

Sotomayor Tops Justices For Number of Public Appearances

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Body

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor has logged 53 public appearances in the past two terms-more than any other justice, according to a [website](#) that tracks justices' speaking engagements.

Near the other end of the spectrum is Chief Justice John Roberts Jr., who has made 11 public appearances in the same time period.

Roberts is visiting the New England School of Law on Wednesday, a rare occasion in which he is interacting with law students as well as making a Law Day keynote address.

The tally comes from [SCOTUS Map](#), which began compiling public appearances by justices in July 2014. Victoria Kwan, co-creator of the site, said the data comes from online searches of the justices' names and other key words and from social-media mentions, as well as crowdsourcing from fans of the site.

Kwan acknowledges she's "positive we have missed things," estimating that the site captures 80 percent of the justices' appearances. Hosting organizations and institutions sometimes do not publicize visits at the request of justices or for other reasons. The court's public information office only occasionally alerts the news media about upcoming justices' off-the-bench talks.

The large total number of appearances-282 since July 2014-fits in with the growing sense that, as individuals, justices have become more visible in recent years.

Stepping Out: Justices' Public Appearances Since July 2014

Source: SCOTUS Map (scotusmap.com)

"It is not your imagination. Supreme Court justices are in the news more than ever," University of California, Irvine School of law professor Richard Hasen wrote in a forthcoming article. Using data about justices' appearances and press interviews since 1960, Hasen created a "Celebrity Index" by dividing the number of justices' appearances by the number of years they served. Nine of the top 10 justices in the index are currently on the court.

Their increased visibility is also a function of modern technology, Hasen cautioned. Decades ago, justices could slip into town and even give a speech without being noticed. But now, Hasen said, justices are learning what police officers have come to know: "Once people have access to the Internet and a smartphone, anything spoken publicly is capable of being recorded ... and eventually picked up by a wide audience."

The frequency of justices' public events and where they take place provides "an interesting snapshot of where the justices' like to spend time," Kwan said. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg favors opera *festivals in the summertime*, and Justice Stephen Breyer will attend "any event that will allow him to speak French," Kwan joked.

But book authorship drives several of the justices' encounters with the public. Many of Sotomayor's appearances could count as events that promote her 2013 memoir *My Beloved World*, for which *she was paid nearly \$2 million* in advances on royalties. Many of Breyer's *42 appearances* showcased his new book *The Court and the World*. Justice Antonin Scalia's 2012 book *Reading Law* still accounts for some of his 51 appearances, most recently in a joint talk last month *in Singapore* with co-author Bryan Garner.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has not authored a book, but has hit the lecture circuit often and with gusto, clocking 49 appearances since July 2014. Notorious RBG, a 2015 biography of Ginsburg, suggests that when she became the most senior liberal justice after the 2010 retirement of Justice John Paul Stevens, *she embraced a leadership role* that included spotlighting the conservative direction of the court. "After years of toil, often in the shadows, she is poised to explain to the country just what is going wrong," the book asserted.

With such high-profile justices as colleagues, why is Roberts, the leader of the court and the judicial branch, so rarely out on the stump?

Kwan offered several explanations, including the fact that he is the only justice with two teenage children at home. She also said that, unlike Scalia, Ginsburg and Samuel Alito Jr., *who sometimes speak to groups* like the Federalist Society and the American Constitution Society, Roberts "may not want to show up at events that could seem partisan."

Florida International University College of Law professor Thomas Baker, who served as administrative assistant to Chief Justice William Rehnquist in 1987, said a chief justice has an "important role" to play as spokesman for the third branch of government. But the chief, he said, also has other duties under more than 60 statutes, including serving as chancellor of the Smithsonian Institution.

"Being chief justice and wearing all those different hats besides the robe makes for a busy, busy work week," Baker said. "So I am not critical of him. Maybe the comparison is not that Roberts is making too few appearances. Maybe you should be wondering if some other justices are making too many."

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