

Over our great history, there has been no shortage of controversial topics. These complex issues have been debated through our democratic process, by our representatives, and by our courts. The nine justices on the Supreme Court will decide some of the topics discussed below. Others will be decided by your elected officials in Congress and the president. It is in the best interest of our nation to have engaged citizens who can work together on a compromised solution.

Gun Control

The topic of gun control intensified after the February 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where 17 students and faculty members were murdered by a 19-year-old with an assault rifle. Gun control is a complicated issue that will require actions from lawmakers on both spectrums. It remains one of the most divisive issues in the United States.

While some Americans want to ban assault-type weapons, tighten the methods for purchase of firearms, and passing other stricter gun laws, others take an opposing view. “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” This is the Second Amendment, and its meaning has been debated over and over again in the court system, with the latest rulings in favor of gun ownership.

Immigration

The Supreme Court’s decision upholding the Trump administration’s controversial travel ban against predominantly Muslim countries, the consideration of an immigration bill in Congress, and the decision to separate families at the southern border have reignited an intense national debate over how the U.S. should treat individuals who seek to enter our country. Throughout its history, the United States has been a nation of immigrants. To put it simply, all Americans come from families of immigrants (except for Native Americans).

Americans offer varying perspectives regarding immigration. The pro and con arguments center around the impact on the U.S. labor force, outdated immigration policy, the tax burden of undocumented workers, possible terrorism and crime, to name a few. It is a complex issue requiring compromise. In addition to the economic benefits it meets the values and beliefs of our country.

Gay Rights / Religious Liberty

Can a Colorado baker refuse to create a wedding cake for a gay couple? A recent decision from the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Jack Phillips, the owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop. A brief from the narrow decision stated “Forcing Phillips to create expression for and participate in a ceremony that violates his sincerely held religious beliefs invades his First Amendment rights.”

Retiring Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy often casts the deciding vote in closely divided cases on major social issues. On the one side, Justice Kennedy has written every major Supreme Court decision protecting gay men and lesbians. On the other, he is the court’s most ardent defender of free speech. Watch for continuing decisions on free speech and anti-discrimination laws when a new justice replaces Kennedy.

Privacy

The right to privacy is not mentioned in the Constitution, but the Supreme Court has said that several of the amendments create this right. Advances in technology have presented challenges to lawmakers and the courts on how to interpret the Fourth Amendment.

Most Americans carry a cellphone with them at all times, transmitting information about their whereabouts to their phone service provider. Can government officials track suspects by obtaining months of cellphone location data from service providers without getting a warrant? Recently the Justice Department suffered a digital-age defeat from the Supreme Court, which sided with the privacy rights of cellphone users in a dispute over law enforcement tracking their movements.

Civil rights and privacy advocates argued current rules open the doors to state abuse of a citizen’s everyday activities in public and private spaces. The Justice Department has state that if consumers knowingly give their data to third parties, including cellphone providers, their privacy rights are diminished.

QUESTIONS / Express your Opinion

When coupling our principles of government with our organized society, we can come to an agreeable solution on the four topics listed above. Summarize a position on *one* of the topics, giving the “*for*” and “*against*” arguments along with your opinion.

Topic: _____

“For” argument: _____

“Against” argument: _____

My opinion: _____
