



Iowa Courts Stat Pack

Data and analysis from the
Iowa Supreme Court & Iowa Court of Appeals (2025-2026)

*Compiled by Michael S. Boal
Belin McCormick, P.C.
Revised July 16, 2026*

Topline Notes

➤ “**Court watching**” is the systematic observation and tracking of a court’s decisions, arguments, or proceedings over time. Done well, it turns anecdotal impressions into defensible, data-backed claims.

Court watching is:

➤ Powerful. The court’s own conduct establishes the basis for any trends, correlations, or behaviors.

➤ Predictive. The more data that is quantified, the better one can predict future behaviors.

➤ Misleading. Data, numbers, and analytics *never* tell the complete story.

➤ As with the rest of the legal industry, artificial intelligence—used responsibly—can greatly enhance court watching by (1) extracting and structuring case data at scale, and (2) surfacing patterns that manual reviewers may need years of accumulated cases to notice.

➤ *A genuine thank you to Claude’s Sonnet 5 for assisting with (but not generating) this year’s Stat Pack.*

Court of Appeals

High-level Observations:

- After many years of new appointments, the Court's membership now holds steady.
- The Court is prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary, having been established by the legislature in 1976.
 - 38 Court of Appeals Judges have been appointed by 5 governors, with 21 former district judges serving as senior judges.
- Equity! Effective Jan. 1, 2026, the Court changed the font and formatting of its opinions.
 - (R.I.P. Arial.)

Term at a Glance: *How did this year compare?*

Common Themes: *What to expect at the Court.*

Judicial District Scorecard: *How'd the lower courts fare?*

Opinions, by Judge: *Who wrote what?*

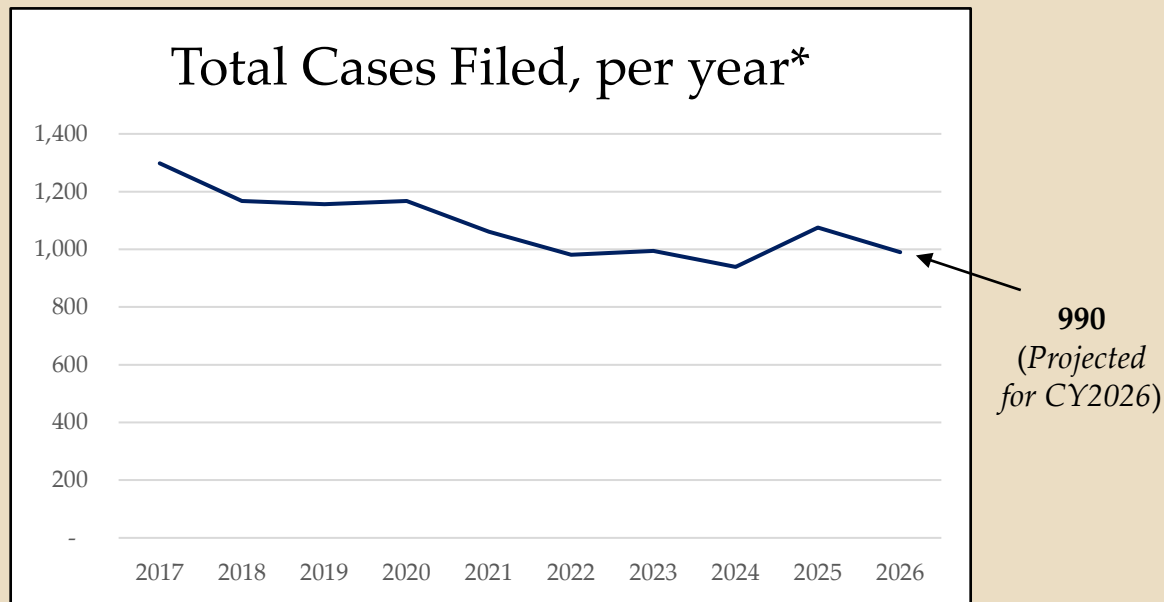
Opinions Lengths & Reviews: *What did they write?*

Divided Cases: *Spotting the battles.*

Voting Alignments: *Who agrees with whom?*

Court of Appeals: Term at a Glance

- Number of decisions issued is on track to **decrease** modestly in 2026.
- Number of cases published will stay **relatively constant** (and incredibly small).

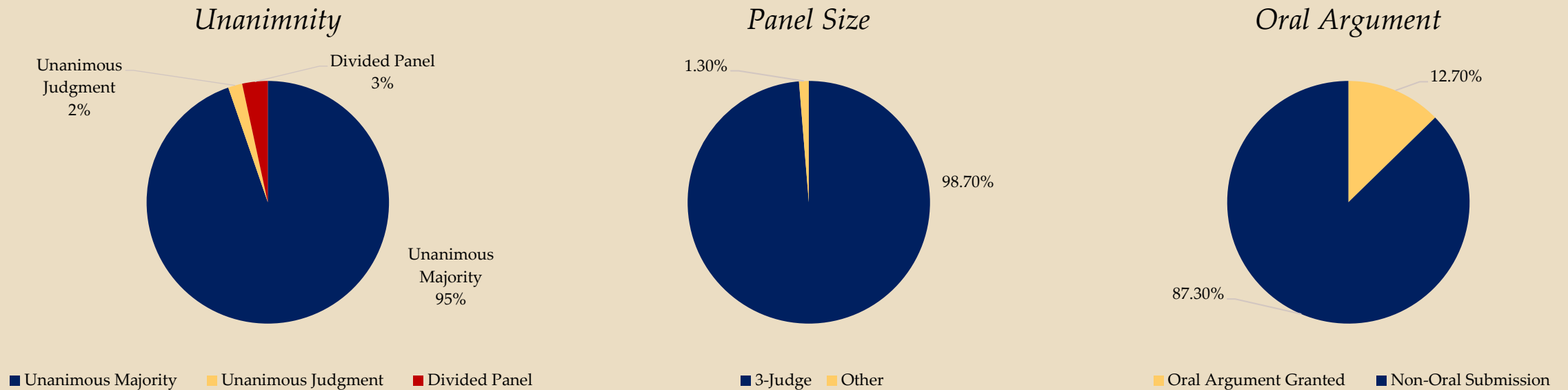


Year*	Published opinions	% of all cases
2018	8	0.7%
2019	5	0.4%
2020	13	1.1%
2021	20	1.9%
2022	14	1.4%
2023	7	1.7%
2024	25	2.7%
2025	15	1.4%
2026	8 (so far)	1.7% (so far)

* By calendar year. The remaining Court of Appeals statistics are compiled from July – June.

Common Themes

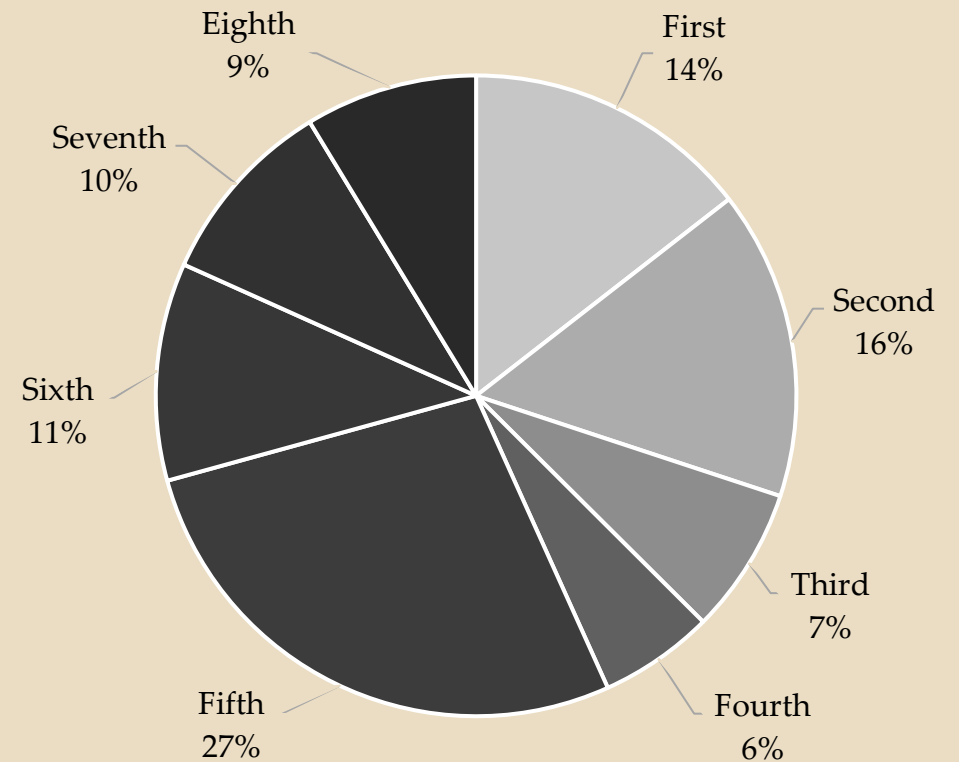
- The Court of Appeals decided cases unanimously **97%** of the time.
- The Court considered cases with three-judge panels in nearly **99%** of its cases.
- The Court considered cases on paper (without oral argument) **87%** of the time.



Judicial District Scorecard

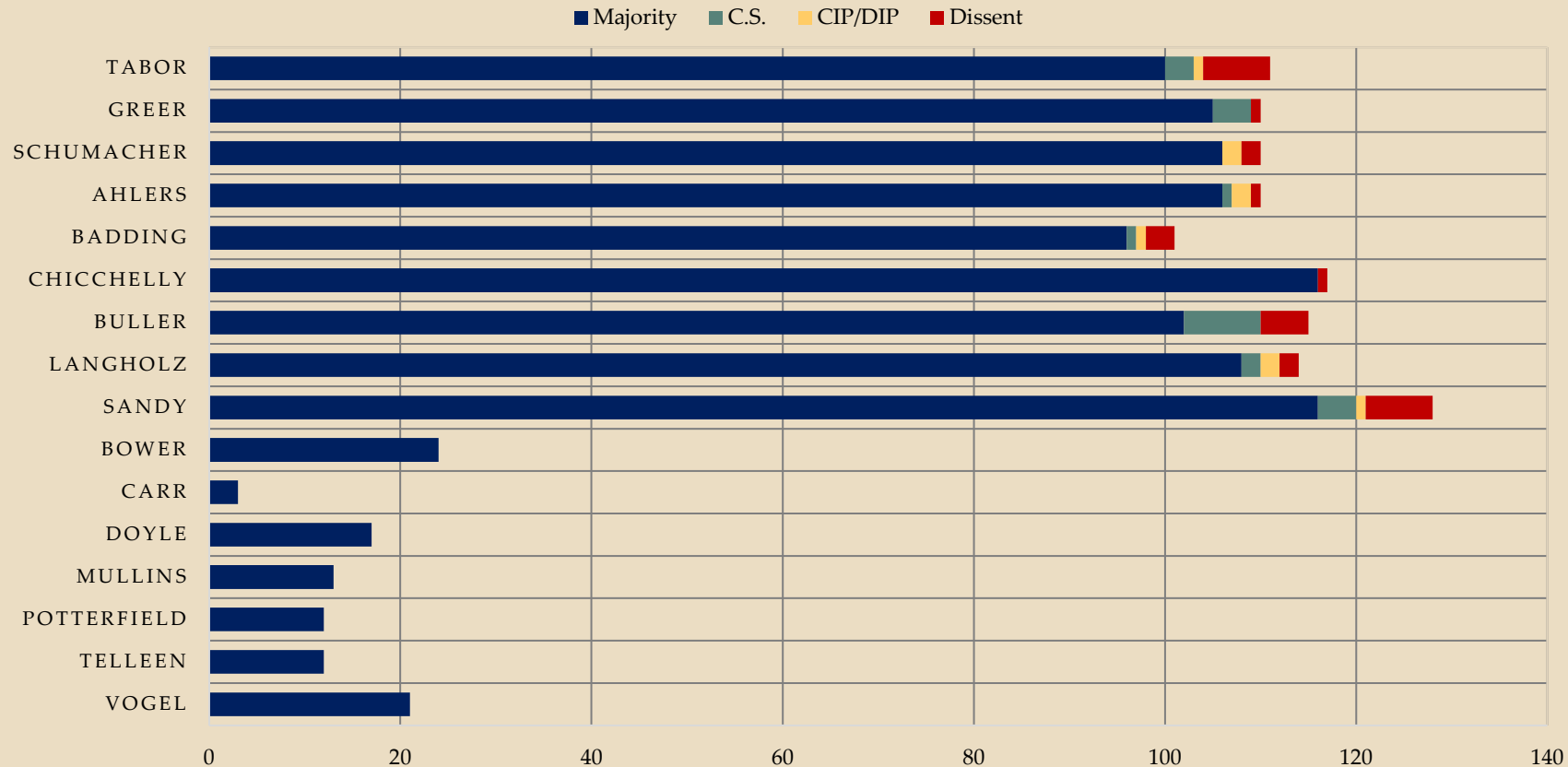
- **19.5%** of the docket originated from District 5C (Polk), a decrease from last year.
- **District 8B** had the highest affirm rate (94%), **Districts 1A** and **5B** the lowest (79%).

District	All Cases	Affirmed	Reversed	Mixed
District 1A	58	79%	9%	12%
District 1B	96	90%	1%	9%
District 2A	62	84%	3%	13%
District 2B	103	93%	2%	5%
District 3A	34	88%	6%	6%
District 3B	44	86%	7%	7%
District 4	61	89%	3%	8%
District 5A	71	85%	6%	10%
District 5B	14	79%	7%	14%
District 5C	206	83%	7%	9%
District 6	116	88%	3%	9%
District 7	102	86%	8%	6%
District 8A	60	90%	5%	5%
District 8B	32	94%	6%	0%
Total	1,059	87%	5%	8%



Number of Opinions, by Judge

- Full-time judges averaged **106** majority opinions this year (senior judges just **10**).
- Full-time judges averaged **6.7** separate opinions (concurring or dissenting).



Opinion Lengths & Reviews

- The average majority opinion was **7.5 pages** (senior judges averaged **6.9** pages).
- Each judge had their opinion subject to further review at least two times this term.

Judge	Avg. Majority (pages)
Tabor	8.3
Greer	10.3
Schumacher	7.8
Ahlers	5.7
Badding	7.6
Chicchelly	6.0
Buller	6.3
Langholz	7.7
Sandy	7.7
Total	7.5

Judge	Cases Reviewed*
Tabor	3
Greer	2
Schumacher	4
Ahlers	9
Badding	2
Chicchelly	6
Buller	6
Langholz	6
Sandy	6
Total	44

** During the 2025-2026 Supreme Court term.*

Divided Cases

- The Court issued more than one opinion in just **57 cases** (5.4% of its total caseload).
- **J. Buller** wrote the most non-majority opinions (13), then Sandy (12), then Tabor (11).
- Five pairs of judges tied for the most frequent “face-offs” this term (4 cases each).

Authors in Split Decs. (Maj. or Sep.)	Number of Cases
Tabor	19
Sandy	18
Buller	16
Langholz	16
Ahlers	10
Greer	10
Badding	9
Chicchelly	9
Schumacher	6

Dueling Authors	Number of Cases
Greer / Buller	4
Buller / Langholz	4
Tabor / Sandy	4
Badding / Sandy	4
Tabor / Langholz	4

Voting Alignments

- **J. Langholz** authored the most majority opinions in non-unanimous cases (10).
- **J. Greer** and **J. Badding** were the most frequent “joiners” of majority opinions in those same cases.

Judge	Authored Majority	Authored Separate	Joined Majority	Joined Separate	Total*
Tabor	8	11	8	3	8
Greer	5	5	9	1	21
Schumacher	2	4	7	1	13
Ahlers	6	4	4	2	16
Badding	4	5	9	2	17
Chicchelly	8	1 ^	8	1	6
Buller	3	13	6	1	23
Langholz	10	6	6	--	22
Sandy	6	12	6	2	9

* Totals exclude per curiam opinions and senior judge participation.

^ Judge Chicchelly's first recorded separate opinion since her appointment in late 2021.

Supreme Court

High-level Observations:

- We now have **four** complete adjudicative terms with the Court's current membership.
 - Though more philosophically aligned than prior Courts, subtle divisions remain.
- There are no known retirements in the near future, as the mandatory retirement age is 78.
 - *Justices' ages currently range from 48 to 69 years old.*
- NEW: SF639, effective Sept. 1, establishes a permanent business specialty court with **two** dedicated district court judges.
 - *Judges Jeffrey Bert & David Nelmark*

Term at a Glance: *How did this year compare?*

Oral Argument & Advocates: *Who is arguing at the Court?*

Amicus Participation: *Who's chiming in?*

Docket Makeup: *What type of cases is the Court hearing?*

Judicial District Scorecard: *How'd the lower courts fare?*

Turnaround Times *How quickly is the Court moving?*

Majority Opinions: *How much are they writing?*

Number of Opinions (This Term): *Who wrote the most?*

Number of Opinions (Over Time): *Are the justices agreeable?*

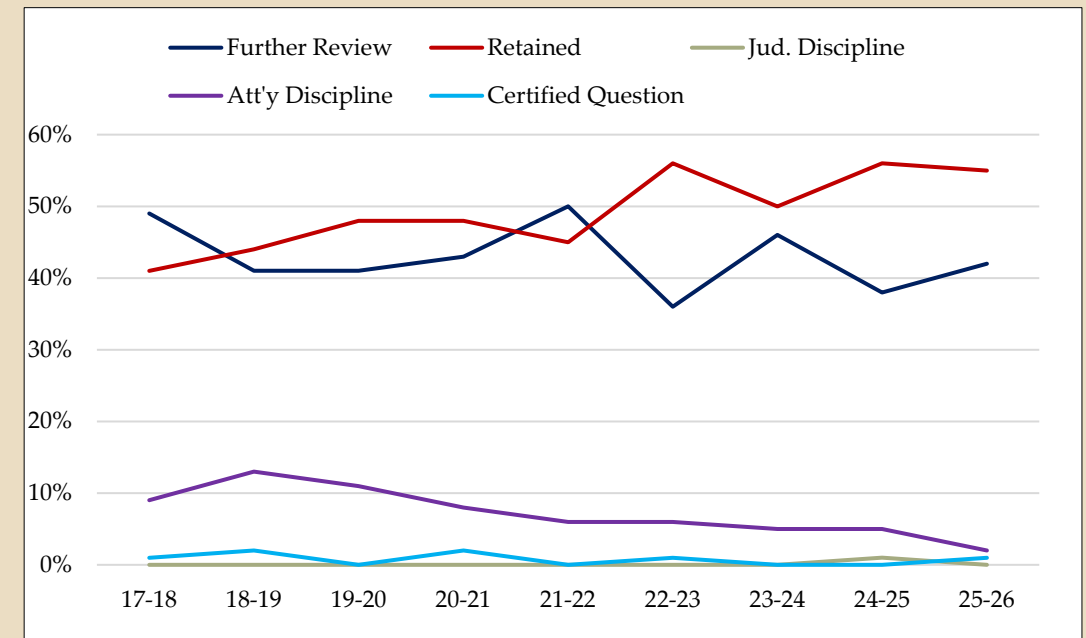
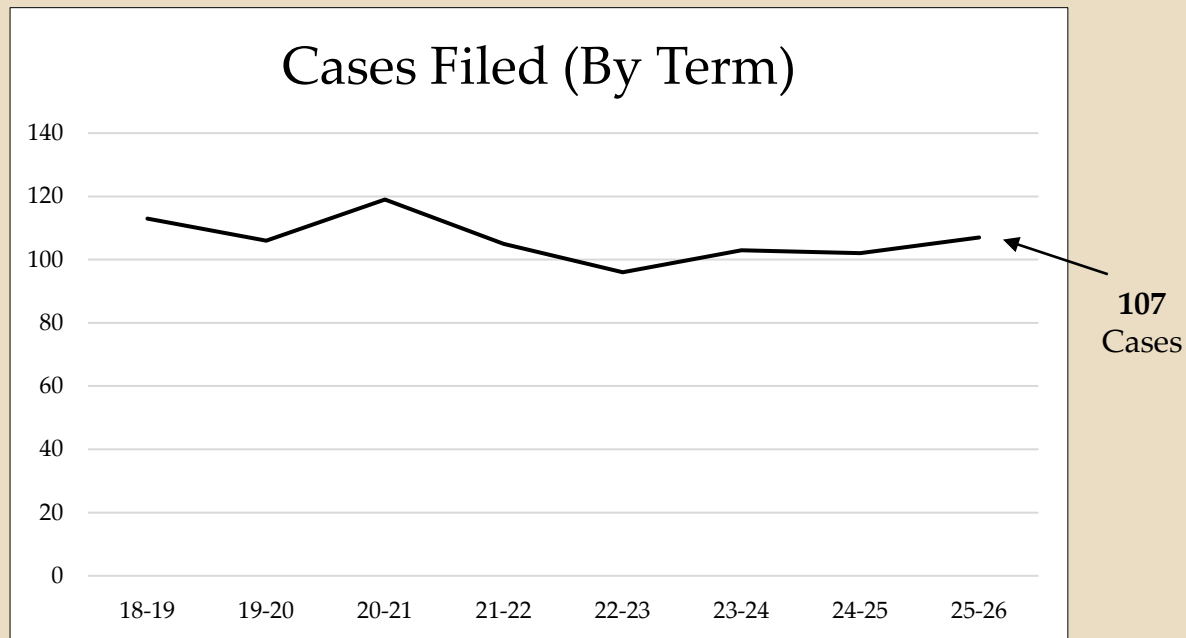
Unanimous Cases (Over Time): *How agreeable?*

Opinions Breakdown: *What happened this year?*

Voting Alignments: *Who agrees with whom?*

Supreme Court: Term at a Glance

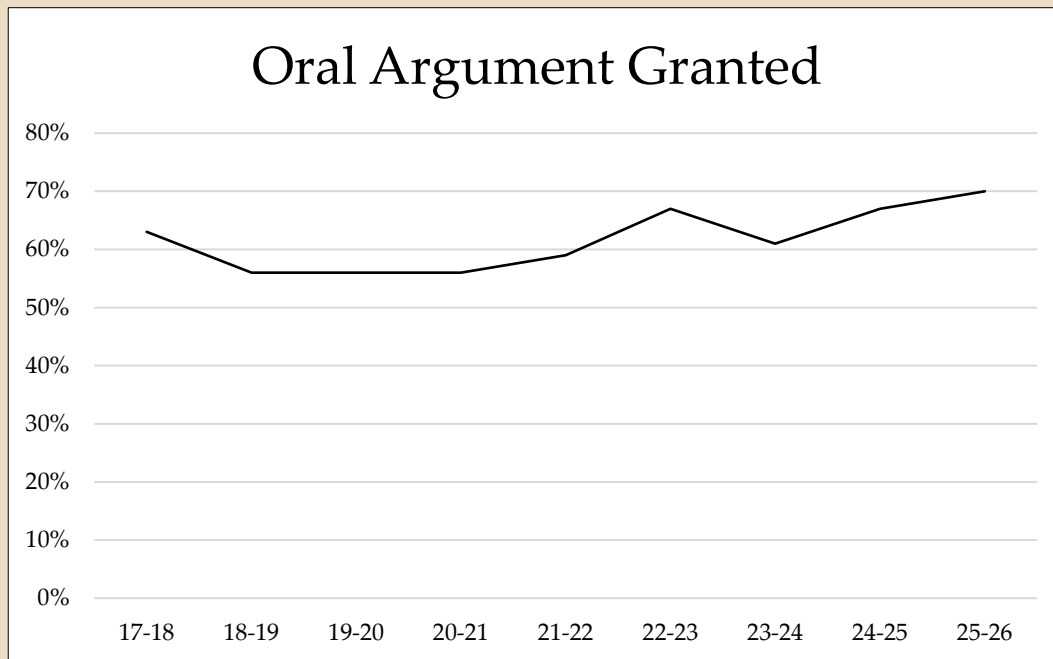
- The Court's caseload remains remarkably consistent, and this year was no exception.
- A majority of the Court's docket continues to be direct appeals (not further reviews).



* The Court's adjudicative term runs from July through June.

Oral Argument & Advocates

- The Court is granting oral argument more now than in recent memory (70% of its cases).
- **Eric Wessan & Louis Sloven** each argued 6 cases this term.



Top Advocates	
Eric Wessan (Solicitor General)	<i>Kelchner v. CRST Expedited, Inc.</i> <i>Gregory v. State of Iowa</i> <i>In re Ezra L. Totton Scholarship</i> <i>In re Representation of Auditor of State</i> <i>State ex rel. Brenna Bird v. TikTok, Inc.</i> <i>State Public Defender v. Iowa Dist Court</i>
Louis Sloven (Criminal Appeals)	<i>State v. Brown</i> <i>State v. Lind</i> <i>State v. Lind</i> <i>State v. Lindaman</i> <i>State v. Schadl</i> <i>Wylde v. State</i>
David Banta (Criminal Appeals)	<i>State v. Gibbs</i> <i>State v. Jackson</i> <i>State v. Pagliai</i> <i>State v. Tolbert</i>

Amicus Curiae Participation

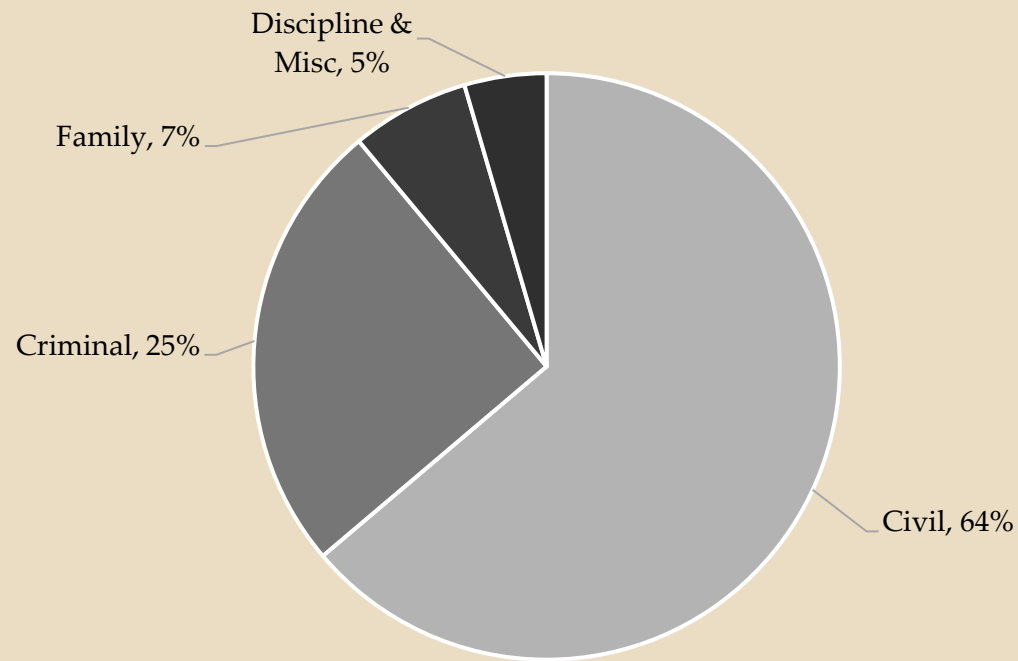
- **32 Iowa attorneys** filed **24 amicus briefs** over **18 cases** this term.
- This is a modest **increase** in the number of briefs filed compared from last year's term, and a slight **increase** in cases with amicus participation.

Case	Amici Submitted
<i>Tieg v. Loeffler et al.</i>	4
<i>State ex rel. Brenna Bird v. TikTok, Inc.</i>	2
<i>State v. Hidlebaugh</i>	2
<i>Wylde v. State</i>	2
14 Others	1

Leading Advocates	No. of Briefs	On behalf of
Rita Bettis Austen	6	<i>ACLU of Iowa</i>
Eric Wessan	3	<i>State of Iowa</i>
Thomas Story	3	<i>ACLU of Iowa</i>

Docket Makeup

➤ The Court continued its marked shift toward more **civil** cases, with nearly 20% of its docket shifting to civil matters over the past two years.



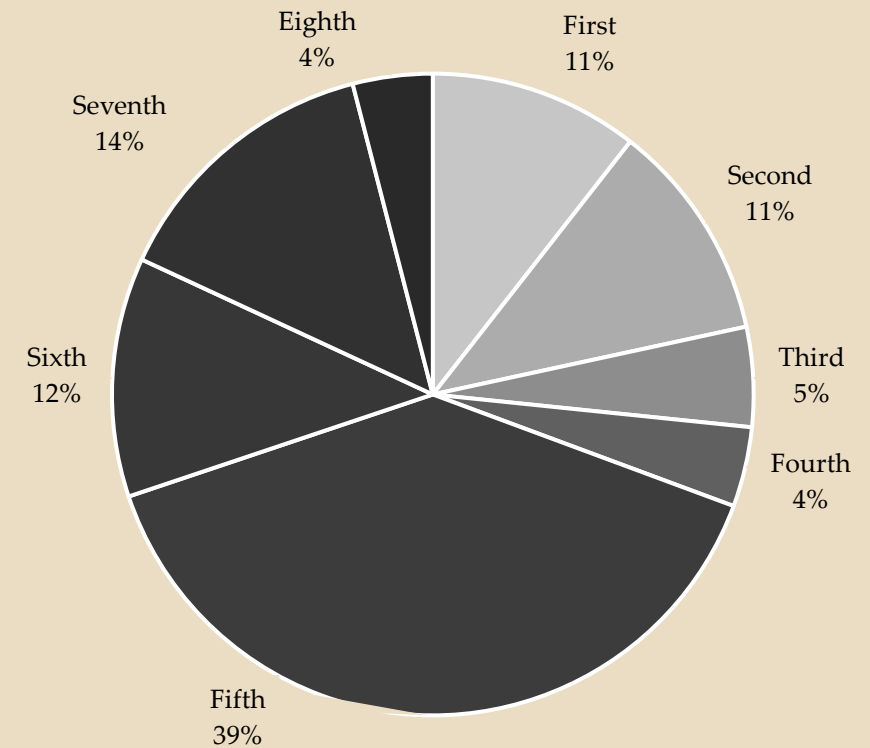
Criminal Case Breakdown	
General / Multiple Areas	11
Constitutional	10
Statutory	7
Procedure	6
Sentencing	5
	27

Civil Case Breakdown	
Med Mal	11
General / Public Law	10
Statutory	7
Procedure	6
Administrative Law	5
Probate / Wills / Trusts	5
Workers' Comp	5
Commercial / Contract	4
Tort / Personal Injury	4
Employment	3
Postconviction Relief	3
Property / Land Use	3
Constitutional	2
	68

Judicial District Scorecard

- **32%** of the Court's opinions reviewed decisions from District 5C (Polk County).*
- District-level affirmance rates varied greatly from district to district.

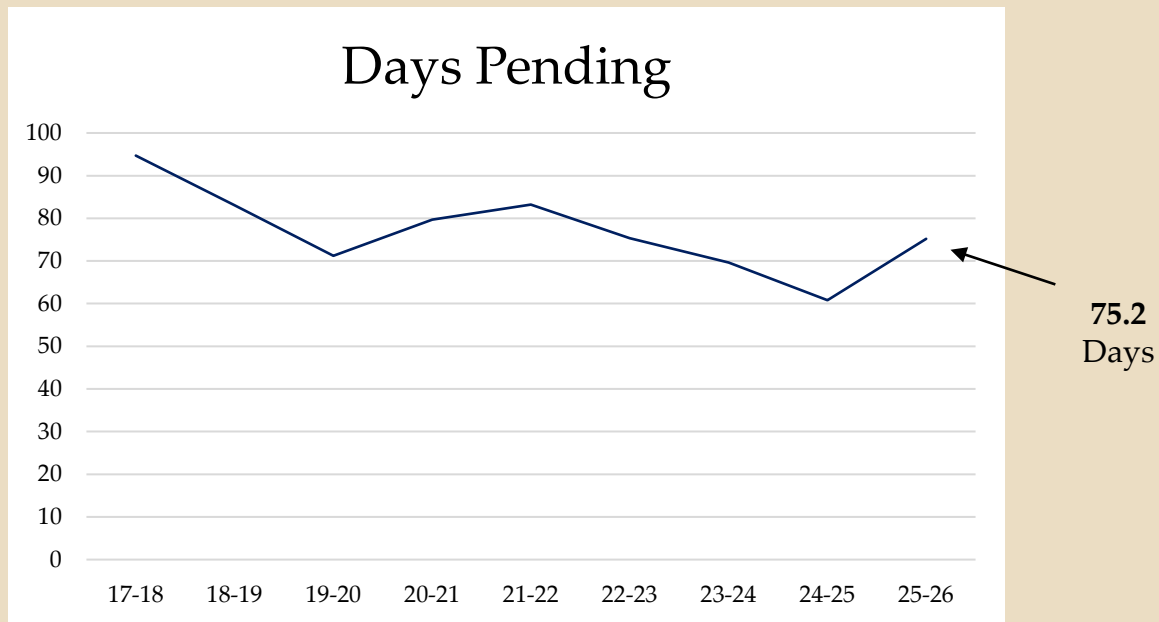
District	All Cases	Affirmed	Reversed	Mixed/Other
District 1A	7	28.6%	42.9%	28.6%
District 1B	3	66.7%	33.3%	--
District 2A	7	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%
District 2B	4	--	75.0%	25.0%
District 3A	2	--	100.0%	--
District 3B	3	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
District 4	4	60.0%	--	20.0%
District 5A	6	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%
District 5B	1	100.0%	--	--
District 5C	30	44.1%	35.3%	8.8%
District 6	11	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%
District 7	13	52.9%	17.6%	5.9%
District 8A	3	100.0%	--	--
District 8B	1	--	100.0%	--
Total	95	49.4%	37.8%	12.8%



* Excludes attorney disciplinary, writ of certiorari, and other similar cases.

Turnaround Times

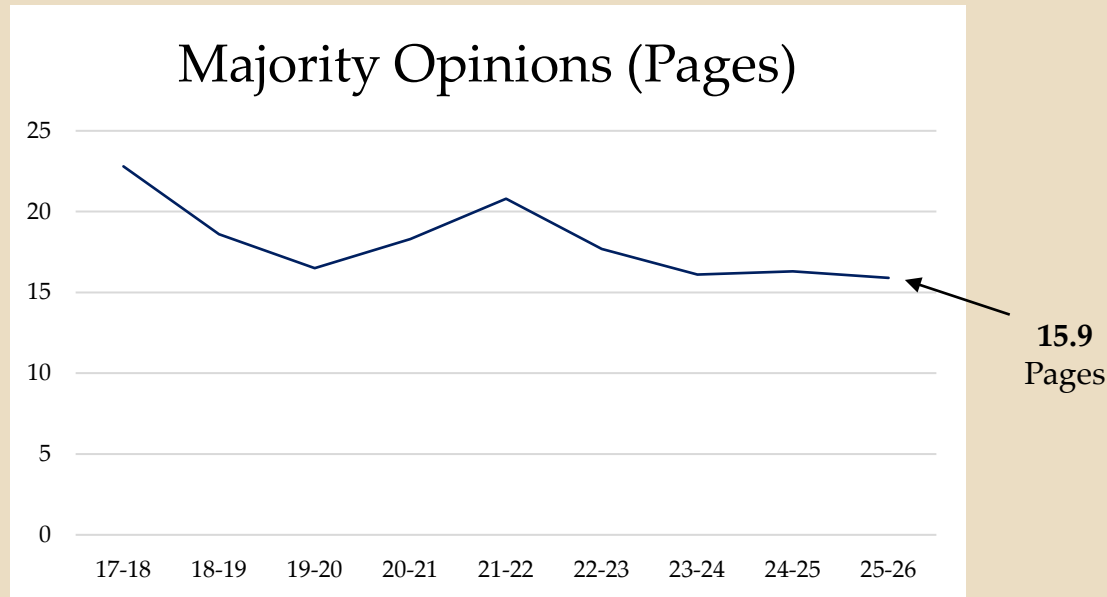
- The Court spent more time with its opinions than last year, but is still improving over time.
- As is often the case, individual justice filing times varied.



Days Pending (submission to filing)	
Christensen	71.3
Waterman	69.0
Mansfield	64.1
McDonald	62.9
Oxley	73.2
McDermott	98.5
May	88.3

Majority Opinions

- Majority opinions were again around **16 pages** (consistent with past years).
- **J. McDermott** edged **C.J. Christensen** for the “briefest” majority opinions.

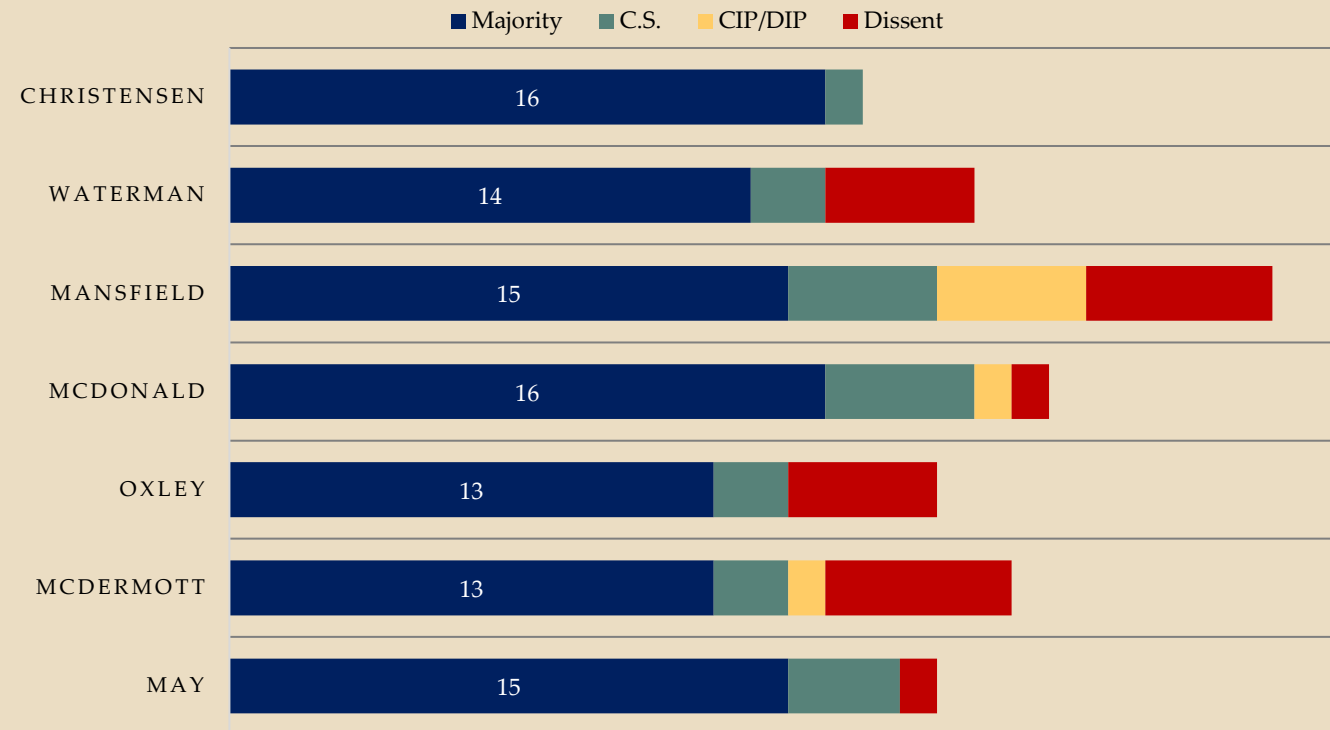


Justice	Average Majority Op.	Longest Majority Op.	Shortest Majority Op.
Christensen	12.5	24	6
Waterman	17.1	50	6
Mansfield	18.3	35	8
McDonald	15.5	31	7
Oxley	21.5	53	10
McDermott	12.0	29	5
May	14.4	26	6

* Excludes per curiam opinions.

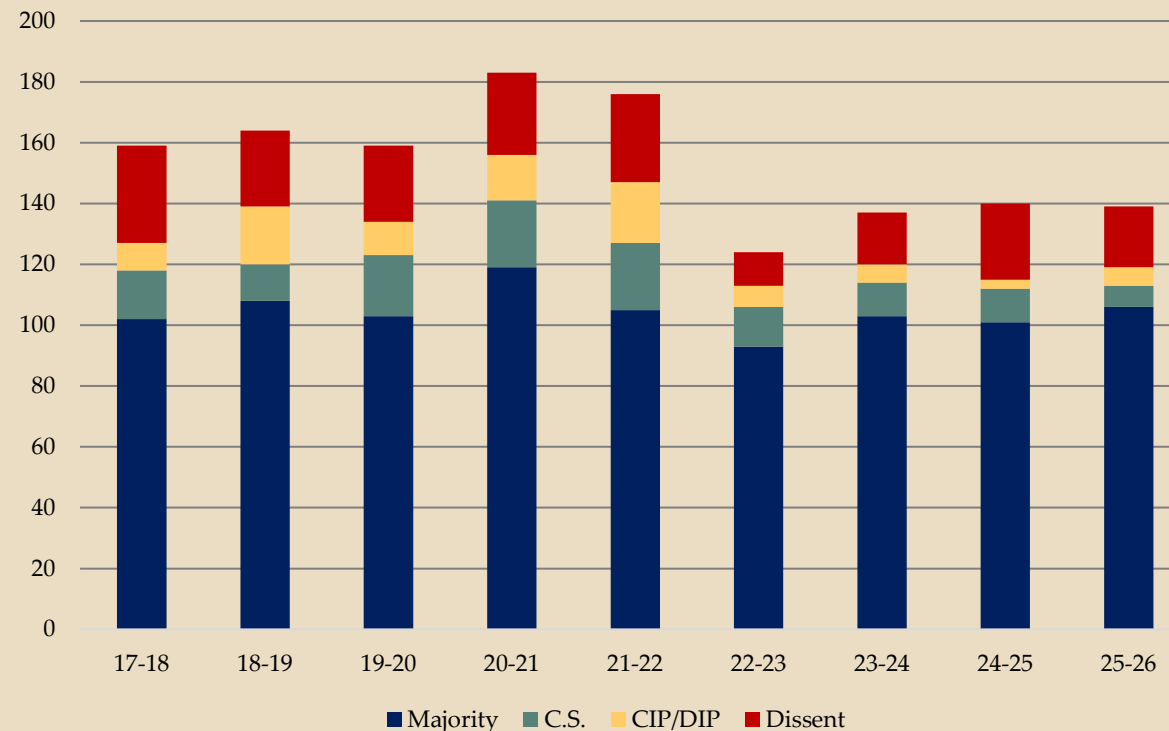
Number of Opinions (This Term)

- Justice **Mansfield** wrote the most total opinions, with **15** majorities and **13** separates.
- Chief Justice **Christensen** wrote the fewest, with **16** majorities and **1** separate opinion.



Number of Opinions (Over Time)

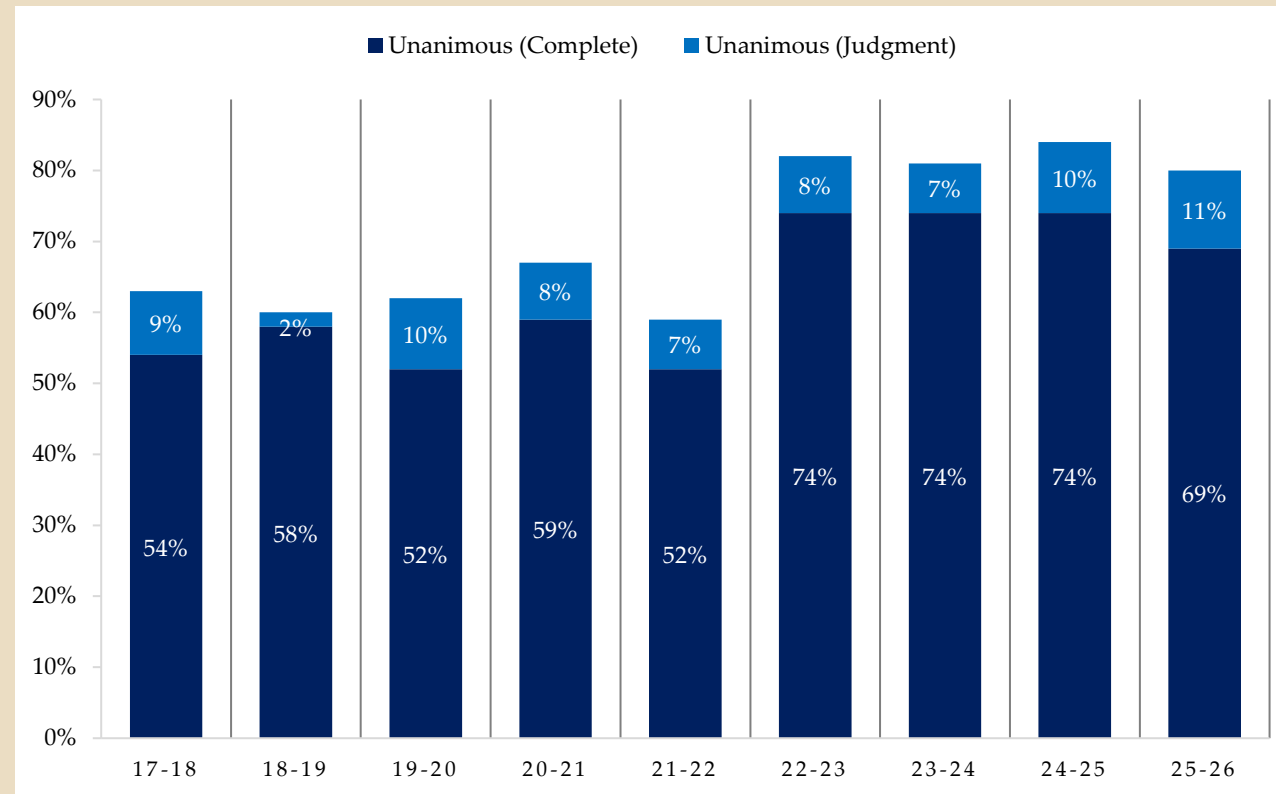
- The Court issued **around the same** number of opinions as the past two years.
- The Court issued **slightly** less total opinions (majorities and separates) than last year.



* Includes per curiam opinions.

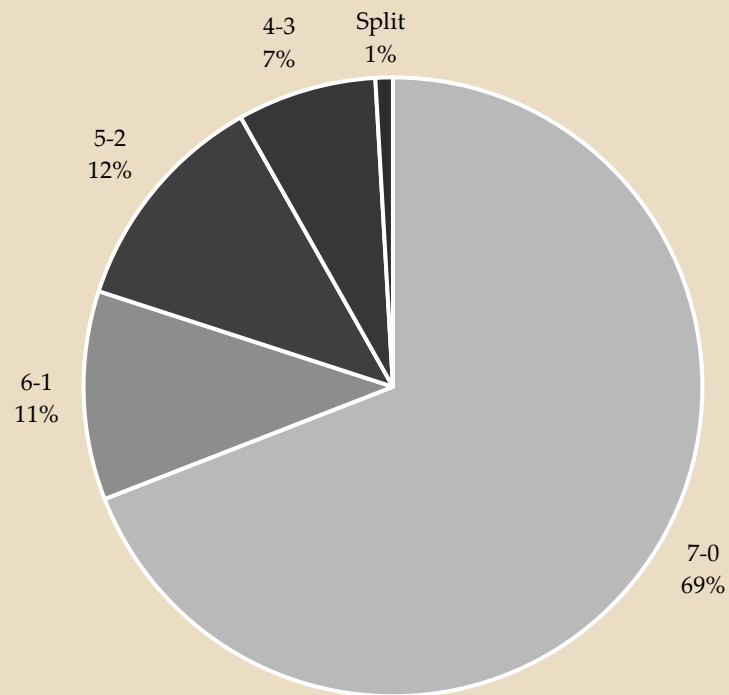
Unanimous Cases (Over Time)

➤ The Court has maintained a higher **rate of unanimous decisions** in the past four years.



Opinions Breakdown

- **80.4%** (86 of 107 cases) were resolved with a unanimous judgment— a slight decrease.
- **J. McDermott** was the “strongest” majority author, delivering 12 unanimous decisions.

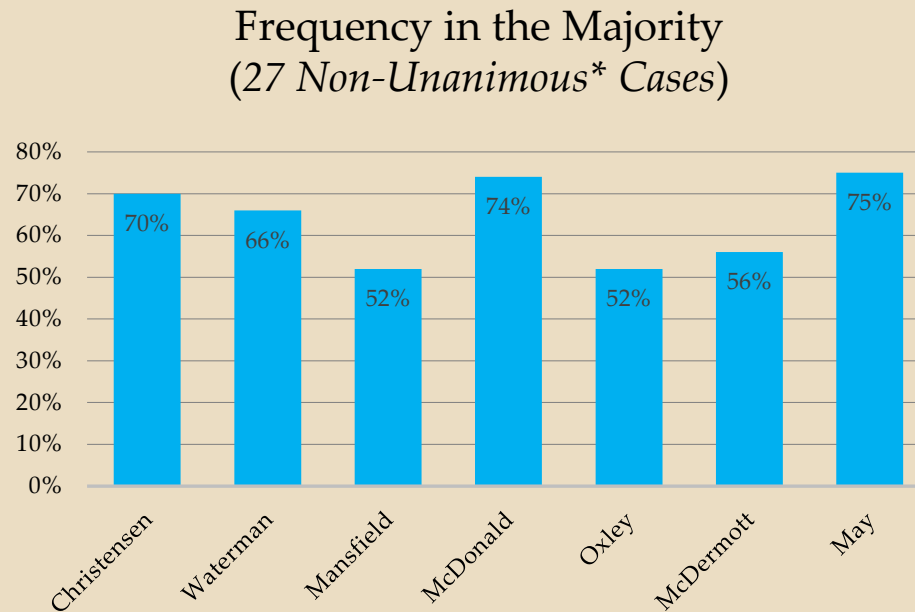


	Majorities	7-0	6-1	5-2	4-3	Majority Strength
Christensen	16	11	1	3	1	6.38
Waterman	14	10	1	1	2	6.36
Mansfield	15	11	0	4	0	6.47
McDonald	16	10	1	3	2	6.19
Oxley	13	12	0	0	1	6.77
McDermott	13	12	0	1	0	6.85
May	15	10	2	1	2	6.33
Total	102	76	5	13	8	6.46

- A vote to concur in the judgment counts as a vote for the majority.
- A decision with less than seven participating justices is grouped by the number of justices not in the majority.
- Breakout chart excludes per curiam and evenly divided opinions.

Opinions Breakdown, cont'd.

- **Js. McDonald** and **May** were most often in the majority in non-unanimous cases.
- **J. Waterman** was the only justice to *not* pen a solo separate opinion (2 years running).



Solo Opinions	
Christensen	1
Waterman	0
Mansfield	6
McDonald	2
Oxley	2
McDermott	3
May	1

* "Non-unanimous" as to the judgment.

Voting Alignments (All Cases)

➤ Agreement in *Full*—

- “Full agreement” means the justices joined the same opinion(s), in all parts.

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	90.5%	85.9%	81.6%	81.7%	84.5%	85.3%
	Waterman	87.2%	85.6%	80.6%	82.5%	87.5%
		Mansfield	80.2%	79.4%	80.2%	82.2%
			McDonald	84.9%	80.0%	95.2%
				Oxley	88.7%	81.9%
					McDermott	81.7%
May						

➤ Agreement in *Part*—

- “Partial agreement” means the justices joined at least one of the same opinion(s).

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	94.7%	88.9%	85.4%	83.7%	87.4%	88.2%
	Waterman	90.4%	86.6%	81.6%	85.6%	89.6%
		Mansfield	83.2%	81.4%	82.2%	85.1%
			McDonald	86.8%	82.9%	96.2%
				Oxley	89.6%	82.9%
					McDermott	83.7%
May						

Voting Alignments (33 Contested Cases*)

➤ Agreement in *Full*—

- “Full agreement” means the justices joined the same opinion(s), in all parts.

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	70.0%	54.8%	40.6%	42.4%	51.5%	53.1%
	Waterman	57.1%	51.7%	36.7%	43.3%	58.6%
		Mansfield	33.3%	32.3%	35.5%	40.0%
			McDonald	50.0%	34.4%	83.9%
				Oxley	63.6%	40.6%
					McDermott	40.6%
						May

➤ Agreement in *Part*—

- “Partial agreement” means the justices joined at least one of the same opinion(s).

	Waterman	Mansfield	McDonald	Oxley	McDermott	May
Christensen	83.3%	64.5%	53.1%	48.5%	60.6%	62.5%
	Waterman	67.9%	55.2%	40.0%	53.3%	65.5%
		Mansfield	43.3%	38.7%	41.9%	50.0%
			McDonald	56.3%	43.8%	87.1%
				Oxley	66.7%	43.8%
					McDermott	46.9%
						May

* A “contested case” is a divided case or one that includes more than one opinion (i.e., at least one special concurrence, CIP/DIP, or dissent).