

Judge Sarah M. Ellison

FY 2020 - 2025*, Dallas Immigration Court

*data covers the first 11 months of fiscal year 2025

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Then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions appointed Sarah M. Ellison to begin hearing cases in November 2018. Judge Ellison earned a Bachelor of Arts in 2006 from the University of Mary Washington and a Juris Doctor in 2009 from St. Mary's University School of Law. From 2017 to 2018, she served as an assistant chief counsel with the Office of the Chief Counsel, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, in Pearsall, Texas. From 2014 to 2017, she served as an assistant U.S. attorney with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas, Department of Justice, in Laredo, Texas. From 2010 to 2014, she served as an assistant district attorney with the District Attorney's Office, Bexar County, in San Antonio, Texas. From 2009 to 2010, she was an associate attorney with the Law Office of Steven C. Benke, in San Antonio. Judge Ellison is a member of the State Bar of Texas.

Deciding Asylum Cases

Detailed data on decisions by Judge Ellison were examined for the period covering fiscal years 2020 through the first 11 months of 2025. During this period, court records show that Judge Ellison decided 258 asylum claims on their merits. Of these, she granted asylum for 98, granted 23 other types of relief, and denied relief to 137. Converted to percentage terms, Ellison denied 53.1 percent and granted 46.9 percent of asylum cases (including forms of relief other than asylum).

Figure 1 provides a comparison of Judge Ellison's denial rate each fiscal year over this recent period. (Rates for years with less than 25 decisions are not shown.)

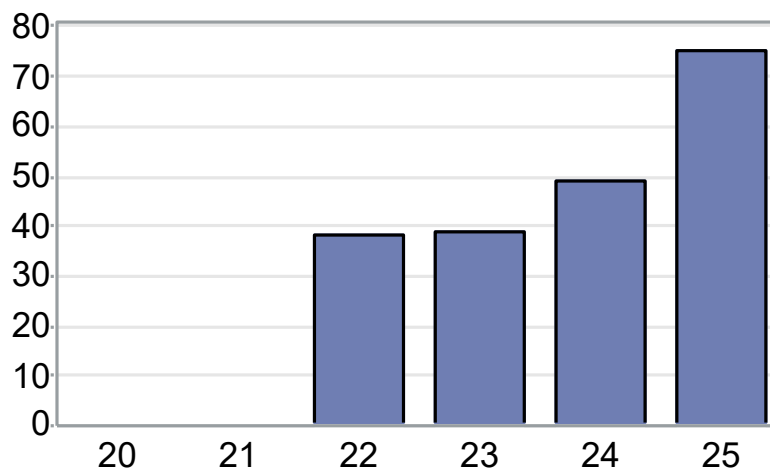


Figure 1: Percent of Asylum Matters Denied

Nationwide Comparisons

Compared to Judge Ellison's denial rate of 53.1 percent, Immigration Court judges across the country denied 58.9 percent of asylum claims during this same period. Judges at the Dallas Immigration Court where Judge Ellison decided these cases denied asylum 73 percent of the time. See Figure 2.

Judge Ellison's asylum grant and denial rates are compared with other judges serving on the same court [in this table](#). Note that when an Immigration Judge serves on more than one court during the same period, separate Immigration Judge reports are created for any Court in which the judge rendered at least 100 asylum decisions.

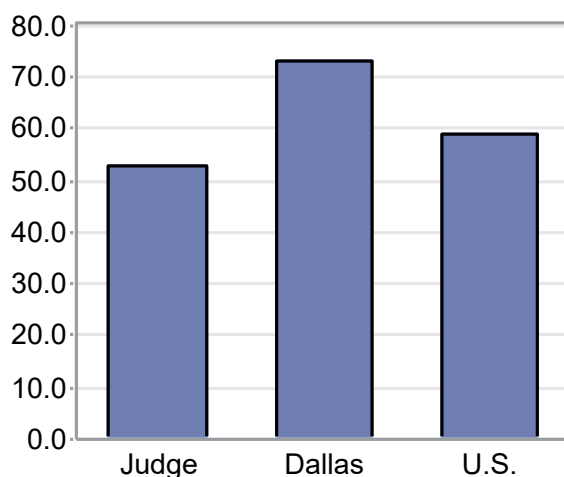


Figure 2: Comparing Denial Rates (percents)

Why Do Denial Rates Vary Among Judges?

Although denial rates are shaped by each Judge's judicial philosophy, denial rates are also shaped by other factors, such as the types of cases on the Judge's docket, the detained status of immigrant respondents, current immigration policies, and other factors beyond an individual Judge's control. For example, TRAC has previously found that legal representation and the nationality of the asylum seeker are just two factors that appear to impact asylum decision outcomes.

The composition of cases may differ significantly between Immigration Courts in the country. Within a single Court when cases are randomly assigned to judges sitting on that Court, each Judge should have roughly a similar composition of cases given a sufficient number of asylum cases. Then variations in asylum decisions among Judges on the same Immigration Court would appear to reflect, at least in part, the judicial philosophy that the Judge brings to the bench. However, if judges within a Court are assigned to specialized dockets or hearing locations, then case compositions are likely to continue to differ and can contribute to differences in asylum denial rates.

Representation

When asylum seekers are not represented by an attorney, almost all of them (77%) are denied asylum. In contrast, a significantly higher proportion of represented asylum seekers are successful. In the case of Judge Ellison, 11.2% were not represented by an attorney. See Figure 3. For the nation as a whole, about 17.1% of asylum seekers are not represented.

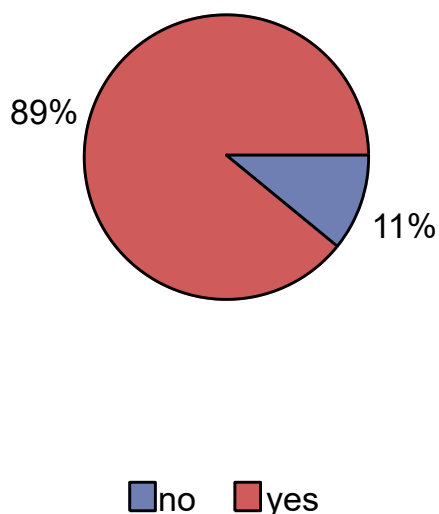


Figure 3: Asylum Seeker Had Representation

Nationality

Asylum seekers are a diverse group. Over one hundred different nationalities had at least one hundred individuals claiming asylum decided during this period. As might be expected, immigration courts located in different parts of the country tend to have proportionately larger shares from some countries than from others. And, given the required legal grounds for a successful asylum claim, asylum seekers from some nations tend to be more successful than others.

The largest group of asylum seekers appearing before Judge Ellison came from El Salvador. Individuals from this country made up 28.7% of her caseload. Other nationalities in descending order of frequency appearing before Judge Ellison were: Honduras (13.2%), Nigeria (11.6%), Venezuela (11.2%), Mexico (6.2%). See Figure 4.

In the nation as a whole during this same period, major nationalities of asylum seekers, in descending order of frequency, were Honduras (11.2%), Guatemala (11.2%), El Salvador (10.9%), Mexico (8.2%), China (5.2%), Venezuela (5.2%), India (5.1%), Ecuador (4.5%), Nicaragua (4.4%), Colombia (4.4%), Brazil (3.1%), Russia (3.1%), Cuba (2.8%).

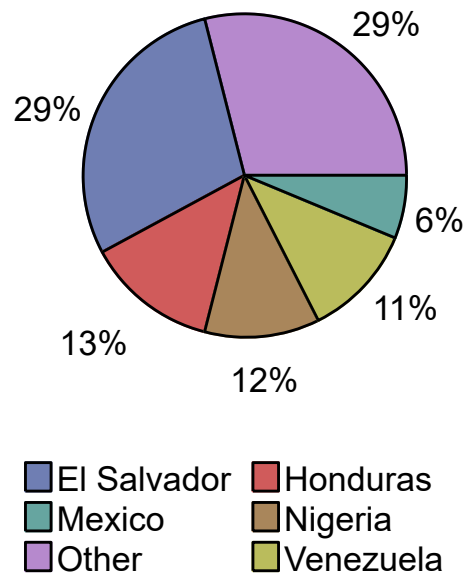


Figure 4: Asylum Decisions by Nationality

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