

## Covid-19: US Supreme Court backs religious groups over New York caps (BBC November 2020)

1. What did you think of the article?
2. How difficult was it to understand?
3. What do you think about the US Supreme Court's ruling?
4. Do you think the State's attendance limits violated rights to religious freedom?
5. Do you think it was especially harsh?
6. Do you think the Governor was right to put these restrictions in place?
7. Why do you think the three liberal justices dissented, as well as the conservative Chief Justice John Roberts?
8. What do you think about the ruling that, "even in a pandemic, the Constitution cannot be put away and forgotten."? Do you think this is right or should other things be taken into account?
9. Furthermore, the ruling said that "The restrictions at issue here... strike at the very heart of the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty." What do you think of this? Do you think at certain times such freedoms can't be guaranteed?
10. Do you think the US Supreme Court will now shift to a more conservative outlook?
11. Let's look at the vocabulary.
12. Final thoughts.

The US Supreme Court has temporarily blocked New York from enforcing attendance limits at places of worship in areas hit hard by coronavirus.

In a 5-4 vote, the court ruled that the state's congregational cap **violated** rights to religious freedom.

In an unsigned order, it said the rules "**single[d] out** houses of worship for especially **harsh** treatment."

This was one of the first **consequential** rulings since conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett was appointed.

President Donald Trump appointed her to replace liberal predecessor Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died in September.

Justice Barrett voted in the majority, along with other Trump appointees Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.

The three liberal justices **dissented**, as did conservative Chief Justice John Roberts.

Earlier this year, before Justice Ginsburg's death, the court voted to leave similar restrictions in place in California and Nevada.

The US is continuing to battle the world's largest outbreak of coronavirus. Over 12.7 million cases have been recorded nationally, and more than 262,000 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

What was said in court? The Supreme Court's decision was a major victory for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn and Agudath Israel, an Orthodox Jewish congregation, which had challenged the restrictions imposed by New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo.

On 6 October, Governor Cuomo shut down non-essential businesses in targeted areas where coronavirus infections had spiked, as part of efforts to control infection rates. Places of worship were also limited to gatherings of 10 in "red" zones, and 25 in "orange" ones.

In court, the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn said the restrictions unfairly singled out places of worship. Agudath Israel of America also argued that its members were subject to "discriminatory targeting."

New York argued in response that it had been the epicentre of the US coronavirus outbreak in the spring. It also said religious gatherings were being treated less stringently than secular gatherings like concerts, which were banned entirely.

But the Supreme Court's unsigned majority ruled that "even in a pandemic, the Constitution cannot be put away and forgotten. The restrictions at issue here... strike at the very heart of the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty."

The court's action will not have an immediate impact since the groups that sued are no longer subject to the restrictions they fought against.