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USA

The U.S. Supreme Court: Reaction, Corruption, Disgrace, Public Repudiation

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The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), the most conservative court in 80 years, has utterly discredited itself in the eyes of most Americans with its anti-democratic decisions, the corruption of some justices, and the identification of some with the far-right insurrection and attempted coup of January 6, 2021. The Supreme Court has always been made up largely of people from the ruling class or its political elite, but not for decades has it done so in such a clearly biased and transparent manner. Today 60 percent of Americans disapprove of the court and many hold it in utter contempt.

SCOTUS justices who serve for life are appointed by the president with the approval of the Senate, a very undemocratic institution that tends to reflect the interests of the ruling class. From the late 1930s through the 1960s Democratic Party presidents—Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson—appointed most of the justices, giving the court a liberal character. In those years, the rights of workers, Black people, and women were strengthened and expanded. With the end of the post-war economic expansion, starting in the 1980s the court became more conservative, and by the 2000s, it became a rightwing court.

SCOTUS' nine justices reflect the country in terms of race, religion, and gender: six are white, two are Black, one is Latina, and two are Jewish, perhaps the most diverse court in U.S. history. But it is now the most conservative court in four decades, dominated by Republican appointees who have passed increasingly reactionary decisions. Republican president George H. W. Bush appointed Justice Clarence Thomas and George W. Bush chose Chief Justice John Roberts and Samuel A. Alito, while Republican president Donald Trump appointed three, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. The right now has a six-to-three majority that has completely altered the direction of the court.

The court's most important single decision was the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* of 2022, that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 SCOTUS ruling that had established women's constitutional right to abortion. But in other decisions, the court has also undone racial discrimination laws, undermined protection of voting rights, compromised the separation of church and state, weakened federal regulatory agencies, and subverted laws for the control of firearms.

At the same time, we have learned of serious corruption in the court. Justice Clarence Thomas accepted financial gifts from billionaire and Republican donor Harlan Crow. Crow paid for the private school education of Thomas' grandnephew and adopted "son," for the house where Thomas' mother lived, for many vacation trips for Thomas in Crow's private jets and yachts, and gave half a million dollars to Thomas's wife Ginni for her rightwing political foundation and paid her a \$120,000 annual salary. Ginni Thomas supports the Trump's "stop the steal" movement that falsely claims he won the election. Justice Alito accepted a \$100,000 Alaska fishing trip from hedge fund manager Paul Singer. Both Crow and Singer are men who have cases that have come before the court, and neither Thomas nor Alito reported their gifts, nor do they apologize.

Now we've learned that Alito flew flags identified with Trump's "stop the steal" and with the January 6 insurrection, one an upside-down U.S. flag at his home and the other a Christian nationalist "appeal to heaven" flag at his vacation home. Within the highest court in the land, we have two corrupt justices, both of whom are linked to the far-right, six conservatives altogether who overturn regulations and democratically decided state and federal legislation. No wonder the court is despised by so many.

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