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The People's Guide to the U.S. Supreme Court: **2025 - 2026 Term**





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Decisions this term *will shape the future of free speech, the rights of LGBTQI+ and immigrant communities, election integrity, and the limits of presidential power.*

The United States is in an existential fight for democracy. With so much on the line for millions of people, the Supreme Court remains a decisive arena. The new term begins on Monday, [October 6](#), and will determine the role of this Court on attempts at unchecked power.

The authoritarian threats from the Trump-Vance administration will test the limits of the Justices, some of whom have frequently sided with the President in unexplained shadow docket decisions. The term approaches as the far-right legal movement continues to use the Court to advance an agenda that makes our country less fair, less safe, and less free. But we, the people, can defy these efforts and find strength and courage together.

As the Court prepares to begin its term, the stakes could not be higher. An informed public has the power to confront autocracy. The People's Guide to the 2025–2026 Supreme Court Term is part of that effort—making complex cases clear and accessible so that people everywhere can understand what's at stake and play a role in shaping our future.



Important Trends to Watch



The Shadow Docket

The Supreme Court's emergency docket, often called the "shadow docket," continues to make [high-stakes](#) decisions with little to no transparency on extremely expedited timelines. These rulings, often profoundly consequential, are frequently issued without the deliberative process and tradition that defines the Court's better-known [merits docket](#)—including oral argument, full briefing from parties and amici ("friends of the court" who are not parties to the case but wish to share additional information for the Court to consider), or signed opinions that [explain](#) the Court's reasoning. Shadow docket opinions don't typically indicate which justice voted which way, further shrouding decisions from transparency.



Although the Court wrapped up its 2024 merits docket in June 2025, it has continued to rule on cases on the shadow docket. As of mid-September, the Trump-Vance administration has filed [28 emergency applications](#) with the Court. This pattern builds on a sharp escalation that began during Trump's first term, when his administration filed [41 applications](#) in four years (compared to [only eight across the 16 years](#) of the Bush and Obama presidencies combined). **The Trump-Vance administration's use of the shadow docket and the Court's willingness to decide highly-consequential matters on the shadow docket is not normal.**

What was once an extraordinary measure has become a routine vehicle for reshaping the law outside the Court's traditional, deliberative process. The consequences are far-reaching, not just for the millions of people the orders impact, but also for the lower courts left to [guess](#) at the Supreme Court's rationale. This year alone, the shadow docket has enabled racial profiling in immigration enforcement, reinstated a ban on transgender people serving in the military, and allowed the administration to withhold millions of dollars in federal funds while moving forward with plans to dismantle agencies and dismiss thousands of career civil servants in the federal workforce.

Democracy Forward produced *The People's Guide to the U.S. Supreme Court: [Summer Update 2025](#)* regarding shadow docket decisions in July 2025; a supplement to this update appears at the end of this guide and can be [accessed here](#)).



Dissents Endure

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's recent [dissents](#) have drawn widespread attention for their [tone](#) and unflinching [critiques](#) of the Court's majority. Her writing—often joined by Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan—carries a deep sense of [urgency](#) over the Court's widening ideological divide, its opaque decision-making, and the far-reaching impact of its threadbare rulings.

In one striking dissent, Jackson accused her colleagues of engaging in "[Calvinball jurisprudence with a twist](#)" after the Court allowed the administration to slash funding for the National Institutes of Health. The phrase, drawn from the comic strip [Calvin and Hobbes](#), refers to a game with only one rule—there are no fixed rules. The twist Jackson describes is the addition of a second rule: "this Administration always wins."

Justice Sotomayor's recent dissent in a shadow docket case allowing federal officers to expand immigration stops in Los Angeles was no less forceful. In a [21-page opinion](#) joined by Justices Jackson and Kagan, she condemned the ruling as "yet another grave misuse of our emergency docket." She warned: "We should not have to live in a country where the Government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish, and appears to work a low-wage job. Rather than stand idly by while our constitutional freedoms are lost, I dissent."

In his 1985 essay [In Defense of Dissents](#), Justice William J. Brennan Jr. argued that dissents are essential to the integrity of the judicial process—holding the majority accountable and laying the groundwork for future change. In that tradition, the dissents of Justices Jackson, Sotomayor, and Kagan not only push back against today's rulings, but may also help shape the law for generations to come.

The Court Outside the Courtroom

The Supreme Court is an intensely private institution, fueling speculation about how the Court will rule or which cases it will take up. Recently, however, the justices have increasingly shared their thoughts and perspectives outside the courtroom in more public domains, making headlines as they expand on past decisions or drop hints about what may come next.

Most notably, earlier this year, Chief Justice Roberts [rebuked](#) President Trump's calls to impeach a judge who ruled against him. Justice Sotomayor expressed her [frustration](#) at work on Late Night with Stephen Colbert. Justice Amy Coney Barrett, during her recent book tour, answered a question on [Fox News](#) regarding the 22nd Amendment's two-term limit. Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who joined Justice Neil Gorsuch in [delivering](#) a [biting critique](#) of lower-court judges, has since acknowledged the "[difficult job](#)" these judges face as the Supreme Court repeatedly halts their rulings.

With the Court's approval rating resting at [historic lows](#) and fractured along largely partisan lines, even seemingly offhand remarks now shape public expectation, fuel speculation, and signal potential shifts inside the Court. This new reality provides a window into how the term may unfold.



Looking Ahead – Not Just One Court

As the new Supreme Court term begins, it's important not only to read the Court's opinions but also to watch its work closely. This guide highlights 17 key cases to watch, with summaries explaining what each case is about and why it matters.

Even as we outline the cases ahead, it's important to remember that while the Supreme Court is powerful, it is not the only forum in the fight to protect our rights. Federal courts across the country—with judges appointed by both Republican and Democratic presidents—are overwhelmingly ruling in favor of the Constitution and the rule of law, and checking the executive branch's excesses of power. The state court system is also proving to be critically important, with a number of state supreme courts protecting individual rights under state constitutions. The Supreme Court matters, but it's not the only courtroom where the work to achieve justice happens.

The ability of the American people to initiate litigation against their government remains one of our strongest tools to defend rights, demand transparency, and hold the government accountable. Democracy Forward is on the frontlines of these fights, working to protect democratic values and advance the public interest. This year alone, we have filed hundreds of legal actions and launched more than 150 investigations, securing multiple significant victories on behalf of unions, nonprofit organizations, veterans groups, houses of worship, parents, educators, medical professionals, and more.

The story of our democracy is still being written—and together, we have the power to shape a future where rights, freedoms, and justice are safeguarded for all.





Cases to Watch

This Term



Merits Docket

1. *Chiles v. Salazar*, No. 24-539

What is this case about?

Free speech and harmful conversion practices.

Background

Conversion “therapy” is a harmful and unscientific practice intended to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity; not only is the practice ineffective in its stated goals, but it has been shown to increase anxiety, depression, and suicidality for LGBTQ+ youth. Every major medical and mental health association in the United States (including the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association) opposes conversion practices. Twenty-three states and D.C. have bans on conversion practices for youth, typically as part of their regulations for the practice of medicine. Colorado is one of those states.

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), the far-right Christian legal organization that has spearheaded recent cases like *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (overturning *Roe v. Wade* and eliminating the federal right to abortion) and *303 Creative v. Elenis* (enabling businesses to request free-speech exemptions from nondiscrimination laws), represents a licensed professional mental health counselor in Colorado claiming that Colorado’s ban on youth conversion practices violates her right to free speech. The lower courts rejected her arguments, holding that the Colorado law is a neutral regulation of professional conduct.

The Trump-Vance administration filed an amicus brief supporting the therapist and will participate in oral argument before the Supreme Court.

Question presented

“Whether a law that censors certain conversations between counselors and their clients based on the viewpoints expressed regulates conduct or violates the Free Speech Clause.”

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Court undermines laws banning conversion practices for youth, more LGBTQI+ children are likely to be subjected to this harmful practice, and organizations like ADF could use this decision to pursue further First Amendment exemptions from laws protecting LGBTQI+ and reproductive rights.





Important dates

Oral argument is scheduled for October 7, 2025

Who is on each side?

Petitioners: Kaley Chiles (represented by Alliance Defending Freedom)

Respondents: Patty Salazar in her official capacity as Executive Director of the Department of Regulatory Agencies, Reina Sbarbaro-Gordon in her official capacity as Program Director of the State Board of Licensed Professional Counselor Examiners and the State Board of Addiction Counselor Examiners, Jennifer Luttmann, Andrew Harris, Marykay Jimenez, Kalli Likness, Sue Noffsinger, Laura Gutierrez, and Richard Cohan in their official capacities as members of the State Board of Licensed Professional Counselor Examiners, and Halcyon Driskell, Kristina Daniel, Erika Hoy, Crystal Kisselburgh, Ramzy Nagy, Leiticia Smith, and Jonathan Culwell, in their official capacities as members of the State Board of Addiction Counselor Examiners

See the full list of “friend of the court” (amicus) briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

2. West Virginia v. B.P.J., No. 24-43 and Little v. Hecox, No. 24-38

What are these two cases about?

The rights of transgender students to compete on sports teams that align with their gender identities.

Background

Since 2020, 27 states have banned transgender youth from playing school sports. Some of these bans allow for invasive forms of sex testing that put all female student athletes at risk and open the door for any school official or adult to question and harass children playing sports.

In *West Virginia v. B.P.J.*, a young transgender girl who wished to run on her school’s girls’ track team brought a lawsuit challenging West Virginia’s trans sports ban as a violation of the Constitution’s Equal Protection Clause as well as Title IX, the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education.

In *Little v. Hecox*, a transgender college athlete and a cisgender high school athlete challenged Idaho’s trans sports ban and requirements for sex testing as violations of the Equal Protection Clause.

Federal courts have blocked enforcement of these bans in both lawsuits.

Last term, the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Skrametti* declined to answer what level of protection transgender individuals receive under the Equal Protection Clause. These cases present another chance for the Court to answer that question.



Questions presented

West Virginia v. B.P.J.

1. “Whether Title IX prevents a state from consistently designating girls’ and boys’ sports teams based on biological sex determined at birth.”
2. “Whether the Equal Protection Clause prevents a state from offering separate boys’ and girls’ sports teams based on biological sex determined at birth.”

Little v. Hecox

“Whether laws that seek to protect women’s and girls’ sports by limiting participation to women and girls based on sex violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Court holds that athletics laws that discriminate based on transgender status don’t violate the Equal Protection Clause or Title IX, many trans people (and especially trans youth) would be deprived of the physical, social, and psychological benefits of team sports. People who are not transgender could face increased risk of invasive investigations and persecution for failure to conform to gender norms (for example, subjecting young female athletes to questions about their menstrual cycle, investigations into their medical records, or even physical inspections of their bodies to determine eligibility to compete). States and even the federal government could also be more likely to pass laws excluding transgender people from other areas of life, including medical care and employment.

Important dates

The parties’ briefs opposing the trans sports bans are due on November 10, 2025, and amicus briefs supporting that position are due one week later.

Who is on each side?

West Virginia v. B.P.J.

Petitioners: State of West Virginia, Lainey Armistead, West Virginia State Board of Education, Harrison County Board of Education, W. Clayton Burch, in his official capacity as State Superintendent, and Dora Stutler, in her official capacity as Harrison County Superintendent

Respondents: B.P.J., by next friend and mother, Heather Jackson (represented by ACLU, ACLU of West Virginia, Lambda Legal, and Cooley LLP)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).



Little v. Hecox

Petitioners: Bradley Little, Debbie Critchfield (formerly Sherri Ybarra), Individual Members of the State Board of Education, Boise State University, Marlene Tromp, Independent School District of Boise City #1, Lisa Roberts (formerly Coby Dennis), Individual Members of the Board of Trustees of the Independent School District of Boise City #1, Individual Members of the Idaho Code Commission, Madison Kenyon, and Mary Marshall (represented by Alliance Defending Freedom and Idaho)

Respondents: Lindsay Hecox and Jane Doe (represented by ACLU, ACLU of Idaho, Legal Voice, and Cooley LLP)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

3. *Bost v. Illinois State Board of Elections, No. 24-568*

What is this case about?

Who can challenge laws allowing states to count mail-in ballots received after election day.

Background

Fifteen states' election laws allow mail-in ballots postmarked by election day to be counted even if they arrive after election day. For example, Illinois allows election officials to count mail-in ballots postmarked by election day up to two weeks afterwards.

A member of Congress and two presidential electors argued that Illinois's state law violates federal law and the U.S. Constitution by changing the meaning of election day, which they allege interferes with their ability to run for office.

A lower court dismissed the lawsuit, finding that these particular plaintiffs didn't have the right (or "standing") to bring these claims. The plaintiffs have appealed, asking the Supreme Court to hold that they do have standing to pursue their case.

The Trump-Vance administration filed an amicus brief supporting the plaintiffs and will participate in oral argument before the Supreme Court.

Question presented

"Whether Petitioners, as federal candidates, have pleaded sufficient factual allegations to show Article III standing to challenge state time, place, and manner regulations concerning their federal elections."





What could the outcome mean for communities?

Though the Supreme Court is not likely to determine the merits of the plaintiffs' claims (i.e. whether election laws like Illinois' are actually unlawful), if the Supreme Court allows this challenge to proceed past the standing stage, courts in the future could use this case to make it harder for people to have their votes counted, especially those who vote by mail.

Important dates

Oral argument is scheduled for October 8, 2025

Who is on each side?

Petitioners: Congressman Michael Bost and Republican Presidential Elector Nominees Laura Pollastrini and Susan Sweeney (represented by Judicial Watch)

Respondents: Illinois State Board of Elections and Executive Director of the Illinois State Board of Elections, in her capacity as the Executive Director of the Illinois State Board of Elections (represented by Illinois)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

4. National Republican Senatorial Committee v. Federal Election Commission, No. 24-621

What is this case about?

Influencing election outcomes through a partisan attack on an established campaign finance law that the Supreme Court held was constitutional in 2001.

Background

Federal election laws that limit the amount of money political party committees can spend in coordination with a political candidate protect individual voters' ability to influence elections from corruption and outsized influence from wealthy donors.

The National Republican Senatorial and Congressional Committees brought this case (along with Vice President J.D. Vance while he was still serving as a U.S. Senator) to challenge these limits on "coordinated party expenditures" as a violation of their constitutional right to free speech.

This case seeks to build on recent court decisions undermining other campaign finance laws, like the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, in which the Court struck down long standing campaign finance laws regulating corporate independent spending by holding that corporations are considered people and money is considered speech under the First Amendment. Plaintiffs are asking the Supreme Court to overrule its 2001 decision (*FEC v. Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee*) because they claim it wrongly denies First Amendment rights.



After the Trump-Vance administration told the Supreme Court that it will not defend the challenged federal election law because it agrees with the Republican Committees' arguments, Democratic Party Committees stepped up to defend the law, and the Supreme Court granted their motion to intervene in the case.

Question presented

"Whether the limits on coordinated party expenditures in 52 U.S.C. § 30116 violate the First Amendment, either on their face or as applied to party spending in connection with "party coordinated communications" as defined in 11 C.F.R. § 109.37."

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Supreme Court strikes down the limits on coordinated party expenditures, it will allow wealthy individuals and organizations to give potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars directly to candidates (through political party committees coordinating with those candidates) to influence election outcomes, further drowning out the voices of the majority of voters.

Important dates

The parties' briefs in support of the limits on coordinated party expenditures are due on September 29, 2025, and amicus briefs supporting that position are due one week later.

Who is on each side?

Petitioners: National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), Senator James David (J.D.) Vance, and former Representative Steven Joseph Chabot (represented by Jones Day)

Respondents: Federal Election Commission (FEC), Allen Joseph Dickerson, Dara Lindenbaum, Shana M. Broussard, Sean J. Cooksey, James E. Trainor, III, and Ellen L. Weintraub (represented by Court-appointed amicus curiae Latham & Watkins LLP); Democratic National Committee (DNC), Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) (represented by Elias Law Group LLP)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

5. Louisiana v. Callais, No. 24-109 (consolidated with 24-110)

What is this case about?

Voting rights and how to address race discrimination in elections.

Background

In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) to enforce the protections of the



Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, particularly for Black Americans whose ability to participate in elections had been unfairly restricted by discriminatory policies like literacy tests and poll taxes, as well as physical violence. Section 2 of the VRA allows voters to sue when states or local governments deny or limit their right to vote based on their race, color, or membership in a language minority group. In redistricting cases where parties bringing Section 2 claims win, courts can require governments to implement voting maps that remedy the discrimination. Section 2 has been integral in enabling voters of color to elect their candidates of choice, especially in states like Louisiana where, post Reconstruction, Black candidates have only won election to Congress from majority-Black districts.

After the Supreme Court held in 2023 that affirmative action in college admissions violates the constitution's Equal Protection Clause, there has been increased scrutiny on race-conscious laws intended to remedy discrimination, including Section 2 of the VRA.

Louisiana's population is roughly one-third Black, but in 2022 only one of Louisiana's six voting districts was majority-Black. A group of voters sued the state under Section 2 of the VRA and won, requiring Louisiana to add a second majority-Black district. Louisiana drew a second Black district but in order to preserve a white incumbent's seat, drew that second Black district from the northwest corner to the southeast corner of Louisiana. The plaintiff voters had proposed a far more geographically compact district.

Afterwards, a group of non-Black voters brought a new lawsuit against Louisiana, arguing that the creation of the second majority-Black district violates the Equal Protection Clause as a racial gerrymander. Louisiana reluctantly defended its new district but asked the Supreme Court to address the alleged conflict between Section 2 of the VRA and the Court's recent precedents emphasizing race neutrality.

The Court originally heard the case in the last term, but held off on issuing a decision and re-added the case to this term for another round of briefing and oral argument on a new question.

Question Presented

"Whether the State's intentional creation of a second majority-minority congressional district violates the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution."

Other questions presented in this case were already briefed and argued last term.

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Court holds that Section 2 of the VRA is unconstitutional, voters who experience discrimination on the basis of their race, color, or membership in a language minority group will be less able to remedy that discrimination through the courts. Such a ruling would fly in the face of the anti-discriminatory aims of both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the VRA itself.





Important dates

Oral argument is scheduled for October 15, 2025

Who is on each side?

Petitioners: Louisiana and Nancy Landry, in her official capacity as the Louisiana Secretary of State, Alice Washington, Clee Earnest Lowe, Power Coalition for Equity and Justice, Ambrose Sims, Davante Lewis, Dorothy Nairne, Martha Davis, Edwin Rene Soule, Press Robinson, Edgar Cage, and the NAACP Louisiana State Conference (represented by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, ACLU, ACLU of Louisiana, Louisiana Justice Institute, Harvard Election Law Clinic, Paul Weiss, and Adcock Law)

Respondents: Philip Callais, Lloyd Price, Bruce Odell, Elizabeth Ersoff, Albert Caissie, Daniel Weir, Joyce LaCour, Candy Carroll Peavy, Tanya Whitney, Mike Johnson, Grover Joseph Rees, and Rolfe McCollister (represented by Graves Garrett Greim and Paul Loy Hurd)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

6. Urias-Orellana v. Bondi, No. 24-777

What is this case about?

The ability of federal courts to overturn an administrative appeals court's determination that asylum applicants do not reasonably fear persecution in their home country.

Background

The Immigration and Nationality Act allows noncitizens who are present in or who arrive in the United States to apply for asylum and other forms of fear-based immigration relief, which they can be granted if they qualify as a refugee, meaning they have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. If an immigration judge orders the removal of a noncitizen asylum applicant, that person can appeal their denial of asylum to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) and then to a federal court of appeals. Members of the BIA are appointed by the U.S. Attorney General, while federal judges must be confirmed by the Senate.

The question in this case is whether the federal court of appeals must defer to the Board of Immigration Appeals' judgment that a noncitizen's particular circumstances are not severe enough to constitute "persecution" under the law, or whether the federal court can instead make its own legal determination based on the undisputed record.

This case pits the conservative movement's opposition to courts' deference to federal agencies (exemplified in the 2024 Supreme Court decision *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*) against its opposition to full judicial review and due process for noncitizens facing imminent removal.



Question presented

“Whether a federal court of appeals must defer to the BIA’s judgment that a given set of undisputed facts does not demonstrate mistreatment severe enough to constitute ‘persecution’ under 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(42).”

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Supreme Court holds that federal courts must defer to the BIA’s judgment that particular noncitizens are not eligible for asylum, it will leave noncitizens with fewer legal protections from removal even where facts and the law support their asylum claims. It would also place additional power in the BIA, an administrative body that is more under the control of the political whims of any given presidential administration than the federal courts are. Additionally, ruling for agency deference in a way that supports President Trump’s deportation goals after the Court spent years undermining agency deference to many of President Biden’s initiatives could lead to allegations that the Court’s decisions are driven by political ends rather than the neutral application of law.

Important dates

The United States’ brief is due on October 9, 2025, and amicus briefs supporting its position are due one week later.

Who is on each side?

Petitioners: Douglas Humberto Urias-Orellana, Sayra Illiana Gamez-Mejia, and their minor child G.E.U.G. (represented by Latham & Watkins LLP and MacMurray & Associates)

Respondents: United States Attorney General Pamela Jo Bondi

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

7. Case v. Montana, No. 24-624

What is this case about?

Under what circumstances law enforcement officers can enter a person’s home without a warrant.

Background

The Fourth Amendment protects people from unreasonable searches and seizures, meaning that usually law enforcement officers need a warrant signed by a judge to enter a person’s home without their consent. If officers violate that rule and find evidence of a crime inside a person’s home, that person can ask a court to disregard that evidence on the grounds that it was unlawfully obtained. But there is an exception to the general warrant rule when officers are seeking to provide emergency assistance, based on a belief that someone is seriously



injured or in imminent danger.

The question in this case is whether officers must have “probable cause” to believe that an emergency is taking place to take advantage of the exception to the warrant requirement, as opposed to the lower standard of just a “reasonable suspicion.”

The petitioner in this case was shot by police officers in his home after his former girlfriend called the police to report that she believed he may commit suicide. Though officers were familiar with the petitioner and suspected he may not in fact be seriously injured or in imminent danger, they entered his home without a warrant nearly an hour later. Once in the house, the officers obtained criminal evidence against the petitioner, which the petitioner sought to suppress on the grounds that the officers were not lawfully present in his home when they found it.

Question Presented

“Whether law enforcement may enter a home without a search warrant based on less than probable cause that an emergency is occurring, or whether the emergency-aid exception requires probable cause.”

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If law enforcement officers only need a “reasonable suspicion” of an emergency happening within someone’s house to enter without a warrant, our Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches within our homes will have a significantly larger loophole and could be increasingly used for warrantless entry in communities across the nation.

Important dates

Oral argument is scheduled for October 15, 2025

Who is on each side?

Petitioners: William Trevor Case (represented by Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, and Hull Swingley & Betchie)

Respondents: Montana

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).



8. Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump, No. 24-1287 (consolidated with No. 25-250)

What is this case about?

The President's authority to impose tariffs.

Background

In April 2025, President Trump announced he was imposing steep tariffs on imported goods from numerous individual countries, claiming emergency authority to do so under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Prior to this, IEEPA has never previously been used to impose tariffs.

The Constitution grants to Congress, not the President, the authority to regulate foreign commerce, impose tariffs, and collect revenue.

Several businesses and a group of states sued the Trump-Vance administration, arguing that IEEPA does not grant the President the authority to impose tariffs. In August, the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit agreed with the plaintiffs in one of the two cases, holding that the Constitution places the power to impose taxes and tariffs "exclusively in the legislative branch." The Supreme Court agreed to hear both cases, consolidating them into this one matter.

This case will test whether the Supreme Court—which previously struck down Biden-Harris administration priorities like student loan forgiveness on the theory that those policies violated the "major questions doctrine"—will apply that theory equally to tariffs, which dwarf student loans in size and significance.

Questions presented

(24-1287): "Whether IEEPA authorizes the President to impose tariffs."

(25-250):

1. "Whether the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), Pub. L. No. 95-





223, Tit. II, 91 Stat. 1626, authorizes the tariffs imposed by President Trump pursuant to the national emergencies declared or continued in Proclamation 10,886 and Executive Orders 14,157, 14,193, 14,194, 14,195, and 14,257, as amended.”

2. “If IEEPA authorizes the tariffs, whether the statute unconstitutionally delegates legislative authority to the President.”

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Supreme Court holds that President Trump has the authority to impose his tariffs, costs for a wide range of goods will rise, disproportionately affecting individuals with less disposable income. The Yale Budget Lab [estimates](#) that these price increases could cost American households \$2,400 in 2025. On the other hand, if the Supreme Court holds that the tariffs are unlawful, it is not clear whether the Trump-Vance administration will refund the billions of dollars it has already collected in IEEPA tariffs—much less refund consumers for the extra money they paid while the tariffs were in effect.

Important dates

The administration’s brief is due September 19, and amicus briefs supporting the administration or neither side are due September 23. Briefs from the parties opposing the tariffs are due October 20, and amicus briefs supporting them are due October 24. Oral argument will be held November 5.

Who is on each side?

**Note that the Trump-Vance administration is both a petitioner in one matter and respondent in the other*

Petitioners:

(24-1287): Learning Resources Inc. and hand2mind Inc. (represented by Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld)

(25-250): President Trump, United States of America, Executive Office of the President; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Kristi Noem in her official capacity as Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Rodney S. Scott in his official capacity as Commissioner for CBP, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, Jamieson Greer in his official capacity as U.S. Trade Representative, and Howard Lutnick, Secretary of Commerce

Respondents:

(24-1287): President Trump, in his official capacity, Kristi Noem in her official capacity as Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Scott Bessent in his official capacity as Secretary of the Department of the Treasury, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Howard W. Lutnick in his official capacity as Secretary of



Commerce, U.S. Department of Commerce, Pete Flores in his official capacity as Acting Commissioner of Customs & Border Protection, U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Jamieson Greer in his official capacity U.S. Trade Representative, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative

(25-250): V.O.S. Selections, Inc., Plastic Services and Products, LLC d/b/a Genova Pipe, MicroKits, LLC; FishUSA Inc., and Terry Precision Cycling LLC (represented by Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, Milbank LLP, Liberty Justice Center, and Ilya Somin) and the States of Oregon, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, and Vermont

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

9. *Trump v. Slaughter*, No. 25-332

What is this case about?

Separation of powers, and bipartisan representation in independent federal agencies.

Background

Since his second inauguration, President Trump has attempted to fire several Democratic members of multimember, bipartisan independent federal agencies like the Federal Reserve, Federal Trade Commission, and National Transportation Safety Board. To enable those officials to do their jobs independently, Congress has limited the President's authority to remove those officials before their terms end unless there is cause to do so. This prevents the President from firing officials for political reasons. The Supreme Court upheld Congress's power to do this, beginning in 1935. Many of the officials unlawfully fired by President Trump have sued, and lower courts have temporarily reinstated them while their cases proceed.

Despite not formally overturning its 90-year precedent, the Supreme Court has used its shadow docket to allow several of President Trump's firings to go into effect while litigation continues. This case, regarding President Trump's firing of Federal Trade Commissioner Rebecca Slaughter, originally arose on the Court's shadow docket. On September 22, the Court granted the Trump-Vance administration's emergency request allowing her firing to go into effect at least temporarily and agreed to hear the case on the merits.

Questions presented

1. "Whether the statutory removal protections for members of the Federal Trade Commission violate the separation of powers and, if so, whether *Humphrey's Executor v. United States*, 295 U. S. 602 (1935), should be overruled."
2. "Whether a federal court may prevent a person's removal from public office, either through relief at equity or at law."



What could the outcome mean for communities?

Bipartisan independent commissions work on important issues and are designed to operate free from extreme political influence and corruption. Allowing President Trump to fire members of these boards without cause undermines those protections and makes all of us more vulnerable to discrimination and fraud from both the government and private corporations.

Important dates

The Court will receive briefs in the case this fall and hear oral argument in December.

Who is on each side?

Applicants: Donald J. Trump, Andrew N. Ferguson in his official capacity as Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, Federal Trade Commission, David B. Robbins in his official capacity as the Executive Director for the Federal Trade Commission

Respondents: Rebecca Kelly Slaughter and Alvaro M. Bedoya (represented by Clarick Gueron Reisbaum, Protect Democracy Project, and Harvard Law School's Democracy and Rule of Law Clinic)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

Shadow Docket

There are some significant emergency petitions that are pending before the Court that are important to watch:

1. *Trump v. Cook*, No. 25A312

What is this case about?

Separation of powers and bipartisan representation in independent federal agencies.

Background

This case resembles a number of other cases in which President Trump has attempted to fire Democratic members of multimember, bipartisan independent federal agencies like the Federal Trade Commission and the National Transportation Safety Board. To enable those officials to do their jobs independently, Congress has limited the President's authority to remove those officials before their terms end unless there is cause to do so. This prevents the President from firing officials for political reasons. The Supreme Court has upheld Congress'





power to do this, beginning in 1935. Many of the officials unlawfully fired by President Trump have sued, and lower courts have temporarily reinstated some while their cases proceed.

Despite not formally overturning its 90-year precedent, the Court has used its shadow docket to allow several of President Trump's firings to go into effect while litigation continues.

This case addresses President Trump's firing of Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook over allegations that she committed mortgage fraud prior to taking office. The district court prevented the government from removing her, finding that even if she committed mortgage fraud (which reports indicate may be [untrue](#)), she could not legally be fired for conduct that occurred before she joined the Fed's Board. Additionally, both the district court and court of appeals noted that Cook was not provided with meaningful advance notice nor the opportunity for a hearing to respond to the allegations prior to being fired, violating her constitutional right to due process.

The Trump-Vance administration asked the Supreme Court for a stay that would allow it to remove Cook from her post while the merits of the district court decision are resolved on appeal. On October 1, the Court deferred the stay application and allowed Cook to remain in her post, breaking with its recent trend of allowing President Trump's firings to go into effect at least temporarily. The Court also took the rare step of scheduling an oral argument on the stay application in January 2026.

What could the outcome mean for communities?

Bipartisan independent commissions work on important issues and are designed to operate free from political influence and corruption. Allowing President Trump to fire members of these boards without cause undermines those protections and makes all of us more vulnerable to discrimination and fraud from both the government and private corporations. Undermining the independence of the Fed and giving the president more influence puts the proper functioning of the U.S. economy at risk.

Who is on each side?

Applicants: Donald J. Trump.

Respondents: Lisa D. Cook, Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (represented by Lowell & Associates and Democracy Defenders Fund)

Democracy Forward Foundation filed an amicus [brief](#) with the Court on behalf of lawyer and historian Jed Shugerman opposing the Trump-Vance administration's application for a stay, explaining that roles like Cook's historically could not be terminated without the procedural protections of fair notice and meaningful process.

See the latest developments in this case on the Supreme Court [docket](#).



2. Noem v. National TPS Alliance, No. 25A326

What is this case about?

Immigration and temporary protected status.

Background

The Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program allows the federal government to designate a foreign country as unsafe for nationals of that country to return safely due to armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. Once a country receives a TPS designation, nationals of that country can apply for TPS status, which offers beneficiaries protections from deportation and the opportunity to obtain driver's licenses and employment authorization. In 2021, the Biden-Harris administration designated Venezuela for TPS, and that designation was later extended.

Shortly after the inauguration, the Trump-Vance administration attempted to revoke Venezuela's TPS designation, throwing hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan TPS beneficiaries into legal limbo. A district court issued a preliminary injunction protecting TPS beneficiaries while litigation proceeded. The Supreme Court, acting on its shadow docket, lifted the injunction and allowed the revocation to take effect. Later, the district court issued a permanent injunction, concluding based on a new claim and new evidence that the TPS revocation was unlawful. The Trump-Vance administration has returned to the shadow docket for relief from that permanent injunction.

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Supreme Court again uses its shadow docket to allow the Trump-Vance administration to revoke the TPS designation for Venezuela, over 300,000 Venezuelan TPS holders will lose their legal right to work and drive. Additionally, they will be at immediate risk of immigration detention and deportation.

Who is on each side?

Applicants: Kristi Noem in her official capacity as Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the United States of America.

Respondents: National TPS Alliance, Mariela Gonzalez, Freddy Arape Rivas, M.H., Cecilia Gonzalez Herrera, Alba Purica Hernandez, E.R., Hendrina Vivas Castillo, Viles Dorsainvil, A.C.A., and Sherika Blanc (represented by UCLA School of Law's Center for Immigration Law and Policy, National Day Laborer Organizing Network, ACLU of Southern California, ACLU of Northern California, and Haitian Bridge Alliance)

See the latest developments in this case on the Supreme Court [docket](#).



3. Orr v. Trump, No. 25A319

What is this case about?

Gender markers on passports for transgender, intersex, and nonbinary Americans.

Background

The day President Trump was inaugurated into his second term, he issued an executive order denying the existence of transgender people and promoting discrimination against transgender people across federal government programs. One provision within the executive order directed the State Department to require government-issued identity documents like passports to display the holder's sex assigned at birth, reversing a policy under which applicants could self-select the gender marker (M, F, or X) that accurately reflects the sex they live as and express.

Several transgender, intersex, and nonbinary people who were subsequently unable to obtain accurate passports brought a class-action lawsuit. The district court granted a preliminary injunction, holding that the State Department's new policy was likely arbitrary and capricious and based on impermissible animus toward transgender individuals. With that injunction in place, transgender, nonbinary, and intersex individuals (including those who are not named plaintiffs in the case) have again been able to obtain accurate passports. The Trump-Vance administration has asked the Supreme Court to end the injunction and permit the government to discriminate in pending and future passport applications as the case progresses through the courts.

What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Supreme Court allows the Trump-Vance administration to reinstate its discriminatory and inaccurate passport gender-marker policy, people obtaining or renewing a passport whose gender identity or presentation differs from their sex assigned at birth will be forced to disclose that fact any time they present their passport, placing them at increased risk of discrimination, harassment, and even violence.

Who is on each side?

Applicants: Donald J. Trump, the United States of America, Marco Rubio in his official capacity as Secretary of State, and the U.S. Department of State

Respondents: Ashton Orr, Zaya Perysian, Sawyer Soe, Chastain Anderson, Drew Hall, Bella Boe, Reid Solomon-Lane, Viktor Agatha, David Doe, AC Goldberg, Ray Gorlin, and Chelle LeBlanc, on behalf of themselves and others similarly situated (represented by ACLU and Covington & Burling LLP)

See the latest developments in this case on the Supreme Court [docket](#).



4. We the Patriots USA Inc. v. Ventura Unified School District, No. 25A322

What is this case about?

Religious exemptions from public school vaccine requirements.

Background

All states require students who attend public schools to be vaccinated against certain diseases, though specific vaccine requirements and the availability of medical or religious exemptions from those requirements vary between states. California is one of five states that does not allow religious exemptions from its school vaccine requirement.

In this case, a California mother and her child and the right-wing anti-vaccination group We the Patriots USA sued a California school district, arguing that the lack of religious exemptions from the vaccine requirement violates parents' right to free exercise of their religion. The district court refused to grant a temporary restraining order requiring the school district to allow the unvaccinated child to attend while litigation continues, noting that emergency relief was not warranted because the mother delayed bringing her case and school was out for the summer. The court of appeals agreed, and the plaintiffs now ask the Supreme Court to reverse that ruling.



What could the outcome mean for communities?

If the Supreme Court allows the child in this case to attend public school without complying with the vaccine requirement or meeting the criteria for a medical exemption, members of that child's community, including those with compromised immune systems who cannot safely be vaccinated, will be at increased risk of contracting or spreading preventable diseases. Such a ruling could encourage new or renewed challenges to vaccine requirements in public schools nationwide, weakening herd immunity and threatening the safety of public education.

Who is on each side?

Applicants: We The Patriots USA, Inc. and Jane Doe (represented by Atkinson Law LC and Jennifer W. Kennedy)

Respondents: Ventura Unified School District ("VUSD"), Antonio Castro in his official capacity as VUSD's superintendent, Erik Nasarenko in his official capacity as Ventura County District Attorney, Sara Brucker in her official capacity as Ventura County Deputy District



Attorney, Tony Thurmond in his official capacity as California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Erica Pan in her official capacity as Director of the California Department of Public Health.

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

Supplement to Summer Update – The Shadow Docket

The Court has continued to issue significant shadow-docket decisions during its summer recess period, after the publication of ***The People's Guide to the U.S. Supreme Court: Summer Update 2025***. Three cases worth noting as indications of how the Court may decide critical cases this term include:

1. *NIH v. APHA, No. 25A103*

What is this case about?

Health research funding, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) related initiatives.

Background

The National Institutes of Health, the world's largest public funder of biomedical research, abruptly canceled \$800 million in research funding to grant recipients based on the Trump-Vance administration's objection to DEI-related initiatives. Researchers, a union, and more than a dozen Democratic-led states (on behalf of their public universities) sued and a federal district court temporarily paused the funding cuts while litigation proceeded, allowing the research to continue. A federal court of appeals also kept that pause in place.

What did the Court hold, and what does the outcome mean for communities?

On August 21, 2025, the Supreme Court allowed the funding cuts to go into effect, devastating researchers and all those who rely on them to develop lifesaving medical care. The decision was deeply fractured; a five-justice majority held that the challenge to the anti-DEI guidance itself could proceed in the district court, but a different five-justice majority held that the challenge to the funding cuts themselves must proceed in a separate court. As Justice Jackson noted in her partial dissent, this frustrating outcome is one that "no party advocated for."

Who is on each side?

Applicants: National Institutes of Health, Jay Bhattacharya in his official capacity as Director of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in his official capacity as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services

Respondents: American Public Health Association, IBIS Reproductive Health, United Auto Workers, Brittany Charlton, Katie Edwards, Peter Lurie, Nicole Maphis (represented by



ACLU, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Protect Democracy Project, and Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel), Massachusetts, California, and 14 other states

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

2. Noem v. Perdomo, No. 25A169

What is this case about?

Racial profiling and immigration.

Background

Federal officials, acting pursuant to President Trump's expressed goals to arrest, detain, and deport one million immigrants from the United States this year, have been conducting aggressive immigration raids in the Los Angeles area, targeting people in large part based on four factors: apparent race or ethnicity, speaking Spanish or accented English, presence in a particular location (e.g. bus stop, car wash, etc.), and apparent occupation (e.g. construction, agriculture, etc.).

Individual U.S. citizens and organizations whose members have been subject to these violent raids sued the Trump administration, arguing that relying on those four factors without further individualized suspicion amounts to racial profiling and is unconstitutional under the Fourth Amendment. A district court issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the administration from relying on "solely" those four factors in immigration enforcement in the Los Angeles area, and a court of appeals largely upheld that injunction.

What did the court hold, and what does the outcome mean for communities?

On September 8, 2025, the Supreme Court stayed the injunction in an unsigned order, allowing the Trump-Vance administration's immigration enforcement based on racial profiling to continue. The majority did not explain its reasoning; of the six who apparently voted in favor of staying the injunction, only Justice Kavanaugh wrote a concurrence explaining why he supported that outcome. Justice Sotomayor led the three liberal justices in dissent, writing: "We should not have to live in a country where the Government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish, and appears to work a low wage job."

Who is on each side?

Applicants: Kristi Noem in her official capacity as Secretary of Homeland Security, Todd M. Lyons in his official capacity as Acting Director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Rodney S. Scott in his official capacity as Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, Michael W. Banks in his official capacity as Chief of U.S. Border Patrol, Kash Patel in his official capacity as Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Pam Bondi in her official capacity as Attorney General, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Ernesto Santacruz Jr. in his official capacity as Acting Field Office Director for Los Angeles U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Eddy Wang in his official capacity as Special Agent in Charge for Los Angeles Homeland Security Investigations for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Gregory K.



Bovino in his official capacity as Chief Patrol Agent for El Centro Sector for U.S. Border Patrol, Jeffrey D. Stalnaker in his official capacity as Acting Chief Patrol Agent of San Diego Sector for U.S. Border Patrol, Akil Davis in his official capacity as Assistant Director in Charge of Los Angeles Office for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Bilal A. Essayli in his official capacity as U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California

Respondents: Pedro Vasquez Perdomo, Carlos Alexander Osorto, Isaac Villegas Molina, Jorge Hernandez Viramontes, Jason Brian Gavidia, Los Angeles Worker Center Network, United Farm Workers of America, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, and Immigrant Defenders Law Center (represented by Munger, Tolles & Olson, ACLU Immigrants Rights Project, ACLU of Southern California, ACLU of Northern California, UC Irvine Immigrant and Racial Justice Solidarity Clinic, Public Counsel)

See the full list of amicus briefs on the Supreme Court [docket](#).

3. Department of State v. AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition, No. 25A269, and Trump v. Global Health Council, No. 25A227

What is this case about?

Foreign aid and separation of powers.

Background

The Trump-Vance administration has moved aggressively to cut billions of dollars in funding to foreign aid programs. American organizations and businesses that receive those funds, or have members that receive funds, sued, claiming that President Trump does not have the authority to withhold money appropriated by Congress specifically for foreign aid, and that he is affirmatively violating the Constitution by not ensuring that Congress's laws are faithfully executed.

This case has moved rapidly up and down the courts, coming to the Supreme Court's shadow docket three times as of September 2025.

What did the court hold, and what does the outcome mean for communities?

On September 25, 2025, the Court stayed an order requiring the Trump-Vance administration to obligate \$4 billion in frozen foreign aid by September 30, 2025. In an unsigned order, the majority emphasized the president's authority over foreign affairs while noting that the decision was not a final ruling on the merits of the case. For the dissenters, that distinction offered little solace. The stay means the funds won't be spent at all because they expire. "The effect is to prevent the funds from reaching their intended recipients — not just now but (because of their impending expiration) for all time," Justice Kagan wrote, joined by Justices Sotomayor and Jackson.

The stakes are immense. If current foreign aid cuts continue through 2030, an estimated 14 million people worldwide who might otherwise survive could die. Despite its lifesaving



impact, foreign aid accounts for only a tiny fraction of the federal budget—UCLA health policy research shows that the average U.S. taxpayer contributes about 18 cents per day to USAID, funds that have helped save more than 90 million lives over the past two decades ([NPR](#)). Cuts could also fuel disease outbreaks within the United States ([NYT](#)).

Who is on each side?

Applicants:

(No. 25A227): Donald J. Trump, Marco Rubio in his official capacity as Secretary of State, Russell T. Vought in his official capacity as Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Acting Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Jeremy Lewin in his official capacity as Under Secretary of Foreign Assistance for Humanitarian Affairs and Religious Freedom at the Department of State, the U.S. Department of State, USAID, and OMB

(No. 25A269): U.S. Department of State, USAID, OMB, Marco Rubio in his official capacity as Secretary of State, Russell T. Vought in his official capacity as Director of OMB and Acting Administrator of USAID, and Donald J. Trump

Respondents:

(No. 25A227): Global Health Council, Small Business Association for International Companies, HIAS, Management Sciences for Health, Inc., Chemonics International, Inc., DAI Global LLC, Democracy International, Inc., and the American Bar Association (represented by Jacobson Lawyers Group, Arnold & Porter)

(No. 25A269): AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition, Journalism Development Network, Inc., and the Center for Victims of Torture (represented by Public Citizen)

See the latest developments in this case on the Supreme Court [docket](#).