

# Five ways this Supreme Court could change America

Ever since Donald Trump appointed three conservative justices to the Supreme court during his four-year presidential term, it seemed to many like it was just a matter of time before the highest judicial body in the US started flexing its muscles by tackling some of the hot-button political and legal issues in the country today.

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With the start of a new court term on Monday, that time may have arrived.

The upcoming docket has a handful of cases - on topics such as abortion, gun control, national security and religion - that could not only set lasting precedent for US courts, but fundamentally change the fabric of US society.

More than few a political activists across the spectrum have taken notice, prompting some - particularly on the left - to issue dire warnings about the vast power of the judicial branch and suggest ways that power could be restrained, either through changing the composition of the Supreme Court or curtailing its authority.

All this criticism has led conservatives on the court to bristle at the accusations that they have a political agenda.

Abortion demonstrations Image source, Getty Images

Image caption, Supporters of abortion access faced off with opponents in demonstrations outside the US Supreme Court this weekend

Justice Samuel Alito said critics were undertaking "unprecedented efforts to intimidate the court". Amy Coney Barrett, who replaced liberal justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg after her death last October, pushed back against those who say the justices are "a bunch of partisan hacks". Clarence Thomas, the longest-serving justice on the court, blamed the media for making it seem like judges were like politicians who rule based on their "personal preferences".

If the conservative justices all vote together one of these major cases - dismantling abortion protections, for instance - such pleas may fall on deaf ears.

Abortion

This will be one of the most-watched cases in recent Supreme Court history, as anti-abortion activists believe the conservative-dominated court could finally abandon nearly five decades of precedent under the landmark case *Roe v Wade* and allow states to impose new restrictions on abortions during the first six months of pregnancy.

The case involves a Mississippi law prohibiting most abortions after the 15th week or pregnancy - a law that was designed from the start to give the court a chance to change course on this politically heated issue.

Thousands march for abortion rights across US

Gun control

For most of US history, the Supreme Court made little effort to define the "right to bear arms" outlined in the Second Amendment to the US Constitution. That all changed in the landmark 2008 case *District of Columbia v Heller*, in which a narrow majority of the justices upheld a constitutional right to own a handgun.

The latest target for gun-rights advocates are strict city and state regulations that they say infringe on that right. In the cross-hairs this term is New York City's tightly restricted access to concealed-carry handgun licences - a case that could give the justices an opportunity to rule that carrying a pistol, even in big cities, should be much easier.