

The Supreme Court Update - May 15, 2025

by Ian Blodger, Jessica M. Leano, and Brock Huebner

The Supreme Court of the United States issued one decision today:

Barnes v. Felix, No. 23-1239: This criminal procedure case concerns the proper scope of analysis for Fourth Amendment excessive force claims. In this case, a driver was pulled over for suspected toll violations. When the driver refused to exit the vehicle and began to drive away, the law enforcement officer jumped onto the doorsill and fatally shot the driver. The driver's estate sued the law enforcement officer for use of excessive force under the Fourth Amendment. The lower courts granted summary judgment for the officer under the Fifth Circuit's "moment-of-threat" rule, which evaluates the reasonableness of the use of force based solely on whether an officer was in danger at the moment of the threat, and does not consider the events leading up to the shooting. The lower courts in this case thus looked only to the two seconds when the officer was on the moving car's doorsill, and concluded that, at that moment, the officer could then have reasonably believed his life was in danger. In a unanimous decision authored by Justice Kagan, the Court reversed and held that the Fourth Amendment requires courts to evaluate the "totality of the circumstances" related to the incident, an analysis which has no time limit and requires consideration of facts and circumstances prior to the shooting. The Court remanded the case to decide whether the officer's use of force in this case was reasonable based on the totality of the circumstances. Justice Kavanaugh (joined by Justices Thomas, Alito, and Barrett) filed a concurrence "to add a few points about the dangers of traffic stops for police officers."

View the [Court's decision](#).

Related People

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Related Capabilities

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