

Capstone Project

Component 2: Client-Facing Report

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April 30, 2026



Figure 1: Judiciary image. Source: Wikimedia Commons, “Judiciary logo.jpg,” licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

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1 Executive Summary

This report summarizes an exploratory analysis of felony court records from Cleveland County, Oklahoma for the year 2018. The purpose of the project was to examine whether sentencing outcomes differed between defendants represented by private counsel and defendants represented by appointed counsel.

The clearest finding is that attorney type was associated with sentencing outcome in this sample. Appointed-counsel cases were more likely to result in incarceration, while private-counsel cases were more likely to result in deferred or suspended outcomes.

However, among cases that resulted in incarceration, imposed sentence length was nearly the same for both attorney groups. This suggests that the main difference was not sentence length after incarceration was ordered, but whether incarceration occurred at all.

These findings do not prove that attorney type caused the sentencing differences. The results do show a pattern strong enough to justify a broader follow-up study with more complete data.

2 Data Overview

The data were collected from public felony court records in Cleveland County, Oklahoma for 2018. The cleaned dataset contained 142 cases. Of those, 117 cases had attorney type clearly classified as either appointed or private counsel. Sentencing-specific analyses focused on the 100 cases that resulted in incarceration, suspended sentence, or deferred sentence.

Table 1: Summary of Key Case Counts

Category	Count
Full cleaned dataset	142
Attorney-eligible cases	117
Sentenced cases	100
Incarceration outcomes	39
Deferred outcomes	39
Suspended outcomes	22
Dismissed outcomes	17

3 Key Findings

3.1 Sentence Outcomes Differed by Attorney Type

The most important pattern was the difference in sentence outcomes by attorney type. Appointed-counsel cases were more likely to result in incarceration. Private-counsel cases were more likely to result in deferred sentencing.

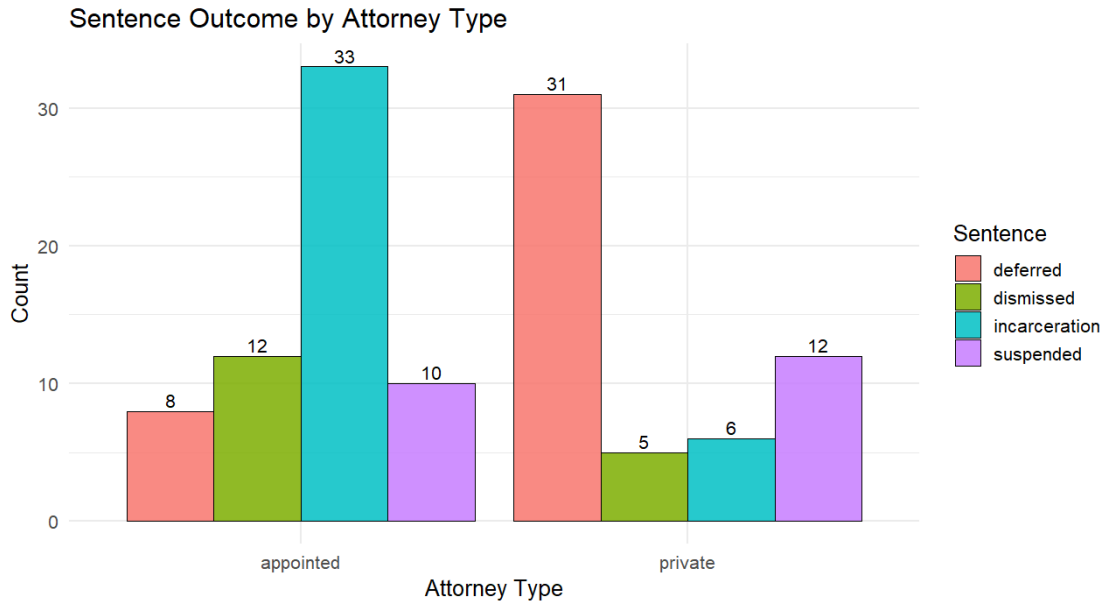


Figure 2: Sentence Outcome by Attorney Type

As shown in Figure 2, appointed-counsel cases had 33 incarceration outcomes compared

with 6 incarceration outcomes for private-counsel cases. In contrast, private-counsel cases had 31 deferred outcomes compared with 8 deferred outcomes for appointed-counsel cases.

This is the main practical finding of the project: the attorney groups had noticeably different sentencing patterns in this sample.

3.2 Incarceration Probability Was Higher for Appointed-Counsel Cases

A predictive model was used to estimate the probability of incarceration while holding selected case characteristics fixed. The comparison held crime severity fixed as nonviolent, other Oklahoma criminal records fixed as yes, and number of counts fixed as more than one.

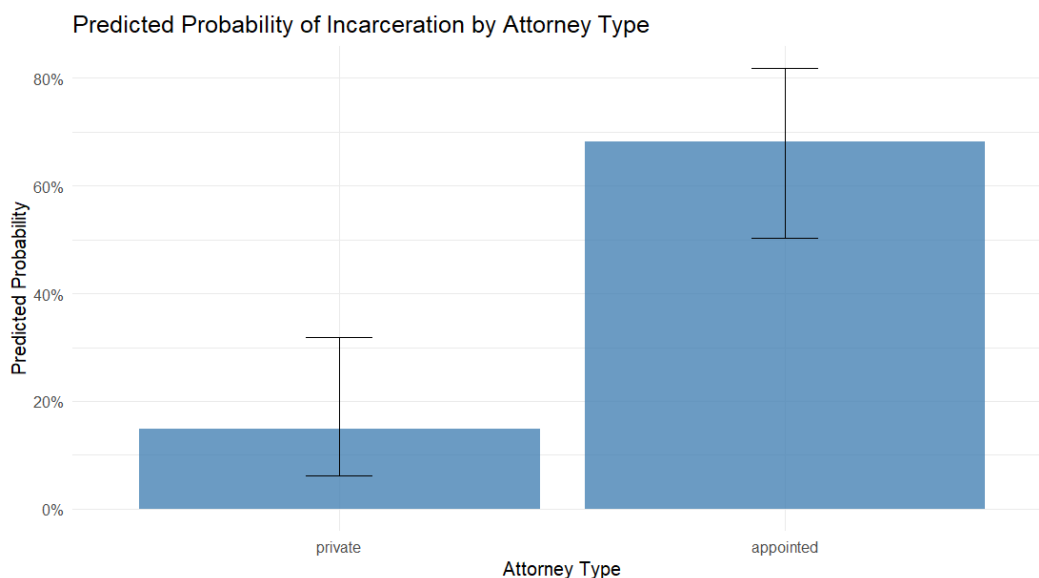


Figure 3: Predicted Probability of Incarceration by Attorney Type

The model estimated an incarceration probability of approximately 14.8% for private-counsel cases and 68.1% for appointed-counsel cases under the comparison conditions shown in Figure 3. This does not establish causation, but it does show that attorney type remained strongly associated with incarceration outcome after accounting for the recorded case characteristics used in the model.

3.3 Sentence Length Was Similar Once Incarceration Occurred

Among cases that resulted in incarceration, imposed sentence length was nearly identical between attorney groups.

Table 2: Sentence Length Among Incarcerated Cases

Attorney Type	N	Mean Days	Median Days	Maximum Days
Appointed	33	2005	1460	8760
Private	6	2008	1825	4380

This suggests that the main difference was not the length of the imposed sentence after incarceration was ordered. The stronger difference was whether incarceration occurred at all.

4 Interpretation

The results show a clear association between attorney type and sentencing outcome in the sampled records. Appointed-counsel cases were more likely to result in incarceration, while private-counsel cases were more likely to result in deferred or suspended outcomes.

At the same time, this study should not be interpreted as proof that appointed counsel caused worse outcomes. Attorney type may be connected to other case characteristics that are not fully captured in public court records.

For example, it would be incorrect to conclude that emergency-room doctors cause higher mortality simply because emergency rooms see more serious cases. Similarly, this project does not prove that appointed attorneys cause worse outcomes. The correct interpretation is that the pattern is strong enough to warrant further study.

5 Recommendations

The results support developing a broader follow-up study. A larger funded project could expand data collection across multiple counties, years, judges, attorneys, and offense categories.

A future study should collect more detailed information on charge type, plea agreement details, bond amount, attorney changes, judge assignment, and the timing of other criminal records.

With those additional details, hierarchical models could be used to account for county-level, court-level, judge-level, attorney-level, and case-level variation.

This project provides a foundation for a more complete study of representation type and sentencing outcomes using public court records.

6 Limitations for Interpretation

This study is based on one county and one year of felony cases. The results should not be generalized to all counties or court systems without additional data.

The study is observational. Attorney type was not randomly assigned, and the analysis cannot prove causation.

The other-records variable indicates whether other Oklahoma criminal records were found, but it does not establish whether those records occurred before, during, or after the 2018 case. Crime severity was also simplified into violent and nonviolent categories, which does not capture every legal detail of charge seriousness.

Despite these limitations, the analysis identifies a meaningful pattern that can support a larger, more complete future study.

7 Video Presentation Link

The video presentation for this capstone project is available at the following link:

Capstone Video Presentation