

Online Appendix

A Robustness Checks: Alternative Modeling Choices

One concern with the main analysis is that measuring professional experience in years may obscure whether results are driven simply by having ever worked in a given role, rather than by the duration of that experience. In addition, some IJs have mixed professional trajectories, serving in multiple prosecutorial roles or combining immigration and non-immigration defense work, which may blur distinctions between background categories. To assess the sensitivity of our findings to these issues, we conduct two robustness checks.

First, we re-estimate Equation 1 using binary indicators for professional background rather than years of experience. Second, we restrict the sample to judges with “pure” backgrounds, excluding the 194 judges who held more than one type of prosecutorial position or more than one type of defense position. Table A.1 reports results for these adapted specifications.

Among prosecutorial backgrounds, the binary specifications yield signs consistent with the main analysis but with less precision. Judges with ICE/OPLA backgrounds grant relief at lower rates than judges without such experience, both using binary indicators and when restricting the analysis to judges with “pure” backgrounds, but neither estimate reaches conventional significance (-0.011 and -0.017 , with standard errors of 0.009 and 0.012). Other prosecutorial roles are heterogeneous in the likelihood of granting relief, suggesting that prosecutorial experience is not behaviorally uniform.

Results for defense backgrounds follow the same pattern. Nonprofit immigration defense experience is positively associated with relief in both specifications (0.008 and 0.025), but neither estimate is statistically significant, and other defense backgrounds show no consistent association with relief. That the signs survive while the precision does not is consistent with the conclusion of the main analysis — what predicts relief decisions is the duration of immigration-specific experience rather than any exposure to a role.

A further concern is that the main results may be influenced by judges with very small numbers of

Table A.1: Binary Background Indicators and Excluding IJs with “Mixed” Professional Backgrounds

	Binary indicators	Pure backgrounds
ICE/OPLA	−0.011 (0.009)	−0.017 (0.012)
AUSA	0.036 [†] (0.019)	0.053 (0.034)
SAUSA	−0.002 (0.011)	−0.063** (0.024)
JAG Corps	−0.032** (0.012)	−0.028 (0.021)
DA	−0.014 (0.014)	−0.020 (0.040)
Private Imm.	−0.003 (0.011)	−0.000 (0.018)
Nonprofit Imm.	0.008 (0.017)	0.025 (0.031)
Private Non-Imm.	0.013 (0.009)	0.018 (0.014)
Nonprofit Non-Imm.	−0.008 (0.017)	0.034 (0.026)
Tenure	0.002** (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)
Appointed by Democratic AG	0.003 (0.010)	0.001 (0.012)
Respondent Detained	−0.179*** (0.017)	−0.201*** (0.024)
National Security Case	0.030 (0.036)	0.038 (0.041)
Televideo Hearing	0.027* (0.011)	0.042** (0.016)
Had Attorney	0.307*** (0.010)	0.318*** (0.013)
Year	−0.034*** (0.003)	−0.034*** (0.004)
Observations	550,633	350,008
R ²	0.326	0.324
Region FE	Yes	Yes
Court FE	Yes	Yes
Clustering	Judge	Judge

Note: [†]p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

observed cases or by courts with too few judges to meaningfully characterize court-level professional composition. To address this possibility, we conduct two additional robustness checks. For the individual-level analysis in Equation 1, we exclude judges who adjudicated fewer than 50 cases during the sample period, leaving 455 judges. For the court-level analyses in Equations 2 and 3, we exclude courts with fewer than three judges, leaving 60 courts. Results from these restricted samples are reported in Table A.2.

Across specifications, the primary findings remain similar to those in the main analysis. In the restricted sample of higher-volume judges, years of immigration enforcement experience remain negatively and significantly associated with relief decisions, and years of nonprofit immigration defense experience remain positive but imprecisely estimated, as in the main analysis. Estimated magnitudes are comparable to the main results, indicating that individual-level background associations are not driven by judges with unusually small caseloads.

Results for court composition and interaction effects are likewise robust to excluding small courts. As in the main analysis, a higher proportion of immigration enforcement judges in a court on its own is not associated with a lower likelihood of relief. The interaction between immigration enforcement experience and court composition remains small and statistically insignificant (0.005, SE 0.004), so the restrictive association with enforcement experience does not vary with the concentration of enforcement-background colleagues. The interaction for nonprofit immigration defense experience remains negative and statistically significant (-0.018 , SE 0.006), indicating that nonprofit immigration experience predicts higher relief probabilities in courts with lower proportions of immigration enforcement judges, with this association attenuating as that proportion rises. This pattern matches the asymmetric conditioning role of court composition reported in the main text.

A further concern is that modeling temporal change with a linear time trend may insufficiently capture non-linear shifts in adjudication associated with policy changes or broader institutional reforms. To assess the sensitivity of the results to this modeling choice, we re-estimate all main specifications replacing the linear time trend with decision-year fixed effects. Table A.3 reports

Table A.2: Excluding Low Caseload Judges and Small Courts

	H1	H2	H3
ICE/OPLA Years	-0.002* (0.001)		-0.004* (0.002)
AUSA Years	0.002 (0.001)		
SAUSA Years	-0.002 (0.001)		
JAG Corps Years	-0.001 [†] (0.001)		
DA Years	-0.002 (0.002)		
Private Imm. Law Years	0.000 (0.001)		
Nonprofit Imm. Years	0.002 (0.002)		0.010*** (0.003)
Private Non-Imm. Years	0.001 (0.001)		
Nonprofit Non-Imm. Years	-0.003 (0.003)		
Proportion ICE/OPLA		-0.018 (0.032)	-0.060 (0.040)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × ICE Years			0.005 (0.004)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × Nonprofit Imm. Years			-0.018** (0.006)
Tenure	0.001* (0.001)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)
Appointed by Democratic AG	0.001 (0.010)	0.003 (0.011)	0.000 (0.010)
Respondent Detained	-0.185*** (0.017)	-0.182*** (0.036)	-0.183*** (0.035)
National Security Case	0.027 (0.037)	0.031 (0.052)	0.025 (0.052)
Televideo Hearing	0.029* (0.012)	0.029 (0.018)	0.030 (0.019)
Had Attorney	0.306*** (0.011)	0.306*** (0.025)	0.306*** (0.026)
Year	-0.034*** (0.003)	-0.034*** (0.005)	-0.034*** (0.005)
Observations	534,525	543,676	537,519
R ²	0.327	0.324	0.326
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Court FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustering	Judge	Court	Court

Note: [†]p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

results for changes in this model specification. Across all hypotheses, the results are consistent with what we reported in our study. Substituting year fixed effects for a time trend does not alter the sign or significance of any coefficient in Equations 1 through 3. These findings suggest that the relationships between professional background and relief decisions are not driven by linear assumptions about temporal change.

As an additional robustness check, we re-estimate the three main specifications using logit models to assess whether results are sensitive to the linear probability framework. Because the purpose of this exercise is to confirm directional consistency rather than to compare effect magnitudes, we report raw logit coefficients with clustered standard errors rather than average marginal effects. Table A.4 presents these results. Across all specifications, the ICE/OPLA coefficient and the interaction between court composition and nonprofit immigration experience retain their direction and statistical significance, while the nonprofit main effect and the interaction with ICE/OPLA experience remain imprecise. The null ICE interaction and the negative nonprofit interaction together indicate that the asymmetric conditioning role of court composition is not an artifact of the linear probability specification.

Our final robustness check concerns our outcome of interest. The dependent variable in the main analysis aggregates relief outcomes across three distinct case types: removal proceedings (RMV), asylum-only cases (AOC), and withholding-only (WHO) cases. Because removal proceedings constitute the vast majority of cases in the sample (removal cases make up 630,614 cases in the sample; asylum-only and withholding-only make up 658 and 8,354 cases, respectively), a potential concern is that the main results primarily reflect dynamics in removal proceedings and obscure heterogeneity across case contexts. To address this concern, we re-estimate Equation 1 separately by case type. Given the substantially smaller number of asylum-only and withholding-only cases, these specifications exclude the national security indicator, which does not vary within the two limited proceedings, and the asylum-only model additionally omits the region and court fixed effects, for which that sample is too small. Results are reported in Table A.5.

Within removal proceedings, which comprise the bulk of the sample, results match the main

Table A.3: Using Year FEs instead of a Time Trend

	H1	H2	H3
ICE/OPLA Years	-0.002* (0.001)		-0.003 [†] (0.002)
AUSA Years	0.002 (0.001)		
SAUSA Years	-0.002 (0.001)		
JAG Corps Years	-0.001 [†] (0.001)		
DA Years	-0.002 (0.002)		
Private Imm. Law Years	0.000 (0.001)		
Nonprofit Imm. Years	0.002 (0.002)		0.010*** (0.002)
Private Non-Imm. Years	0.001 (0.001)		
Nonprofit Non-Imm. Years	-0.003 (0.003)		
Proportion ICE/OPLA		-0.004 (0.031)	-0.032 (0.041)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × ICE Years			0.003 (0.004)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × Nonprofit Imm. Years			-0.017** (0.006)
Tenure	0.001* (0.001)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)
Appointed by Democratic AG	0.002 (0.010)	0.002 (0.011)	0.000 (0.010)
Respondent Detained	-0.183*** (0.017)	-0.182*** (0.036)	-0.184*** (0.034)
National Security Case	0.026 (0.037)	0.028 (0.052)	0.022 (0.052)
Televideo Hearing	0.028* (0.011)	0.028 (0.018)	0.029 (0.018)
Had Attorney	0.306*** (0.011)	0.307*** (0.025)	0.306*** (0.025)
Observations	535,270	550,827	544,670
R ²	0.328	0.325	0.327
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Court FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustering	Judge	Court	Court

Note:

[†]p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table A.4: Logit Models (Raw Coefficients)

	H1	H2	H3
ICE/OPLA Years	−0.013** (0.005)		−0.023 (0.015)
AUSA Years	0.010 (0.010)		
SAUSA Years	−0.015 (0.009)		
JAG Corps Years	−0.010 (0.007)		
DA Years	−0.009 (0.012)		
Private Imm. Law Years	−0.002 (0.005)		
Nonprofit Imm. Years	0.013 (0.009)		0.069*** (0.016)
Private Non-Imm. Years	0.007 (0.006)		
Nonprofit Non-Imm. Years	−0.022 (0.021)		
Proportion ICE/OPLA		0.148 (0.226)	0.007 (0.300)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × ICE Years			0.019 (0.028)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × Nonprofit Imm. Years			−0.127** (0.040)
Tenure	0.005 (0.004)	0.009** (0.003)	0.007* (0.003)
Appointed by Democratic AG	−0.009 (0.067)	0.001 (0.073)	−0.013 (0.066)
Respondent Detained	−1.368*** (0.113)	−1.369*** (0.203)	−1.372*** (0.199)
National Security Case	0.206 (0.294)	0.220 (0.364)	0.177 (0.366)
Televideo Hearing	0.076 (0.107)	0.070 (0.168)	0.081 (0.167)
Had Attorney	2.471*** (0.051)	2.466*** (0.092)	2.473*** (0.092)
Year	−0.254*** (0.018)	−0.253*** (0.033)	−0.247*** (0.033)
Observations	535,270	550,827	544,670
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Court FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustering	Judge	Court	Court

Note:

† p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

analysis. An additional year of immigration enforcement experience is associated with a lower likelihood of relief (-0.002 , $p < 0.05$), and nonprofit immigration experience is positively but imprecisely associated with relief (0.002), as in Table 2. The effect sizes are consistent with the main results, indicating that the associations reported in the main study are not an artifact of aggregating across case types.

Results for asylum-only and withholding-only cases are noisier due to limited sample sizes and simplified specifications, but they point the same way. Nonprofit immigration defense experience is positively associated with relief in both limited proceedings (0.009 , $p < 0.1$, in asylum-only cases and 0.010 , $p < 0.05$, in withholding-only cases), and the immigration enforcement coefficient is negative but imprecise in asylum-only cases and near zero in withholding-only cases. District attorney experience is negatively associated with relief in withholding-only proceedings (-0.006 , $p < 0.05$). These patterns suggest that our results do not depend on the aggregation of relief decisions across case types.

Table A.5: Relief Outcomes across 3 Case Types

	H1 (AOC)	H1 (RMV)	H1 (WHO)
ICE/OPLA Years	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.002* (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)
AUSA Years	-0.009 (0.008)	0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
SAUSA Years	0.006 (0.013)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.003)
JAG Corps Years	0.002 (0.005)	-0.001 [†] (0.001)	-0.001 (0.002)
DA Years	-0.007 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.006* (0.002)
Private Imm. Law Years	-0.001 (0.005)	0.000 (0.001)	0.004 (0.003)
Nonprofit Imm. Years	0.009 [†] (0.005)	0.002 (0.002)	0.010* (0.004)
Private Non-Imm. Years	-0.000 (0.004)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
Nonprofit Non-Imm. Years	-0.003 (0.014)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)
Tenure	0.001 (0.003)	0.001* (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)
Appointed by Democratic AG	0.011 (0.054)	0.001 (0.010)	-0.024 (0.023)
Respondent Detained	-0.305*** (0.049)	-0.184*** (0.017)	-0.219*** (0.035)
Televideo Hearing	-0.012 (0.055)	0.029* (0.011)	0.085** (0.026)
Had Attorney	0.407*** (0.044)	0.306*** (0.011)	0.107*** (0.011)
Year	-0.016 (0.020)	-0.034*** (0.003)	-0.026*** (0.005)
National Security Case		0.027 (0.037)	
Observations	609	535,267	7,792
R ²	0.276	0.327	0.132
Region FE	No	Yes	Yes
Court FE	No	Yes	Yes
Clustering	Judge	Judge	Judge

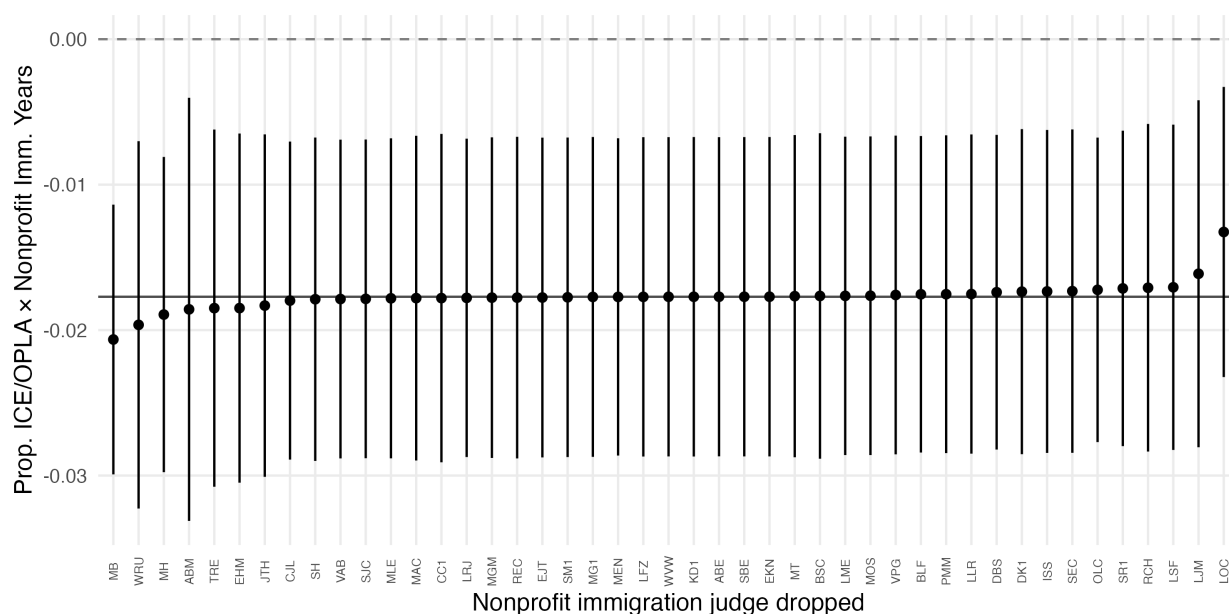
Note:

[†]p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

B Single-Set Specifications and Leave-One-Out Checks

Table B.1 re-estimates Equations 1 and 3 with the prosecutorial and defense variables, and the two interactions, entered one at a time rather than jointly. The estimates match those of Table 2 in the main text; the only difference is that the nonprofit immigration main effect reaches marginal significance ($0.003, p < 0.1$) when the defense variables enter alone. Figures B.1 and B.2 show that the interaction between court composition and nonprofit immigration experience does not depend on any single judge or court. Re-estimating Equation 3 after dropping each of the 45 judges with nonprofit immigration experience, or each of the 67 courts, leaves the coefficient between -0.021 and -0.013 and statistically significant in every case.

Figure B.1: Leave-One-Judge-Out Estimates of the Nonprofit Immigration Interaction



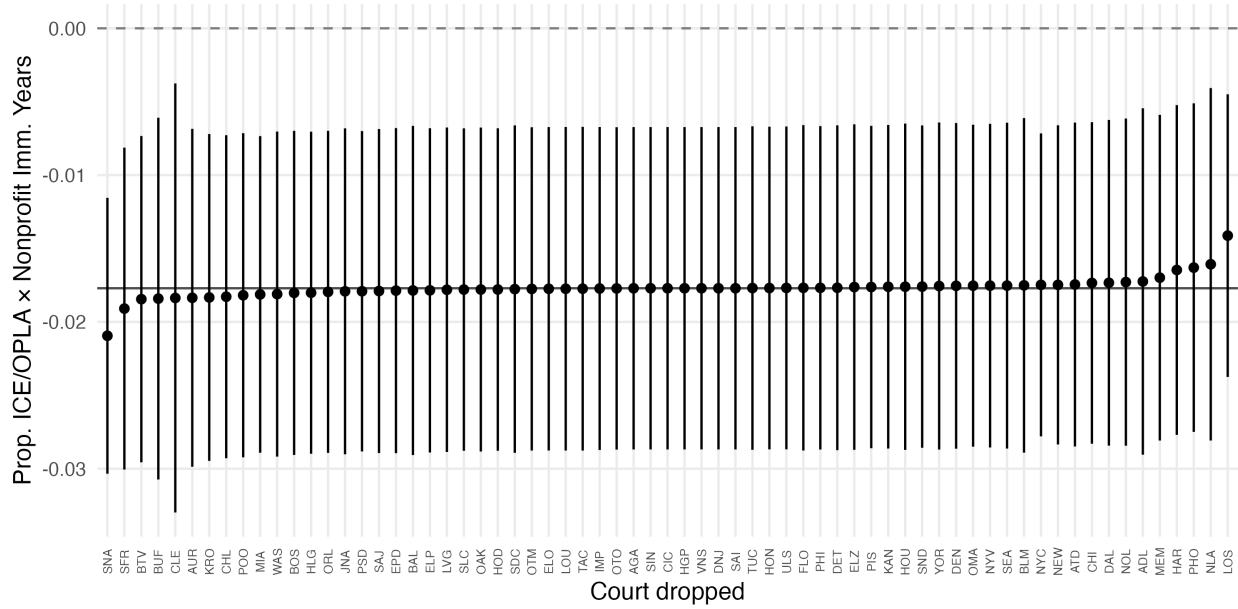
Note: Each point is the coefficient on Prop. ICE/OPLA $\times$ Nonprofit Imm. Years from the joint H3 model re-estimated after dropping the labeled judge (one of the 45 judges with nonprofit immigration experience). Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered by court. The solid horizontal line is the full-sample estimate (-0.018); the dashed line marks zero.

Table B.1: Background Sets and Interactions Estimated One at a Time

	H1a	H1b	H3a	H3b
ICE/OPLA Years	−0.002** (0.001)		−0.004* (0.002)	
AUSA Years	0.001 (0.001)			
SAUSA Years	−0.002 (0.002)			
JAG Corps Years	−0.002 [†] (0.001)			
DA Years	−0.002 (0.001)			
Private Imm. Law Years		0.001 (0.001)		
Nonprofit Imm. Years		0.003 [†] (0.001)		0.011*** (0.002)
Private Non-Imm. Years		0.002 [†] (0.001)		
Nonprofit Non-Imm. Years		−0.002 (0.003)		
Proportion ICE/OPLA			−0.048 (0.037)	0.013 (0.033)
Prop. ICE/OPLA × ICE Years			0.005 (0.004)	
Prop. ICE/OPLA × Nonprofit Imm. Years				−0.019*** (0.005)
Tenure	0.001* (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)	0.001** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Appointed by Democratic AG	0.001 (0.010)	0.002 (0.010)	0.002 (0.011)	0.000 (0.010)
Respondent Detained	−0.184*** (0.017)	−0.183*** (0.017)	−0.187*** (0.035)	−0.181*** (0.035)
National Security Case	0.027 (0.037)	0.030 (0.036)	0.024 (0.052)	0.030 (0.052)
Televideo Hearing	0.028* (0.011)	0.029* (0.012)	0.030 (0.018)	0.029 (0.018)
Had Attorney	0.307*** (0.011)	0.306*** (0.011)	0.307*** (0.025)	0.307*** (0.025)
Year	−0.034*** (0.003)	−0.034*** (0.003)	−0.034*** (0.005)	−0.034*** (0.005)
Observations	540,861	545,967	544,670	550,827
R ²	0.326	0.325	0.325	0.325
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Court FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustering	Judge	Judge	Court	Court

Note: [†]p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Figure B.2: Leave-One-Court-Out Estimates of the Nonprofit Immigration Interaction



Note: Each point is the coefficient on Prop. ICE/OPLA $\times$ Nonprofit Imm. Years from the joint H3 model re-estimated after dropping the labeled court (67 courts). Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered by court. The solid horizontal line is the full-sample estimate (-0.018); the dashed line marks zero.

C Robustness Checks: Sensitivity Analysis

An alternative explanation worth considering is that observed differences in relief outcomes may be driven not by immigration enforcement and nonprofit backgrounds, but by other judicial characteristics that are highly correlated with these backgrounds and with decision-making. For instance, judge ideology is an important driver of judicial behavior (Miller, Keith, and Holmes 2015; Keith, Holmes, and Miller 2013). Judges could have self-selected into particular professional backgrounds due to their underlying ideology, which would indicate that ideology is driving the decision-making, not professional background.

To address this concern, we conduct a sensitivity analysis to assess how strong an unobserved confounder would need to be to nullify the observed effect on relief decisions. We benchmark against judge ideology, which originates from the Blasingame et al. (2024) data and is taken from judges' voting records in national elections. Judge ideology is an indicator for whether a judge identifies with the Democratic party, and it is available for 305 of the 502 judges in our sample.

We apply the sensitivity analysis to the models in Columns 1 and 3 of Table 2, estimated on the 305 judges with a party code and with the ideology indicator added. Because of the subsample, the coefficients differ from those in Table 2: among these judges, the ICE/OPLA coefficient is -0.0025 (SE 0.0008) with the ideology control and -0.0023 without it, and the interaction between court composition and nonprofit immigration experience is -0.019 (SE 0.008) with the control and -0.017 without it. Adding ideology therefore leaves both estimates essentially unchanged.

We do not benchmark against case characteristics such as attorney representation, because a judge's background can shape whether a respondent obtains counsel, for instance through decisions on continuances, which makes representation a channel through which background operates rather than a confounder of it (Ryo and Peacock 2021).

As shown in Figures C.1 and C.2, the respective null hypotheses that immigration enforcement experience and the nonprofit immigration interaction have no effect on relief decisions would still be rejected even if an omitted variable were four times as strong as judge ideology. A confounder as strong as ideology would move the ICE/OPLA coefficient from -0.0025 to -0.0023 and the interaction from -0.019 to -0.016 ; one four times as strong would move them to -0.0018 and -0.008 . The robustness values are 3.2 percent for the ICE/OPLA coefficient and 2.1 percent for the interaction, meaning that a confounder would need to explain more than that share of the residual variance in both the treatment and the outcome to drive the estimate to zero. Notably, judge ideology is associated with case outcomes but exhibits minimal explanatory power for professional background, as indicated by its partial R^2 with the treatment of about one percent.

As a result, even a hypothetical confounder several times stronger than judge ideology would have limited ability to attenuate the estimated effects, as it would need to simultaneously explain substantial variation in both treatment and outcome. This pattern supports the interpretation that professional background in immigration law itself plays an important role in shaping judicial decision-making.

Figure C.1: Sensitivity Analysis for ICE/OPLA Years (Equation H1)

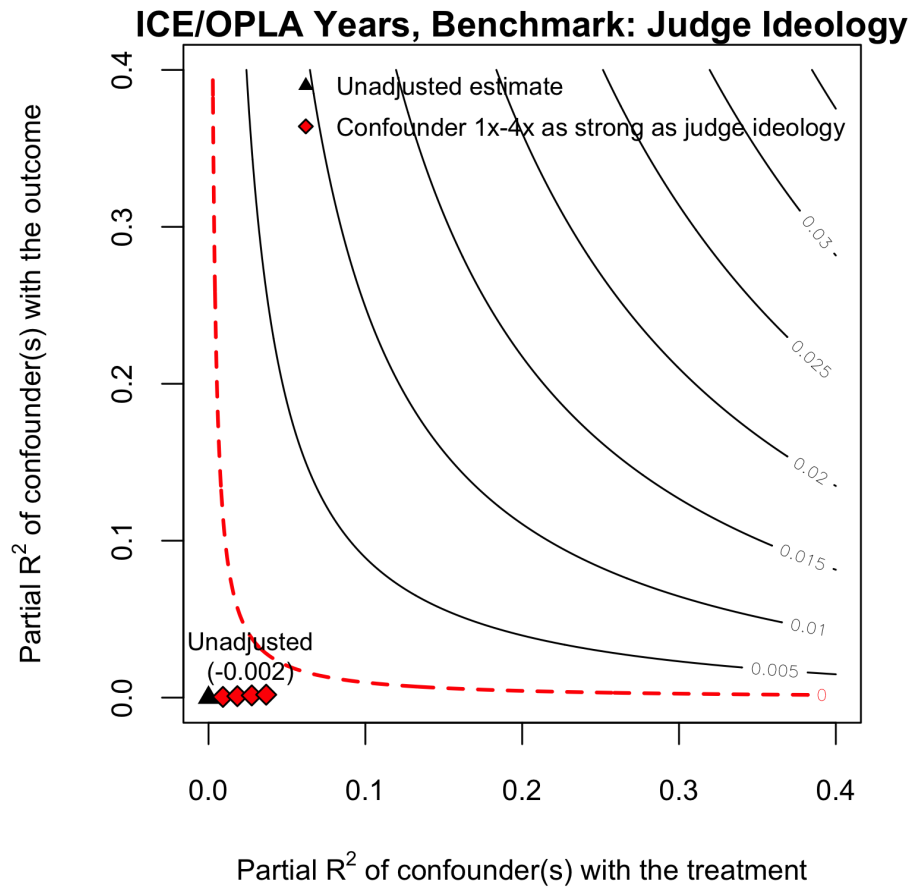
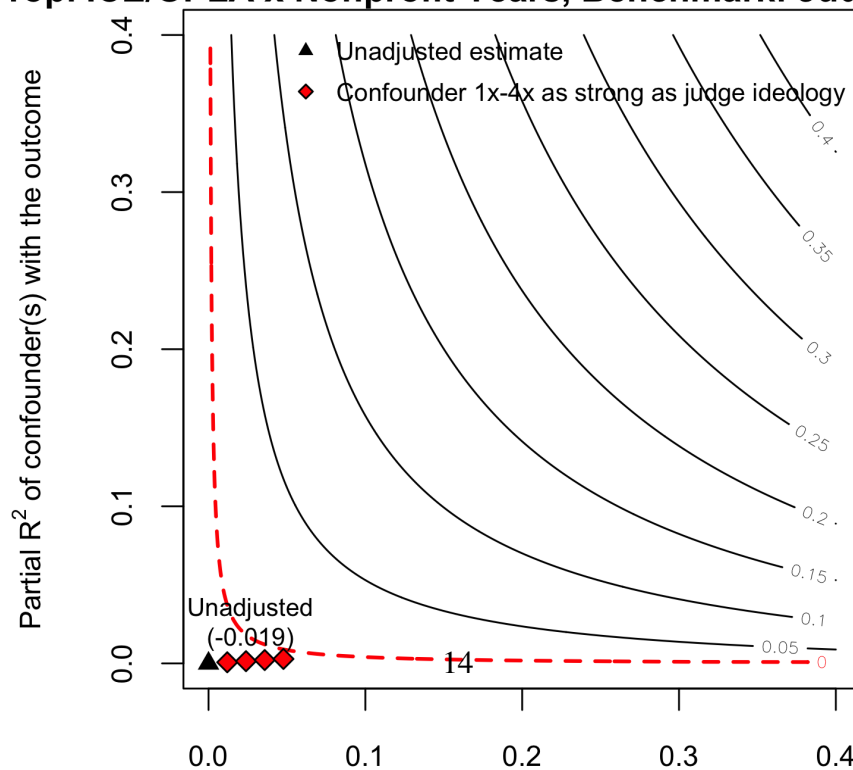


Figure C.2: Sensitivity Analysis for the Nonprofit Immigration Interaction (Equation H3)

Prop. ICE/OPLA x Nonprofit Years, Benchmark: Judge Ideology



D Information on Data Cleaning

We reported in our paper that across the three case types, there are a number of different legal pathways for relief. Here we provide documentation of what kinds of decisions within each case type were considered a relief outcome, and which were considered a removal outcome. Table D.1 reports our classification schema.

Table D.1: Construction of Binary Relief Outcome

Case Type	Outcome Codes	Relief Indicator
Asylum-Only (AOC)	C (Conditional Grant), G (Grant), P (TPS)	Relief = 1
	D (Denied)	Relief = 0
Removal Proceedings (RMV)	R (Relief Granted), Q (EOIR 42B), T (Transfer), P (TPS), H (Haitian Relief)	Relief = 1
	X (Removal), V (Voluntary Departure)	Relief = 0
Withholding-Only (WHO)	G (Grant), C (Conditional Grant), Q (EOIR 42B), P (TPS), H (Haitian Relief)	Relief = 1
	D (Denied)	Relief = 0

Before any other restriction, we drop 40 EOIR judge codes that do not correspond to individual judges: visiting-judge codes (VJ1 to VJ9), detail codes used during the 2017 detention surge (X01 to X38), and test codes such as XXX and AAA. These account for 3,270 proceedings, or 0.47% of the raw data.

The case data also reports the nationality of respondents. We transformed this information using the UN's nationality data into different regions of origin. Table D.2 details the correspondence between region codes and names.

Table D.2: Region Code Mapping

Code	Region	Code	Region
1	Northern Africa	12	South-eastern Asia
2	Eastern Africa	13	Southern Asia
3	Middle Africa	14	Western Asia
4	Southern Africa	15	Eastern Europe
5	Western Africa	16	Northern Europe
6	Caribbean	17	Southern Europe
7	Central America	18	Western Europe
8	South America	19	Australia and New Zealand
9	North America	20	Melanesia
10	Central Asia	21	Micronesia
11	Eastern Asia	22	Polynesia

E Research Ethics

Interview data cited in this study were originally collected as part of a separate research project under Institutional Review Board-approved protocol STUDY00009416. All participants provided informed consent and are identified anonymously. Interview data were generated through semi-structured interviews with former immigration judges conducted for that project.

References

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