

Civil Case and Criminal Felony Defendant Filings in U.S. District Courts (2024): Overview and Analysis

March 24, 2025

The [Administrative Office of U.S. Courts](#) regularly compiles data related to the workload of the federal courts. This Insight provides a brief overview and analysis of one measure of workload—the number of civil and criminal filings in U.S. district courts for the 2024 calendar year. District courts are the primary trial courts of the federal judiciary. District courts conduct trials and hearings, as well as resolve disputes “by determining the facts [of a case] and applying the law to those facts.” Additionally, district courts, within limits set by statute and the Constitution, “have jurisdiction to hear nearly all categories of federal civil and criminal cases.”

The analysis below includes the 91 district courts established under Article III of the U.S. Constitution ([territorial courts](#) are excluded). This Insight does not provide legal analysis of the types of cases described in the text.

Civil Filings

Civil cases involve legal disputes [between two or more parties involving the Constitution, federal laws, or treaties](#). Cases can also be brought in district court under [certain other circumstances](#).

Overall, there were 268,085 civil filings in 2024 across all 91 U.S. district courts, representing a decline of 26% in the number of civil filings from 2023 (the decline represents, in part, fewer filings in an [earplug products liability multidistrict litigation](#)).

The average and median numbers of filings across the 91 courts were 2,946 and 1,723, respectively. The number of filings ranged from a minimum of 262 in the [District of North Dakota](#) to a maximum of 16,458 in the [Central District of California](#).

Figure 1 shows, for each U.S. district court, the most common type of civil filing in 2024. Prisoner petitions represented the most common type of filing in 46 (51%) of 91 U.S. district courts. Examples of such petitions include various [postconviction motions](#). Among these 46 courts, the percentage of such

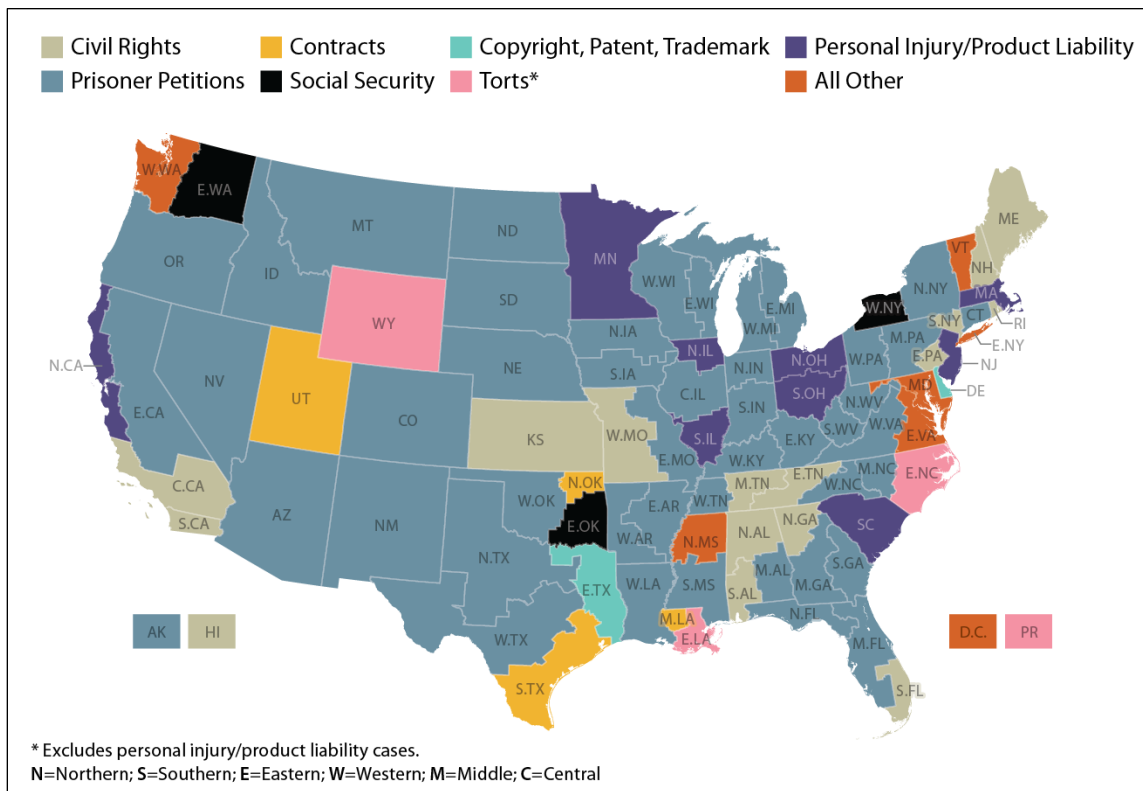
Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN12531

filings ranged from a low of 18% in the [Western District of Texas](#) to a high of 59% in the [Western District of Virginia](#).

Figure 1. Greatest Number of Civil Filings by Nature of Suit in U.S. District Courts
2024



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts.

Filings related to civil rights claims were the most common civil filing in 16 (18%) of 91 district courts. Examples of such filings include claims involving [types of discrimination that violate federal law](#) (e.g., discrimination on the basis of race). Among these 16 courts, the percentage of such filings ranged from a low of 18% in the [Northern District of Georgia](#) to a high of 31% in the [Southern District of New York](#).

Filings related to personal injury or product liability claims were the most common civil filing in 9 (10%) of 91 district courts. Among these 9 courts, the percentage of such filings ranged from a low of 23% in the [District of Massachusetts](#) to a high of 58% in the [Southern District of Illinois](#).

Figure 1 also shows district courts where the greatest number of civil filings were for claims related to Social Security, contracts, torts (excluding personal injury or product liability), as well as claims related to intellectual property (copyrights, patents, trademarks) and a catchall “all other civil cases” category.

Criminal Felony Defendants

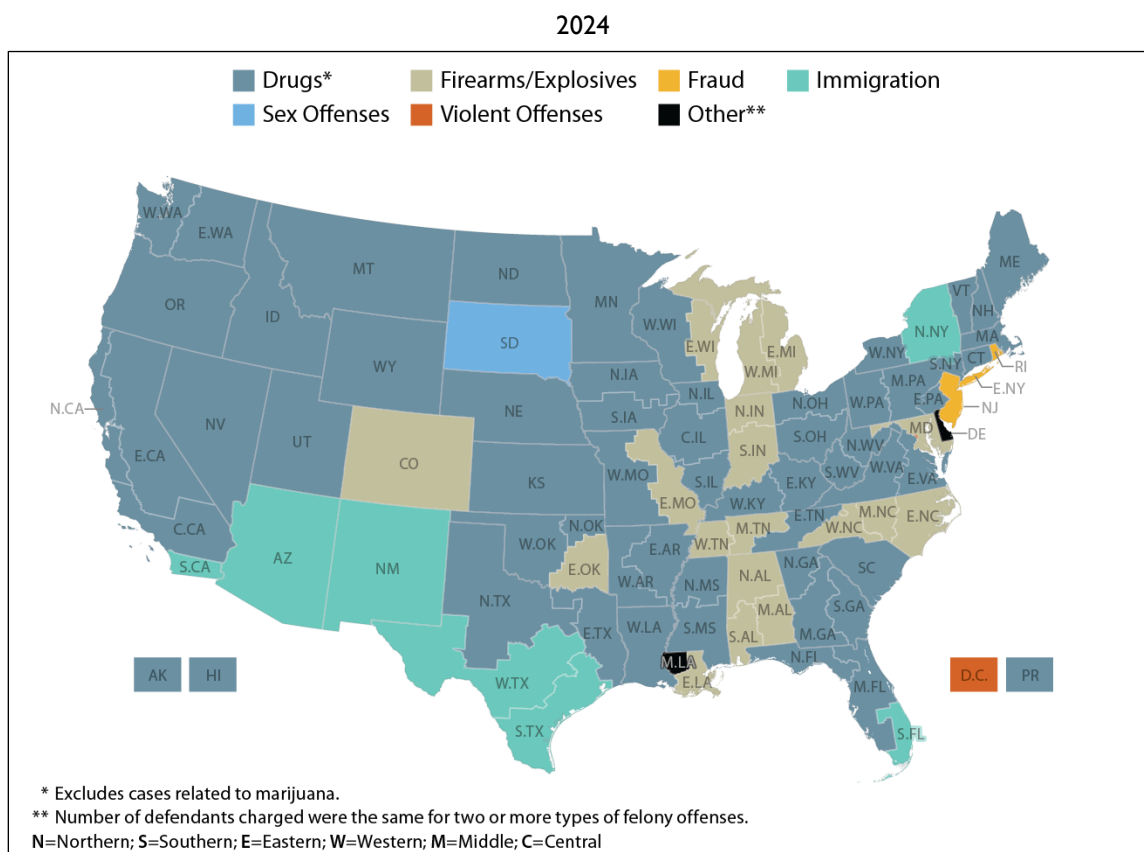
Criminal cases are initiated by the government, “usually through the U.S. attorney’s office, in coordination with a law enforcement agency.” Such cases “involve an allegation by the government that an individual or entity violated the criminal laws of the United States.” The data reported below do not include cases involving transfers from one court to another and only include felony defendant filings.

Overall, there were 68,105 criminal felony defendants charged with federal offenses in 2024 across all 91 U.S. district courts (representing an increase of 11% in the number of defendants charged from 2023).

The average and median number of felony defendants charged across the 91 courts were 748 and 379, respectively. The number of defendants charged with a federal offense ranged from a minimum of 91 in the [District of Hawaii](#) to a maximum of 11,981 in the [District of Arizona](#).

Figure 2 shows, for each U.S. district court, the most common type of federal felony offense for which defendants were charged in 2024. Defendants charged with drug-related offenses (excluding marijuana) represented the greatest number of defendants charged in 59 (65%) of 91 U.S. district courts. Among these 59 courts, the percentage of defendants charged with such offenses ranged from a low of 23% in the [Eastern District of Pennsylvania](#) to a high of 71% in the [Northern District of West Virginia](#).

Figure 2. Greatest Number of Criminal Felony Defendants Charged by Nature of Offense in U.S. District Courts



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts.

Defendants charged with offenses related to firearms or explosives represented the greatest number of defendants charged in 18 (20%) of 91 district courts. Among these 18 courts, the percentage of defendants charged with such offenses ranged from a low of 27% in the [District of Maryland](#) to a high of 50% in the [Middle District of North Carolina](#).

Defendants charged with immigration-related offenses represented the greatest number of defendants charged in 7 (8%) of 91 district courts. Among these 7 courts, the percentage of defendants charged with such offenses ranged from a low of 24% in the [Southern District of Florida](#) to a high of 90% in the [District of Arizona](#).

Figure 2 also shows district courts where the greatest number of defendants charged in 2024 were for offenses related to fraud, sex offenses, or violent offenses.

Overall, civil filings were more numerous than cases involving criminal felony defendants in 84 (92%) of 91 district courts. Cases involving criminal defendants were more common in the Districts of [Arizona](#), [New Mexico](#), [North Dakota](#), [Puerto Rico](#), [South Dakota](#), [Southern California](#), and [Western Texas](#)—ranging from a low of 56% of all cases in the Southern District of California to a high of 72% of all cases in the District of Arizona.

Author Information

Barry J. McMillion
Analyst in American National Government

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.