

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**The Structure of Eviction in Central Florida: A Python-Based Approach  
to Assembling an Annual Case-Level Dataset of Civil Court Records in  
Orange County, 2024**

by

Daniel Kind



A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Division of Social Sciences  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in:

*Committee on Environment, Geography, and Urbanization  
Law, Letters, and Society*

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Evan Carver  
Instructor: Dr. Christopher Kindell  
Preceptors: Hayley Birss & HongJin Jo

Spring Quarter 2026

## **Abstract**

Eviction is one of the most common legal processes shaping housing insecurity in the United States, with millions of cases filed each year. Yet the indicators most often used to describe the eviction crisis typically stop at the front end of the process, measuring filings and sometimes judgments without showing how cases resolve, how quickly they move, or how often they reach enforcement. This thesis addresses that blind spot by constructing an original case-level dataset of 15,039 residential eviction cases filed in Orange County, Florida in 2024, collected by scraping the county clerk's public docket using a custom Python browser automation tool. I ask three linked questions: how landlord type (corporate vs. non-corporate) shapes case outcomes; how tenant legal representation affects case disposition; and what share of cases reach the enforcement stage, and for whom. I find that the 2024 docket is defined by corporate dominance and extreme legal asymmetry. Corporate plaintiffs file 88% of cases; plaintiffs have attorneys in 92.5% of filings, while tenants have attorneys in only 1.5%. Writs of possession, where the court orders that authorize a sheriff to physically remove a tenant from a property, are issued in 52.6% of filings, and 90.6% of issued writs are posted, meaning the sheriff has served notice at the property that removal is imminent. Corporate filings are substantially more likely to end in dismissal or settlement, while non-corporate cases more often end in administratively closed outcomes whose final resolution is less legible in the docket record. I argue that eviction court in Orange County functions as dual infrastructure: a high-volume rent-enforcement system that corporate repeat players use routinely and strategically, and, given the near-total absence of tenant counsel, a rapid pathway to physical displacement for the tenants who are least equipped to navigate the system's compressed procedural timelines.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would not have been able to complete this project without the support of my loved ones and the guidance of University of Chicago faculty. I am deeply grateful to my parents, David and Tina, and my sibling, Sarah, who supported me throughout this process and put up with far more talk about eviction dockets than anyone should reasonably have to. Thank you to my partner, Sig, whose patience and encouragement carried me through the most demanding stretches of this work.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my instructor, Dr. Christopher Kindell, whose understanding, generosity, and genuine investment in his students made this thesis possible in ways that went far beyond the classroom. Topher's guidance shaped this thesis at every stage, and I am lucky to have had him in my corner.

Thank you to my preceptors, Hayley Birss and HongJin Jo, whose feedback and close engagement with my drafts strengthened this project considerably. And thank you to my faculty advisor, Dr. Evan Carver, whose direction helped me find and develop my project before it had even begun.

Finally, this project is informed by the experiences of friends and community members in Orlando who have navigated the housing insecurity that this thesis attempts to document, and it is written with them in mind. My hope is that the data I have unearthed will one day germinate into a useful crop for any researcher seeking to better understand the eviction process.

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                 |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Abstract</b>                                                                 | <b>ii</b>  |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>                                                         | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>I. Introduction</b>                                                          | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>II. Literature Review</b>                                                    | <b>7</b>   |
| Eviction Data Infrastructure and Measurement Challenges                         | 7          |
| Landlord Type, Repeat Players, and Filing Behavior                              | 10         |
| Tenant Legal Representation and Access to Justice                               | 14         |
| Sociolegal Theoretical Frameworks: Institutional Advantage and Procedural Power | 17         |
| Geographic Concentration and the Florida Context                                | 21         |
| <b>III. Methods</b>                                                             | <b>25</b>  |
| Data Source and Collection                                                      | 25         |
| Variable Construction and Coding                                                | 27         |
| Analytic Strategy                                                               | 30         |
| Scope and Limitations                                                           | 31         |
| <b>IV. Results</b>                                                              | <b>33</b>  |
| Filing Composition and Landlord Type                                            | 33         |
| Representation Configurations                                                   | 37         |
| Outcomes by Landlord Type                                                       | 38         |
| Outcomes by Tenant Representation                                               | 40         |
| Attorney Concentration                                                          | 41         |
| Writ of Possession: Issuance, Posting, and Timelines                            | 44         |
| Repeat Players: Plaintiff and Defendant Concentration                           | 48         |
| <b>V. Discussion</b>                                                            | <b>52</b>  |
| <b>VI. Conclusion</b>                                                           | <b>58</b>  |
| <b>VII. Digital Appendix</b>                                                    | <b>61</b>  |
| <b>VIII. References</b>                                                         | <b>63</b>  |

## Introduction

Between April 22 and December 10, 2024, Laura Helton, a renter in Orange County, was evicted nine times from nine different properties. Over the same eight-month span, she was filed against twelve times in eviction court, and she was unrepresented in every one of those cases. Across all twelve filings, the plaintiffs (six distinct corporate landlords and several other entities) had legal representation. In eight of those cases, the six corporate plaintiffs employed the services of the same attorney, James Barron, Esq., whose law offices evicted her seven separate times in eight months. Ms. Helton's trajectory is a crystallization of the stakes of this project, in which the same renter can get caught in a pattern of eviction as repeated corporate practice, overwhelmingly one-sided legal representation, and case processing that can translate a simple paper filing into the physical removal of a tenant from a home, again and again.

Eviction is often imagined by the public as a last-resort response to an irreparable breach of a lease. In practice, it is one of the most common points of contact between renters and the civil legal system, and it is embedded in the ordinary operation of contemporary rental markets. Nationally, landlords file eviction cases by the million; in 2018 alone, an estimated 3.6 million eviction cases were filed against approximately 2.7 million unique households in the United States (Garnham, Gershenson, & Desmond, 2022). A "filing," however, is not the same thing as an enforced removal. Some cases end quickly in dismissal, settlement, or payment plans; some end in landlord judgments that may or may not be enforced; and some proceed to a writ of possession. Thus, what matters, both empirically and politically for this project, is not just how many cases are filed, but what the court is doing with those filings.

A writ of possession is issued when the court clerk formally generates the order at the landlord's request after a final judgment, but it is posted only when a deputy physically affixes

the order to the tenant's door, starting the 24-hour countdown before the sheriff returns to execute the lockout, meaning a writ can sit issued in the court file without ever reaching the household, while a posted writ signals that physical removal is genuinely imminent.

These questions carry particular urgency in the Southeast, where eviction filing rates are consistently elevated (Hepburn, Rutan, & Desmond, 2021). Florida is among the states most affected by this regional pattern, and recent demographic and housing pressures make the consequences of court process especially high stakes. Florida's recent population growth has ranked among the fastest in the country, including roughly 2% growth from 2023 to 2024 (Saunders, 2024). Within Florida, Orange County (the Orlando metro core) has sustained high eviction filing volumes in the post-COVID moratorium period. Local reporting has described 2022 as a decade-high year and 2023 as a year which exceeded even that record; for many renters, eviction is a recurring feature of the housing market's normal operation (Caraballo, 2025). That pattern has persisted, even as the post-moratorium surge has begun to ease: Orange County recorded 12,671 residential eviction filings in 2024 and 11,561 in 2025, down from peaks of 14,475 in 2022 and 14,272 in 2023, but still roughly at or above the county's pre-pandemic baseline of 11,083 filings in 2019 (Shimberg Center for Housing Studies). This data indicate that the system is settling not into a quieter equilibrium but into a chronically elevated one.

Florida law also makes the eviction process unusually fast-moving for tenants who try to fight back. The most common defense to an eviction is simply paying or having paid the rent that the landlord claims is owed. Tenants who instead want to raise any other defense (for example, that the unit has serious habitability problems, that the landlord retaliated against them, or that the rent demand itself was improper) must, within five days of being served (excluding

weekends and legal holidays), either deposit the disputed rent into the court registry or file a motion asking the court to determine the correct amount to deposit. A tenant who misses that five-day window forfeits nearly every defense available to them and faces an automatic default judgment, followed by a writ of possession authorizing the sheriff to remove them from the home (Fla. Stat. § 83.232).

Despite growing public attention to eviction, and despite the existence of better national and state filing counts than were available even a decade ago, one core feature of the system often remains analytically invisible: what actually happens between a filing and a tenant's removal, and how that trajectory varies depending on who is filing and who has access to legal help. Many widely used eviction indicators are “front-end” measures: how many cases were filed, where, and when (Hepburn, 2024). Those counts are indispensable for showing scale and geography. But they cannot, by themselves, answer the most consequential process questions that determine how eviction functions in practice. They cannot tell us whether corporate landlords file differently than individual landlords, whether those filings are pushed to judgment or resolved through dismissal, or whether the cases that end in a landlord win are routinely converted into writs that are posted and enforced. In other words, aggregate filing counts can tell us how often the threat of eviction is activated; they cannot tell us how often that threat becomes state-backed displacement.

This thesis treats eviction court dynamics, therefore, as a problem of process. The same institutional venue can plausibly serve two functions at once. In one mode, eviction court operates as bargaining infrastructure. The threat of judgment can discipline tenants' rent payment, generate late fees and court costs, and produce negotiated closures without the court ever adjudicating the underlying housing dispute on the merits of the case. In another mode,

eviction court operates as displacement infrastructure. It exists as a rapid administrative pathway by which a landlord's complaint is transformed, through defaults, judgments, and writs, into physical removal. Without case-level trajectories, researchers cannot see how these two modes are distributed across plaintiff types, representation configurations, and enforcement stages. We know that some landlords file far more often than others, and we know that tenants are frequently unrepresented. But without tracing cases from filing to closure to writ issuance and posting, we cannot observe how these features interact to shape what the court does.

The core research problem of this thesis is therefore interactional and institutional: how do landlord type and representation asymmetry combine to structure the probability that a case becomes a negotiated closure versus a formal eviction judgment, and, crucially, how often do such judgments proceed to the enforcement stage that operationalizes displacement? This problem is sharpened by a second, related institutional feature: the concentration of litigation capacity on the plaintiff side. If a county-wide eviction docket is processed primarily by a small set of attorneys filing at scale on behalf of many nominally distinct corporate landlords, the court may operate less like individualized adjudication and more like a volume-processing system for standardized claims. The relevant questions for such a system are how a legally routinized process, run at speed, under procedural rules that penalize delay, and in a context where tenants rarely have counsel, allocates outcomes and enforcement across different kinds of plaintiffs and defendants.

I therefore ask three linked questions. First, how does landlord type, operationalized here as corporate versus non-corporate plaintiffs, shape eviction outcomes in Orange County's 2024 docket? Second, how does tenant legal representation affect case disposition in a court system where plaintiffs are almost always represented, and tenants almost never are? Third, what

proportion of cases reach the writ of possession stage, and who is most likely to be exposed to the moment when a court case becomes enforcement action?

In brief, I find that corporate landlords dominate the docket and use eviction court primarily as rent-enforcement infrastructure, dismissing or settling cases at 3.5 times the rate of non-corporate filers. Tenant representation, though vanishingly rare at 1.5%, is associated with measurably lower eviction-grant rates. And writs of possession are issued in more than half of all filings, with over 90% of issued writs posted, which documents a system in which judgments are almost automatically converted into enforcement actions within a median of fifty days. From these findings, I conclude that Orange County's civil courts operate on two tracks at once: one designed to pressure tenants and one for removing them.

To answer these questions, I constructed an original case-level dataset of all 15,039 residential eviction cases filed in Orange County in 2024 by scraping the Orange County Clerk of Courts public docket using Python browser automation. Unlike prior approaches to eviction data collection, which have typically relied on aggregate statistics published by court systems, hand-coding of sampled case files, or partnerships with court administrators to access bulk data exports, the method I developed navigates the clerk's website programmatically, extracting docket information from individual case pages at scale without requiring special access or institutional cooperation. Each row in the dataset corresponds to one case, and each column captures the same set of observable features of the court process: plaintiff identity and a name-based classification of landlord type; attorney appearances and whether each side is represented; case disposition coding; whether a writ of possession is issued and whether it is posted; and key timeline dates that allow measurement of speed from filing to judgment and from judgment to the enforcement phase. The central contribution is both a novel, replicable method for building

case-level eviction datasets from public web portals and a reconstruction of the lifecycle of cases at county scale, allowing an analysis that moves beyond filings as an endpoint.

The thesis proceeds as follows. The next section reviews existing scholarship and conceptual frameworks relevant to eviction data, landlord filing behavior, and representation in housing court, situating my research questions within broader debates about how civil courts distribute institutional advantage. I then describe my data collection and coding methods and explain how the case-level dataset was constructed from the public docket. The results section presents the empirical patterns in filing composition, representation configurations, outcome distributions, writ-of-possession incidence, and case timelines, including the ways these patterns differ by landlord type and tenant representation. Finally, I discuss what these patterns suggest about eviction court's institutional function in Orange County and conclude by outlining implications for policy, data transparency, and future research.

Eviction court, in other words, is not doing one thing. It is a system that simultaneously serves as routine leverage for the landlords who use it most and as a fast track to removal for the tenants least equipped to contest it. Understanding that duality, and making it empirically visible, is the central task of this thesis.

## **Literature Review**

Analyzing the institutional dynamics of eviction court necessarily draws on several intersecting fields of scholarship, including sociolegal studies of institutional advantage and access to justice, housing policy research on eviction measurement and landlord behavior, and urban sociology's attention to the geographic concentration of housing instability. Following the trajectory of a case from filing to enforcement allows for connection between these fields. This path begins in the study of eviction data infrastructure and the measurement challenges that have constrained prior research, continues into an examination of landlord filing behavior and the strategic divergence between corporate and individual filers, and arrives at existing research on tenant legal representation and its effect on case outcomes. Understanding the process-level dynamics of eviction must consider each of these aspects: landlords operate within a system whose data infrastructure determines what can be observed, file according to strategies that vary by organizational type, and face tenants whose access to counsel shapes whether filings become contested proceedings or default judgments. Sociolegal theory, particularly the frameworks of institutional logics and repeat-player advantage, provides the conceptual foundation for interpreting how these factors interact. When combined with research on the geographic concentration of evictions and the specific policy context of Florida, these analytical bases provide the foundation for a case-level study of Orange County's 2024 eviction docket.

### **Eviction Data Infrastructure and Measurement Challenges**

Early eviction studies have relied on aggregate filing counts and cross-sectional surveys, which paint a broad-brush picture of the eviction crisis but obscure the fine-grained dynamics of individual cases. A major challenge is that administrative court records were designed for case management rather than research, leading to incomplete and sometimes misleading data. Porton,

Gromis, and Desmond (2021) provide the clearest evidence of this problem: analyzing over 3.6 million records, they found roughly 22% of eviction case entries contain ambiguous or inaccurate information about how the case was resolved. These inaccuracies carry consequences beyond research: they can falsely inflate a tenant's eviction history, making it harder for tenants to secure future housing, pass background checks, or qualify for rental assistance even when no formal eviction occurred. Such errors bias estimates of eviction prevalence and outcomes and vary widely by jurisdiction, reflecting idiosyncrasies in how each state's court system records case events and complicating cross-jurisdictional comparisons.

Beyond accuracy issues, court databases omit critical information that researchers and policymakers need. Court filings usually record the names of the parties, property address, dates, and ultimate judgment, but they do not capture informal evictions or tenants' reasons for leaving. Many evictions occur outside the court process entirely, through informal pressure, cash-for-keys deals, or illegal lockouts, and thus never enter official statistics. Even among formal cases, court records rarely note why the eviction was filed (nonpayment, lease violation, etc.) or the tenant's characteristics (income, race, presence of children) that are crucial for understanding disparities. Researchers have turned to tenant surveys to estimate that informal evictions may be twice as common as court-ordered ones (Desmond, 2016), underscoring how much administrative data can truly miss.

The present study inherits most of these constraints. Because it draws on the same kind of court-generated records, it can describe only what the formal docket records and cannot speak to households who left under informal pressure, took a cash-for-keys offer, or were locked out illegally before any case was ever filed; nor can it recover the reasons a filing was brought or the demographic characteristics of the tenant on the receiving end. What it can do is take the slice of

the eviction process that is visible in court data such as filings, dispositions, judgments, and writs, and trace it more carefully than front-end filing counts allow, while remaining clear that this slice is a partial view of a larger displacement process most of which never reaches a courthouse.

Even aggregate indicators from improved databases like Princeton's Eviction Lab have limitations. The Eviction Lab's national dataset (covering 2000–2016) was a breakthrough in standardizing millions of records, but because it aggregates annual counts by area, it cannot detail what happened within each case. An eviction "filing" in those data could result in a tenant moving out, or it could be resolved with no displacement. The Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse and other state repositories have started providing more localized eviction statistics, but these too are typically limited to counts of filings and judgments, offering little insight into the sequence of events in a case. Crucially, case outcomes short of formal eviction have often been invisible in the data. Settlements and stipulations are common in housing court but are hard to systematically observe in official records.

Summers and Steil (2025) note that because such agreements are not always formally coded as evictions, they were largely overlooked in previous eviction research. Their analysis of Boston eviction cases traced distinct procedural pathways for each case and found that the single most common route to displacement was a move-out settlement (an agreement, often negotiated in the courthouse hallway, in which the tenant promises to vacate by a set date in exchange for the landlord dropping the case or waiving back rent) which accounted for 43% of forced moves in their data. Another 34% came through default judgments, in which the tenant never filed a response or appeared in court and the landlord won automatically, with no hearing on the merits.

Together, these two pathways far outnumbered evictions resulting from full trials. This kind of insight only emerges with detailed, case-level data on eviction trajectories.

Another fundamental data challenge is access and timeliness. Housing courts in many jurisdictions do not provide easily downloadable records; some lack any automated system. Published data often lag reality by years, hampering not only research but also policymakers' ability to respond to emerging trends, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when cities scrambled to track eviction filings in real time. In Florida, local researchers partnered with the Eviction Lab to create an Eviction Tracking System that compiles weekly filings in near-real-time for certain counties (Johnson, Stojanovic, & Hepburn, 2025). Such efforts have been resource-intensive, highlighting the need for more institutionalized data collection. The literature agrees that better eviction data (complete, accurate, and case level) are needed. Without them, studies may miscount evictions, overlook procedural outcomes, and fail to identify the mechanisms that produce housing instability.

### **Landlord Type, Repeat Players, and Filing Behavior**

Another robust strand of research has examined how landlord characteristics shape eviction filing patterns, consistently finding that large, institutional landlords behave very differently from small-scale landlords in housing court. The theoretical backdrop is Marc Galanter's classic repeat-player versus one-shotter framework (1974), which observed that parties who engage in frequent litigation accumulate expertise, establish relationships with court personnel, and can play the long game—for instance filing many cases to shape favorable precedents or intimidate opposing parties—whereas one-shotters lack these strategic benefits. This dichotomy maps powerfully onto eviction dynamics. Most tenants are one-shot defendants

facing the court only when threatened with losing their home, whereas large landlords file evictions routinely as part of their business model. Smaller landlords—typically individual owners of one to a few rental properties, who manage those properties personally rather than through a corporate structure—occupy an intermediate position. Some may become semi-regular filers as they gain experience with the process, but many approach eviction as a last resort rather than a routine tool. Between these poles sit mid-sized landlords who may own ten to fifty units and file periodically but lack the organizational infrastructure, dedicated legal counsel, and routinized filing protocols of large corporate operators. Additionally, eviction filings can originate from public housing authorities, nonprofit housing providers, and property management companies acting on behalf of individual owners, each of which may follow distinct institutional logics in their use of the court system.

Empirical studies confirm that corporate and institutional landlords are disproportionate drivers of eviction filings. In Boston, landlords owning over 100 rental units accounted for 45% of all eviction filings in 2015–2016, even though such owners represented less than 0.5% of all landlords in the city—and while these large owners control a disproportionate share of the rental housing stock relative to their numbers, that share is far smaller than their share of evictions. By contrast, the city's small and medium-sized landlords made up nearly 90% of all landlords and roughly 44% of all rental units, yet were responsible for only 27% of evictions, indicating that filing intensity per unit is dramatically higher among large corporate owners (Summers & Steil, 2025).

In other words, a tiny fraction of landlords generated most evictions, a pattern commonly observed in many cities. Research by the Eviction Lab echoes this distribution: large property owners are often serial filers, repeatedly suing tenants for nonpayment, whereas small landlords

evict far less frequently. Nationally, an estimated 4% of landlords file more than one eviction case per year, and this sliver of repeat filers likely comprises mainly corporate actors (Garboden & Rosen, 2019).

A second important distinction in this literature, though one less commonly drawn out in administrative-data research, is between landlords who manage their own buildings directly and those who delegate day-to-day operations to a third-party property management company. Studies of landlord behavior find that the more professionalized and bureaucratized the management arrangement, the more readily the relationship with tenants is reframed in creditor–debtor terms and the more routinely eviction filings are deployed as a rent-collection tool, while smaller owner-managed landlords more often rely on informal communication and payment-plan workarounds to avoid filing at all (Garboden & Rosen, 2019; Balzarini & Boyd, 2020). One critical concept emerging from this work is serial eviction filing: the practice—most pronounced among professionalized landlords and property management companies—of filing for eviction on the same tenant repeatedly, sometimes month after month, even when the tenant ultimately stays in the unit (Watson, Garboden, McCabe, & Rosen, 2023; Leung, Hepburn, & Desmond, 2021).

Garboden and Rosen’s qualitative study in Baltimore and Dallas first documented this as a deliberate strategy: landlords use the court not necessarily to remove tenants, but to enforce rent payment. By filing as soon as rent is late, landlords create a legal threat that pressures tenants to pay fees and arrears, yet in many cases they do not pursue the eviction to its conclusion. This turns housing court into rent-collection infrastructure rather than a forum that simply adjudicates irreparable lease breaches. Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond (2021) quantified the prevalence of serial filings across dozens of states: by their estimate, almost half of all

eviction filings in the United States are part of a serial pattern. These filings rarely result in actual removal on the first go; instead, the tenant often pays something and the case is dropped, only to be refiled if they fall behind again. The consequences for tenants are severe: each filing comes with court fees, late fees, and a mark on the tenant's court history that can follow them across jurisdictions, surfacing in background checks and screening reports regardless of whether the case ended in an actual eviction, creating what Leung et al. describe as a routinized, drawn-out process of housing instability rather than a one-time disruptive event.

Serial filing behavior is closely tied to landlord scale. Large, professionalized landlords are far more likely to engage in serial filings than smaller landlords. Immergluck et al. (2020), examining eviction records in Atlanta, found that the biggest landlords not only filed more evictions overall but had a much higher share of their filings turn out to be serial filings. In contrast, non-serial filings (cases more likely to result in a tenant's actual displacement) were more associated with smaller landlords and with marginalized neighborhoods. Properties in predominantly Black neighborhoods had far higher non-serial eviction rates, suggesting that in those areas, when landlords file, it more often leads to forcible removal.

Larger corporate players, meanwhile, tended to operate in a mode of frequent filing but less frequent actual evictions. Raymond et al. (2021) showed that in the single-family rental sector, institutional investors file for eviction at significantly higher rates than small landlords, even after controlling for tenant demographics and location. By contrast, small landlords often view formal eviction as burdensome and costly, since each filing requires at least \$1000 in court fees, potential attorney costs, and lost rental income that can collectively reach tens of thousands of dollars per case, making alternative remedies such as informal negotiation, cash-for-keys arrangements, or simply waiting for a tenant to leave voluntarily more attractive when they are

available (Garboden & Rosen, 2019). Corporate landlords, by virtue of their organizational capacity and dedicated legal counsel, are better positioned to deploy formal eviction strategically because the per-case cost is lower relative to their portfolio size; small landlords, who must personally invest time and money in each filing, face proportionally higher costs that make alternative remedies more attractive (Garboden & Rosen, 2019).

These divergent behaviors raise an important question: which type of landlord displaces more tenants? In absolute terms, large landlords' dominance in filing numbers means they likely account for a large share of executed evictions as well. However, a per-filing perspective suggests small landlords may be more effective at turning filings into evictions, since they file less often and usually as a last resort. No existing research fully reconciles these patterns to determine displacement rates by landlord type, which is precisely the gap this thesis aims to fill by tracking outcomes, judgments, and writs of possession for each case in the Orange County dataset. The literature sets up the hypothesis clearly: eviction court appears to serve a dual function as a debt-collection tool for high-volume corporate landlords, and an actual removal mechanism for smaller landlords who push cases to judgment. This duality links to the sociolegal theories discussed below, but first, another critical factor in case trajectories must be reviewed: whether the tenant has legal counsel.

### **Tenant Legal Representation and Access to Justice**

Perhaps the most consistently identified asymmetry in eviction proceedings is the massive imbalance in legal representation: landlords almost always have an attorney or specialized agent, while tenants almost never do. Nationwide surveys have found that 90% or more of landlords are represented in eviction cases, whereas 90% or more of tenants go unrepresented (Desmond, 2016). This national pattern is visible even in jurisdictions with

comparatively robust legal aid infrastructure: in Chicago's Cook County, one of the largest eviction courts in the country and a jurisdiction where tenant advocacy organizations have a significant presence, roughly 81% of landlords appeared with lawyers compared to only 12% of tenants. Housing court is a textbook case of what Rebecca Sandefur calls the justice gap: low-income people's overwhelming unmet need for legal help in civil matters (Sandefur, 2016).

The consequences in eviction court are dramatic. Without counsel, most tenants struggle to navigate procedural requirements—filing written answers, raising legal defenses, negotiating effectively—and many do not even show up to their hearing, whether from lack of notice, inability to miss work or arrange childcare, or the intimidation factor of court. High default rates are common. When tenants fail to respond or appear, a landlord victory is virtually guaranteed. Even when tenants do appear, if they are unrepresented while the landlord has an attorney, the odds are stacked against them. Court observations have noted that eviction hearings can be dispensed at an astonishing pace, sometimes under two minutes per case, with bewildered tenants having little chance to advocate for themselves. As Engler (1997) described, housing courts often amount to meetings between landlords' attorneys and unrepresented tenants, where the latter may be coaxed into signing unfavorable agreements or simply lose by procedural default.

Against this background, a growing body of research has examined the impact of providing legal representation to tenants, either through civil legal aid or through right-to-counsel programs. The evidence is remarkably consistent: tenants with attorneys achieve significantly better outcomes. A landmark randomized experiment by Seron et al. (2001) in New York City demonstrated that represented tenants were much more likely to retain possession of their units or reach favorable settlements, while unrepresented tenants more often ended up

evicted or with monetary judgments against them. Having a lawyer reduced the eviction judgment rate from 51% to 21% in their sample and greatly increased the chances of getting rent abatements or payment plans instead of immediate ouster.

New York City's right-to-counsel program, the first and largest of its kind in the country, has generated especially comprehensive data. Cassidy and Currie (2023) analyzed the program's rollout using a quasi-experimental design that compared outcomes in neighborhoods that received counsel access at different times, and found that as counsel rates for tenants rose, eviction filings dropped and tenant success rates improved markedly. Gaining access to a lawyer reduced the probability of an eviction warrant being issued by 34% and cut the likelihood of an actual eviction by about 16%. These benefits were even larger in neighborhoods with high poverty and immigrant populations, suggesting representation can mitigate vulnerabilities that compound in disadvantaged communities.

While the consensus on the benefits of counsel is strong, the literature also discusses practical and structural challenges. Even with more lawyers available, tenant outreach and engagement are hurdles. Sandefur's research on access to justice points out that many people do not recognize their problem as legal or fear engaging with the legal system (Sandefur, 2019). Tight timelines to answer an eviction complaint (in Florida, only five business days), lack of effective service of summons, and confusion about court procedures all can filter out tenants before their day in court. Albiston and Sandefur (2013) argue that meaningful access to justice requires not just a formal right, but institutional accommodations so that disadvantaged groups can invoke their rights. The vast majority of U.S. tenants still face eviction unrepresented. Scholarship on access to justice in evictions makes clear that tenant legal representation is a pivotal factor in case trajectories. It can mean the difference between negotiated outcomes versus

abrupt eviction orders, or between preserving a tenancy versus a family entering the shelter system. This underscores a key premise of this thesis: outcomes of eviction cases are likely co-determined by who the landlord is (repeat-player strategy) and whether the tenant has counsel, two factors that existing studies have mostly examined separately.

### **Sociolegal Theoretical Frameworks: Institutional Advantage and Procedural Power**

Understanding eviction court as dual infrastructure, as I attempt to do, can be aided by sociolegal theories about how legal institutions reflect and reproduce power asymmetries. One useful lens is the institutional logics perspective (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). This theory posits that in any given domain, actors may operate according to different logics of action: sets of assumptions, practices, and goals that make sense within a broader institutional context. In eviction court, at least two distinct logics are visible, often corresponding to different types of landlords.

Corporate landlords and property management firms tend to operate at the intersection of two related but distinct logics: a market logic, in which the rental unit is treated as a revenue-generating asset and the tenant relationship as a contractual transaction to be optimized for yield, and a bureaucratic logic, in which day-to-day operations, including the response to missed rent, are routinized into standardized procedures executed by staff working from scripts, ledgers, and software dashboards. Under the market logic, eviction is one tool among many for protecting a revenue stream; under the bureaucratic logic, the filing itself becomes a default administrative response triggered automatically by a delinquent account, largely decoupled from any individualized judgment about the tenant or the underlying circumstances. The two logics reinforce each other: market pressure to minimize arrears creates the demand for a fast, repeatable enforcement mechanism, and bureaucratic standardization is what allows that

mechanism to scale across hundreds or thousands of units without managerial bandwidth becoming a bottleneck.

The goal, in either register, is rarely the immediate physical removal of the tenant but rather the assertion of leverage and the maintenance of contractual order at scale. In contrast, small landlords are individual owners who typically manage one to a few properties and whose rental income may constitute a significant portion of their livelihood. They often approach eviction with a more personal, ad-hoc logic; interviews suggest they weigh moral considerations and the cost of court, sometimes viewing eviction as the last resort when a relationship has broken down (Garboden & Rosen, 2019). This aligns with a more household or relational logic, where decisions are influenced by individual relationships and informal norms, not just by maximizing a ledger. The coexistence of these logics in the same court system leads to the dual functioning described earlier.

Galanter's "Why the Haves Come Out Ahead" (1974) provides another foundational framework. Galanter theorized that repeat players (those who use the courts regularly) have built-in advantages: they develop expertise, can spread the costs of litigation, lobby for procedural rules that favor them, and negotiate from a stronger position because they are not as desperate in any single case. One-shotters (those who rarely litigate) are typically unfamiliar with the process and focused on the immediate case rather than long-term strategy. In eviction court, the landlord side, especially corporate landlords, clearly fits the repeat-player mold. Many large landlords file dozens or hundreds of cases a year; they often retain the same law firm for all filings, and some even have in-house counsel. The tenant side almost always faces a singular, high-stakes case with no prior experience and no expectation of return play. Notably, small landlords also often approach the court as relative newcomers and in cases involving non-

corporate plaintiffs who lack legal representation, the dynamics may more closely resemble a one-shotter versus one-shotter contest than the classic repeat-player versus one-shotter asymmetry.

When neither party has litigation experience or legal counsel, the court's procedural defaults (particularly rules that penalize tenant delay) may do more to determine outcomes than either party's strategic choices. However, even inexperienced landlords hold a structural advantage in eviction proceedings: they are the initiating party, they choose when to file, and the procedural burden falls disproportionately on the defendant to respond within short timelines. This positional advantage helps explain why small landlords achieve high eviction-grant rates despite lacking repeat-player expertise.

Sociolegal scholars have also examined legal consciousness and mobilization of law in the context of unequal power. Ewick and Silbey (1998) describe how ordinary people often experience the law as a distant structure, a game only experts can play, or an arbitrary force to resist. Many low-income tenants see housing court as a rigged game where landlords and lawyers set the rules, or they become alienated, choosing to avoid legal confrontation altogether. This helps explain high default rates and why so many tenants do not pursue legal remedies. The mobilization of law is very uneven, and in evictions, this translates to many tenants simply moving out after a threat or notice, without ever contesting the landlord's claim. Albiston's work on access to justice emphasizes how procedural rules and institutional culture can systematically disadvantage those unfamiliar with them (Albiston, 2007). The fact that a tenant must affirmatively raise a defense means that many meritorious defenses are never raised because unrepresented tenants do not know how. The broader institutional logic of the courts, oriented toward efficient case processing, property rights, and contract enforcement, tends to align with

the interests of the initiating party, which in eviction proceedings is always the landlord. Judges and clerks often see their role as processing straightforward cases of rent nonpayment unless something extraordinary is raised (Engler, 1997). This institutional orientation may be the most powerful mechanism explaining why both corporate and small landlords win their cases at high rates: it is less that landlords possess superior litigation skill than that the court's default procedures are structured to produce landlord-favorable outcomes in the absence of active tenant defense.

These power dynamics extend even to mission-driven housing providers. Gromis, Hendrickson, and Desmond (2022) found that some public housing authorities exhibit eviction filing rates as high or higher than private landlords. Despite operating under a logic that combines bureaucratic rules and social service mandates, many public housing authorities resort to serial filings just like corporate landlords when facing pressures to collect rent and maintain solvent operations. The difference came down to organizational culture and policies, not legal constraints, underscoring how landlord identity and institutional priorities critically shape how eviction law is deployed, even within the same legal framework.

In summary, sociolegal theories help explain why eviction court operates in ways that systematically produce landlord-favorable outcomes across virtually all configurations of parties. Galanter's repeat-player theory predicts the advantage that large, frequent filers have, but the procedural structure of the court itself, with its short response windows, default-judgment mechanisms, and orientation toward efficient case processing, generates landlord advantage even when neither party is a sophisticated litigant. Theories of legal consciousness and access to justice illuminate the tenant side: why so many do not or cannot engage the law's protections. Together, these perspectives reinforce the importance of studying eviction case trajectories with

attention to power and roles and suggest that an analysis focusing on how landlord type and tenant representation influence the path of a case is vital to uncover the implicit patterns of advantage built into the eviction system.

### **Geographic Concentration and the Florida Context**

Evictions are not evenly distributed across space or populations; research consistently shows they are concentrated in neighborhoods, buildings, and subgroups. Desmond's work in Milwaukee first brought attention to how a small number of urban neighborhoods, typically low-income, majority-minority areas, account for a disproportionate share of evictions (Desmond, 2016). Subsequent multi-city studies have confirmed that eviction is a durable, geographically concentrated phenomenon. Hepburn, Rutan, and Desmond (2021) analyzed 660,000 eviction records across 17 U.S. cities and found that the same neighborhoods tend to have high eviction rates year after year, a pattern they term durable inequality in the geography of eviction. Neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and large renter populations consistently produced the highest eviction filing rates each year, even in the absence of obvious economic shocks. This persistence reflects the operation of structural factors such as decades of residential segregation, discriminatory lending and zoning practices, chronic disinvestment in infrastructure and services, and wage stagnation relative to housing costs. These inequities have created and sustained conditions of concentrated poverty and housing precarity in specific areas. The result is that high eviction rates in these neighborhoods are not simply a function of having more renters, but a product of the historical and ongoing processes that determine which communities bear the greatest housing cost burdens and which residents have the fewest resources to absorb income disruptions.

Zooming in further, researchers have identified that even within high-eviction neighborhoods, a few buildings or addresses are hot spots of repeat evictions. Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond (2021) noted that some large apartment complexes file on dozens of tenants every year. The same pattern appears across jurisdictions: a small set of properties and a small set of plaintiffs generate a disproportionate share of total filings, while the majority of rental properties produce few or none each year. Hepburn (2024) characterizes this as the "concentrated geography" of eviction and argues that any accurate description of eviction at the city or county level must account for the fact that the system's volume is driven by a comparatively narrow slice of actors and addresses, not by the rental market as a whole.

Findings on eviction concentration have spurred a range of policy proposals. One approach is increasing filing costs or hurdles for serial filers. Because research shows that some landlords use repeated filings against the same tenant as a routinized rent-collection tool rather than as a genuine attempt to recover possession (Garboden & Rosen, 2019; Watson, Garboden, McCabe, & Rosen, 2023), jurisdictions can raise court filing fees or impose procedural hurdles to discourage filings whose primary purpose is leverage rather than the resolution of an actual housing dispute. A second policy gaining traction is just-cause or good-cause eviction, which requires landlords to identify a legitimate reason to evict beyond simply ending a lease. A third is eviction diversion: pre-filing or in-process programs that connect landlords and tenants with mediation and rental assistance before a case reaches the court docket. Philadelphia, which made its Eviction Diversion Program permanent in 2024, is the most-cited example: roughly 70% of landlord–tenant pairs that go through mediation reach an agreement, and as of early 2025 filings in the city remained roughly 37% below the pre-pandemic average — a gap that has held for

several consecutive years, making Philadelphia one of the few large jurisdictions where post-pandemic filings have not returned to or exceeded their 2019 baseline (Melamed, 2025).

Florida illustrates what is at stake when these policy levers are absent. Florida cities including Jacksonville, Tampa, and Orlando have historically ranked among those with the highest eviction filing rates nationally, reflecting a combination of high rent burdens, weak tenant protections, and streamlined court procedures that move cases from filing to judgment unusually fast. Orange County in particular experienced a surge of filings in 2023 and 2024 as pandemic-era protections lapsed, and although filings eased somewhat in 2025, they remain near or above the county's pre-pandemic baseline despite substantial population growth (Shimberg Center for Housing Studies). Florida has no state-level right to counsel, no state-level just-cause requirement, no state-mandated diversion program, and relatively low filing fees, meaning the incentive structure currently rewards frequent filings rather than discouraging them, and tenants face the procedural pressure of the state's compressed five-day response window without any of the institutional supports that programs like Philadelphia's are designed to provide.

Even with these structural features in clear view, a basic descriptive question about how Florida's system actually operates remains unanswered. Existing data tell us how many evictions are filed in Orange County, but not how many result in a writ of possession that is actually issued, posted, and executed by the sheriff. Very few studies, in Florida or elsewhere, have collected that kind of case-level outcome data. This dearth of writ-issuance and execution data is a glaring gap in the empirical literature on eviction, because the writ is the legal instrument that converts a paper proceeding into the physical removal of a household. Without it, the ultimate metric of displacement is invisible, and any assessment of the human impact of eviction filings is necessarily incomplete. The present thesis's focus on case trajectories from filing through

judgment to writ issuance and execution is designed to address that gap directly within the Orange County 2024 docket.

Taken together, the five streams of scholarship surveyed in this chapter (eviction data infrastructure, landlord type and filing strategy, representation asymmetry, sociolegal theory of institutional advantage, and the geographic concentration of filings) establish the empirical and theoretical foundation for the present study. Each stream contributes a piece: data infrastructure constrains what can be observed; landlord type shapes filing strategy; representation asymmetry structures case outcomes; sociolegal theory explains the mechanisms of institutional advantage; and geographic concentration identifies where the system's effects are most acute. What has been missing is research that traces how these factors interact across the full lifecycle of a single case at the scale of an entire county. Specifically, no existing study has combined landlord-type classification, representation coding, outcome tracking, and writ-of-possession data within a single jurisdiction's complete annual docket. The dataset and methods I describe in the next section are designed to fill that gap by constructing precisely this kind of case-level, process-oriented record for Orange County, Florida in 2024.

## Methods

This project investigates a single central question about Orange County's 2024 eviction docket: how often, and for whom, does an eviction filing actually convert into the physical removal of a household? Answering that question requires three linked analyses. First, a descriptive baseline of the writ-of-possession pipeline: what proportion of filings end in a judgment, what proportion of judgments produce an issued writ, what proportion of issued writs are actually posted and executed by the sheriff, and how long each step takes. Second, an examination of how landlord type: corporate plaintiffs and large property management firms versus individual or small-scale owners: shapes movement through that pipeline, given prior research showing that professionalized landlords tend to file more frequently and treat filings more instrumentally. Third, an examination of how tenant legal representation affects the same trajectory, given prior research showing that represented tenants reach materially different case outcomes than unrepresented ones. The two predictor analyses (landlord type and representation) are conducted against the descriptive baseline, allowing the analysis to assess not just whether each predictor matters but where in the case lifecycle it matters most whether at filing, at judgment, at writ issuance, or at execution. I focus on calendar year 2024 because it provides a recent, complete annual docket observed under a single procedural regime, allowing comparison across cases without the distortions that partial-year windows can create.

### Data Source and Collection

A central choice in the design was to build a case-level dataset in which each row corresponds to one eviction case and each column captures the same set of observable features: plaintiff identity, attorney appearances, case disposition, writ status, and key timeline dates. This structure was necessary because the Florida statewide eviction numbers that are publicly

available are aggregated at the monthly county level and therefore cannot answer questions about which landlords filed, which cases involved counsel, or how individual cases resolved. Orange County was selected because it combines substantive and practical value: it is a high-volume Florida eviction jurisdiction operating under the same statewide statutory framework as other counties, while also maintaining a public clerk website detailed enough to recover the case-level detail that statewide counts erase. Using the full 2024 docket also makes it possible to analyze the court's ordinary annual operation rather than a short period that could be unusually high or low for seasonal or administrative reasons. As a case selection, Orange County functions as a "typical" case of a high-volume Florida eviction jurisdiction: it is the state's fifth-most-populous county, has a renter population and rent-burden profile broadly consistent with other major Florida metros, operates under the same statewide eviction statute (Fla. Stat. § 83.232), and uses the same clerk-of-court's docket system deployed across most Florida counties. Findings from Orange County are therefore not idiosyncratic to its local court culture but are plausibly informative about the broader dynamics of Florida's eviction system, while remaining bounded by the limitations of a single-county study.

The raw information came from the Orange County Clerk of Courts docket, the publicly accessible case management system that records each procedural event in an eviction case. The docket tracks a case from the initial complaint through any motions, hearings, judgments, and writs, and is typically organized as a case summary plus a chronological list of dated entries. The clerk site is not designed for bulk data extraction, as it requires navigating a search form, paginated result tables, and a CAPTCHA. To collect data at scale, I used Python browser automation rather than manual transcription. Specifically, I used Playwright, a Python library for programmatic browser control, to operate a Chromium browser that submitted searches and

navigated results. The returned pages were saved as HTML and then parsed using BeautifulSoup, a Python library for extracting structured data from HTML documents, to capture the table cells corresponding to case number, filing date, status, and other fields.

All searches for a given 2024 date window were conducted within a single, contained collection session, so the docket was captured as it stood at one observation moment rather than re-scraped at different times across the project. This approach prevents the inconsistencies that would arise if individual cases were observed at different points in their lifecycle (for example, a case recorded as "open" during one scrape and "dismissed" during a later one), and it eliminates the risk of double-counting cases whose status had changed between collection passes.

The final dataset included 15,039 residential eviction cases filed in Orange County between January 1 and December 31, 2024. The case universe is anchored to filing date rather than disposition date: every 2024-filed case appears in the dataset regardless of when it resolved, and a small share of cases were still open or had post-2024 dispositions at the time of data collection, which the analysis flags where relevant. This filing-anchored construction provides sufficient scale to reduce the risk of sampling bias and to permit meaningful comparisons across rare categories, such as cases involving tenant counsel.

### **Variable Construction and Coding**

A key concept in the analysis is the case trajectory: the pathway and timing from filing to final judgment and, where applicable, to writ-of-possession issuance and posting. Recording these dates allows measurement of duration (days from filing to judgment, days from judgment to writ posting) rather than treating outcome categories alone as the sole analytical endpoint, since two cases that end in landlord victory can impose very different time pressures on tenants.

The writ of possession measure was separated into two stages, issuance and posting, because a court can authorize enforcement without that authorization reaching the execution stage. Another core variable was landlord type, coded as corporate versus non-corporate by applying a regular expression to the plaintiff name field that flagged a broad set of business-entity markers, including standard legal suffixes like “LLC”, “Inc”, “Corp”, and “Ltd”, as well as industry terms such as “property”, “realty”, “management”, “investment”, “holdings”, “apartment”, and “homes”. The rule was designed to be conservative in the corporate direction: a plaintiff was coded as corporate only when the name contained at least one marker that clearly indicated a business entity. This means some landlords filing under personal names may be miscoded as non-corporate, while every plaintiff coded as corporate is at minimum operating through a registered business entity.

The "corporate" label here is therefore a legal-form distinction rather than a size or scale distinction: it includes large institutional owners and property management firms but also captures individual or family operators who have set up an LLC for liability or tax purposes and file in that LLC's name. The analysis treats this category as a proxy for professionalized or formalized ownership rather than as a measure of corporate scale per se, and the limitations section returns to this point when discussing what the variable can and cannot tell us about the underlying landlord population. Legal representation was measured by reading the docket's attorney fields to see whether each side appeared with counsel, coded as a binary indicator, because the immediate question was whether the presence of a lawyer is associated with different case endings and different movement to the writ stage.

This binary approach also reflects a practical constraint: the docket is reliable about whether an attorney filed a formal notice of appearance but does not capture the gradient of legal

help that exists outside that single binary. Intensity of representation (whether a tenant's attorney attended one hearing or actively litigated the case across multiple motions and filings) is invisible in the docket fields, even though prior research suggests intensity matters substantially for outcomes. Informal advice (a tenant who consults a friend, a relative, a clinic intake line, or a pro bono attorney without that attorney ever filing in the case) leaves no trace at all. Limited-scope assistance, sometimes called "unbundled" legal services, in which an attorney helps draft a single document or coach the tenant for a hearing without entering an appearance, similarly produces no visible attorney record. And legal aid involvement often runs through advice-and-counsel services or duty-counsel programs at the courthouse that do not generate a formal appearance even when the assistance materially shapes how the tenant proceeds. The binary indicator therefore likely understates the prevalence of any tenant-side legal help while still capturing the most consequential threshold, whether a lawyer formally entered the case, which is itself the variable most prior representation research has used.

Case outcomes were coded into five mutually exclusive categories. Landlords win with eviction granted covers cases in which the court entered judgment for the plaintiff and authorized possession, regardless of whether a writ was subsequently issued or executed. Dismissed covers cases that the court closed without entering judgment for either side, including voluntary dismissals by the plaintiff and dismissals for procedural defects. Settled covers cases closed by a stipulated agreement between the parties on the docket, including pay-and-stay arrangements and negotiated move-out agreements. Closed without a clear dispositive event covers cases that appear to have terminated administratively (for example, an inactive docket with no judgment, dismissal, or settlement entry) but where the underlying disposition cannot be determined from

the visible record alone; this is treated as a substantive outcome category in its own right because it is a real and reasonably common feature of how the Orange County docket operates.

Unknown/missing is reserved for the small subset of cases in which the docket itself was incomplete at the time of collection, ambiguous in a way that prevented coding, or otherwise failed to provide enough information to assign any of the four substantive categories. All 15,039 cases in the dataset are retained regardless of outcome category, including those coded unknown/missing; the analysis reports them transparently rather than dropping them, because excluding cases on the basis of data quality would obscure where the public docket itself fails to record what happened, which is itself one of the patterns this thesis aims to document.

### **Analytic Strategy**

The choice to construct these variables from the public docket, rather than conducting interviews or purchasing commercial eviction datasets, follows from the thesis's aim to measure system-wide patterns across an entire county using a transparent, replicable source. Interviews can illuminate experience and strategy but cannot reconstruct the full distribution of outcomes and timelines across all filings; proprietary datasets would reduce transparency and complicate replication. Using the public docket keeps the source open, even though it requires more technical work to extract.

The analytic strategy began with descriptive statistics: counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations showing how outcomes and writ status differ across corporate versus non-corporate filers and across represented versus unrepresented parties. This approach documents the distributional patterns before imposing more complex models. Visualizations were used to make differences in distributions and timelines legible.

For statistical inference, the analysis used chi-square tests of independence to assess whether each predictor (like landlord type and tenant representation) is associated with each outcome of interest, examining each predictor separately against outcomes rather than fitting a joint or interactive model. Odds ratios were used to express the magnitude of those associations for binary comparisons. An alternative would have been logistic regression, which can adjust for additional covariates simultaneously and test interaction terms, but such an approach requires more reliably measured covariates than the docket provides and risks creating a false impression of causal control. The design therefore prioritizes transparent bivariate comparisons on variables the docket measures well, while treating more elaborate causal or interactive modeling as out of scope for what a public docket alone can justify. Where descriptive patterns suggest the effect of one predictor may vary across levels of the other, those patterns are noted in the results discussion but not subjected to formal interaction testing.

### **Scope and Limitations**

Several limitations follow from the data source itself: the site's CAPTCHA and pagination mean extraction depends on stable site behavior across runs; docket entries can be ambiguous, incomplete, or inconsistent across cases; attorney appearance is an imperfect proxy for access to legal help; and focusing on one county limits how far results can be generalized without repeating the same build in other counties. These limitations were handled by making scraping steps deterministic and repeatable, separating unknown from missing so data gaps remain visible, keeping coding rules explicit in a codebook so another researcher could reproduce the dataset, and using spot checks against the live portal to verify that scraped fields matched what a human reader would see on the docket, with the remaining uncertainty treated as a documented constraint on interpretation rather than silently smoothed over.

At the same time, the single-county scope was a very deliberate starting point. Because the scraping pipeline, coding rules, and variable definitions were built to be transparent and replicable, the method can be adapted to any Florida county that uses the same clerk-of-court's docket system, and most do. A second county would allow direct comparison of whether the patterns documented here are specific to Orange County's local court culture or are structural features of Florida's eviction framework. The dataset constructed here is therefore a proof of concept for the kind of research tool that could build a national case-level eviction dataset.

## **Results**

The 2024 Orange County eviction docket is a system defined by three structural features: corporate dominance, extreme representation asymmetry, and concentrated litigation capacity. Corporate plaintiffs filed 88% of all cases; plaintiffs had attorneys in 92.5% of filings while tenants had attorneys in only 1.5%; and a single attorney appeared in more than one-third of all cases. Writs of possession were issued in 52.6% of filings, and 90.6% of issued writs were posted, meaning the sheriff physically served notice at the property that removal was imminent. In practical terms, this means that once a judge grants an eviction, the enforcement mechanism that translates that legal judgment into a tenant's physical removal from their home is activated in over nine out of ten cases. Outcome distributions diverged sharply by landlord type: corporate filings ended in dismissal or settlement at 3.5 times the rate of non-corporate filings, while non-corporate filings more often produced eviction-granted outcomes or administratively closed dispositions.

This section presents findings in seven parts. I first describe filing composition and landlord type, then document representation configurations across the docket. The next two subsections examine outcome distributions by landlord type and by tenant representation status, respectively. I then analyze attorney concentration on the plaintiff side, followed by writ-of-possession issuance, posting, and timelines. The section concludes with an analysis of repeat players on both the plaintiff and defendant sides of the docket.

### **Filing Composition and Landlord Type**

The 2024 docket contained 15,039 eviction filings across four Orange County case types. The largest share, 12,505 filings (83.2%), were coded CC – Residential Eviction, the standard county court case type for nonpayment-of-rent and lease-violation evictions of residential

tenants. Another 2,294 filings (15.3%) were coded CC – Eviction Non-Monetary, the county court case type for residential evictions in which the underlying claim does not turn on rent owed (for example, lease-term expiration, holdover tenancy, or alleged lease violations unrelated to payment). A smaller 231 filings (1.5%) were coded CC – Non-Residential Eviction, covering commercial-tenant evictions filed in county court. Finally, 9 filings (0.06%) were coded CA – Eviction, the circuit court case type used when an eviction claim is filed alongside damages claim that exceeds the county court's jurisdictional cap and therefore must be heard in circuit rather than county court. Together, the three residential-eviction case types (CC-Residential, CC-Eviction Non-Monetary, and the residential portion of CA – Eviction) constitute the population of interest for this thesis, with non-residential commercial evictions retained in descriptive counts but excluded from outcome analyses where commercial-versus-residential differences would confound interpretation.

Corporate plaintiffs dominated the docket. Under the project's name-based plaintiff classification (described in the Methods section), 13,230 filings (88.0%) were brought by corporate entities, and 1,809 filings (12.0%) were brought by non-corporate plaintiffs. As noted in the methods discussion, the corporate label captures legal form rather than scale, so it includes both large institutional owners and smaller operators filing under an LLC.

Case status at the time of data capture indicated that most filings had reached some form of closure within the year window, though a meaningful share had moved into a second post-closure stage. Closed cases — those that had reached an initial disposition (judgment, dismissal, settlement, or administrative termination) and were not subsequently reopened comprised 13,174 filings (87.6%). Reclosed cases, those that had been closed at least once, then formally reopened on the docket (typically because a party filed a post-judgment motion such as a motion to vacate,

a motion for rehearing, or a request to enforce a settlement), and then closed again, comprised 1,504 filings (10.0%). A reclosed case is therefore a case that the court has resolved twice on the same docket: once at initial disposition, and again after a procedural reopening event.

The remaining 361 filings sat in non-final or unresolved states at the time of capture: 263 cases (1.75%) were Pending (filed but not yet adjudicated), 90 (0.60%) were Reopened Modification (formally reopened and awaiting a second disposition), and 8 cases (0.05%) were distributed across On Appeal, Inactive, and Reopen Inactive. Cases in these unresolved states are retained in descriptive counts and in filing-composition reporting but excluded from outcome analyses, since by definition they have not yet produced a coded outcome and including them in outcome comparisons would force the analysis to either guess at a final disposition or treat unresolved cases as a fourth outcome category that has nothing in common with the substantive categories beyond the absence of a final answer.

Outcome coding yielded three mutually exclusive substantive categories: Plaintiff Won – Eviction Granted, Dismissed/Settled, and Unknown – Closed — plus a residual Missing category for cases whose docket entries were too sparse, ambiguous, or inconsistent to support any outcome assignment. Outcomes were assignable for 14,764 cases (98.2% of the docket); the remaining 275 cases (1.8%) lacked sufficient information for coding and were retained in descriptive totals but excluded from outcome comparisons. Among the 14,764 codeable cases, 7,920 (53.6%) ended in a plaintiff win with an eviction granted, 4,618 (31.3%) ended in dismissal or settlement, and 2,226 (15.1%) were coded Unknown – Closed.

The Unknown – Closed category requires explanation, because at 15.1% of codeable outcomes it is large enough to materially shape any aggregate description of how the docket resolves. Unknown – Closed cases are cases that the court has formally closed, meaning the

**Table 1: Filing Composition by Case Type and Landlord Type**

TABLE 1

| CASE TYPE                     | CORPORATE     | NON-CORPORATE | TOTAL         | % OF DOCKET |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| CC – Residential Eviction     | 11,241        | 1,264         | 12,505        | 83.2%       |
| CC – Eviction Non-Monetary    | 1,788         | 506           | 2,294         | 15.3%       |
| CC – Non-Residential Eviction | 193           | 38            | 231           | 1.5%        |
| CA – Eviction                 | 8             | 1             | 9             | 0.06%       |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>13,230</b> | <b>1,809</b>  | <b>15,039</b> | <b>100%</b> |

*Corporate plaintiffs filed 88.0% of all cases. Residential eviction (nonpayment of rent) cases constituted the vast majority (83.2%) of the docket.*

docket reflects a terminal status entry rather than an open or pending one, but where the visible record does not specify which of the three substantive outcomes (plaintiff win, dismissal, or settlement) occurred. In practice these cases typically show an administrative closure entry without a corresponding judgment, dismissal order, or stipulation of settlement, leaving an outside reader unable to determine from the public docket alone which side, if either, prevailed.

The original methodological instinct (and a reasonable suggestion from review) was simply to drop these cases from the outcome analysis. I retained them as a coded category, however, for two reasons. First, dropping 15.1% of the docket as if it were a data-quality problem would understate how often the public eviction record itself fails to make case dispositions visible to the public, a pattern that is itself substantively important, because it bears directly on the question of whether eviction court is functioning as a transparent legal forum. Second, as the next subsections show, the rate of Unknown – Closed outcomes differ sharply between corporate and non-corporate landlord cases (12.9% versus 32.2%), which means the category is not noise distributed at random across the docket but a structured feature of how different kinds of cases move through the system. A residual category that varies that

systematically with the principal predictor of interest cannot be discarded without losing an analytically meaningful pattern.

### **Representation Configurations**

Plaintiffs were represented by counsel in 13,911 cases (92.5%), while defendants were represented by counsel in only 232 cases (1.5%). The cross-classification of representation status further illustrated the structure of this gap. In 13,694 cases (91.1% of the entire docket), the plaintiff had an attorney and the defendant did not. Only 217 cases (1.4%) involved attorneys on both sides, 15 cases (0.10%) involved a represented defendant facing an unrepresented plaintiff, and 1,113 cases (7.4%) listed no counsel for either party.

Representation status also varied sharply by landlord type on the plaintiff side. Corporate plaintiffs reported legal representation in 13,068 of 13,230 filings (98.8%), while non-corporate plaintiffs reported representation in 843 of 1,809 filings (46.6%). Conversely, tenant representation remained rare in both landlord segments but appeared at slightly higher frequency in non-corporate cases: 51 of 1,809 non-corporate filings (2.8%) listed a represented defendant, compared to 181 of 13,230 corporate filings (1.4%) listing a represented defendant.

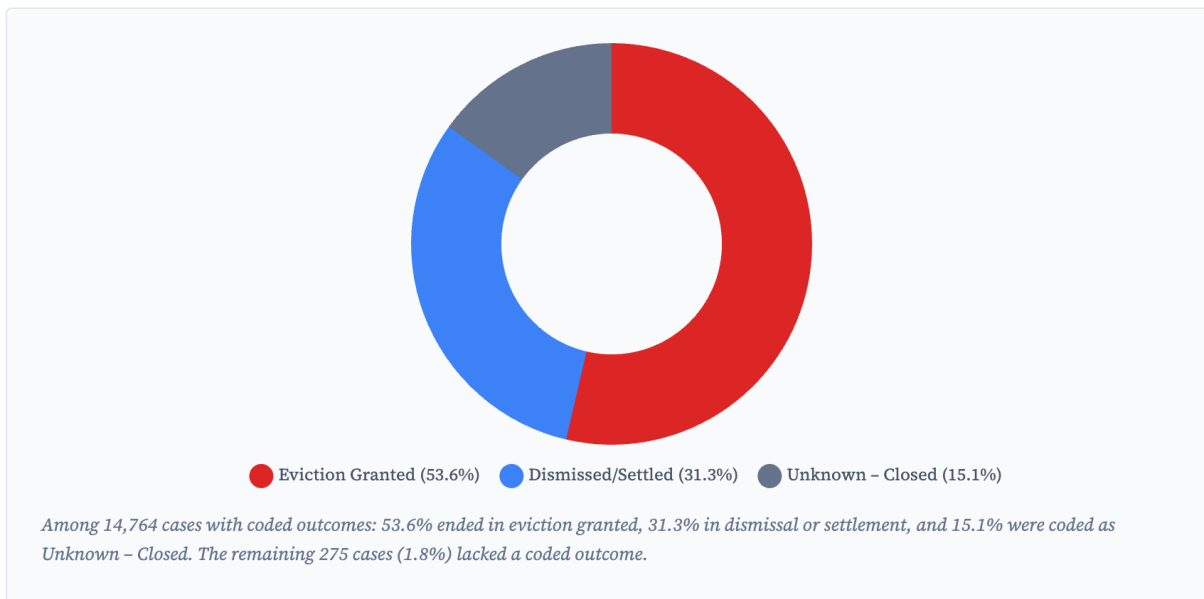
### **Outcomes by Landlord Type**

The dataset's central comparison concerns how case outcomes differed by landlord type. Within the 14,764 filings with non-missing outcomes, 13,092 cases (88.7%) involved corporate plaintiffs, and 1,672 cases (11.3%) involved non-corporate plaintiffs. Outcome distributions diverged sharply across these two groups. For corporate plaintiffs, 6,951 cases ended in an eviction granted (53.1%), 4,454 ended in dismissal or settlement (34.0%), and 1,687 ended as unknown-closed (12.9%). For non-corporate plaintiffs, 969 cases ended in an eviction granted

(58.0%), 164 ended in dismissal or settlement (9.8%), and 539 ended as unknown-closed (32.2%).

**Figure 1: Outcome Distribution across All Filings**

FIGURE 1



Two differences were particularly large in magnitude. First, dismissal/settlement outcomes comprised approximately one-third of corporate filings with coded outcomes (34.0%) but approximately one-tenth of non-corporate filings with coded outcomes (9.8%). The dismissal/settlement share was 3.5 times higher among corporate plaintiffs than among non-corporate plaintiffs. Second, unknown-closed outcomes comprised nearly one-third of non-corporate filings with coded outcomes (32.2%) but only 12.9% of corporate filings with coded outcomes.

The overall association between landlord type and case outcome was statistically strong. A chi-square test of independence, testing landlord type (corporate versus non-corporate) against the full three-category outcome variable (eviction granted, dismissed/settled, and unknown-closed) — yielded  $\chi^2 = 652.65$  ( $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), with effect size Cramér's  $V = 0.210$ . This

omnibus result tells us that landlord type and outcome are not independent in the sample of 14,764 codeable cases, but the test itself does not say which outcome category drives the association. To answer that, the analysis turns to focused contrasts on the individual outcomes.

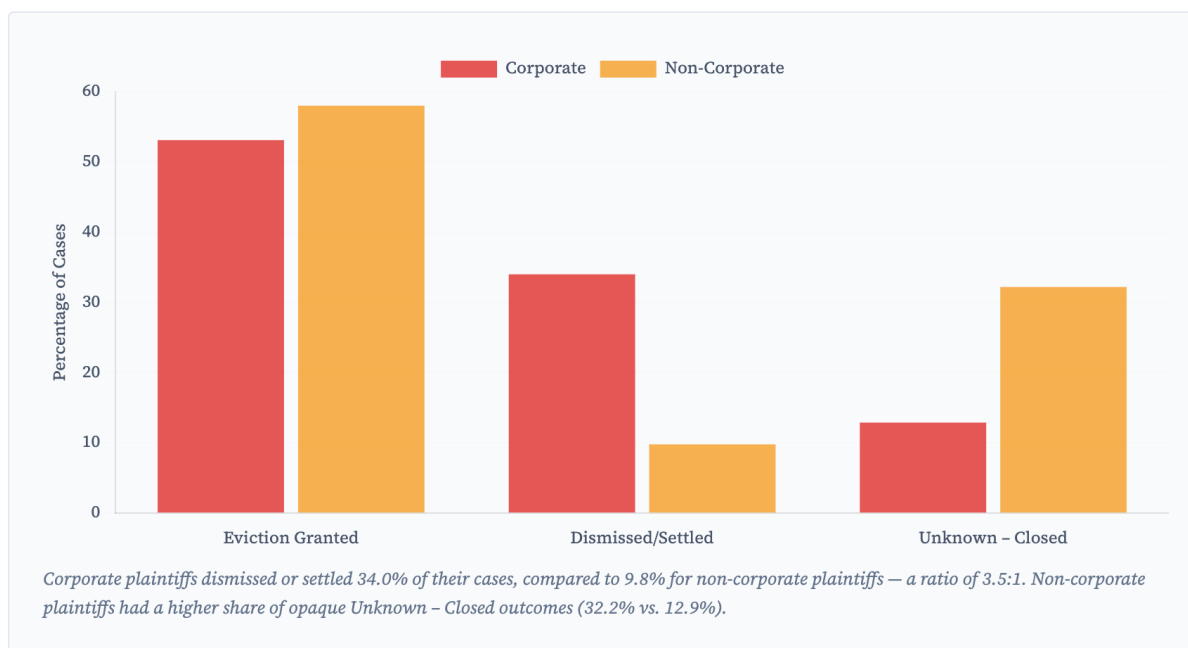
The largest difference, as the previous paragraph showed in raw rates, is in the dismissal/settlement category: 34.0% of corporate-plaintiff cases ended in dismissal or settlement, compared with only 9.8% of non-corporate cases. Two ways of expressing the magnitude of that difference are useful, and they generate different numbers because they are measuring different things. As a risk ratio, the ratio of one probability to another, the 34.0% versus 9.8% gap means corporate cases were about 3.5 times more likely than non-corporate cases to end in dismissal or settlement ( $RR = 3.47$ ). As an odds ratio, the ratio of one odds to another, where odds are  $p / (1 - p)$ , the same underlying difference produces a value of 4.74, because odds expand the apparent gap when the outcome of interest (dismissal/settled) is common rather than rare ( $OR = 4.74$ , 95% CI: 4.02–5.59). The two numbers are not contradictory; they are the same fact expressed in different metrics. I report both because the risk ratio is the more intuitive description of the lived gap (one type of case is roughly 3.5 times more likely to end this way than the other), while the odds ratio is the standard reporting unit in the eviction literature and is what most published comparisons will be expressed in.

Because “Unknown – Closed” formed a substantial share of non-corporate outcomes, an additional restricted comparison examined cases with determinate coded dispositions: eviction granted versus dismissed/settled, excluding unknown-closed outcomes. Within this determinate subsample, non-corporate plaintiffs obtained eviction grants in 969 of 1,133 cases (85.5%), while corporate plaintiffs obtained eviction grants in 6,951 of 11,405 cases (60.9%). The landlord-type outcome pattern also persisted within the largest case-type category, CC - Residential Eviction,

and within non-monetary eviction filings, where dismissal/settlement outcomes comprised 33.6% of corporate non-monetary outcomes but 8.4% of non-corporate non-monetary outcomes.

**Figure 2: Outcome Distribution by Landlord Type**

FIGURE 2



## Outcomes by Tenant Representation

Differences in outcomes by tenant representation status were observable at the aggregate level even though represented defendants comprised a small fraction of filings. Among the 232 cases in which defendants were represented by counsel, 102 ended with an eviction granted to the plaintiff, producing an eviction-grant rate of 44.0%. Among the 14,807 cases in which defendants were unrepresented, 7,818 ended with an eviction granted, producing an eviction-grant rate of 52.8%. The absolute difference between these rates was 8.8 percentage points.

Association between defendant representation and the three-category outcome distribution was assessed on the 14,764 cases with non-missing outcomes. The  $2 \times 3$  cross-tabulation of defendant counsel (Yes/No) and outcome category produced a chi-square statistic

of  $\chi^2 = 28.45$  with  $df = 2$  and  $p < 0.001$ , indicating that case outcomes were not distributed identically across represented and unrepresented defendants. Effect size was modest (Cramer's  $V = 0.044$ ), reflecting both the rarity of defendant representation and the fact that most cases remained clustered in high-eviction and dismissal categories even among represented defendants.

Outcome differences by tenant representation varied by landlord type. In cases filed by corporate plaintiffs, represented defendants experienced eviction grants in 85 of 181 filings (47.0%), compared to 6,866 eviction grants in 13,049 unrepresented-defendant filings (52.6%). In cases filed by non-corporate plaintiffs, represented defendants experienced eviction grants in 17 of 51 filings (33.3%), compared to 952 eviction grants in 1,758 unrepresented-defendant filings (54.2%). The represented-defendant subsample in non-corporate filings remained small ( $n = 51$ ), but the raw distributions were sufficiently distinct to present as counts and within-group percentages.

### **Attorney Concentration**

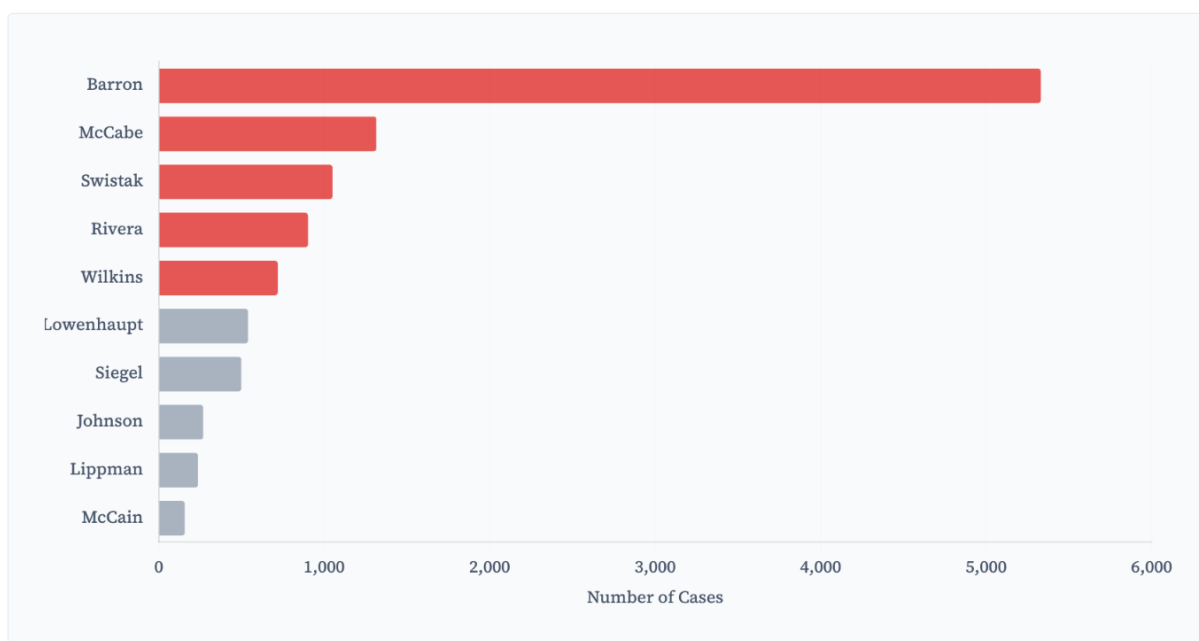
The plaintiff side of the docket did not reflect a diffuse market of many attorneys each handling a small number of eviction filings. Instead, filings clustered heavily among a small set of repeat attorneys. Across the full docket, 517 distinct plaintiff attorney names appeared at least once. Yet the distribution of filings per attorney was extremely skewed: the median plaintiff attorney appeared in 1 case, and 75% of plaintiff attorneys appeared in 2 cases or fewer.

At the top of the distribution, a single attorney's firm, the Law Offices of James Barron, appeared in 5,330 cases. This caseload represented 35.4% of the full 2024 docket and 38.3% of the represented-plaintiff docket, situating one attorney as a central node in the county's eviction filings. The next four highest-volume plaintiff-side attorneys were the Offices of William McCabe (1,315 cases), Jay Swistak (1,050 cases), Elizabeth Rivera (902 cases), and Jeffery

Wilkins (720 cases). Together, these five attorneys accounted for 9,317 cases, or 62.0% of the entire docket. The top ten plaintiff attorneys accounted for 11,019 cases, or 73.3% of the entire

## Attorney Concentration on the Plaintiff Side

### ATTORNEY ANALYSIS



| RANK | ATTORNEY           | CASES | % OF DOCKET | CUMULATIVE % |
|------|--------------------|-------|-------------|--------------|
| 1    | James Barron       | 5,330 | 35.4%       | 35.4%        |
| 2    | William McCabe     | 1,315 | 8.7%        | 44.2%        |
| 3    | Jay Swistak        | 1,050 | 7.0%        | 51.1%        |
| 4    | Elizabeth Rivera   | 902   | 6.0%        | 57.1%        |
| 5    | Jeffery Wilkins    | 720   | 4.8%        | 62.0%        |
| 6    | Kenneth Lowenhaupt | 540   | 3.6%        | 65.5%        |
| 7    | Matthew Siegel     | 499   | 3.3%        | 68.9%        |
| 8    | Barry Johnson      | 269   | 1.8%        | 70.6%        |
| 9    | Mark Lippman       | 237   | 1.6%        | 72.2%        |
| 10   | Ryan McCain        | 157   | 1.0%        | 73.3%        |

Barron's 5,330 cases spanned 680 distinct plaintiff names. The top 5 attorneys collectively represented 1,322 distinct plaintiffs. 517 total distinct plaintiff attorneys appeared on the docket; median caseload: 1; 75th percentile: 2.

docket. Concentration was even stronger when attention was restricted to corporate filings where the top five plaintiff attorneys collectively handled 9,118 of them (68.9%).

Attorney concentration was also visible in the breadth of landlord-plaintiffs represented by high-volume counsel. Barron's 5,330 cases were filed on behalf of 680 distinct plaintiff names, indicating that his docket presence was not attributable to a single landlord's unusually high filing volume. Across the five highest-volume attorneys collectively, 1,322 distinct plaintiff names appeared at least once. This pattern was descriptively consistent with a market structure in which a small set of attorneys functioned as repeat representatives across hundreds of corporate landlord-plaintiffs, rather than as counsel bound to a single frequent-filing entity.

Barron's volume in particular matters because repeated filings against the same named tenants change the strategic environment of the case, and your dataset gives you a basis for saying that. Within Barron's 5,330 cases, 464 distinct named defendants appear more than once, and those repeat-defendant cases account for 1,016 of Barron's filings, about 19.1% of his Barron-filed docket. Barron's practice is built on returning the same people to court more than once, which means the legal process is essentially functioning as an iterative enforcement system rather than as a one-time adjudication of a single breakdown in the tenancy. When the same attorney repeatedly files against the same tenant, the plaintiff side carries forward procedural familiarity, standardized pleadings, and an institutional memory of prior nonpayment or noncompliance, while the tenant reenters court under greater pressure and usually without comparable legal capacity. The warrant is that repetition itself shifts leverage. A first filing threatens loss of housing; a second or third filing does so against a record of prior court contact that can make resistance harder, settlement less favorable, and exit more likely. Barron's dominance therefore is not significant merely because he handles many cases. It is significant

because the recurrence of the same defendants within his caseload suggests that attorney concentration helps convert eviction court into a rolling mechanism of discipline, one that can be used on the same households again and again rather than only to resolve isolated disputes.

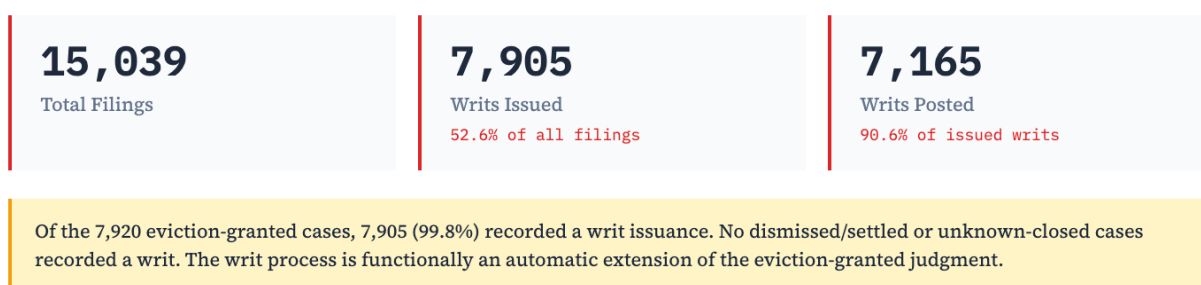
### **Writ of Possession: Issuance, Posting, and Timelines**

The dataset captured two stages of writ enforcement: whether a writ of possession was issued and whether it was posted at the property. These stages represent distinct moments in the displacement process with different consequences for the tenant. Issuance means the court has authorized the sheriff to carry out the removal—at this point, the legal authority for displacement exists but the tenant may not yet know. Posting means the sheriff has physically served notice at the property, typically by affixing a notice to the door, informing the tenant that they must vacate within a specified period (usually 24 hours in Florida) or face forcible removal. For the tenant, the distinction matters because the window between issuance and posting represents the last interval in which a legal intervention (such as filing a motion to stay or reaching a last-minute agreement with the landlord) might prevent physical removal.

Across the full docket, writs were issued in 7,905 cases (52.6%). Writs were posted in 7,165 cases (47.6% of the entire docket). Writ issuance was tightly linked to coded case outcomes. Of the 7,920 cases coded as Plaintiff Won – Eviction Granted, 7,905 (99.8%) recorded an issued writ of possession, while no cases coded as Dismissed/Settled or Unknown – Closed recorded a writ issuance. In other words, essentially every eviction-granted case produced a writ, and no case that ended any other way produced one. The writ stage is therefore not a separate enforcement track that cases can reach from multiple endings; it is the direct operational follow-through of a single outcome, the landlord-win judgment. This tight coupling is itself an important descriptive finding, because it means the question "how often does a filing convert into

a removal order?" is, in this docket, equivalent to the question "how often does a filing produce an eviction-granted judgment?" The two questions collapse into one, and the writ-issuance rate is functionally a downstream readout of the judgment rate. Once issued, writs were typically posted. Among the 7,905 cases with a writ of possession issued, 7,165 also recorded a posted writ, meaning that 90.6% of issued writs were posted. Posting rates were similar across landlord types when measured conditional on issuance: 90.4% of issued writs in corporate filings were posted, and 91.2% of issued writs in non-corporate filings were posted.

### Writ of Possession Pipeline



The timing of cases through the docket's key dates indicated that a substantial portion of the docket moved from filing to judgment and, where relevant, to writ posting within a relatively short period. Among cases with a non-missing filing-to-judgment interval, the median time from filing to judgment was 27 days in residential eviction cases (which involve nonpayment of rent and constitute the majority of the docket) and 28 days in non-monetary eviction cases (which involve lease violations or holdover tenancies unrelated to rent). The near-identical medians suggest that the court processes both types at similar speed, though the legal basis and available defenses differ. Within residential eviction cases, the interquartile range for filing-to-judgment was 20 to 40 days. Among writ-posted cases with a nonnegative judgment-to-possession interval, the median time from judgment to writ posting was 21 days, with an interquartile range of 16 to 28 days. Measured directly from filing to writ posting, the median filing-to-posting interval was

50 days, with an interquartile range of 41 to 65 days. The minimum observed filing-to-posting interval in the dataset was 6 days, and 49.1% of posted writs were posted within 49 days (seven weeks) of filing.

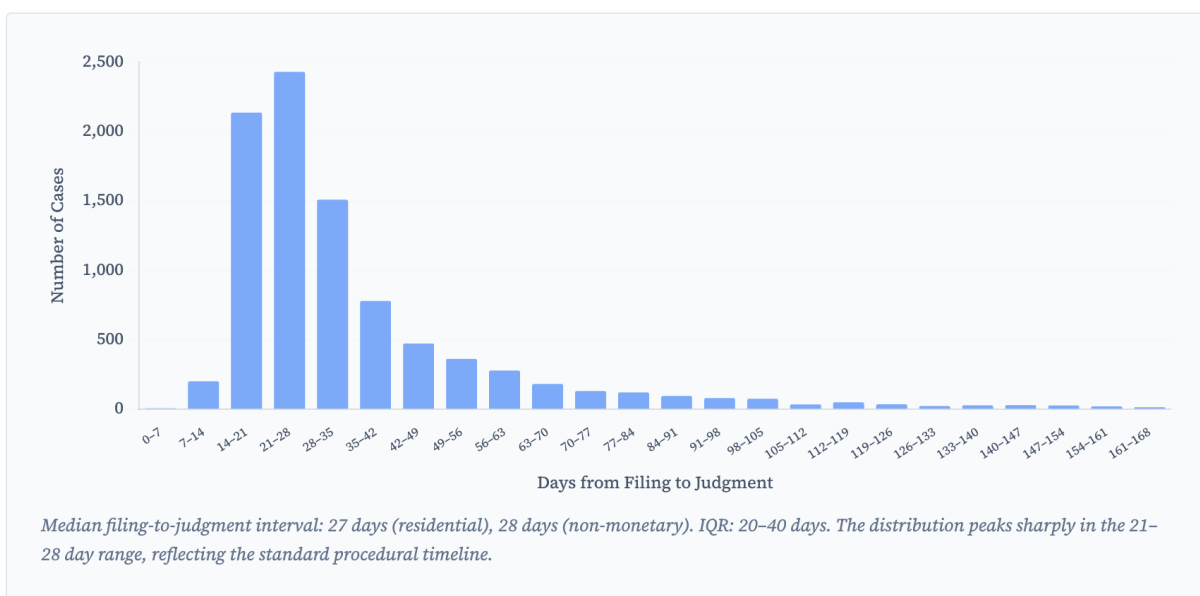
For comparison, Summers and Steil (2025) found that the median time from filing to final resolution in Boston eviction cases was approximately 90 days, and many states with longer statutory response periods produce correspondingly slower timelines. Orange County’s 50-day median from filing to writ posting, which represents not just a legal resolution but the initiation of physical enforcement, illustrates how Florida’s compressed procedural framework accelerates the entire displacement process relative to jurisdictions with more protective timelines.

### Repeat Players: Plaintiff and Defendant Concentration

On the plaintiff side, the highest-volume filing entities accounted for a meaningful share of total cases despite the presence of nearly 4,000 distinct plaintiff names (3,987). The twenty

**Figure 3A: Distribution of Filing-to-Judgment Intervals**

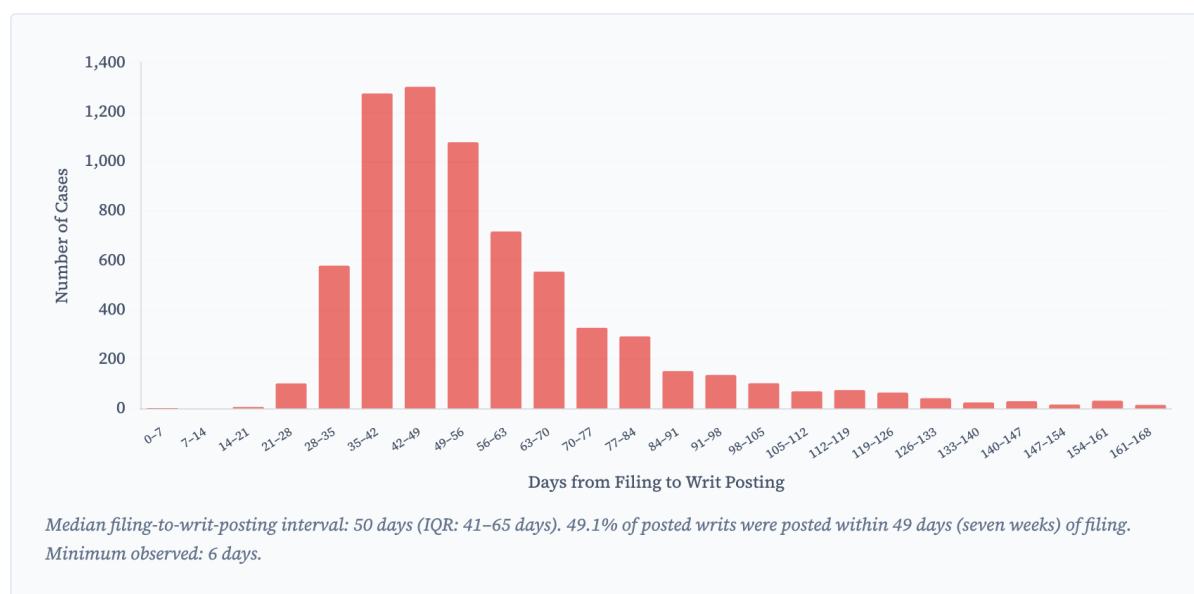
FIGURE 3A



most frequent plaintiff names accounted for 1,490 cases, representing 9.9% of the entire docket. All top twenty plaintiff names were corporate entities under the project's corporate classification. The largest filer was Southern Oaks Residences LLC with 121 filings, followed by Harbor Beach Acquisition LLC with 99 filings, and Orlando 442 Owner LLC with 90 filings.

### Figure 3B: Distribution of Filing-to-Writ-Posting Intervals

FIGURE 3B



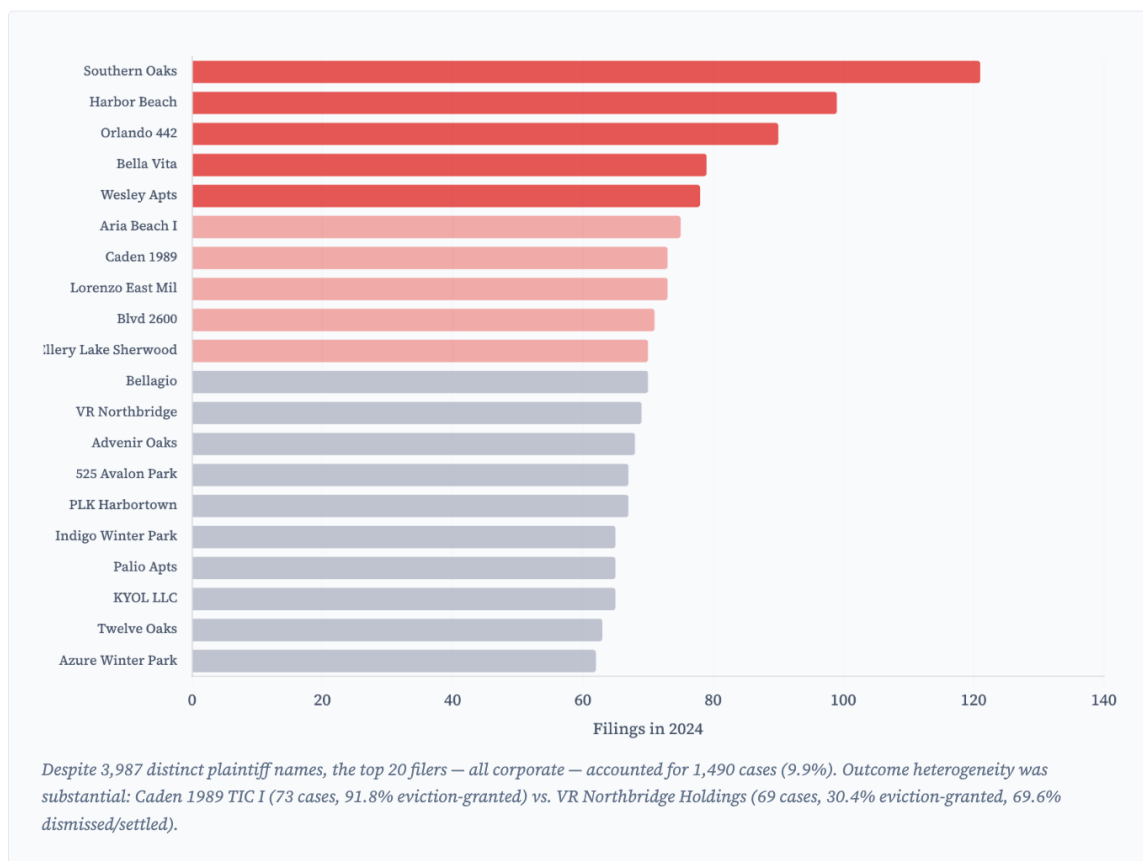
Outcome distributions varied substantially even within this high-volume corporate-filer subset. Caden 1989 TIC I LLC filed 73 cases and received eviction-granted outcomes in 67 of them (91.8%), with 3 dismissed/settled and 3 coded as unknown-closed. By contrast, VR Northbridge Holdings Limited Partnership filed 69 cases and received eviction-granted outcomes in 21 (30.4%), while 48 cases ended in dismissal/settlement. These two examples were reported

as concrete demonstrations of heterogeneity in outcomes among the docket’s most frequent corporate filers.

## Repeat Players: Plaintiff and Defendant Concentration

### REPEAT PLAYER ANALYSIS

#### Top 20 Filing Entities



On the defendant side, repeated filings appeared with high eviction-grant rates and no recorded defense counsel. Because eviction case records are public documents filed in open court, the names of parties are part of the public record and are reported here to illustrate the concrete human trajectories that underlie the aggregate statistics. The most frequently named defendant, Laura Helton, appeared in 12 cases filed by 9 distinct plaintiffs; 9 of those 12 cases ended with eviction-granted outcomes, 2 ended as dismissed/settled, and 1 ended as unknown-closed. None of Helton’s 12 cases listed defense counsel, while all 12 listed plaintiff counsel.

Anexstacia Watson appeared in 9 cases filed by 9 distinct plaintiffs; all 9 cases ended with eviction-granted outcomes, and all 9 recorded writs posting. Michael Glover also appeared in 9 cases filed by 9 distinct plaintiffs; all 9 ended with eviction-granted outcomes, and all 9 recorded writs posting. The ten most frequently occurring defendant-name entries in the dataset accounted for 79 cases. In those 79 cases collectively, none listed defense counsel.

Helton's trajectory raises an obvious question: how is it mechanically possible to be evicted nine times in eight months, given that eviction proceedings cannot ordinarily begin until a tenant has missed at least a full month's rent? The case file itself does not fully answer that question, but the structure of Florida's eviction process suggests several overlapping mechanisms. Florida's three-day pay-or-quit notice plus five-day response window means the legal timeline from missed rent to filing can be as short as eight to ten days, so a tenant who enters a unit, misses one rent payment, and exits within a few weeks can easily generate a filing per tenancy. Some of those filings may have been resolved without an actual sheriff-executed removal, meaning the colloquial language of being "evicted" nine times can encompass a range of outcomes from formal court-ordered removal to filings that ended without enforcement. Some may reflect the serial-filing dynamic documented by Garboden and Rosen (2019), in which corporate property managers file against the same tenant repeatedly at the same address as a rent-collection tactic rather than as a genuine attempt to remove. And some may reflect filings made after Helton had already moved out, for unpaid rent or alleged damages associated with prior tenancies.

The point of the case is not that any single one of these mechanisms fully explains it, but that the eviction process in Florida is fast, formal, and instrumentalized enough that a single tenant can become enmeshed in it almost continuously across months and that this kind of

recurrent, accumulating exposure to court is precisely the structural pattern that aggregate filing counts and outcome statistics can render invisible. The case is a methodological argument as much as a substantive one: it shows what gets lost when eviction is measured one filing or one outcome at a time, instead of being traced as a process across the lifecycle of a tenant's actual housing trajectory.

Repeated filing also occurred in the narrower form of repeated cases filed by the same landlord-plaintiff against the same named defendant. For example, Damani King and Travis White appeared together as defendants in 7 cases, all filed by Camden Lavina LLC. Among these seven cases, 4 ended as dismissed/settled, 2 ended with eviction-granted outcomes, and 1 ended as unknown-closed.

Across 15,039 eviction filings in 2024, the results address each of the thesis's three research questions. First, landlord type shaped outcomes in distinct ways: corporate plaintiffs comprised 88.0% of filings and were far more likely to reach dismissal or settlement (34.0%) than non-corporate plaintiffs (9.8%), while non-corporate filings more often ended in eviction-granted outcomes or administratively closed dispositions. Second, tenant legal representation affected case disposition even in a system where it was vanishingly rare: represented defendants experienced eviction-grant rates 8.8 percentage points lower than unrepresented defendants, and the 91.1% of the docket structured as represented plaintiff versus unrepresented defendant described the dominant configuration of the court. Third, the writ-of-possession data reveal that 52.6% of all filings reached the writ stage, with 90.6% of issued writs posted, and a median filing-to-posting interval of 50 days, documenting how quickly filings translate into enforcement. Across all three questions, repeat players were visible at multiple levels: a single plaintiff-side attorney appeared in 35.4% of cases, the top twenty filing entities accounted for 9.9% of the

docket, and a small set of serial defendants experienced repeated eviction-granted outcomes and posted writs without recorded defense counsel in any filing.

## Discussion

This thesis began with a simple problem: most accounts of eviction stop too early. They tell us how many filings there are, and sometimes how many judgments landlords win, but they do not show what the court is doing once a case enters the system and begins to move. I built this project around that gap by reconstructing the full 2024 eviction docket in Orange County and following cases across filing, disposition, judgment, and writ activity. I find that eviction court in Orange County works in two ways at once. For corporate landlords, it often functions as a routine mechanism of rent enforcement and legal pressure. For tenants facing judgment in a system where legal help is almost absent, it also functions as a fast pathway toward physical removal. That is the central significance of this project. Looking at the individual docket changes what the court becomes visible as. It stops looking like a neutral site where lease disputes simply arrive and starts looking like infrastructure through which different actors pursue different ends.

The most important finding is therefore not any single number but the split in institutional function that appears once filings are disaggregated by landlord type and then followed through the docket. Corporate landlords do not seem to use court in the same way as smaller landlords. Their cases much more often end short of final dispossession, which suggests that the filing itself is doing important work. It imposes deadlines, fees, and risk. It changes the balance of power between landlord and tenant before the court ever must reach the end of the case. In that sense, the filing is a part of the conflict itself. Non-corporate landlords, by contrast, appear to reach court later, when the tenancy is already closer to collapse and the case is more likely to move toward a definite landlord win. I do not mean that every corporate landlord files strategically in the same way, or that every small landlord files only as a last resort. I mean that, across the

docket, the same legal forum appears to be serving different practical purposes depending on who is using it. That is what I mean by dual infrastructure.

That distinction matters because it changes how eviction should be understood as a social and legal process. If a large share of corporate cases resolves without culminating in formal eviction judgment, then the filing cannot be treated as a simple proxy for imminent displacement. It still matters enormously. A filed case can destabilize a tenant, generate fees, damage screening prospects, and force payment under threat. But its function is often to compel compliance rather than to complete removal. By contrast, where cases move more directly from filing to judgment and then into enforcement, the court is not just threatening displacement. It is carrying it out 90.6% of the time. The danger of aggregate filing counts is that they flatten those two processes into one event type. They treat all filings as though they mean the same thing. This thesis shows that they do not. The filing is sometimes a pressure tactic inside a broader rent-collection regime, and sometimes the front end of a tightly compressed removal process. Without case-level reconstruction, those uses blur together and the institutional character of the court remains misdescribed.

The representation findings make that institutional picture sharper. What stands out in Orange County is that the ordinary case is built around one-sided legal participation. Plaintiff counsel is routine and tenant counsel is exceptional and that asymmetry matters long before anyone reaches a hearing on the merits. A represented landlord enters court with knowledge of filing requirements, procedural timing, and the practical meaning of each docket step. An unrepresented tenant enters the same system with little time, little guidance, and little room for error. In a state with compressed deadlines, that imbalance is not incidental. The point is larger than the familiar claim that “lawyers help.” Of course they do. The deeper point is that this

docket is organized around a procedural structure in which one side almost always has the tools to use the system effectively and the other side usually does not. The result is that unequal access to counsel becomes unequal access to the court itself, even where formal rights exist on paper.

This is also why the writ data matter so much. Many accounts of eviction treat the case as effectively over once the landlord wins judgment. In Orange County, that is too early to stop. Judgment is where enforcement begins. Writs of possession were issued in 52.6% of all filings, and once issued, 90.6% were posted, meaning that in most cases that reach judgment, the sheriff is directed to the property and serves notice that removal is imminent. The median time from filing to writ posting was 50 days, and nearly half of all posted writs were posted within seven weeks of the initial filing. Once cases are followed into writ issuance and posting, the distance between paper judgment and threatened physical removal looks much smaller than front-end statistics suggest. That does not mean every posted writ ends in a set-out, and I do not claim to observe every downstream housing outcome. But in over nine out of ten cases where a judge grants an eviction, the enforcement mechanism that translates that legal judgment into a tenant's physical removal from their home is activated, and it is activated quickly. The court's coercive power is concrete and routinely deployed. If researchers stop at filings or even at judgments, they miss the point at which legal process becomes materially attached to displacement.

The attorney concentration patterns reinforce that reading. One reason the court can operate so smoothly as rent-enforcement infrastructure and removal infrastructure is that a substantial share of the docket is processed through a narrow, highly concentrated plaintiff-side apparatus. The significance of that pattern is that repetition itself produces institutional advantage; repeated appearances create familiarity with the clerk's office, timing norms, document practices, and the ordinary flow of cases. They also let landlords externalize the

practical labor of eviction into a repeat-player legal infrastructure that smaller or less organized actors may not possess. In that setting, the courtroom does not look like a space in which isolated parties occasionally meet over a housing dispute. It looks more like a processing site within a larger system of professionalized claim enforcement. That matters because it helps explain why eviction in this county appears so routinized. The law authorizes the process, but repetition and concentration help make it operational at scale.

These findings fit with Galanter's scholarship on serial filing, repeat players, and access to justice, but they also push his scholarship in a somewhat different direction. Existing work has already shown that large landlords often use eviction repeatedly and that tenant counsel changes outcomes. My findings support both points. What this project adds is a full-docket view of how these patterns coexist inside one countywide system over one year, and what they reveal when studied together rather than separately. The corporate filing literature helps explain why so many cases appear to be using court as leverage rather than solely as an endpoint. The access-to-justice literature helps explain why tenant-side vulnerability is not merely a matter of individual hardship but of institutional design. The repeat-player literature helps explain why concentrated legal infrastructure matters. But the contribution here is to show how those strands are joined in practice. In Orange County, they combine to produce a court that is simultaneously a management tool for landlords and a displacement mechanism for tenants.

At the same time, I do not want to claim more than the docket can show. One alternative explanation is that the landlord-type differences reflect different mixes of cases rather than different uses of court. Corporate landlords may manage larger portfolios, file earlier in the delinquency cycle, or serve tenant populations with different payment patterns and lease structures. Small landlords may wait longer before filing, which would make their cases look

more terminal by the time they reach court. That is plausible. Another possibility is that what appears strategic at the level of corporate use is sometimes just bureaucratic routine, the result of standardized property-management systems and automatic filing protocols rather than conscious case-by-case calculation. Those alternatives matter, but they do not undo the central claim.

Whether a filing is strategically chosen in each case or produced by organizational routine, it can still function as rent-enforcement infrastructure. Likewise, even if some observed tenant disadvantage reflects selection into representation rather than the full independent effect of counsel, the broader structure remains the same: meaningful tenant defense is scarce, plaintiff-side legal capacity is ordinary, and the system moves under those conditions.

The limitations of the project follow directly from the strengths of the data. The docket lets me observe formal legal movement with unusual granularity, but it does not tell me everything that matters socially. I cannot see the full household circumstances behind a missed rent payment, the informal negotiations that happened before filing, the quality of legal representation, the condition of the unit, or what happened to tenants after the writ stage unless the court itself recorded it. My landlord coding captures organizational form as it appears in filing names, not ultimate ownership with perfect precision. My representation measure captures formal attorney appearance, not all informal assistance. And because this is a countywide descriptive reconstruction rather than a causal design built around richer covariates, I can identify strong institutional patterns without claiming that I have isolated every mechanism behind them. Those limits should narrow the claim, but they do not weaken its importance. The value of the project lies in showing what a public docket can reveal once someone follows the cases all the way through.

That, finally, is why I think this kind of project matters beyond Orange County. Eviction research often suffers from a visibility problem. The most accessible numbers are the front-end ones, so they come to stand in for the process. But filing counts do not tell us how different landlords use court, how representation shapes the path of cases through the system, or how often legal claims become enforcement actions. Granular docket reconstruction does. It makes the internal life of the institution newly legible. It lets us see that eviction is not one event, and that housing court is not doing one thing. Future work should extend this method across Florida counties, link dockets to parcel and ownership data, and connect court records to downstream enforcement and household outcomes. But even before that next step, this thesis shows something important. If we want to understand eviction as it operates, we must stop treating the filing as the whole story. In Orange County, the story is a court that helps manage rent extraction at scale while also moving many tenants toward removal with remarkable speed. That is the dual infrastructure this thesis set out to identify, and the granular docket is what finally brings it into view.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to trace what happens between an eviction filing and a tenant's removal in Orange County, Florida, and to examine how landlord type and tenant representation shape that trajectory. By constructing an original case-level dataset of 15,039 filings from the 2024 docket, I have documented a system defined by corporate dominance, extreme representation asymmetry, and a concentration of litigation capacity among a small number of plaintiff-side attorneys serving hundreds of nominally distinct landlord-plaintiffs.

The central argument is that eviction court in Orange County operates as dual infrastructure. For corporate landlords, the court functions as a high-volume rent-enforcement mechanism: filings are frequent, often handled by the same small set of attorneys, and resolved through dismissal or settlement at rates that suggest the filing itself, rather than the judgment, is the operative tool. For tenants, the overwhelming majority of whom face the system without counsel, the court functions as a rapid pathway to displacement, with compressed procedural timelines, near-automatic writ issuance upon judgment, and a median filing-to-writ-posting interval of 50 days.

As detailed in the Methods section, several limitations constrain the scope of these findings. Most consequentially, the dataset covers a single county in a single year, limiting generalizability without replication. The dataset also cannot capture informal evictions, tenant experiences outside the courtroom, or factors such as rent amount, unit condition, and tenant income that likely shape case outcomes. The Unknown - Closed category, which comprises a meaningful share of the docket, represents a genuine ambiguity in the public record rather than a fully resolved analytical category.

Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to eviction scholarship in several ways. First, the dataset itself—a county-scale, case-level reconstruction of an entire year’s docket—represents a methodological contribution to a field that has largely relied on aggregate counts (Garnham, Gershenson, & Desmond, 2022) or small-sample case studies (Summers & Steil, 2025). The scraping and coding approach is replicable and could be adapted to other Florida counties that use the same clerk system, enabling the kind of comparative analysis that Porton, Gromis, and Desmond (2021) identified as essential. Second, the documentation of attorney concentration adds an empirical dimension to Galanter’s (1974) repeat-player theory that existing research has theorized but rarely measured at this scale. Third, the writ-of-possession data, which trace cases from judgment to enforcement, address a gap that scholars including Hepburn (2024) and Desmond (2016) have identified as critical: the difference between a legal outcome and physical displacement. The finding that 90.6% of issued writs were posted provides concrete evidence for the enforcement stage that most eviction datasets omit.

The policy implications of these findings center on three areas. First, the near-total absence of tenant representation (1.5% of defendants had counsel) in a system that moves at the speed documented here constitutes a strong empirical case for a right-to-counsel program in Orange County. The existing research on such programs, reviewed in the literature section, consistently demonstrates improved tenant outcomes; the data presented here suggest that the structural conditions for a right-to-counsel intervention are present. Second, the concentration of filings among a small number of attorneys and landlord entities suggests that targeted interventions—whether judicial oversight, filing surcharges for serial filers, or eviction diversion programs—could address a meaningful share of the docket by focusing on a relatively small number of actors. Third, the fact that this dataset had to be built from scratch, case by case, from

a public docket not designed for research use, underscores the need for institutional investment in eviction data infrastructure. If policymakers want to know what eviction court is doing, they need data systems that make that visible.

Future research should extend this analysis in several directions. Replication in other Florida counties would test whether the patterns observed here—particularly the corporate-landlord dismissal/settlement pattern and the degree of attorney concentration—are features of Orange County’s specific docket or of Florida’s eviction system more broadly. Longitudinal analysis across multiple years would allow examination of whether filing patterns and outcome distributions are stable or responsive to policy changes, economic conditions, or shifts in the rental market. Qualitative research, including interviews with tenants, landlords, attorneys, and judges, would illuminate the strategic calculations and lived experiences that underlie the statistical patterns documented here. And integration of eviction data with property ownership records, rental assistance databases, and downstream housing outcomes (shelter entry, homelessness, housing instability) would allow researchers to trace the full consequences of eviction court processing beyond what the docket alone can reveal.

## Digital Appendix

This thesis is accompanied by a Digital Appendix ([which can be accessed at this link](#)) containing all figures, tables, and supplementary data visualizations referenced in the text. The appendix is provided as a companion HTML file (digital\_appendix.html) that can be viewed in any modern web browser. It includes the following materials:

*Table 1: Filing Composition by Case Type and Landlord Type.* Tabulates the 15,039 filings across the four case-type codes (CC – Residential Eviction, CC – Eviction Non-Monetary, CC – Non-Residential Eviction, and CA – Eviction) by corporate and non-corporate plaintiff classification.

*Figure 1: Outcome Distribution across All Filings.* A doughnut chart displaying the three-category outcome distribution for the 14,764 cases with coded outcomes: Eviction Granted (53.6%), Dismissed/Settled (31.3%), and Unknown – Closed (15.1%).

*Figure 2: Outcome Distribution by Landlord Type (Corporate vs. Non-Corporate).* A grouped bar chart comparing outcome percentages across the two landlord categories, illustrating the 3.5:1 dismissal/settlement ratio.

*Table 2: Cross-Tabulation of Landlord Type and Case Outcome with Chi-Square Results.* Presents counts and within-group percentages for each landlord type–outcome combination, with chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2 = 652.65$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), Cramer’s  $V$  (0.210), and the odds ratio for dismissal/settlement (OR = 4.74, 95% CI: 4.02–5.59).

*Figures 3A and 3B: Distribution of Filing-to-Judgment and Filing-to-Writ-Posting Intervals.* Histograms displaying the distribution of case processing times in seven-day bins. Figure 3A shows filing-to-judgment intervals (median: 27 days, IQR: 20–40 days). Figure 3B shows filing-to-writ-posting intervals (median: 50 days, IQR: 41–65 days).

The Digital Appendix also includes supplementary visualizations: an overview dashboard with key statistics, monthly filing trends, representation configuration breakdowns (including outcomes by tenant representation status and plaintiff representation by landlord type), attorney concentration analysis with the top ten plaintiff attorneys by case volume, a writ-of-possession pipeline analysis, and a repeat-player section covering both plaintiff concentration (top twenty filing entities) and defendant concentration (including the Laura Helton case study).

## References

- Albiston, C. R. (2007). Institutional perspectives on law, work and family. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 3, 397–423.
- Albiston, C. R., & Sandefur, R. L. (2013). Expanding the empirical study of access to justice. *Wisconsin Law Review*, 2013(2), 101–120.
- Balzarini, J., & Boyd, M. L. (2020). Working with them: Small-scale landlord strategies for avoiding evictions. *Housing Policy Debate*, 31(3–5), 425–445.
- Caraballo, L. H. (2025, March 31). Eviction cases hit record highs again, displacing Central Floridians. *Central Florida Public Media*.
- Cassidy, M., & Currie, J. (2023). The effects of legal representation on tenant outcomes in housing court: Evidence from New York City’s Universal Access Program. *Journal of Public Economics*, 222, 104844.
- Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. Crown.
- Engler, R. (1997). Out of sight and out of line: The need for regulation of lawyers’ negotiations with unrepresented poor persons. *California Law Review*, 85(1), 79–130.
- Ewick, P., & Silbey, S. S. (1998). *The common place of law: Stories from everyday life*. University of Chicago Press.
- Florida Legislature. (n.d.). Chapter 83. Landlord and tenant. Fla. Stat. § 83.232. Online Sunshine. Accessed December 7, 2025.
- Friedland, R., & Alford, R. R. (1991). Bringing society back in: Symbols, practices, and institutional contradictions. In W. W. Powell & P. J. DiMaggio (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis* (pp. 232–263). University of Chicago Press.

- Galanter, M. (1974). Why the “haves” come out ahead: Speculations on the limits of legal change. *Law & Society Review*, 9(1), 95–160.
- Garboden, P. M. E., & Rosen, E. (2019). Serial filing: How landlords use the threat of eviction. *City & Community*, 18(2), 638–661.
- Garnham, J. P., Gershenson, C., & Desmond, M. (2022, July 11). New data release shows that 3.6 million eviction cases were filed in the United States in 2018. Eviction Lab.
- Gonzalez Alverio, L. I. (2025, January 16). Housing crisis in Florida: The Puerto Rican face of evictions. *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*.
- Graetz, N., Gershenson, C., Porter, S., Sandler, D., & Desmond, M. (2024). The impacts of rent burden and eviction on mortality in the United States, 2000–2019. *Social Science & Medicine*, 340, 116398.
- Gromis, A., Hendrickson, J., & Desmond, M. (2022). No safe harbor: Eviction filing in public housing. *Social Service Review*, 96(3), 356–393.
- Hepburn, P. (2024). Commentary: Using eviction court records to inform local policy. *Cityscape*, 26(1), 287–294.
- Hepburn, P., Louis, R., & Desmond, M. (2020). Racial and gender disparities among evicted Americans. *Sociological Science*, 7, 649–662.
- Hepburn, P., Rutan, D. Q., & Desmond, M. (2021). The concentrated geography of eviction. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 693(1), 64–81.
- Immergluck, D., Ernsthausen, J., Earl, S., & Powell, A. (2020). Evictions, large owners, and serial filings: Findings from Atlanta. *Housing Studies*, 35(5), 903–924.
- Johnson, S., Stojanovic, L., & Hepburn, P. (2025, April 24). Preliminary analysis: Eviction filing patterns in 2024. Eviction Lab.

- Leung, L., Hepburn, P., & Desmond, M. (2021). Serial eviction filing: Civil courts, property management, and the threat of displacement. *Social Forces*, 100(1), 316–344.
- Melamed, S. (2025, February 18). Philly is "rare" city where eviction filings dropped and stayed down. Here's why. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.
- Porton, A., Gromis, A., & Desmond, M. (2021). Inaccuracies in eviction records: Implications for renters and researchers. *Housing Policy Debate*, 31(3–5), 377–394.
- Raymond, E. L., Miller, B., McKinney, M. E., & Braun, J. P. (2021). Gentrifying Atlanta: Investor purchases of rental housing, evictions, and the displacement of Black residents. *Housing Policy Debate*, 31(3–5), 818–834.
- Sandefur, R. L. (2016). What we know and need to know about the legal needs of the public. *South Carolina Law Review*, 67(2), 443–460.
- Sandefur, R. L. (2019). *Legal tech for non-lawyers: Report of the survey of US legal technologies*. American Bar Foundation.
- Saunders, J. (2024, December 19). Florida is the fastest growing state in the country. *WUSF Public Media*.
- Seron, C., Frankel, M., Van Ryzin, G., & Kovath, J. (2001). The impact of legal counsel on outcomes for poor tenants in New York City's housing court. *Law & Society Review*, 35(2), 419–434.
- Shimberg Center for Housing Studies. (n.d.). Eviction filings, 2019–2025: Orange County, Florida. Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse, University of Florida. Accessed May 8, 2026. <https://flhousingdata.shimberg.ufl.edu/eviction-foreclosure/results?nid=4800>.
- Summers, N., & Steil, J. (2025). Pathways to eviction. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 50(1), 129–169.

Thornton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (2008). Institutional logics. In R. Greenwood et al. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 99–128). Sage Publications.

Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W., & Lounsbury, M. (2012). *The institutional logics perspective: A new approach to culture, structure, and process*. Oxford University Press.

Watson, H., Garboden, P. M. E., McCabe, B. J., & Rosen, E. (2023). Every month like clockwork? Patterns and prevalence of serial eviction filing among landlords. *Socius*, 9, 1–17.