

Immigration Judges Closed and Denied More Asylum Cases in March Than Any Month on Record

In a record-breaking month, immigration judges fast-tracked asylum denials at a record pace, raising questions about due process, the politicization of the courts, and the future of the asylum system.



AUSTIN KOCHER

MAY 11, 2025



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The latest data on asylum decisions in immigration court [1](#) paints a stark and deeply troubling picture. In March 2025, immigration judges decided 10,933 asylum cases—more than in any other single month since at least 2001. And of those cases, 76% were denied—also the highest denial rate record for any month in more than two decades.

This is not an accident—*this is a policy decision*.

The Trump administration, which resumed in January 2025, appears to be fast-tracking asylum decisions with the clear goal of clearing the docket by simply denying as many people as possible, as quickly as possible.

To put this in perspective: before this new surge, the previous high for total asylum case completions was 10,458 in February 2020. The highest denial rate before this administration was 74% from January 2019. These numbers

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Between explicit policy changes and implicit threats to [get in line or get fired](#), judges on the whole seem to be following orders to *deny, deny, deny*. These changes have happened with breathtaking speed, too, since these data only reflect the administration. In immigration court

Looking back at the occurred, but they a massive volume denial rates hover monthly completion administration has system faster than lack of [due process](#) person's complex

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be speed alone. Yes, the [immigration court backlog](#) is massive and represents a real challenge. But our response should not be to convert immigration court into a mass denial machine. Asylum decisions are often [life-or-death matters](#). They involve deeply personal and often traumatic histories that require careful review. And they are already hard enough to



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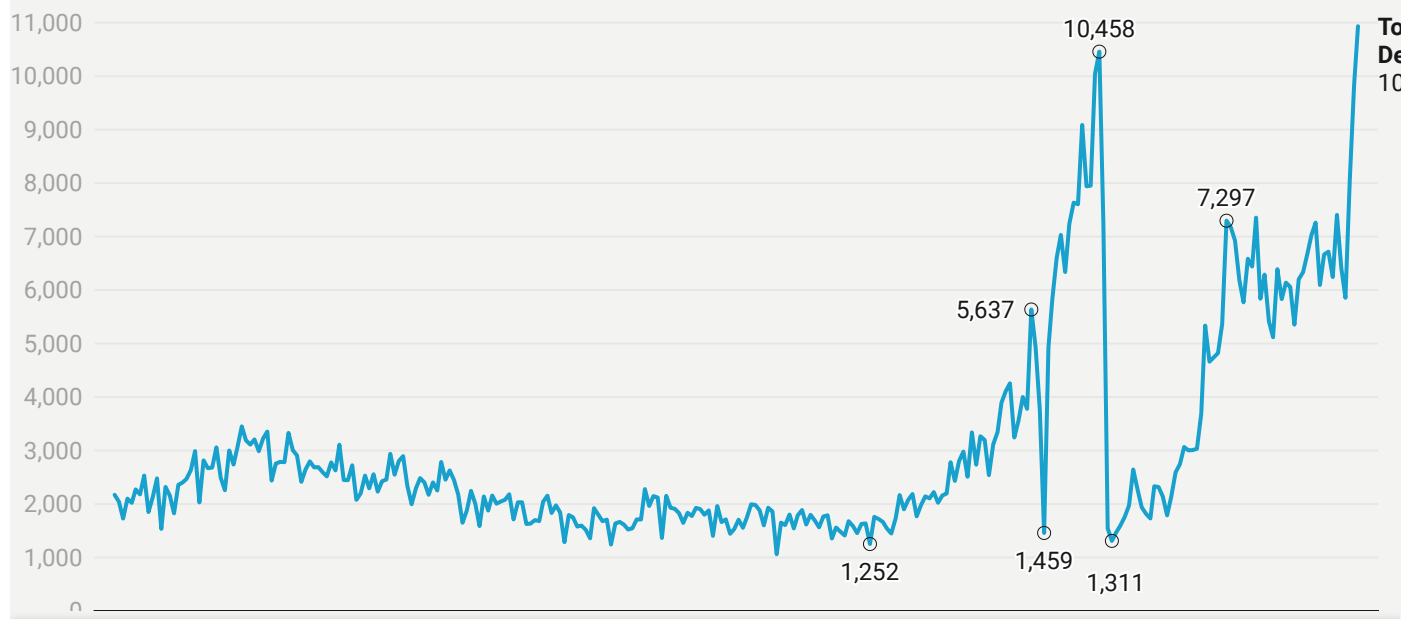
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[enforcement strategy](#). People who are denied asylum are, in most cases, also issued removal orders, which fits squarely into a larger agenda of mass deportation. What makes this even more chilling is the administration’s practice of [arresting people directly at court](#). So we’re not just talking about denying protection—we’re talking about punishing people for showing up to court, for following the legal process, and for trying to do things the right way.

The two graphs included here show the trend clearly. The first traces the sheer rise in monthly asylum case completions and the second shows the denial rate skyrocketing in parallel. Together, these two simple data points signal an aggressive shift in clearing out pending asylum cases by quickly denying them. If this continues over the next four years, the asylum system will be virtually unrecognizable from what we’ve seen over the past decade.

Total Asylum Cases DECIDED In Immigration Court Each Month



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Percent of Asylum Cases DENIED In Immigration Court Each Month

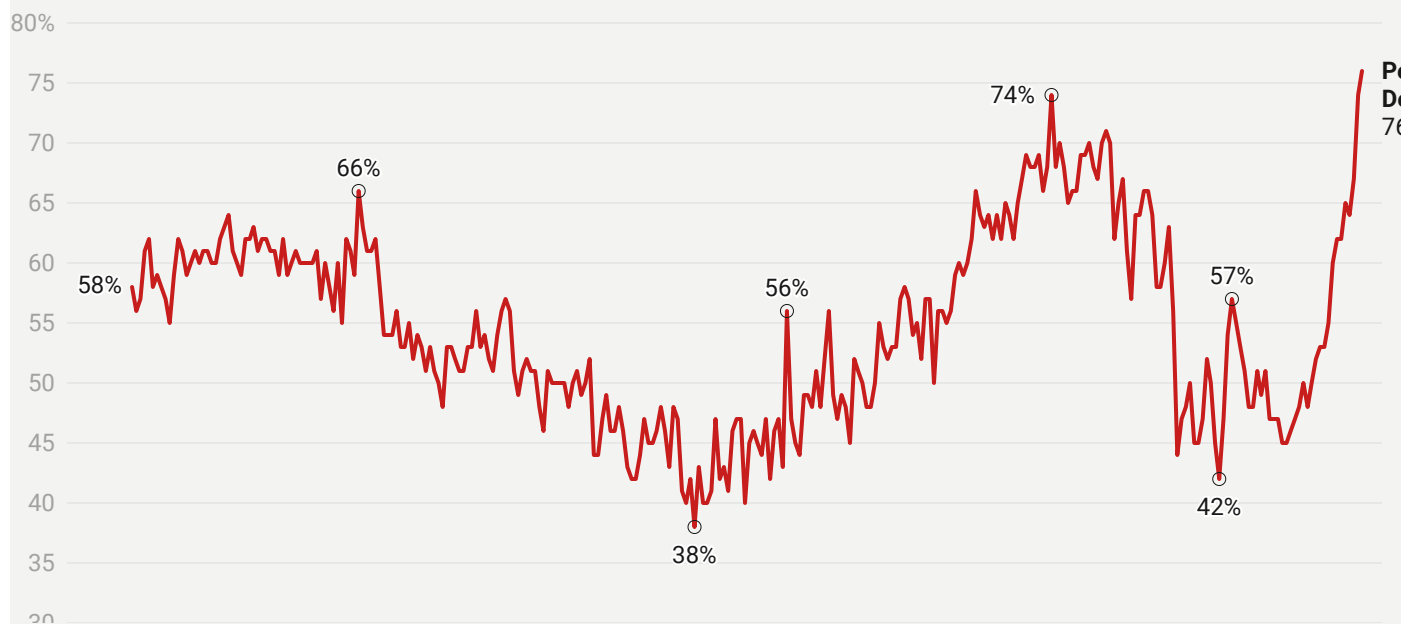


Chart: Austin Kocher • Source: TRAC • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

This could have ripple effects, although it might be too early to observe that in the data. If people begin to feel that going to court only leads to rapid denial and possible arrest, many may stop showing up altogether—not because they want to “evade” the authorities, but because they no longer believe in the legitimacy of the system. And that’s exactly how a legal system begins to lose legitimacy: when the process no longer looks like it can lead to fair outcomes.

It’s important to remember that the record-breaking denials we’re seeing in March 2025 only reflect the cases that actually made it to a hearing. As I wrote in a previous post, under new guidance from [EOIR Acting Director Sirce Owen](#), many asylum seekers will now be blocked from even getting their day in court. A recent memo gives judges wide discretion to toss out

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AUSTIN KOCHER • APRIL 17, 2025

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Nor do these numbers capture asylum seekers who are blocked from even getting to immigration courts due to border enforcement policies. [Human Rights First](#) and [Refugees International](#) published a new research report about asylum seekers' experiences along the U.S.-Mexico border so far under the Trump administration. Interviews with migrants and their families revealed a pattern of denying migrants even a basic humanitarian screening known as a [credible fear interview](#)—even when migrants expressed fear of returning to their home country.

The report highlights a phenomenon that I hadn't seen named before: "chain refoulement." Under U.S. and international law, governments are supposed to return people to places where they would face persecution, regardless of whether they have been granted asylum or not. This is the principle of [non-refoulement](#). Under this administration, asylum seekers are also being sent to third countries—not just [El Salvador](#), but [Panama](#) and [Costa Rica](#), too—where they may then be returned to dangerous countries possibly at the direction of the United States. This loophole of "chain refoulement" undermines humanitarian protection while outsourcing cruelty to other less powerful countries.

Read the entire report "'This Is An Order From Trump': Abuse, Expulsions, and Refoulement of People Seeking Asylum" for more information.

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I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal

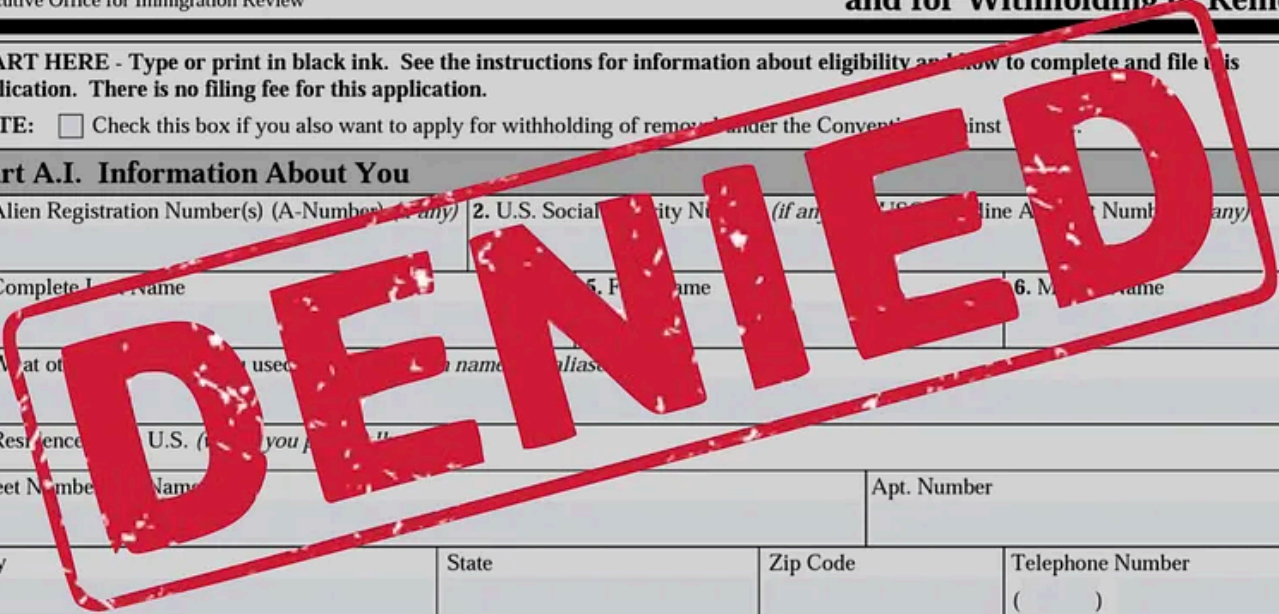
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NOTE: Check this box if you also want to apply for withholding of removal under the Convention Against Torture.

Part A.I. Information About You

1. Alien Registration Number(s) (A-Number) (if any)		2. U.S. Social Security Number (if any)		3. U.S. Line A Number (if any)	
4. Complete Last Name		5. First Name		6. Middle Name	
7. What other names have you used? (Include maiden name, aliases, etc.)					
8. Residence in U.S. (if you are currently residing in the U.S.)					
Street Number and Name				Apt. Number	
City		State	Zip Code	Telephone Number ()	

(NOTE: You must be residing in the United States to submit this form.)



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Sam May 11, 2025

♥ Liked by Austin Kocher

Truly disturbing. Thank you for illuminating this phenomenon.

And interesting that under Trump 1, where the anti-asylum policy at EOIR took the form of fast track denials to this extent. It makes me wonder whether something else is at work here (could the data be flawed or warped somehow?).

Also you note that “It’s important to remember that the record-breaking denials we’re seeing in March 2025 only reflect the cases that actually made it to a hearing.” Is that accurate? The TRAC data encompasses denials of all defensive asylum applications that EOIR doesn’t it? Would a pretermitted application be categorized differently? My understanding as a practitioner has always been that a prepermission functions as a hearing on the merits of the application, albeit without the procedure it is normally due.

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