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# THE BENCHLINE

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This Benchline will take a retrospective look at the federal judiciary in 2025. This year, President Trump prioritized federal judicial nominees who demonstrated loyalty above independence, all while his Administration issued unprecedented executive orders. At the same time, the Supreme Court **overturned** decades of established legal precedent, often with no explanation or accountability. Luckily, many lower court judges held the line against authoritarian overreach.

AFJ will continue to highlight attacks on our democracy. Our continued efforts to educate the public on judicial nominations remain critical in the broader fight to protect our democracy. We've worked to make sure the public is activated and informed, and our impact is evident through **local media coverage** of the latest judicial nominees.

We deserve a judiciary that respects the separation of powers, serves our communities, enforces the civil rights of everyday people, and represents the full breadth of diversity in our country. Research, education, and advocacy are more urgent than ever, and we appreciate your continued support and engagement.

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## THE SUPREME COURT

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This past year, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in several major cases, with **topics** covering religious freedoms, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental and administrative law, immigration law, and disability rights. The Court issued several concerning decisions, including decisions that affirmed state bans on gender affirming care, restricted educators' ability to offer LGBTQ+ inclusive stories, and limited the federal courts' ability to issue universal injunctions.

There were a few rulings that helped keep our communities safer and supported access to justice. The Supreme Court upheld the ATF's ghost guns regulation in *Bondi v. VanDerStok*, which will help keep dangerous weapons off our streets. In *A.J.T. v. Osseo Area Schools*, the Court unanimously ruled to make it easier for students with disabilities to seek damages.

Unfortunately, the **new term** will likely result in many consequential and harmful decisions. The Justices will weigh in on cases that could reshape environmental accountability, dismantle campaign finance limits, and alter the future of voting rights. Oral arguments in some of these cases have already begun. This term will test the balance of corporate power, democracy, equality, and fundamental rights in the year ahead, and we will keep you updated as decisions are issued.



AFJ CONTINUES TO  
**OPPOSE AND EXPOSE**  
EXTREME NOMINEES WHO  
**THREATEN OUR RIGHTS.**

So far, President Trump has confirmed 26 federal judges out of 34 nominees (as of December 18). Many seem to have been hand selected for their loyalty to Trump. Nearly all of Trump's nominees are prosecutors, former corporate attorneys, or conservative state judges. Almost all of them are white, and only eight of those nominated are women. The good news? Trump has nominated far fewer judges this year than in 2017. That year, he nominated 49 district court and 19 circuit court judges.

Many of Trump's **nominees** have been even more ideologically extreme than before. Every nominee this year **acknowledged** only that President Biden was the certified winner of the 2020 election — proxy language for election denialism. Nominees like **Emil Bove** (Third Circuit), **Eric Tung** (Ninth Circuit), and **Jennifer Mascott** (Third Circuit) have demonstrated a partisan leaning, hostility towards civil rights, and have spent their careers siding with corporations over consumers.

For example, **Bove** previously served as Trump's personal defense attorney and used questionable tactics while litigating cases. He is one of many judges who is neither fit nor qualified for the position.

Not only were Trump's nominees some of the most extreme, but the Trump administration also bucked the long-established process for judicial nominations. The Administration announced nominees through Truth Social instead of through official White House channels. Two slates of nominees were not **publicly announced** until mere days before their scheduled Senate Judiciary hearings. Media outlets including **Reuters** and **Bloomberg** were getting their information from our website before learning about the latest nominees from the Trump Administration.

Federal judges make consequential decisions that have decades-long impact. The public deserves nothing less than full transparency and a robust public discourse before any nominee is considered and confirmed. The Administration's refusal to follow standard procedures to ensure timely access to information continues to be a gross disruption of important, protective norms.

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## HOLDING

# THE BENCHLINE

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Even though the Supreme Court sided with Trump's concerning power grabs, many district court judges, appointed by both Republicans and Democrats, maintained a fair, independent, and trustworthy judiciary. Court Accountability's recent **analysis** of court decisions at all levels reveals that at the district court level, Republican and Democratic appointed judges ruled against the Trump Administration in near equal proportions. It's encouraging to see data that supports the examples we share in this newsletter. We will continue highlighting judges who uphold the rule of law, maintain democratic norms, and keep government and institutions accountable. These judges may be the very last line of defense keeping our democracy intact.

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