

Collaborative Report | March 2025

# THE STATE OF CRIMINAL COURT TRANSPARENCY IN 2024

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# The State of Criminal Court Transparency in 2024

In 2023, Scrutinize and Reinvent Albany’s report [Open Criminal Courts](#) exposed a systemic failure of judicial transparency in New York: 94-99% of criminal court decisions remained unpublished. Without published decisions, voters and judicial reappointment committees cannot properly evaluate judges seeking another term; legislators lack insight into how courts apply new laws; and New Yorkers remain unaware of how justice is administered in their communities and how the Constitution is interpreted.

The report’s findings prompted [strong calls](#) for increased transparency and legislative action. In response, Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris [introduced](#) and secured passage of legislation ([S9674](#) of 2024) in the Senate aimed at addressing this fundamental failure of transparency. However, the bill did not pass in the Assembly, leaving the judiciary’s opacity unaddressed for another year. The bill was reintroduced in 2025 as [S3864/A4674](#) by Senator Gianaris and Assemblymember Burdick.

Despite this push for reform, transparency remains the exception rather than the norm. The New York court system, led by Chief Judge Rowan Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Joseph Zayas, has yet to publicly take a position on increasing transparency of decisions in the courts they oversee.

This new benchmarking report reviews 2023 and 2024 data to highlight the judges and counties where progress has been made in making decisions publicly and freely available [on the NYS Reporter website](#). It identifies the champions of judicial transparency—those judges and courts leading the way in making their decisions accessible to all.

Despite some improvements, transparency remains a rare practice. Judges and courts must do better, not only for New Yorkers but for the legitimacy of the very institution they serve. Now more than ever, the judiciary must not only *be* open and fair—it must *appear* open and fair to maintain public trust. The public expects to be able to find information online in 2025; without modern access to judicial decisions, the courts appear to be both behind the times and a black box of government decision-making. Lacking a decisive commitment to transparency, the courts risk further eroding the public’s faith in the justice system.

## Judicial Leadership in Transparency

New York’s judges shape the legal landscape not only through their rulings but also through their choice of whether to make those rulings available to the public. When

judges choose not to make their decisions public, they obscure judicial reasoning and weaken trust in the judiciary, making it appear as if they rule in darkness.

The number one factor determining how many decisions are published is the judges themselves. Those who choose to make their decisions publicly accessible contribute directly to judicial transparency and should be recognized for their leadership.

## Who Publishes? The Top Judges of 2024

In 2024, only 130 New York judges published at least one criminal court decision.<sup>1</sup> Among them, a small group stood out for their commitment to making their rulings publicly available. These judges have taken deliberate steps to ensure that their decisions are accessible to all New Yorkers, setting a crucial example in judicial transparency. Their efforts reinforce accountability and provide valuable legal guidance to attorneys, legislators, and the public.

The following judges had the highest number of published criminal court decisions in 2024:

- Yadhira Gonzalez-Taylor (Bronx) – 34 decisions
- Wanda L. Licitra (Queens) – 23 decisions
- Joshua Glick (Kings) – 20 decisions
- Brenda M. Freedman (Erie) – 13 decisions
- Claudia Daniels-DePeyster (Kings) – 13 decisions
- Juan M. Merchan (New York) – 11 decisions<sup>2</sup>
- Patrick Hayes Torres (Kings) – 10 decisions
- Adam D. Perlmutter (Kings) – 9 decisions
- E. Deron Bowen (Bronx) – 9 decisions
- Joanne D. Quinones (Kings) – 8 decisions

## Who Improved the Most? Trends in Judicial Publication

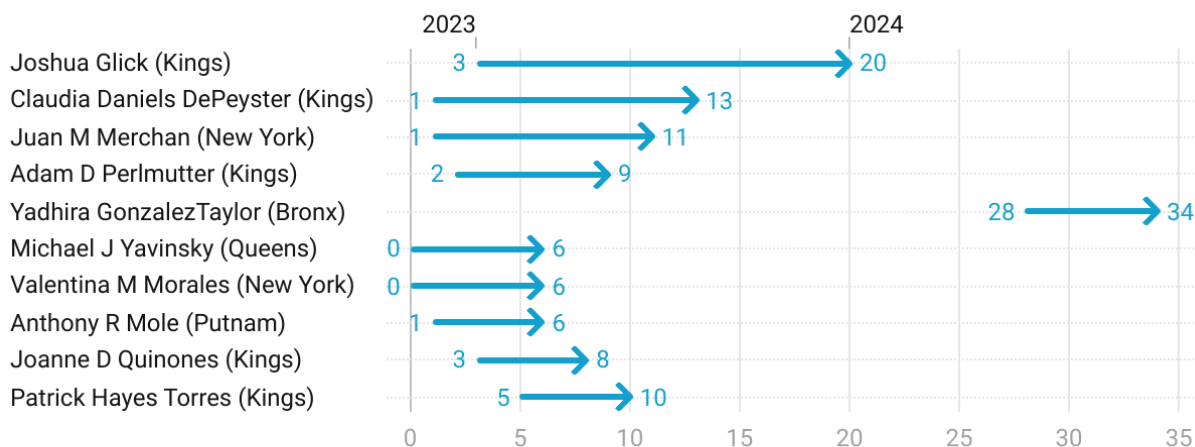
Some judges significantly increased their publication rates from 2023 to 2024, demonstrating that improvement is possible, even within a single year.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of judges presiding over criminal cases each year is not made available by the court system, meaning that it is not possible to determine how many judges publish no decisions in 2024.

<sup>2</sup> All of Judge Merchan's published decisions stem from *People v. Trump*. Our 2023 report, [Open Criminal Courts](#), specifically highlighted this case as an example of the judiciary's initial failure to require that rulings be publicly available, even in matters of extraordinary public interest.

**Figure 1: Judges with the Largest Publication Increases (2023-2024)**



Source: Scrutinize and Reinvent Albany, The State of Criminal Court Transparency in 2024 • Created with Datawrapper

## County-Level Transparency

While the number one factor influencing publication is a judge’s individual choice, the courts themselves remain institutions with formal and informal policies that can influence transparency. Judicial publication may be affected by administrative priorities, internal court culture, and policies set by supervising judges. For example, courts have previously implemented performance metrics to assess judges’ “efficiency” in handling criminal cases. These kinds of institutional pressures—whether explicit or implicit—could also shape publication practices.

We do not know whether such policies exist in relation to judicial transparency, but county-level data provides insight into where judges, collectively, are publishing more frequently. The following section examines the 2024 data to identify which counties have performed the best—and which have lagged behind. While we cannot pinpoint the precise causes why some counties stand out while others do not, the role of supervising judges and court administrators—under whose watchful eyes judges remain more or less transparent to New Yorkers—cannot be ignored.

## Leaders in Criminal Decision Transparency

The following counties had the highest publication rates of criminal court decisions per 100,000 residents in 2024.

**Table 1: Counties with the Highest Criminal Court Publication Rates (2024)**

County	Decisions Published	Total Population	Publication Rate
Tompkins	8	103,558	7.7
Putnam	6	98,060	6.1
Schuyler	1	17,507	5.7
Bronx	71	1,356,476	5.2
Columbia	3	60,470	5

*Publication Rate: per 100k residents. Population figures are from 2023, as official 2024 figures had not yet been released at the time of compilation.*

Source: Scrutinize and Reinvent Albany, The State of Criminal Court Transparency in 2024 • Created with Datawrapper

## Laggards in Criminal Decision Transparency

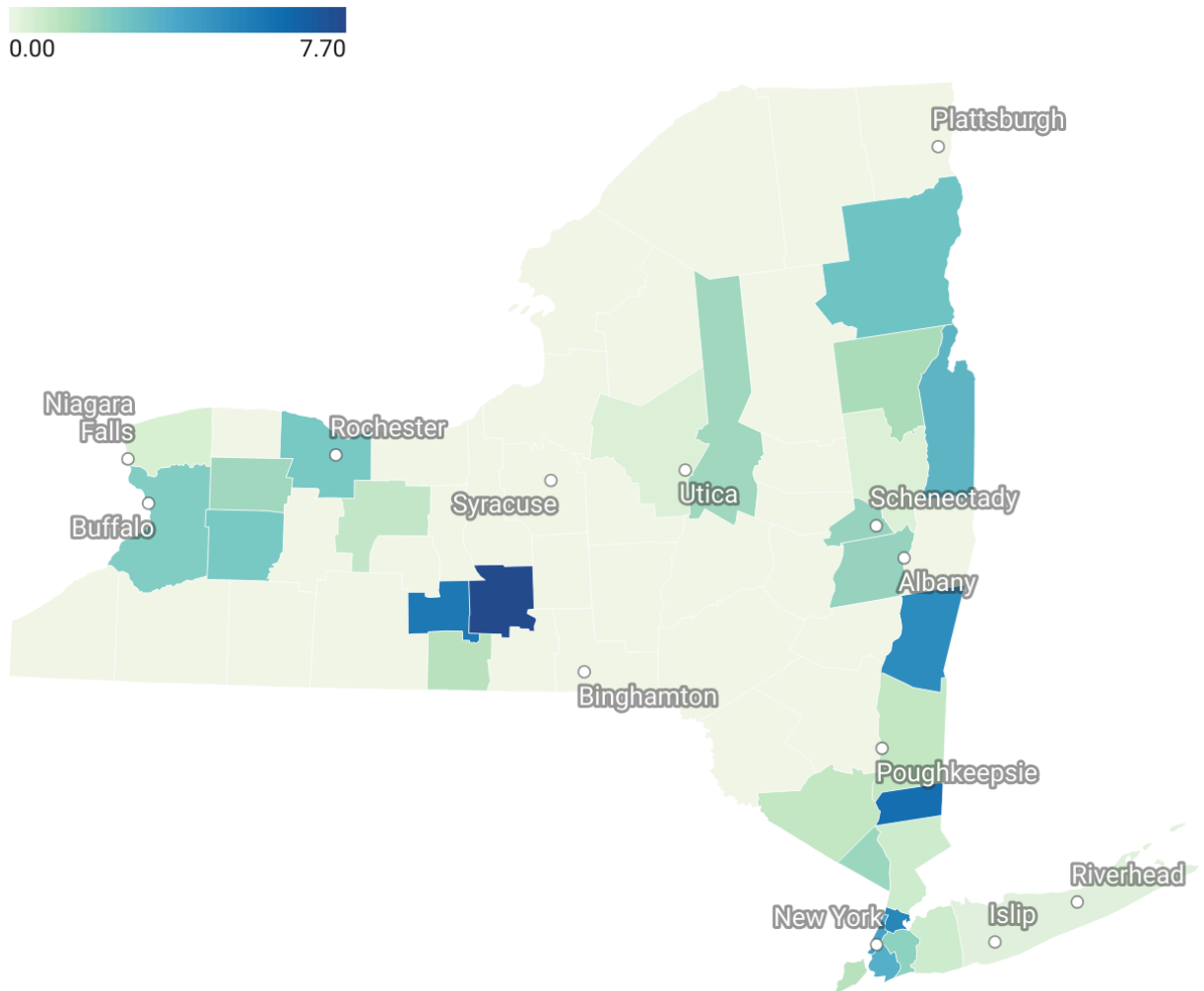
Despite some counties showing progress, judicial transparency remains alarmingly scarce across much of the state. In 2024:

- **39 counties** published fewer than one decision per 100,000 residents.
- **32 counties failed to publish a single criminal court decision**, leaving over 2.7 million New Yorkers in those counties in the dark.

These figures underscore the persistent and systemic opacity of New York’s judiciary, where transparency remains the exception rather than the norm.

A map with the publication rates for all New York State counties is provided below (interactive map will be available online).

**Figure 2: Criminal Court Publication Rates by County (2024)**



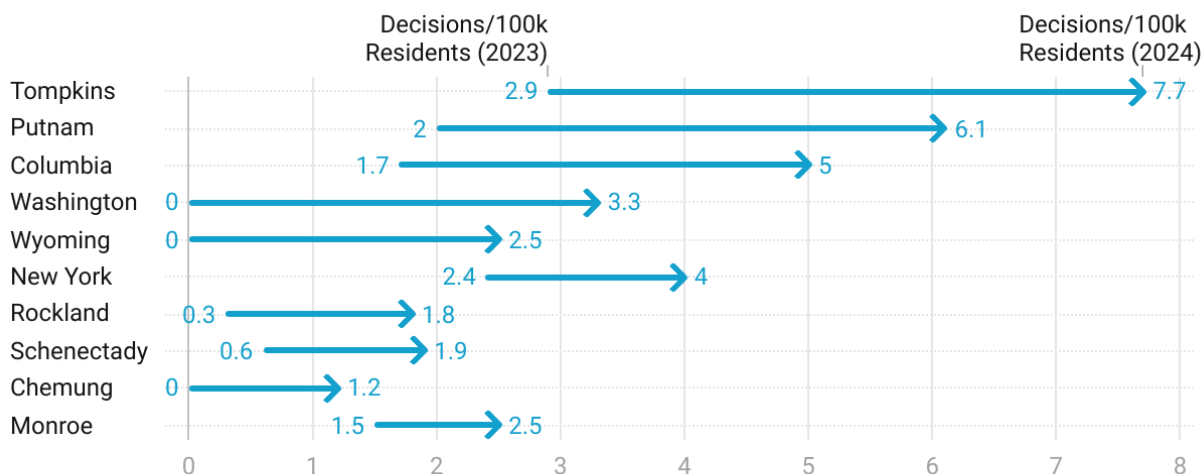
Source: Scrutinize and Reinvent Albany, The State of Criminal Court Transparency in 2024 • Created with Datawrapper

## **Criminal Publication Trends from 2023 to 2024**

Statewide, only 373 criminal court decisions were published in 2023 and 394 in 2024. While these numbers mark an increase from previous years, the overwhelming majority of decisions remain inaccessible to the public.

The following counties saw the largest improvements in criminal case publication rates in 2024. These gains remain extremely modest compared to the total number of unpublished criminal decisions.

**Figure 3: Counties with the Largest Publication Rate Increases (2023-2024)**



Source: Scrutinize and Reinvent Albany, The State of Criminal Court Transparency in 2024 • Created with Datawrapper

## More Is Needed: The Transparency Gap Persists

The failure of many judges to publish their decisions stands in stark contrast to those who have taken action. In 2024, the vast majority of judges still opted *against* making their rulings available to New Yorkers. The average number of published decisions per judge remains dismally low, at just 3.03, with a median of 1—figures that reinforce the persistent lack of transparency *Open Criminal Courts* has tracked since 2010.

Judicial transparency is not incidental; it is a *choice*. The judges who publish frequently do so despite the absence of any systemic requirement. Their actions prove that better transparency **is possible** in the legal system.

Yet even among the most transparent judges, **significant gaps remain**. Without a clear mandate for publication, transparency will remain inconsistent, preventing New Yorkers from understanding how justice is administered in their communities.

**The path forward is clear.** The judiciary, led by Chief Judge Rowan Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Joseph Zayas, must make a public commitment to make judicial decisions accessible by default, not exception. The Legislature must pass Senator Gianaris and Assemblymember Burdick’s bill, [S3864/A4674](#), to eliminate judicial opacity once and for all. Until then, many of New York’s courts will continue to operate in the shadows—undermining trust in a system that depends on public confidence to function.

## Data Methodology

We obtain criminal court decisions data from the [New York State Reporter website](#), which we consider to be a comprehensive repository of publicly available criminal court

decisions. Our analysis covers decisions published between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024.

We obtained the following information from each decision:

- **Type of Decisions:** Given that this benchmarking report focuses on criminal courts, we exclude decisions in civil cases. To distinguish between criminal and civil decisions, we use the title of each decision as an indicator. Specifically, we include decisions with titles that begin with phrases such as ‘People of the State of New York,’ ‘People of the State of N.Y.,’ and similar configurations. Titles that started with ‘People ex. rel.’ were also retained, among other configurations. We exclude any decision that has been withdrawn from publication, as indicated within the text of the decision itself.
- **Publication Date:** Published decisions are often associated with multiple dates, including the date listed on the Reporter website and the date listed in the decision itself. To standardize this and stick to the date of publication, we rely on the year specified in each decision’s web address as the official year of its publication.
- **Authoring Judge:** The name of the judge who authored each decision is included in the text of the decision.
- **Originating County:** We identify the county of origin for each decision using the ‘Court’ column provided by the State Reporter or the decision itself.<sup>3</sup>

We obtained population data for each New York County from [New York State’s data portal](#). Since no population data is yet available for 2024, we use 2023 data.