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Fifth Circuit Panel & En Banc Rehearing

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	The Statistics: Sobering or Fascinating?.....	1
II.	Rehearing by the Panel and by the En Banc Court.....	2
A.	Rehearing en banc.....	2
1.	Grounds.....	2
2.	Deadlines.....	4
3.	Form of petition	5
a.	Contents	5
b.	Length	7
c.	Attachments	8
d.	Number of copies.....	8
4.	Responses.....	8
B.	Panel rehearing.....	8
1.	Grounds.....	8
2.	Deadlines.....	9
3.	Form of petition	10
a.	Content.....	10
b.	Length	10
c.	Attachments	11
d.	Number of copies.....	11
4.	Responses.....	11
C.	Processing of petitions for panel and en banc rehearing.....	12
1.	Processing of panel rehearing petitions	12
2.	Processing of en banc rehearing petitions.....	12
a.	The panel initially has control after an en banc petition is filed	12
b.	Who may request a poll and who may vote in the poll.....	12
c.	Request for a poll	13
d.	The number of judges counted in determining how many votes it takes to grant	13
e.	No poll request.....	14
f.	Negative poll.....	14
g.	Affirmative poll	15

D.	Judges’ procedures for handling rehearing petitions in chambers.....	16
E.	Extension of time to file a petition for panel or en banc rehearing.....	17
III.	Strategies for Obtaining En Banc Review	17
A.	Questions of law	17
B.	Question of exceptional importance or unusually high stakes.....	18
C.	Conflicting decisions or lack of clarity in the law	18
D.	Issues of First Impression	19
E.	Amicus support	19
F.	When the controlling Fifth Circuit precedent is unfavorable, angle for a panel dissent.....	19
G.	Reasons that may weigh against en banc review	20
1.	Some are influenced in their poll vote by whether the parties have filed a petition for rehearing en banc.	20
2.	En banc review is a harder sell for some judges.....	21
3.	A vote to grant en banc is not necessarily a vote to reach a different result, but some judges may feel like it is.....	22
4.	Some judges are reluctant to grant en banc rehearing from an unpublished opinion.....	23
5.	Some judges may be reluctant to grant en banc rehearing from an opinion that lacks a comprehensive analysis of the claimed error.....	23
6.	It is harder to get en banc review in diversity cases on questions of state law.	24
7.	Injustice to the parties in the particular case usually will not be enough to garner a majority vote in an en banc poll, nor for a case to withstand en banc review.....	25
8.	Requesting en banc on the basis of error correction is an uphill battle.....	25
H.	Opinions dissenting from the denial of en banc rehearing (DDRs) must be understood in context.....	26
IV.	Charts—Efforts at Obtaining En Banc Review from 2011 to 2017	28
A.	Grants of en banc review	28
1.	En banc grants from July 1, 2016 to April 20, 2017 (partial statistical year)	28
2.	En banc grants from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.....	30
3.	En banc grants from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.....	33
4.	En banc grants from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.....	35

5.	En banc grants from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013	37
6.	En banc grants from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.....	40
B.	Cases in which the Fifth Circuit denies en banc review after a poll.....	43
1.	En banc denied after a poll from July 1, 2016 to April 28, 2017 (partial statistical year).....	43
2.	En banc denied after a poll from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.....	46
3.	En banc denied after a poll from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.....	50
4.	En banc denied after a poll from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.....	55
5.	En banc denied after a poll from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013.....	58
6.	En banc denied after a poll from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.....	60
C.	Cases in which the petition for en banc rehearing was “disposed of by other means.”	62
1.	4 petitions disposed of by other means from July 1, 2016 to April 20 2017 (partial statistical year).....	62
2.	4 petitions disposed of by other means from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.....	62
3.	11 petitions disposed of by other means from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.....	63
4.	9 petitions disposed of by other means from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.....	64
5.	7 petitions disposed of by other means from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013.....	64
6.	6 petitions disposed of by other means from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.....	65

EN BANC REVIEW IN THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

By Dana Livingston

I. THE STATISTICS: SOBERING OR FASCINATING?

Counsel considering filing a petition for panel or en banc rehearing should be aware of the low chances of success.

	2012 ¹	2013 ²	2014 ³	2015 ⁴	2016 ⁵
En Banc Petitions filed ⁶	250	229	224	236	194
Denied	235	220	209	217	190
▪ <i>with a poll vote</i>	4 (1.7%)	9 (4.3%)	13 (6.2%)	14 (6.5%)	12 (6.2%)
▪ <i>without a poll vote</i>	231	211	196	203	178
Granted	7 (2.8%)	6 (2.6%)	3 (1.3%)	5 (2.1%)	6 (3.1%)
▪ <i>on Court's own motion with oral argument</i>	2	0	0	1	2
▪ <i>on Court's own motion without oral argument</i>	1	0	1	0	0
▪ <i>on motion of parties with oral argument</i>	4	5	2	3	3
▪ <i>on motion of parties without oral argument</i>	0	1	0	1	1
Disposed of by other means	6 (2.4%)	7 (3%)	9 (4%)	12 (5%)	4 (2.1%)

¹ UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FIFTH CIRCUIT, CLERK'S ANNUAL REPORT: JUDICIAL WORKLOAD STATISTICS FOR JULY 2011–JUNE 2012 at 29 encl. D (2012).

² UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FIFTH CIRCUIT, CLERK'S ANNUAL REPORT: JUDICIAL WORKLOAD STATISTICS FOR JULY 2012–JUNE 2013 at 29 encl. D (2013).

³ UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FIFTH CIRCUIT, CLERK'S ANNUAL REPORT: JUDICIAL WORKLOAD STATISTICS FOR JULY 2013–JUNE 2014 at 29 encl. D (2014).

⁴ UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FIFTH CIRCUIT, CLERK'S ANNUAL REPORT: JUDICIAL WORKLOAD STATISTICS FOR JULY 2014–JUNE 2015 at 30 encl. D (2015).

⁵ UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FIFTH CIRCUIT, CLERK'S ANNUAL REPORT: JUDICIAL WORKLOAD STATISTICS FOR JULY 2015–JUNE 2016 at 31 encl. D (2016).

⁶ The numbers in the chart above showing grants and denials are not only of petitions filed within each statistical year since a handful of petitions are pending at the open of each statistical year and a nearly equal number pending at the close of each statistical year:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Pending at beginning of statistical year	21	23	19	22	24
Still Pending as of close of statistical year	23	19	22	24	18

These numbers are mostly consistent with those a decade earlier, although slightly fewer en banc petitions were filed and slightly more were granted then: for the 12-month period that ended June 30, 2004, 192 petitions for rehearing en banc were filed, and the court granted 11 en banc rehearings, or 5.4% of the petitions filed.⁷ Regardless, the following statement from the Fifth Circuit’s Internal Operating Procedures remains true: compared to all the cases decided by the court, “[f]ewer than 1% of the cases decided by the court on the merits are reheard en banc.” I.O.P. FOLLOWING 5TH CIR. R. 35.

That statistic fails to tell the whole story. The three shaded rows in the chart above show the statistics of filed en banc petitions that got some traction at the court—either a grant, a poll, or a modification by the panel. The five-year average for petitions that got some traction is nearly 11% of the en banc petitions filed, which is relatively high given the extraordinary nature of en banc review. The charts at the end of this paper give a flavor of what issues garnered some en banc interest, even if not resulting in a grant.

II. REHEARING BY THE PANEL AND BY THE EN BANC COURT

A. Rehearing en banc

Currently, a majority of the circuit judges who are in regular active service and not disqualified may order that an appeal be heard or reheard en banc. FED. R. APP. P. 35(a). For the Fifth Circuit, a list of active-status judges (listed by seniority) and a list of senior-status judges (listed alphabetically) can be found here: <http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/docs/default-source/forms-and-documents---clerks-office/addressandphonelisting.pdf>.

1. Grounds

A petition for hearing or rehearing en banc, formerly called a “suggestion for en banc consideration,” is an extraordinary procedure to be used only for cases involving questions of exceptional importance or to secure or maintain uniformity of the court’s decisions. *See id.* As the Fifth Circuit Internal Operating Procedures describe, a petition for rehearing en banc “is intended to bring to the attention of the

⁷ UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FIFTH CIRCUIT, CLERK’S ANNUAL REPORT: JUDICIAL WORKLOAD STATISTICS FOR JULY 2003–JUNE 2004 at 18, 23 encl. D (2004).

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