when compared to the New York office. The remaining offices, located in Arlington, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and San Francisco, had a range of unobserved factors that influenced case approval odds

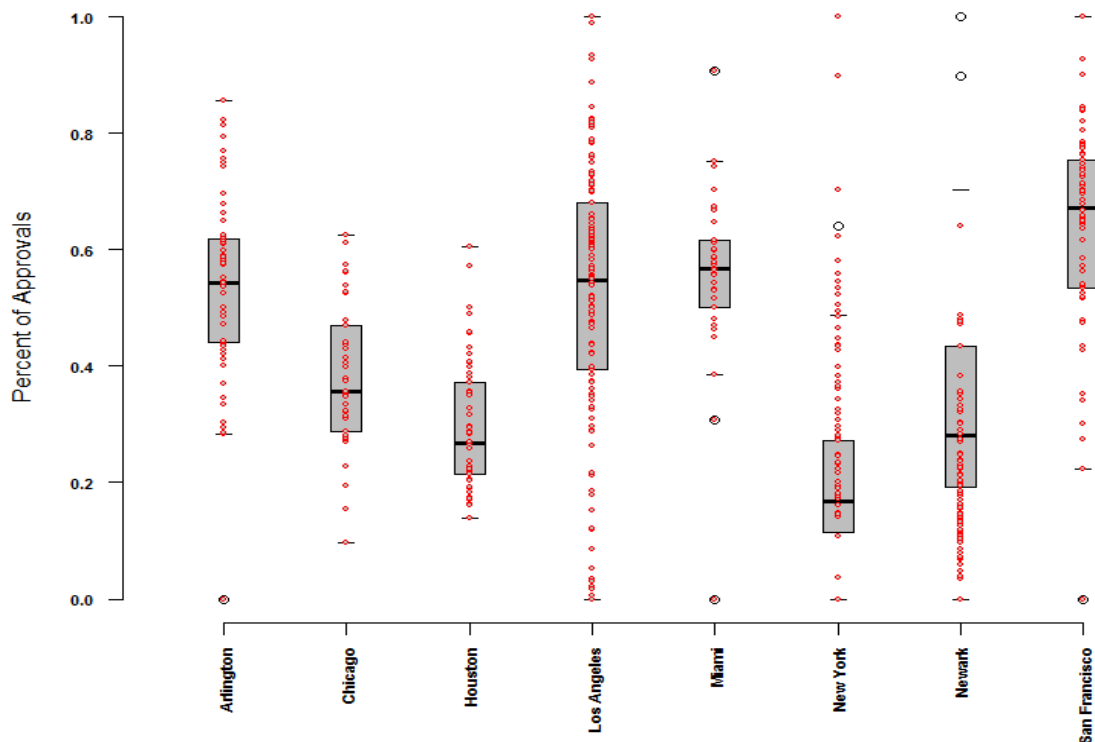
³⁰ See, Appendix: "Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014," Figure 15 Table: Final Model Approval Odds Ratios.

when compared to the New York office, with Arlington showing the smallest influence and San Francisco the largest influence.

Unfortunately, the model used in this analysis does not allow for the interpretation of each asylum office's approval odds because the number of asylum offices (8) does not provide sufficient statistical strength to make reliable estimates. However, there is a significant range of asylum officer approval odds both within and between the offices. A wide variation range of approval odds signals that there are unobserved office-level factors that exert influence on approvals that are either unknown or unmeasurable. Further analysis would be required to identify these yet unknown factors. These factors may include applicant or officer characteristics, additional aspects of the applicant's world subregion, or asylum office cultural norms that may exert systematic influence on outcomes.

Individual Asylum Officers within each office also exhibited a range of approval percentages, illustrated in Figure 3, below. In Figure 3, red dots represent each individual officer's approval rate, the gray boxes encompass the range between the 25th and 75th percentiles of approval rates for each office, with the black bar representing the 50th percentile, and black circles represent data outliers.

Figure 3: Range of Individual Officer Approval Rates by Asylum Office



One primary reason for the variation in approval percentages is due to Asylum Officers not having equal caseload assignments. For example, an officer may be assigned to conduct a final review of a large number of cases that other Asylum Officers recommended be approved pending security checks. This officer may tend to enter a larger ratio of approvals into RAPS than an average officer adjudicating a case from start to finish. Alternatively, an officer may be assigned to conduct a final review of a large number of cases that other officers gave notice of intent to deny determinations pending the applicant's submission of additional relevant evidence, if any. This officer may tend to enter a larger ratio of denials into RAPS than an average officer adjudicating a case from start to finish. Senior Asylum Officers are asylum officers with extensive experience adjudicating applications, and asylum offices utilize these officers in unique ways. This may also explain, to some extent, differences in approval odds amongst officers. Senior Asylum Officers often are assigned complex cases, like cases involving applicants with criminal convictions or cases requiring the application of novel case law. Senior Asylum Officers may grant a lower ratio of cases because their caseloads are disproportionately complex and tend to have more criminal and legal hurdles compared to typical asylum cases. Moreover, between offices, the quality of the representation or the circuit in which the case is being decided may impact approval rates across offices. These differences in workload types may account for some of the officer approval rate outliers in Figure 3.

2. Subregions of Nationality and Approval Odds

During the course of an asylum adjudication, the Asylum Officer must determine whether the applicant has established that he or she has been persecuted or has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.³¹ Country conditions information is an important factor in asylum decision-making.³² Given the determinative role that country conditions information plays in the decision-making process, it follows that case approval outcomes will vary across nationalities.

This analysis found considerable differences in asylum approval odds based on the applicant's nationality subregion. The results indicate that cases with the highest approval odds are those filed by nationals of countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia. Compared to the East Asia subregion,³³ applicants from Northern Africa were about 11 times more likely to be granted asylum and applicants from West Asia³⁴ were about 5 times more likely to be granted asylum.³⁵

³¹ INA § 101(a)(42)

³² See INA § 101(a)(42); 8 CFR § 208.13; See UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, HANDBOOK ON PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING REFUGEE STATUS.

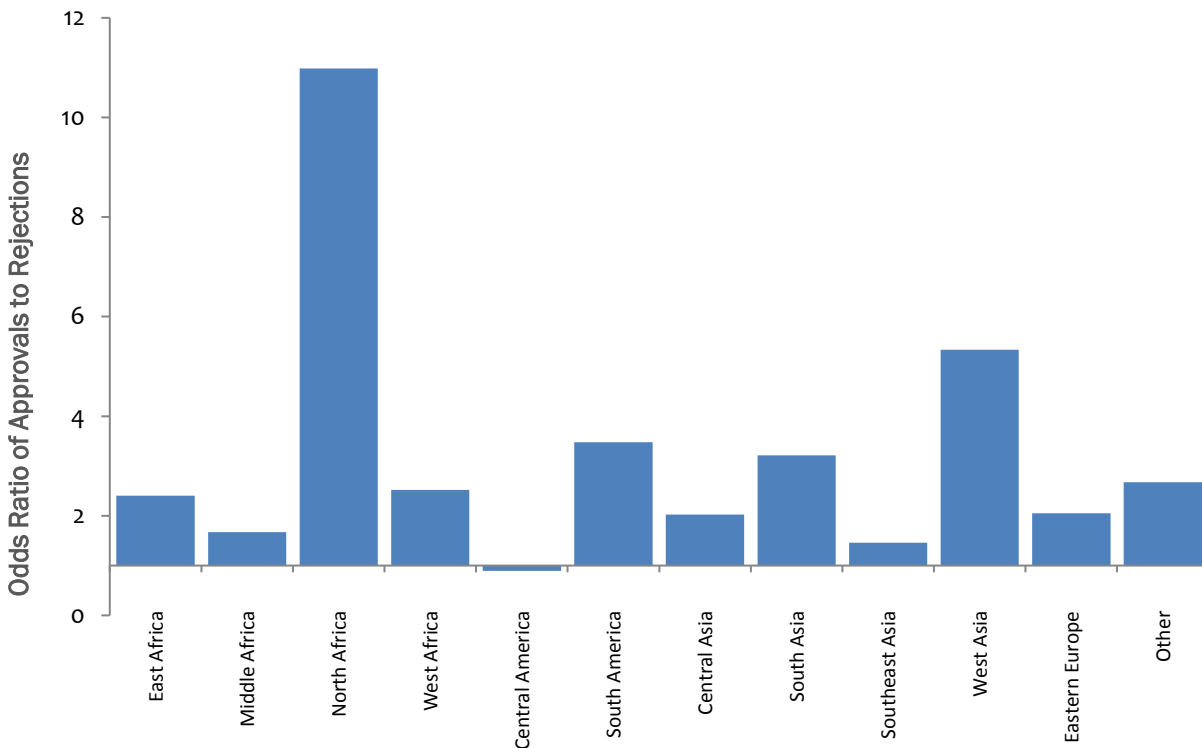
³³ East Asia is designated as: China, Hong-Kong Special Administrative Region (China), Macao Special Administrative Region (China), Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Republic of (South) Korea.

³⁴ West Asia is designated as: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

³⁵ North Africa is designated as: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Western Sahara. West Asia is designated as: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

The lowest case approval odds are for Central American nationals at about 11 percent less likely.³⁶

Figure 4: Nationality Subregion Changes in Odds for an Asylum Approval*



Reference is East Asia –see footnote 63 on page 38 for details.

3. Officer Characteristics and Approval Odds

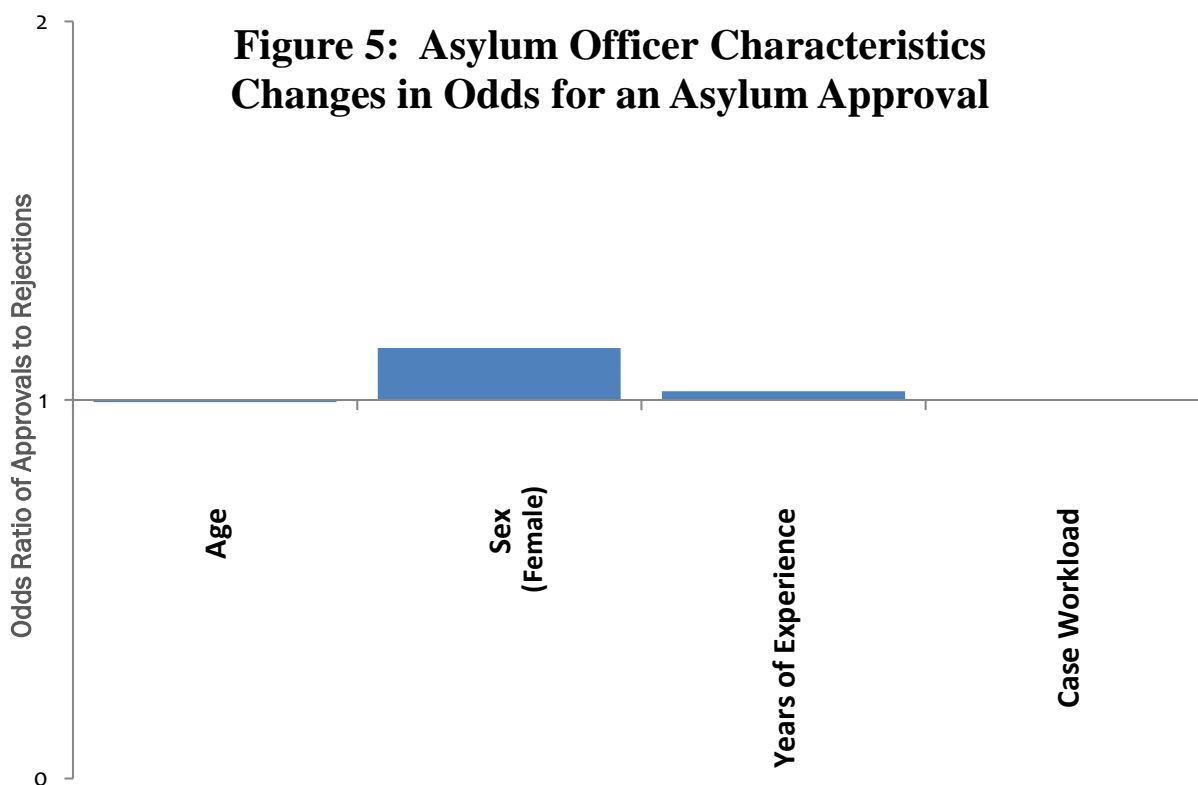
Similar to grant rates across asylum offices and immigration courts, several studies also have addressed whether personal characteristics of asylum decision-makers affect case approval odds. In 2008, the GAO found that the immigration judge’s gender and the length of the service as an immigration judge significantly affected asylum outcomes.³⁷ Conversely, the *Lives in the Balance* study found little difference between the grant rates of male and female asylum officers, but it did find that grant rates increased among officers with more adjudication experience.³⁸ On average, Asylum Officers in this analysis were about 47 years old, were about 56 percent female, and had about 7 years of asylum adjudication experience.

³⁶ Central America is designated as: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

³⁷ GAO Study at 22.

³⁸ Schoenholtz et al, p. 178, 189.

This analysis indicates that an Asylum Officer's age, sex, and number of total asylum cases adjudicated do not have a statistically significant impact on case approval odds.³⁹ While an Asylum Officer's years of experience did have a statistically significant impact on case approval odds, a more experienced officer was only one to four percent more likely to approve an asylum application. The Asylum Division trains its officers to properly weigh relevant evidence when determining applicant eligibility for asylum. The Division also trains officers to ignore irrelevant and inappropriate evidence like an individual officer's preconceived notions that certain nationals are not truthful, or whether an applicant follows the same cultural norms as the interviewing officer.⁴⁰ This training aims to ensure, in part, that each officer's personal characteristics, like his or her age, sex, or personal beliefs do not inappropriately affect eligibility determinations.



4. Applicant Characteristics

This analysis indicates that each applicant characteristic measured has a statistically significant impact on approval rates.⁴¹ However, the range of the change in approval odds varied

³⁹ See, Appendix: "Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014," Figure 16 Table: Final Model Approval Odds Ratios.

⁴⁰ Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Lesson Plan, Decision Making, pages 10-11.

⁴¹ See, Appendix: "Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014," Figure 16 Table: Final Model Approval Odds Ratios.

significantly. For example, having one or more dependents had the smallest impact among applicant characteristics, increasing the odds of case approval by eight percent. Alternatively, whether an applicant filed before the 1-year deadline had the largest effect on approval odds among applicant characteristics, as applicants that filed before the deadline were 3.8 times more likely to receive an approval.

An applicant's nationality subregion's Freedom House score also had a large impact on case approval odds. Applicants from regions with a lower Freedom House score had an 88 percent higher likelihood of case approval. As mentioned above, country conditions information is an important part of asylum decision making. Whether the government of the applicant's nationality protects the exercise of a political opinion, religion, racial identity or other identity affects the applicant's eligibility for asylum. As a result, the Asylum Division expects that the Freedom House rating of an applicant's nationality would affect the applicant's approval odds.

This analysis indicates that applicants without representation had a 33 percent lower likelihood of being granted asylum. Applicants who must provide evidence that their case merits an exception, like an exception to the 1-year filing deadline, particularly may benefit from representation. An asylum applicant must establish that he or she filed for asylum within 1 year from the date of last arrival in the United States, or establish that he or she is eligible for an exception to the 1-year filing requirement.⁴² If an applicant fails to establish either timely filing or that an exception applies, the application must be referred to the Immigration Court.

Each applicant has the burden to establish by "clear and convincing" evidence that they filed for asylum within the 1-year deadline.⁴³ Clear and convincing is a relatively high standard, and represented applicants may benefit from an attorney with knowledge of the type of evidence necessary to meet this burden. The exceptions to the deadline include the existence of changed circumstances materially affecting the applicant's eligibility for asylum or extraordinary circumstances related to the delay in filing.⁴⁴ Asylum officers are trained to fulfill their affirmative duty "to elicit all relevant and useful information bearing on the applicant's eligibility for asylum," including whether the above exceptions apply.⁴⁵ Applicants required to produce evidence of such exceptions might particularly benefit from the guidance of an attorney, who might ensure the applicant submits relevant documentary or testimonial evidence of the existence of an exception to the 1-year filing deadline.

Attorney case-selection tendencies may also explain, to some extent, why represented applicants are more likely to be granted asylum. Attorneys may tend to agree to represent applicants with stronger asylum claims and refuse to represent clients with weaker claims. Generally, attorneys want to develop and maintain a reputation for winning asylum cases. Moreover, attorneys do not want applicants to invest time and money if the applicants do not have a strong claim and likely would be denied asylum regardless of whether they had legal representation. These incentives

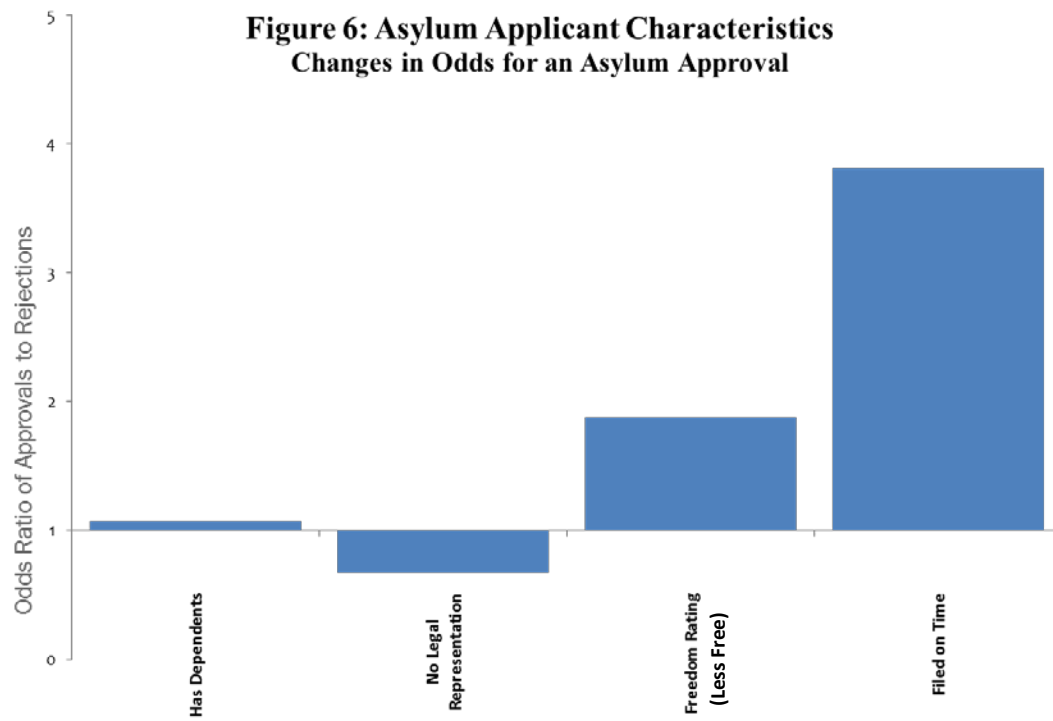
⁴² 8 C.F.R. § 208.4(a).

⁴³ INA § 208(a)(2)

⁴⁴ INA § 208(a)(2)(D); 8 C.F.R. § 208.4(a).

⁴⁵ UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, HANDBOOK ON PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING REFUGEE STATUS, para. 196; 8 C.F.R. § 208.9(b); Asylum Lesson Plan, One Year Filing Deadline.

may explain, in part, how attorney case-selection bias may skew approval outcomes for represented applicants compared to unrepresented applicants.



VI. Conclusions

This report provides information on factors associated with affirmative asylum applications adjudicated by the USCIS Asylum Division from FYs 2010-2014 and the changes in case approval odds associated with those factors. Of the factors measured, timeliness in filing for asylum, geographic subregion of nationality, and freedom score of an applicant's country of nationality were the most statistically significant factors in accounting for differences in case approvals. Not having legal representation was also influential, but less influential than other applicant characteristics. Statistical analysis also indicates that personal characteristics of the asylum officers like gender, age, and experience had a small-to-negligible effect on case approval odds. Future studies incorporating additional factors may aid in the effort to explain differences among asylum approval rates among asylum offices and across applicant nationalities.

Appendix A: Analysis Method of Asylum Approvals – Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014

Reported here are the data and methodology used to statistically model the influence of select asylum officer, applicant, and asylum office characteristics on asylum case approval outcomes between FY 2010 and 2014.

The primary objective of this analysis was to ascertain what relationship, if any, a select set of asylum officer and applicant characteristics have with case approvals, accounting for unobserved group-level contextual factors that may influence case decisions. A three-level hierarchical (nested) model was used to estimate asylum approval outcome ratios of individual asylum applicants on individual asylum officers' dockets, with asylum officers situated within the context of their respective offices. Hierarchical models allow for group patterns within a set of data to be accounted for so that differences between groups can be detected. In this analysis, the use of a hierarchical model allows for limiting outcomes to officers who reviewed the cases, and in turn limiting those officers to their respective asylum offices so that approval differences within and between can be measured. Models that do not distinguish between groups are weak because they may not detect outcome differences or the degree to which a factor may influence an outcome.

Contextual factors were included in these models because they may indirectly influence case outcomes due to officers and applicants being exposed to norms from organizational governance, societal practices, customs, and cultural aspects. As such, differences in approval odds may be partially the result of systematic bias that individuals develop within the same context that may ultimately affect the decision-making process by asylum officers, rather than any given individual factor associated with an officer or applicant. By accounting for group-level factors in a three-level hierarchical framework, the models were able to isolate the influence of individual and group-level contextual factors that have been shown to have a relationship with case outcomes.

The results show that individual asylum officer demographic characteristics have little-to-no influence on asylum case approvals. Applicant characteristics have considerable influence on approvals, notably whether the applicant filed for asylum within 1 year of his or her last arrival as required by statute. Applicants who filed prior to the deadline were far more likely to be granted an approval than those who filed after. The geographic subregion of the applicant's nationality and freedom level of the applicant's country of nationality were the next most influential characteristics on approvals. The results show that countries that are less free are more likely to produce applicants who are eligible for asylum. Not having legal representation was the least influential of the applicant characteristics measured by the study, with the absence of representation leading to an approval being less likely.

Data

Each observation in the analysis was a completed–adjudicated–case between October 1, 2010, and September 30, 2014. The data used in the analysis is derived from three sources.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Human Resources Office provided the Asylum Division with officer biographical data, including gender and age. This data came from the National Finance Center database.

The USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate Asylum Division Refugees, Asylum, and Parole System (RAPS) database provided data on individual case decisions. The independent variables that represent applicant characteristics are recorded from the I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal form.⁴⁶ All cases included in the study were from affirmative asylum cases only. A total of 102,376 cases initially was examined in the analysis. Observations for officers who adjudicated less than 36 cases were removed to meet a minimum standard for conducting statistical analysis, leaving 101,103 cases for analysis.

Information pertaining to Asylum Officer experience also was also derived from RAPS using the date that each officer first and last entered a final decision in the case management database. Only officers who adjudicated at least 36 affirmative cases were included in the analysis, leaving the work of 461 total officers to be used in the analysis.

Data from Freedom House⁴⁷ provided a “freedom score” for each applicant’s country of nationality. The freedom score is based on the relative strength of each country’s freedom in political rights and civil liberties.⁴⁸ Asylum applicants in this study were from 173 (90 percent) of the 193 countries in the world, which demonstrates considerable diversity within the data.

Dependent Variable – Asylum Application Outcomes

The outcome variable is of applicant case outcomes, which is divided into two types; approved (coded as 1) and nonapproved (coded as 0). Cases that were denied, referred, terminated, or rescinded were treated as nonapproved cases. Approval outcomes were modeled as the response of interest. Figure 7 shows the distribution of asylum officer approval percentages by individual office.

⁴⁶ Form details can be found at: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-589>.

⁴⁷ Freedom House is an independent nongovernment organization focused on promoting democracy across the world. More about the organization can be found at: <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us>.

⁴⁸ Freedom House uses a rating process to derive the Political Rights and Civil Liberties scores for its annual Freedom of the World report. Details of the method can be found at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2016/methodology>.

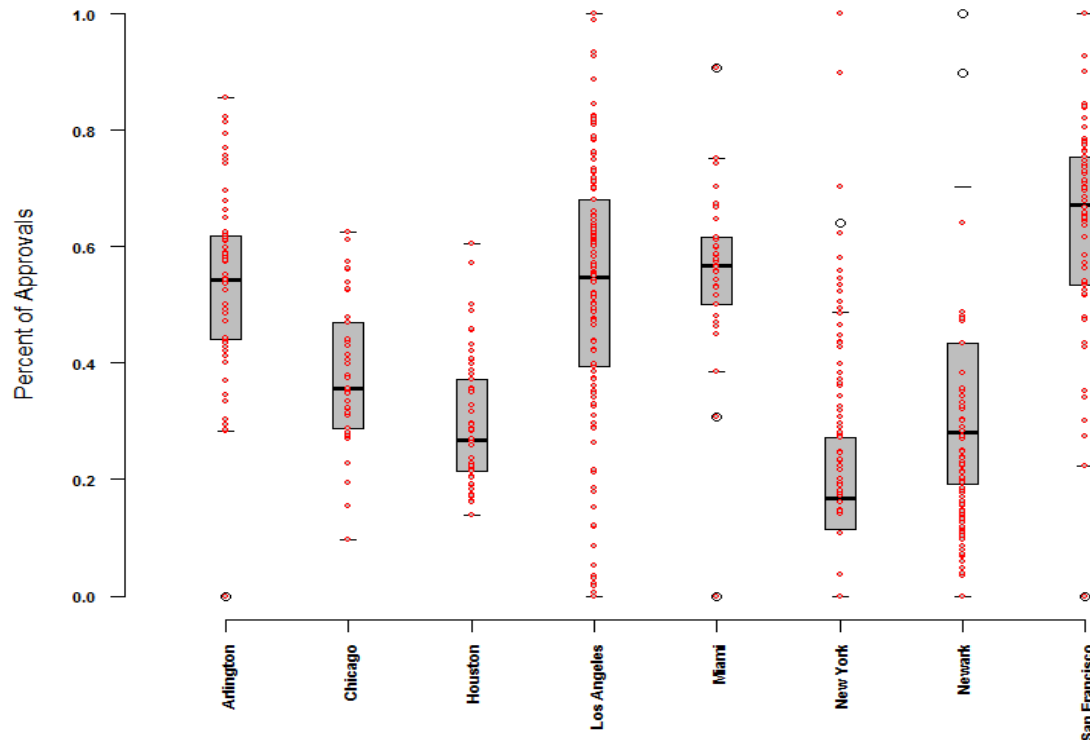


Figure 7: Distribution of Approval Percentages for Individual Asylum Officers, by Asylum Office

Independent Variables – Asylum Officer & Applicant Characteristics

A select set of asylum officer and applicant personal characteristics was used in this analysis to measure the direct relationship between officers and applicants and case outcomes. Empirical evidence from previous research on asylum cases addressing why these characteristics are expected to have influence on outcomes is scant, even though the theoretical reasons for their inclusion is noted (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO, formerly known as the General Accounting Office] 2008; Ramij-Nogales et. al., 2008; GAO 2016). This analysis uses similar variables to measure the relationship between asylum officers and applicant personal characteristics and asylum case outcomes.

Asylum Officer Variables

Four personal characteristics of asylum officers are used in this analysis as individual-level independent variables. Those variables are (i) age, (ii) gender, (iii) years of adjudication experience, and (iv) total number of cases adjudicated.⁴⁹

Evidence showing that age implicitly affects decision-making is scant. It has been suggested that younger officers might be more likely to approve a case because they would be more altruistic or

⁴⁹ Age, years of experience, and total number of cases were calculated for each case at the time the case was completed.

more sympathetic towards claims, or may be less experienced in key skills such as eliciting testimony, evaluating evidence, and familiarity with country conditions. Previous asylum decision outcome studies have not found a relationship between age of the judge/officer and the applicant's outcome (GAO, 2008, Schrag, et. al. 2010).

Studies have posited the effect that gender may have on case outcomes. This distinction is based on the emotional and cognitive differences between the sexes in solving problems (Gilligan, 1982; Lehman, 1993). Ramij-Nogales et. al. (2008) and Keith et. al. (2013) found that female immigration judges granted approvals more than males, but criminal justice research on the effect of gender differences on case outcomes is mixed (Mallicoat, 2007; Freiburger & Burke, 2011; Peck, Leiber, & Brubaker, 2014; Glynn, A, & Sen, M. 2015; Leiber, Peck, & Beaudry-Cyr, 2016; Lim, 2016).

Experience was measured in terms of years spent on the job adjudicating asylum cases.⁵⁰ Schoenholtz, et. al. (2014) posited that experience can have a negative effect on case approvals. In that analysis, the negative effect of experience on approval rates was seen as the result of an officer amassing knowledge and wisdom over the years in regard to the differences between cases that have elements of truth to those that are based on falsehoods. Miller & Curry (2009) found, though, that accumulated experience from adjudicating Federal Circuit Court cases does not influence judicial decision-making.

The total number of cases an officer has adjudicated is an additional experience factor that is specific to working on assigned cases. Handling more cases brings more direct experience from specifically working on a case, excluding time spent on other adjudication activities (e.g., training, general research, or discussions with colleagues about cases). Total case count, then, represents the more specific "at the desk" experience in adjudicating cases.

Asylum Applicant Variables

Five characteristics are used that represent characteristics and actions of the applicant and/or the applicant's country of nationality. Those are (i) whether or not the applicant had dependents, (ii) whether or not the applicant had legal representation, (iii) whether the applicant filed for asylum before the 1-year filing deadline, (iv) level of freedom that the applicant's country of nationality enjoys, and (v) region of nationality.

It has been suggested that having dependents potentially might help an applicant obtain asylum because it demonstrates a greater level of credibility (Ramij-Nogales, et. al., 2008). Indeed, the authors of that study found that asylum seekers with dependents had higher approval rates (48.2 percent) than those without dependents (42.3 percent). It was posited that asylum officers may be more sympathetic to applicants with dependents because it is seen as a strong attempt to protect the family (Ramij-Nogales, et. al., 2008; Schrag, et. al. 2010). In both studies, the results

⁵⁰ Adjudication experience was calculated by subtracting a case decision date from the earliest date at which the officer handling that case began adjudicating. The decision date represents the total time in which experience was gained across all cases up to the end of that case. The earliest adjudication date represents the first time an officer handled and completed an asylum case.

indicate that asylum applicants with dependents had a higher likelihood of being granted an approval while controlling for several officer and applicant characteristics.

The use of legal representation has been shown to improve case approval odds (Ramij-Nogales, et. al., 2008; Schrag, et. al. 2010, GAO, 2016). The trained representative can help an asylum seeker to fill out application materials correctly, navigate the legal apparatus, reinforce the importance of credibility and relevance of certain evidence to the eligibility criteria, and provide overall guidance on applying for asylum successfully. However, higher case approval odds may also be indicative of attorney selection bias in which an attorney may consciously or subconsciously choose to represent cases that are stronger.

Filing before the 1-year deadline serves as control and less as an explanatory variable. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 requires an applicant to apply within 1 year of his or her last arrival, unless extraordinary or changed circumstances arise that affect asylum eligibility or cause a delay in filing.⁵¹ It is believed that Congress' intent was to filter in those who had legitimate cases for asylum, because applicants who were truly fleeing from a fear of persecution would apply for asylum as soon as possible once in the U.S., except in certain circumstances (Schrag, et. al. 2010). About 40 percent of all cases were filed after the deadline, with 20 percent of those being granted making them an important variable to consider. Beyond being a control, it has been unknown as to what impact the deadline had on an approval and to what degree. As such, this variable is included as a control and to report the level of effect.

Asylum seekers typically come from countries with known humanitarian crises, high levels of conflict, and low levels of freedom. As such, subregion⁵² of nationality⁵³ was included to determine if the countries with most/least problems are associated with the highest/lowest approval odds. This characteristic also serves as a proxy for cultural or ethnic bias in the decision-making process, which has been shown to be strongly associated with nationality (Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Fearon, 2003; Chandra, 2006) as well as examining whether approvals are being granted to applicants who come from countries known to pose threats to their populations.

Freedom rating scores were used in this analysis to create an average score between political rights and civil liberties that represents an overall level of "real-world rights" for each applicant's country of nationality. It is expected that freedom in countries with lower real-world rights (higher freedom score) will have greater approval odds.

⁵¹ INA §§ 208(a); 101(a)(42); 8 C.F.R. § 208.4(a); Matter of Y-C-, 23 I & N Dec. 286, 288 (BIA 2002).

⁵² To reduce analytical complexity, countries were grouped into regions based on proximity to each other and similar socio-demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics to be represented as a regional collective of nationalities. Research shows that several characteristics related to these three factors statistically cluster from interactions between nearby countries (Berry, 1976; Brown, 1999; Georgas, van de Vijver, & Berry, 2004; Stanca, 2010; Clint, 2011; Glade, 2012; Dobson & Gelade, 2016) and persist over time (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). The root of these findings is from geography, in which spatial dependence and interaction provide the foundation for any expectation that countries in proximity to one another share commonalities. These two concepts stipulate that strong relationships are formed between geographies from social and economic interactions that occur and form diffusion processes that tie the geographies together in shared commonalities—see Miller, 2004 for an overview and empirical evidence of these processes.

⁵³ Nationality in the context of this analysis refers to country of citizenship.

Method

The final model used in this analysis estimates asylum applicant approval odds ratios by combining individual asylum officer and applicant characteristics, while accounting for asylum officer and asylum office group-level effects. The final models represent a “nested” hierarchical structure of multiple applicants assigned to asylum officer case dockets, with those officers being situated in distinct asylum offices.⁵⁴ These models create a contextual framework that isolates the impact of group-level characteristics that equally weigh on an outcome. In regard to an asylum officer, that person oversees multiple cases, and the characteristics of that person are applied systematically to the review of each applicant’s case. The hierarchical approach accounts for asylum office contexts that may affect or influence decision outcomes. Accounting for these groups improves the estimation of odds ratios because it accounts for unobserved characteristics that exert uniform influence on decisions, but that are not specifically modeled nor captured in simple one-level models with indicator variables because the variation is not measured—see group mean centering discussion below. Further, pooled data suffers from aggregation effects that hide underlying patterns, especially in data that has natural groups (i.e., offices), and that adversely affect statistical analysis. The adverse effect is known as Simpson’s Paradox and is discussed below.

The use of a hierarchical approach also allows for the results in this analysis adhere to the legislative language (on page 1) that USCIS and the Executive Office for Immigration Review use consistent methodologies to allow the results to be more directly comparable with each other.⁵⁵

Stage 1 – Grouping Cases for Measuring Contextual Effects

A strategy first was derived to group cases that emulated the natural “nesting” structure of the data. This included grouping cases on officer dockets within asylum offices and countries of nationalities into world subregions. Grouping accounts for potential systematic bias in decision-making towards applicants, but also allows testing for unobserved group effects. Three groups were used, which are (i) asylum officers, (ii) asylum offices, and (iii) applicant nationality subregion. The first two groups were used to adjust the data so they emulate the nesting structure. The third group was to aggregate the countries of nationality to reduce the number of variables used in the model.

Group one is made up of asylum officers, and was created to emulate the relationship of an officer handling multiple applicant cases simultaneously across time applying the same personal characteristics to each case. In this instance, cases potentially may be influenced systematically

⁵⁴ Asylum offices have delineated geographic territories, in which applicants residing in those geographies must submit to the respective office.

⁵⁵ Several simple one-level logit models were created and the results show the estimates to relative in comparison to their effects sizes between the included variables. The results also indicate that the use of the hierarchical modeling approach refined the results by accounting for the organizational grouping structure of the data. Some of the estimates were similar between the one-level and hierarchical models, but a number of variables were very different. Also, initial one-level models were run for each asylum office individually and reveal sizeable variation between the offices for a number of the included variables. Future analyses will include two-level hierarchical models for each individual office.

from the static characteristics of the officer (e.g., age, gender, adjudication experience, case workload). The officer characteristics form a more comprehensive decision calculus with applicant characteristics (e.g., dependents, legal representation, freedom rating, filing date, region of nationality).

The asylum offices comprise group two. This grouping was created to account for officers adjudicating from asylum offices with jurisdiction over a distinct U.S. geographic area. Contextual influence on officers may emanate from either asylum office working environment, or possibly the jurisdictional geography in which they reside, such as the laws of the federal circuit courts to which their decisions must adhere. Here, officers systematically may be influenced by organizational practices, culture, and norms with equal influence. These normative factors can come in the form of shared philosophies, societal practices, customs, or beliefs that may form from common organizational practices, rules, culture, or policies, but also from living in certain regional geographies. These group norms may influence applicant cases within an office.

Applicant nationality subregions comprise group three to represent the jurisdictional context of the individual offices. Nationalities by world subregion were used to represent immigrant settlement patterns associated with specific asylum offices, from which the pool of applicants emanates.

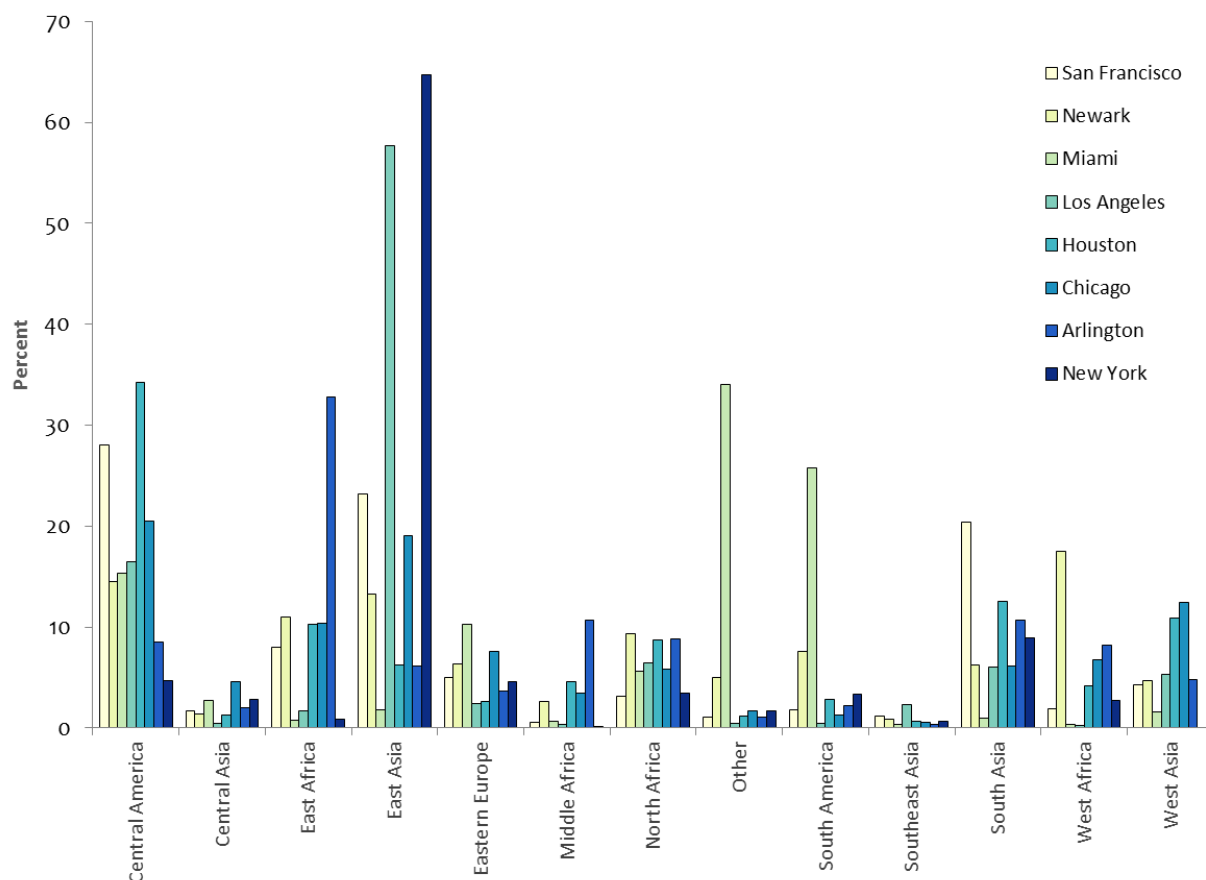


Figure 8: Percentage of Applicants from Regions of Nationality, by Asylum Office

Immigrants and nonimmigrants alike tend to concentrate geographically (neighborhoods, cities, counties, regions) from years of migration, forming enclaves that share commonalities in language, culture, and other societal practices that may affect an applicant's behavior. While applicants of all nationalities are present in each jurisdiction, considerable differences can be seen for the individual office jurisdictions in Figure 8. All asylum offices show very few percentages of applicants from Southeastern Asia, but a wide variation for most other regions, with the greatest differences for those from East Asia.

Figure 9 shows the converse of Figure 8, in which the percentages for each nationality subregion are depicted across the asylum offices. Applicants from the Other category of nationalities have the least differences across the offices, and applicants from Central America show the greatest differences. Houston and Chicago are the only offices that do not show a large percentage of one or two nationality subregions.

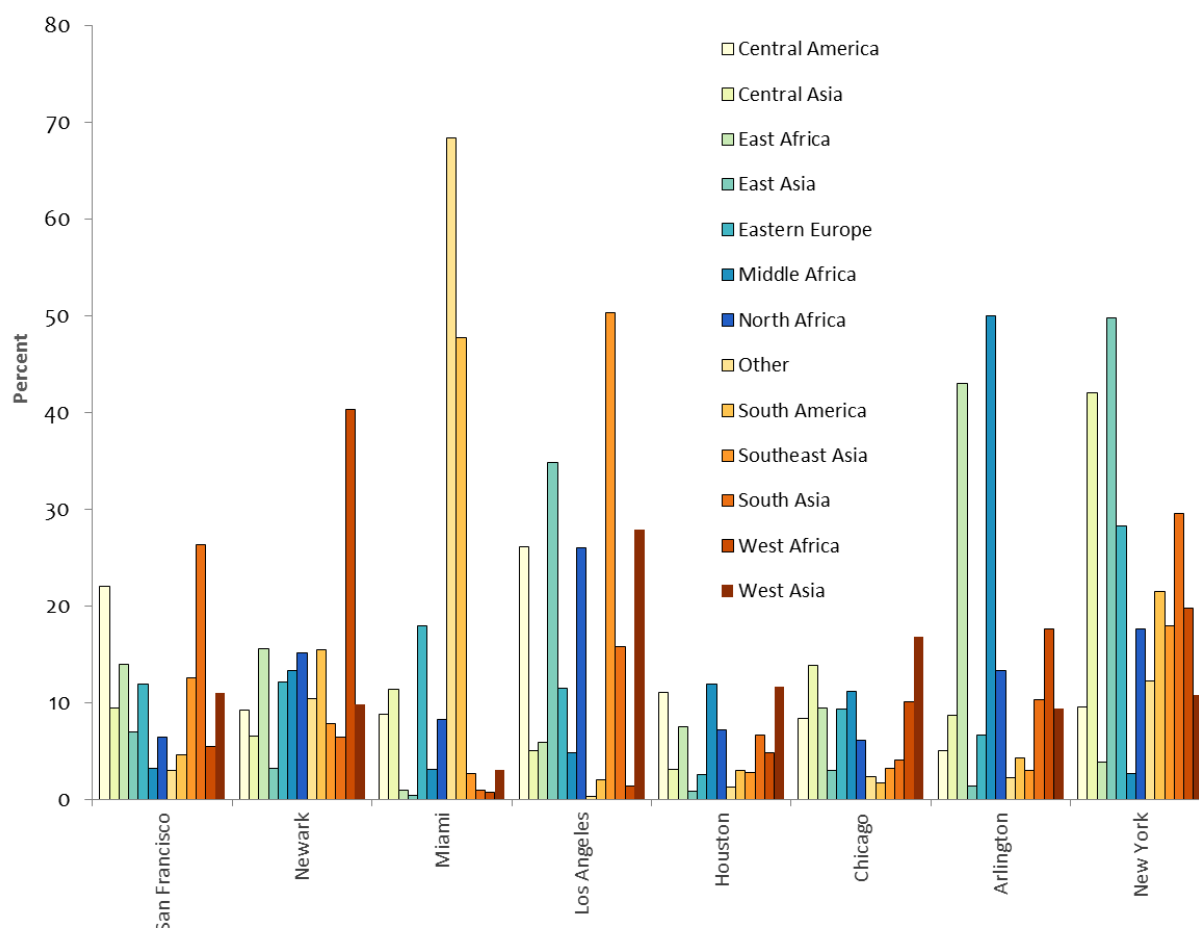


Figure 9: Percentage of Applicants for Asylum Offices, by Regions of Nationality

The inclusion of group-level variables accounts for the unobserved contextual factors that may have equal impact on individual applicant approval odds. That is, applicant approvals can result partially from contextual factors that influence each officer and, in turn, influence each case an officer handles in his/her docket. The model's structure is a three-level "nested" hierarchy. The

asylum offices serve as a contextual factor and are modeled at level three (highest level), to which the office culture, environment, and other norms are part of the context that influences each officer. Asylum officers are modeled at level two, whom are situated within distinct offices. Finally, officer and applicant characteristics are modeled at level one (lowest level), with these characteristics having direct influence on the decisions. Nationalities by world subregion are a level-1 applicant characteristic modeled as dichotomous (dummy) factors.

Stage 2 – Centering the Independent Variables and Groups

All independent variables were group mean centered to the asylum office means to isolate contextual effects within asylum offices for substantive and technical reasons that emulate the structure of the data. When pooled, group differences within an asylum office or by asylum officers are not detectable when modeled, i.e., correlated observations are not analyzed by the groups to which they belong in the regression data cloud. As such, group mean centering ensures that group effects were accounted for in examining the likelihood of approvals within each of the offices.

From the substantive aspect, group mean centering applies a *moderation* effect on approval decisions. This approach measures the relationship magnitudes between the officers and applicants within asylum offices on the approval decisions, while isolating the contextual aspects of the asylum offices and officers to account for contextual norms (Hofman & Gavin, 1998). Unlike the mediation approach, moderation considers contextual factors to have a two-directional (positive or negative) influence on outcomes. Across time, though, organizational norms can change that range in short to long time periods. Changes can come from such factors as staff turnover, hiring practices, new leadership mandates, or shifts in attitudes by local populations. These changes also vary from office to office and are reflective of changes in the socio-demographic and economic geographies in which they reside (Firebaugh, 1978; Allik and McCrae, 2004; Schmitt, et. al., 2007; Gelnade, 2013). Group mean centering represents that positive/negative change that may occur within asylum offices.

Technically, group mean centering allowed for isolating group effects to be within the asylum offices to emulate moderation. Group mean centering allows the approval outcome variation to be cordoned off within asylum offices to produce unbiased estimate parameters because they have not been adjusted to an overall mean for all offices (Firebaugh, 1978; Raudenbush & Byrk 2002). As such, the applicant and officer characteristics will be uncorrelated between asylum offices and the relationship between individual characteristics and approval within an asylum office is emphasized. With only eight asylum offices, the office estimates cannot be interpreted because there is no statistical power to be confident in the accuracy of the odds ratios. Nevertheless, the asylum offices were included at level-3 to preserve the natural structure of the data.

In group mean centering independent variables, the continuous covariates were centered on the asylum office means. All dichotomous and polytomous factors were centered on their asylum office proportions.

Stage 3 – Systematically Examining Characteristics with Approvals

Several incremental models were constructed first to scrutinize the selected variables—including several combinations and transformations—to verify their relationship with approval outcomes. The SAS LOGISTIC and GLIMMIX procedures with the logistic link function were used to model a dichotomous case outcome of approvals (code = 1) or rejections (code = 0). Several asylum officer and applicant characteristics were used as independent variables.

This sequential process allowed for systematically evaluating the stability and validity of the model variables to ensure their appropriateness for use in the final models. The final variable selection is theoretically grounded, validated by their use in similar research, and demonstrated stability when tested across several models⁵⁶. The selected variables for the final models are:

Asylum Officer

- Age: Continuous measure rounded down to the previous birthday age⁵⁷.
- Sex: Dichotomous factor to distinctly identify male and female officers.
- Years of Experience: Continuous measure of an officer's number of years as an asylum officer for USCIS rounded down to the previous anniversary⁵⁸.
- Total Cases Adjudicated: Continuous measure of the total number cases handled as an asylum officer for USCIS.

Asylum Applicant

- Has Dependents: Dichotomous factor to distinctly identify applicants who have a spouse and/or children and those who do not have a spouse and/or children.
- No Use of Legal Representation: Dichotomous factor to distinctly identify applicants who use representation to present their cases and those who do not use representation.
- Nationality Freedom Rating: Continuous measure that is the average of two scores that measure political and social freedoms.
- Filed by Deadline: Dichotomous factor to distinctly identify applicants who filed on or at the 1-year deadline and those who filed after the deadline.

Groups

- Asylum Officers: Average values of approval outcomes for each officer's case docket, within their respective asylum office.
- Asylum Offices: Polytomous factor that serves as a separate indicator variable for each of the asylum offices, in which each case is within an office.

⁵⁶ The model results are not presented here, but are available upon request.

⁵⁷ Age was squared and included in the initial models to test for a nonlinear decreasing effect of age on the decision-making process by officers. It was found that controlling for a nonlinear age effect had no effect on the odds of an approval. As such, the age squared variables was excluded from the final models to reduce complexity.

⁵⁸ Adjudication experience was calculated by subtracting a case decision date from the earliest date at which the officer handling that case began adjudicating. The decision date represents the total time in which experience was gained across all cases up to the end of that case. The earliest adjudication date represents the first time an officer handled and completed an asylum case.

- Regions of Nationality:⁵⁹ Polytomous factor that serves as a separate indicator variable for several world regions, in which an applicant's nationality is from a specific region.

Stage 4 – Testing for Group Variation of Asylum Offices and Asylum Officers

An initial logistic unconditional *between-group* model was first estimated of approval odd ratios at any given asylum office, without accounting for any explanatory factors. The results from this initial model show the approval odds differences between the asylum offices.⁶⁰ The considerable differences in approval odds ratios demonstrate the need to apply group mean centering to the independent variables (see Figure 10). All offices are statistically significant in regard to the presence of unobserved factors influencing approval odds, with the model explaining 13 percent of the differences between offices, leaving 87 percent of the differences emanating from unknown factors.

Overall the graph in Figure 10 shows that, as compared to the New York Asylum Office, the Houston and Newark offices have similar odds of granting approvals, Chicago being somewhat similar, Arlington, Los Angeles, and Miami being moderately different, and San Francisco being considerably different (see Figure 10 Supporting Table, below). This variation in approval odds is an indicator of unobserved factors contributing to the differences in approval odds.

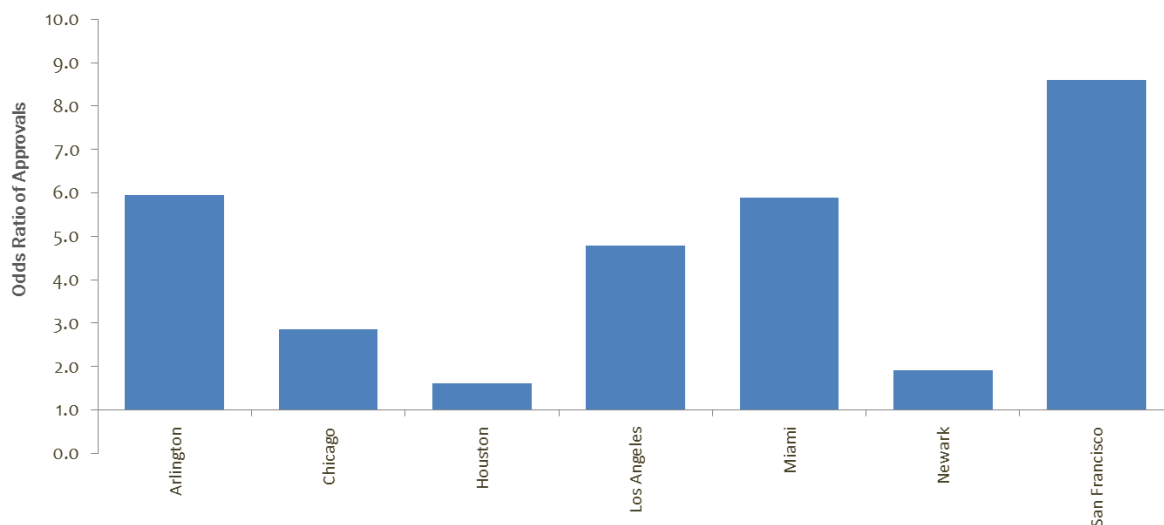


Figure 10: Odds Ratios for Approvals for the Asylum Offices Only, with the New York Office as Reference

The likelihood of approvals is about, on average, 5.5 times more likely for the Arlington (5.9), Los Angeles (4.8), and Miami (5.9) offices, as compared to the New York office. The lowest likelihood of approval granting is about, on average, 2.1 times in the Chicago (2.7), Houston

⁵⁹ Geographic subregion groupings follow the U.N. Statistical Division delineations:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

⁶⁰ For modeling approvals to account for the individual office differences, the New York office is the quantitative and qualitative choice for comparison. The New York office (i) has the lowest percentage of case approvals; (ii) is primarily dedicated to affirmative adjudications, (iii) has the highest volume of cases, and (iv) has the smallest geographic coverage area for applicant filing.

(1.5), and Newark (1.8) offices, as compared to the New York office. The San Francisco office shows the likelihood of an applicant being granted an approval is about 8.6 times more likely than in New York.

A second simple logistic unconditional *between-group* model was constructed to examine the difference in approval odds between all asylum officers, not distinguishing their being within one of eight asylum offices. The results from model 2 show 26 percent ($p < 0.0001$) of the differences in approval odds are accounted for by unobserved factors in an asylum officer's decision-making, not accounting for any additional factors. The ratios tended to show that officers within an office systematically were more likely to grant (Arlington, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco) or reject (Houston, New York) a case as groups, possibly from their shared culture, environment or other office norms. Only Chicago and Newark showed variation in approvals and rejections. This finding indicated a need to account for an organizational structure to capture within office variation (see Figure 11).



Figure 11: Odds Ratios for Asylum Officers Only

A third unconditional hierarchical *between-* and *within-group* model then was estimated to situate asylum officers within their respective office to examine the changes of approval odds ratios within the individual offices. Approval odds ratios across all asylum officers no longer followed office-specific patterns and now varied between lower and higher odds of an approval by officer, i.e., approval odds by officers no longer were equally likely to grant or reject an

approval as a group. However, considerable variation of approval odds within and between the offices remained. Only about 49 percent (226) of asylum officers now showed a statistically significant relationship with regard to unobserved factors being associated with the granting of approvals—a 26 percentage point decrease from model 2 (see Figure 12).

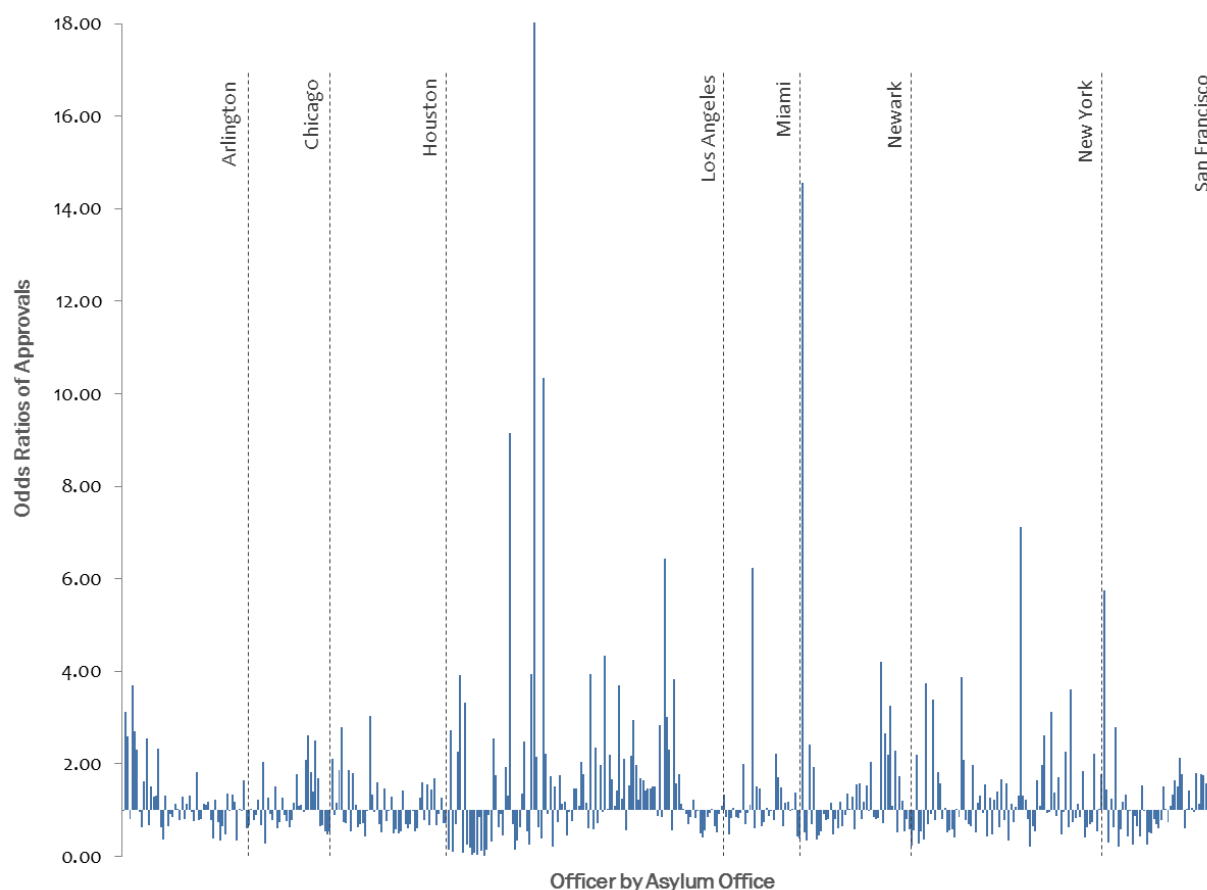


Figure 12: Odds Ratios for Asylum Officer, within Asylum Offices⁶¹

These results indicated that structuring the data to account for within office variation (group mean centering) improves the estimation of approval odds and reduces error from modeling all officers as single group and helps to explain the differences between offices identified in the first model.⁶²

⁶¹ The bar that reaches 18 in the Los Angeles Asylum Office extends beyond the range to be 43.3 times more likely to grant an approval. The large number was the result of one officer being assigned to review recommended approval determinations, which typically result in approvals. The bar was truncated to preserve the ability to visualize the remaining bars in the graph.

⁶² The results from analyzing all cases combined suffer from a statistical problem that occurs from aggregation bias, called Simpson's Paradox. The aggregation prevents detecting underlying patterns in the data from observations that share a commonality. This problem occurs because statistical techniques treat combined observations as a single group, in which the observations are assumed to be indistinguishable from one another and not have any shared commonalities that might affect the results. However, cases often do share commonalities that may have converse relationships between an outcome and the explanatory factors when analyzed as a subgroup.

Final Model

With considerable approval differences for asylum offices and asylum officers uncovered in the above analyses, a conditional hierarchical model was implemented to estimate *between-* and *within-group* asylum approvals odds ratios. The final model includes asylum officer and applicant characteristics, while accounting for asylum officers within their respective offices in a three-level hierarchical (nested) structure to account for differences within and between the offices.

The final model is defined, in general, as:

$$Y_{dig} = \beta_0 + \beta'_i X'_i + \beta'_g \delta'_g + e_{ig} \quad (1)$$

where: Y_{dig} estimated odds of a case approval decision d based on individual characteristics i of the applicant's and officers and group commonalities g ;

X'_i all relevant individual characteristics;

β'_i expected change of approval odds from the relevant groups;

δ'_g all relevant groups, in which the average approval decisions for each group are used;

β'_g expected change of approval odds from the relevant groups;

e_{ig} error around the approval odds for a case approval decision d of an applicant based on all relevant individual characteristics and group commonalities.

and specifically as:

) where: Y_{dig} estimated odds of a case approval decision d based on individual characteristics l

of the asylum applicants and officers, accounting for officer and asylum office group commonalities g ;

β_0 expected average asylum officer and asylum office group decisions;

$X\beta_o$ estimated change in odds from individual officer characteristics:

X_{o1} Age, mean centered on 0

X_{o2} Sex, proportion centered on Female

X_{o3} Years of Experience, mean centered on 0

X_{o5} Case Count, mean centered on 0

$X\beta_a$ estimated change in odds from individual applicant characteristics:

X_{a1} Has Dependents, proportion centered on Yes

X_{a2} No Use of Representation, proportion centered on Yes

X_{a3} Country of Nationality Freedom Rating, mean centered on 0

X_{a4} Filed on Time, proportion centered on Yes

X_{a5} Nationality in World Region, proportion centered on Yes

$X\beta_r$ expected change of approval odds for unobserved nationality sub-region r factors;

e_{aor} error around the approval odds for a case approval decision d of an applicant based on asylum officer and applicant characteristics, nationality sub-regions;

β_0 expected average approval decision d of a case of applicants from sub-regions r by an asylum officers o at asylum office f ;

- δ_o expected average approval decision for the asylum officers o ;
- δ_f expected average approval decision for the asylum offices f ;
- e_{dof} error around the approval probabilities of applicant case decisions d by an asylum officer o at asylum office f .

In accounting for the structure of the asylum officers within their respective offices, final model (1 and 2) now explains 21 percent ($p < 0.0001$) of the differences in approval odds. The odds ratios for all asylum officer and applicant variables are discussed in the next section. The results for the asylum offices cannot be interpreted because there are only eight observations and offer no statistical power for drawing any conclusions. However, the offices are included in the model at level three to preserve the natural “nesting” of officers within an office and the cases that the officers review. Keeping the offices in the model limits the analysis of cases to be within the respective offices so that differences of approvals within and between the offices can be detected. As noted previously, models that do not distinguish between groups are problematic because they may not detect outcome differences or fail to appreciate the level of influence that factors may truly have in explaining the outcomes. In some instances, relationships between the outcomes and factors could be reversed or change in statistical significance.

Discussion of Final Model Results

Overall, the results show that 1) filing on time, 2) geographic subregion of the applicant’s nationality, and 3) freedom level of the applicant’s country of nationality best explain the differences in case approvals. Not having legal representation was also influential, but less so than applicant characteristics.

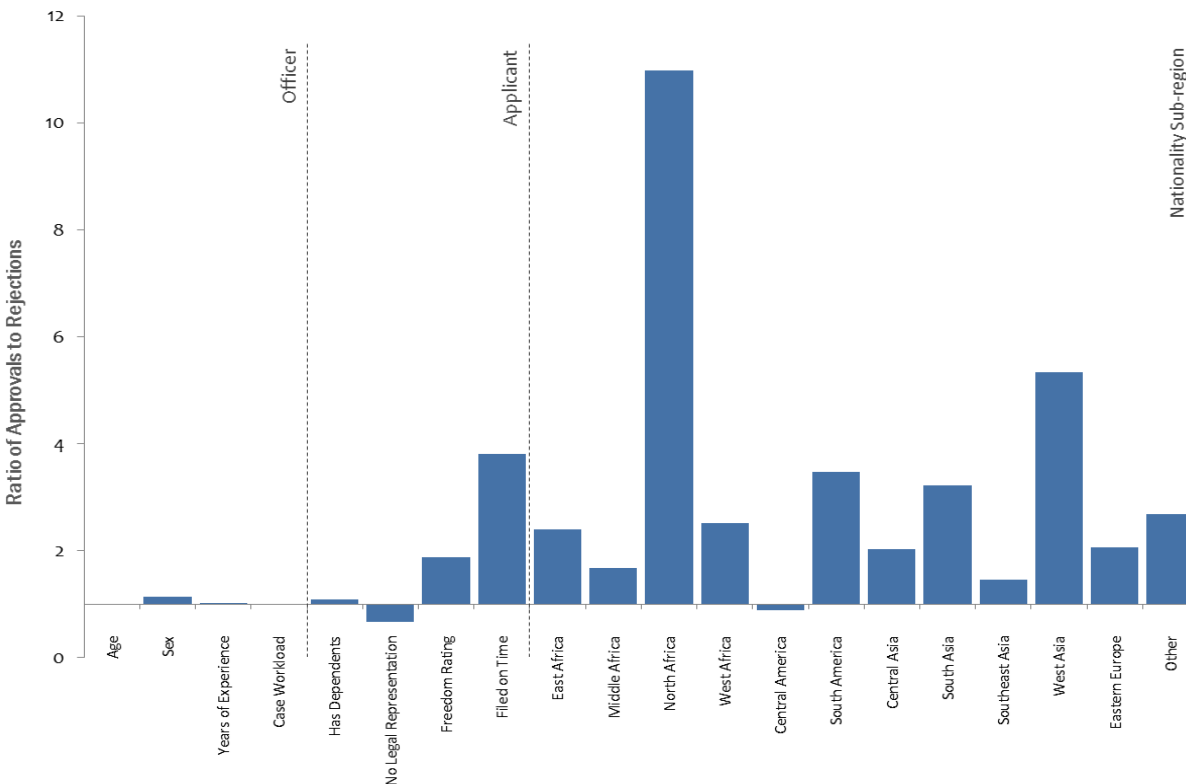


Figure 13: Approval Odds Ratios – Final Model

Figure 13 shows the variation of approval odds ratios for all modeled asylum officer and applicant characteristics, including the specific world subregions.⁶³ Nearly all variables are statistically significant, except for three of the four asylum officer characteristics. Years of Experience is the only officer variable statistically significant, but approval odds are no more than one to four percent more likely.

Asylum officer characteristics appear to have no influence on approvals, with all four characteristics either not being statistically significant or their influence on an approval being minimal; odds ratios close to one. Age and gender appear to be consistent with previous research and have no impact on case outcomes. This finding suggests that officers are making objective decisions based on relevant evidence. This finding may be the result of a number of factors related to how cases are processed by USCIS asylum officers. Officers must follow law and USCIS policies in making decisions.

Also, a second layer of case review is undertaken by an officer's supervisor before a case decision is rendered final. Finally, the weekly training that officers receive provides up-to-date information on law, procedures, and country conditions that may help to corroborate claims. These aspects all work to mitigate any biases that may emerge from personal characteristics, making decision-making as objective as possible.

Applicant characteristics show a wide range of influence on approvals. While statistically significant, having dependents only increases the likelihood of an approval by 8 percent, on average. Not using legal representation decreases the likelihood of an approval, on average, by 33 percent. Applicants who are from countries with lower freedom levels are about 88 percent more likely, on average, to be granted an approval. Filing on time appears to be the most important applicant characteristic in terms of gaining an approval, with an approval being 3.8 times more likely if an application is filed by the 1-year deadline. Having dependents does not appear to increase the likelihood of being granted an approval by much; only eight percent if the applicant has dependents. This suggests that case decisions are based on legal eligibility, regardless of the presence of dependents. Not using legal representation to help with the application process leads to an applicant being less likely to gain approval. Applicants from countries with lower levels of freedom have a greater chance of approval.

An applicant's nationality subregion has a significant effect on case approval odds. Except for filing on time, the subregions show the largest odds ratios for approvals over all other characteristics. Central America is the only subregion in which approvals are less likely, as compared to East Asia (11 percent less likely). Across the remaining subregions, the highest approval odds are for North African⁶⁴ nationals, at about 11 times more likely to be granted an approval than East Asian applicants. The differing odds ratios between the subregions indicate varying country conditions impacting the need to seek asylum. These results are consistent with expectations that countries that are less free are more likely to produce applicants who are eligible for asylum.

⁶³ East Asia served as the reference group for the analysis. East Asia was selected because China is within that region and had the largest number of cases at nearly 40 percent of all cases in this study.

⁶⁴ Most of the applicants in the North Africa subregion are from Egypt.

Figure 14 shows the variation of approval odds ratios for asylum officers, demarcated by office. The percentage of asylum officers that shows a statistically significant relationship of unobserved factors being associated with granting an approval is 49 percent (225). Of those officers, about 50 percent (120) show ratios in which granting an approval is more likely, as opposed to less likely. Within individual offices, the range of percentages of asylum officers associated with unobserved factors contributing to their approval odds ratios ranged from the lowest in Houston and Miami (31 percent) to the highest in Los Angeles (66 percent), followed by San Francisco at (66 percent). The average for asylum officers across all eight offices remains at 45 percent.

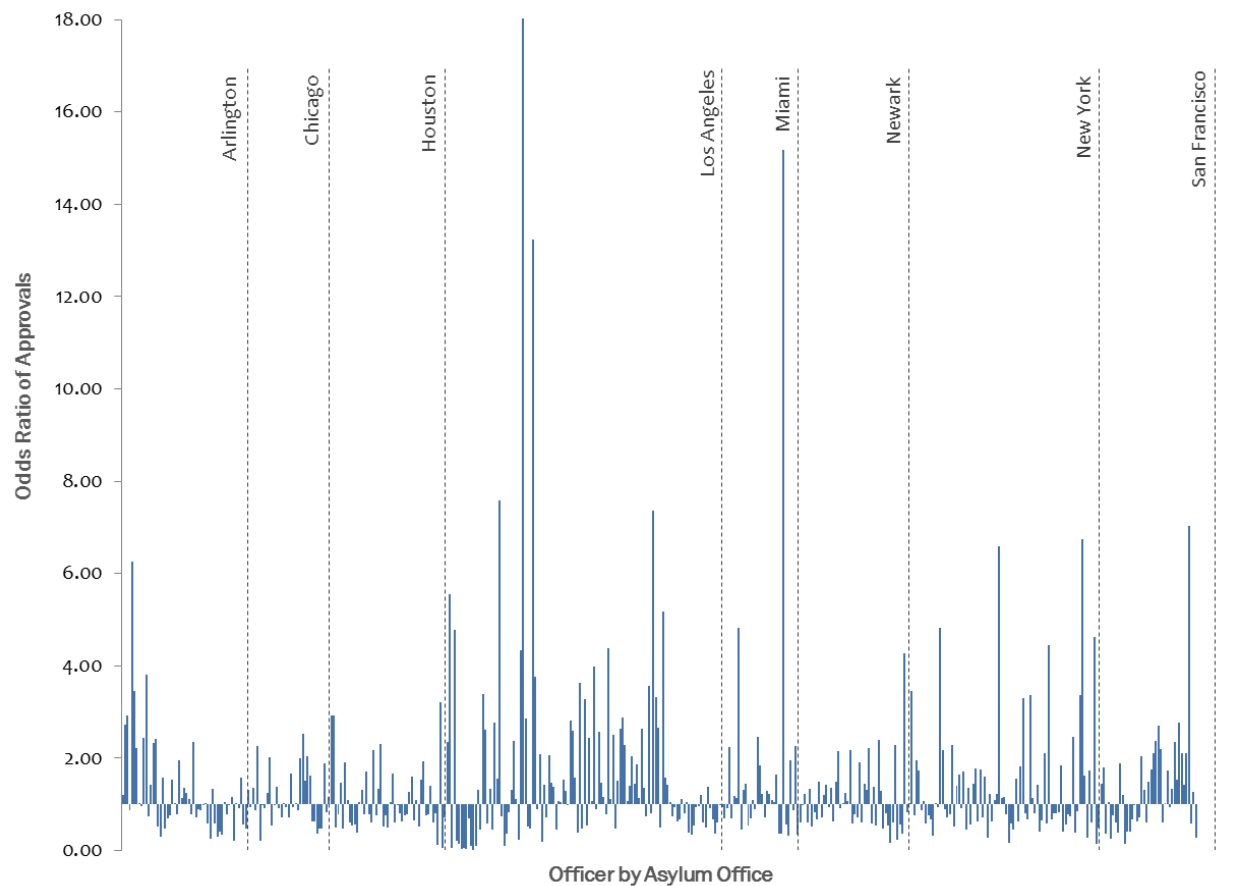


Figure 14: Odds Ratios for Asylum Officer, within Asylum Offices – Final Model

Conclusion

The timeliness in filing for asylum, geographic subregion of nationality, and freedom score of an applicant's country of nationality are the most influential factors analyzed for this report on case approvals. Not having legal representation was influential, but less than applicant characteristics. Asylum officer characteristics have minimal influence on case approvals, suggesting objectivity in granting approvals, i.e., there is minimal implicit bias in the decision-making process based on the characteristics used.

More important, though, is the relevance of geographic factors associated with the country of nationality in terms of the freedom levels of political rights and civil liberties and the world subregion from which applicants fled. The results of the freedom levels and the geographic subregions are congruent, with countries that are less free being more likely to produce applicants who are approved for asylum. There is considerable variation in approval odds based on the subregion of the applicant's country of nationality. However, it should be noted that the approval odds of a country's freedom level is approximately the same as the average of all of the subregion approval odds.

As indicated, approval odds for the individual asylum offices cannot be interpreted because there are only eight offices. That number provides no statistical power and therefore this report is unable to draw any conclusions. However, the results from Figure 14 show a substantial range of asylum officer approval odds both within and between the offices. This means that unobserved office-level factors likely have considerable influence on approvals. These factors may include applicant or officer characteristics, aspects of the geographies the applicants are from, or norms of the asylum office culture that may exert systematic influence on outcomes.

Odds Ratios with Confidence Bounds			
Field Offices	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval	
		<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
<i>Arlington</i>	5.94	5.64	6.26
<i>Chicago</i>	2.86	2.70	3.04
<i>Houston</i>	1.62	1.51	1.74
<i>Los Angeles</i>	4.78	4.60	4.97
<i>Miami</i>	5.89	5.59	6.20
<i>Newark</i>	1.92	1.82	2.02
<i>San Francisco</i>	8.60	8.19	9.03
<i>New York (Reference)</i>			

Figure 15 Table: Initial Asylum Office Model Approval Odds Ratios

Odds Ratios with Confidence Bounds				
	Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Officer	Age	0.99	0.99	1.00
	Sex (F)	1.14	0.94	1.37
	Experience (Years)	1.02 **	1.01	1.04
	Case Workload	1.00	1.00	1.00
Applicant	Has Dependents	1.08 ***	1.03	1.13
	No Legal Representation	0.67 ***	0.65	0.70
	Freedom Rating	1.88 ***	1.80	1.97
	Filed on Time	3.81 ***	3.66	3.97
World Sub-Region	East Africa	2.40 ***	2.23	2.60
	Middle Africa	1.67 ***	1.49	1.88
	North Africa	10.98 ***	10.07	11.98
	West Africa	2.52 ***	2.30	2.77
	Central America	0.89 **	0.82	0.97
	South America	3.48 ***	3.13	3.86
	Central Asia	2.03 ***	1.81	2.27
	South Asia	3.21 ***	2.98	3.46
	Southeast Asia	1.46 ***	1.22	1.74
	West Asia	5.34 ***	4.90	5.81
	Eastern Europe	2.05 ***	1.89	2.23
	Other	2.67 ***	2.39	3.00
	East Asia (Reference)			

*** statistical significance at the $p \leq 0.001$ under a Chi-square distribution

** statistical significance at the $p \leq 0.01$

Figure 16 Table: Final Model Approval Odds Ratios

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Appendix B: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ADOTC	Asylum Division Officer Training Course
APSO	Asylum Pre-Screening Officer
BIA	Board of Immigration Appeals
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
EOIR	Executive Office for Immigration Review
FLETC	Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office (formerly General Accounting Office)
HR	Human Resources
HROC	USCIS Human Resources Operations Center
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
JD	Juris Doctor
NFC	National Finance Center
NOID	Notice of Intent to Deny
NTA	Notice to Appear
RAIO	Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate
RAIO CT	Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Combined Training Course
RAPS	Refugees, Asylum, and Parole System
TPS	Temporary Protected Status
UAC	Unaccompanied Alien Children
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services