SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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PANKAJKUMAR S. PATEL, ET AL.,)
Petitioners,)
v.) No. 20-979
MERRICK B. GARLAND,)
ATTORNEY GENERAL,)
Respondent.)
	_

Pages: 1 through 102

Place: Washington, D.C.

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3	PANKAJKUMAR S. PATEL, ET AL.,)
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5	v.) No. 20-979
6	MERRICK B. GARLAND,)
7	ATTORNEY GENERAL,)
8	Respondent.)
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10		
11	Washington, D.C.	
12	Monday, December 6, 20)21
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14	The above-entitled matter	c came on for
15	oral argument before the Supreme	e Court of the
16	United States at 10:00 a.m.	
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1	APPEARANCES:
2	MARK C. FLEMING, ESQUIRE, Boston, Massachusetts; on
3	behalf of the Petitioners.
4	AUSTIN L. RAYNOR, Assistant to the Solicitor General,
5	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf
6	of the Respondent in support.
7	TAYLOR A.R. MEEHAN, ESQUIRE, Chicago, Illinois;
8	Court-appointed amicus curiae in support of the
9	judgment below.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:00 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 20-979,
5	Patel versus Garland.
6	Mr. Fleming.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF MARK C. FLEMING
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
9	MR. FLEMING: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	As the government agrees, section
12	1252(a)(2)(B)(i) does not bar review of the
13	agency's threshold determination that Mr. Patel
14	is ineligible for adjustment of status. That
15	understanding is consistent with the statutory
16	text, context, and history, and it's also
17	consistent with this Court's explanation in
18	Kucana that the (B)(i) bar is limited to
19	decisions made discretionary by legislation.
20	Congress could have written (B)(i)
21	differently. It could have barred review of any
22	individual determination, as it did in
23	subsection $(A)(1)$, or of the final order of
24	removal, as it did in subsection (C).
25	But Congress didn't use those words.

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1 It used "judgment" and specifically "any
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- 2 judgment regarding the granting of relief." And
- 3 nobody has identified any instance in which the
- 4 INA uses "judgment" in the sweeping way
- 5 suggested by the Eleventh Circuit.
- To the extent there's any doubt,
- 7 though, it is resolved by the strong presumption
- 8 of reviewability of agency action, and that's
- 9 especially so because the Eleventh Circuit's
- 10 position, undisputedly, bars all judicial
- 11 review, even for errors of law, of the numerous
- 12 adjustment-of-status decisions that are made
- outside of removal proceedings by U.S.
- 14 Citizenship and Immigration Services. The
- 15 Court-appointed amicus does not deny that or
- 16 attempt to justify it.
- 17 That's enough to resolve this case.
- 18 The Court does not need to resolve the slight
- 19 difference between our reading and the
- 20 government's. We all agree it does not affect
- 21 Mr. Patel's situation. And to the -- to the
- 22 extent that this Court does reach it, we believe
- our reading is preferable, both because it gives
- 24 full meaning to the phrase "regarding the
- 25 granting of relief" -- the government does not,

- 1 but rather treats it as though it weren't even
- 2 in the statute -- and also because our reading
- 3 is easily administrable.
- 4 Jurisdictional lines should be clear,
- 5 and our line is clear. Threshold decisions
- 6 regarding eligibility are not subject to (B)(i);
- 7 the discretionary decision to grant relief to an
- 8 eligible non-citizen is. And, again, if there's
- 9 any doubt, the strong presumption of
- 10 reviewability breaks the tie in our favor.
- 11 And I'd welcome the Court's questions.
- 12 JUSTICE THOMAS: Counsel, normally we
- 13 review judgments or orders and not reasoning.
- 14 It seems as though you're asking us to review
- reasoning as opposed to the order itself.
- MR. FLEMING: So, Justice Thomas, the
- 17 review in an immigration case is of a final
- 18 order of removal. And as this Court said in
- 19 Chadha, the final order of removal subsumes
- 20 everything that goes before.
- 21 The question for purposes of
- 22 interpreting the jurisdictional bar is what
- 23 Congress meant by the phrase "any judgment
- 24 regarding the granting of relief."
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, that seems

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1
      pretty broad.
                MR. FLEMING: Well, it -- it --
 2
 3
      Congress in immediately neighboring sections
      used far broader terms. In the preamble to (B),
 4
      it says "judgment, decision, or action," but
 5
      then (B)(i) only catches "judgment," whereas
 6
 7
      (B)(ii) uses "decision or action," which are
      broader terms. Subsection (A)(i) talks about
 8
 9
      "any individual determination," which is much
10
      broader.
11
                Had Congress wished to bar any
12
      possible determination that goes into evaluating
      an application for adjustment of status, it
13
14
      could have said any individual determination,
15
      any decision or action, or the final order of
16
      removal, which is, in administrative law and
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JUSTICE THOMAS: So, if you wanted --

certainly in immigration law, the final decision

of the agency that includes everything that has

17

18

19

gone before.

- MR. FLEMING: Congress didn't do that.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: -- to accomplish what
- amicus argues, how would you have written it?
- MR. FLEMING: "Any decision or action
- under sections," and then the five types of

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1 removal, which is the language that Congress
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- 2 used in (B)(ii). It simply qualified it by
- 3 saying the decision or action has to be
- 4 specified by statute as in the Attorney
- 5 General's discretion, and that is -- and there
- 6 are other additional contextual clues, but I
- 7 think those are the main ones --
- 8 JUSTICE THOMAS: But I don't --
- 9 MR. FLEMING: -- Congress --
- 10 JUSTICE THOMAS: -- I don't see any
- 11 real difference between what you're -- you
- 12 suggest would do the job versus what's already
- 13 there.
- MR. FLEMING: So there -- there are
- 15 two differences, Justice Thomas.
- One is the word "judgment" in
- 17 administrative law and immigration law is used
- in a narrow way to mean a discretionary
- 19 determination or discretionary decision.
- No one in this case -- not the
- 21 Eleventh Circuit, not the amicus, not the
- 22 parties -- have come up with any use of
- 23 "judgment" in the INA that refers to factual
- 24 findings or refers to judgment in the broad
- 25 sense we would think of it under the Federal

- 1 Rules of Civil Procedure. It's just not used
- 2 that way in administrative law and certainly not
- 3 in -- in immigration law.
- 4 Moreover, we have additional
- 5 contextual cues. Most importantly, it's the
- 6 reasoning that this Court employed in Kucana
- 7 because (B)(ii) uses "any other decision or
- 8 action, which links (B)(i) and (B)(ii) together
- 9 in a way that this Court said shows that both
- 10 sections were directed to decisions made
- 11 discretionary by statute. There is no way to
- 12 reconcile the Eleventh Circuit's view with that
- 13 language in Kucana.
- With respect to the five forms of
- 15 relief that are enumerated, what is it that is
- 16 specified as discretionary by legislation? It's
- 17 not the eligibility factors. It's not whether
- 18 someone like Mr. Patel is admissible to the
- 19 United States. That is a factual issue or an
- 20 issue of mixed law and fact that is frequently
- 21 reviewable and, in fact, is reviewed because it
- is a basis for holding someone removable from
- 23 the country.
- 24 And if the government in this case had
- 25 charged Mr. Patel with being removable because

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1 he misrepresented U.S. citizenship, it would
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- 2 have been reviewable. That very issue would
- 3 have been reviewed on an appeal of the final
- 4 order of removal.
- But, because it was not charged as a
- 6 removability ground but simply as a bar to
- 7 discretionary relief of adjustment of status,
- 8 under the Eleventh Circuit's view, that very
- 9 same issue was not removable. That, we think,
- 10 must be incorrect because Congress does not
- 11 typically allow the jurisdiction of the federal
- 12 courts to turn on the charging decisions of the
- 13 executive. This Court said that much in Kucana.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Fleming, just on
- 15 -- on this same line, I mean, are you saying
- that "judgment regarding the granting of relief"
- means what you say it means as a matter of just
- ordinary meaning, or are you saying that it's a
- 19 term of art in the immigration statutes? And,
- if so, which portion -- you know, is -- is it
- 21 the whole phrase "judgment regarding the
- 22 granting of relief"? Is it just the word
- "judgment"? I mean, what -- what are you saying
- 24 we should read your way and why?
- MR. FLEMING: Well, so I -- there --

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1 there are a couple of answers to that, Justice
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- 2 Kagan.
- First of all, I think we would all
- 4 agree, and the Eleventh Circuit agreed,
- 5 "judgment" by itself, in isolation, can have
- 6 several meanings, and so one needs to look at it
- 7 in the context in which it is used.
- 8 "Regarding the granting of relief," we
- 9 believe, calls in the traditional distinction
- 10 which this Court has noted several times, going
- 11 back to Foti versus INS and St. Cyr, that
- 12 there's -- that these discretionary grants of
- 13 relief happen in two stages.
- 14 First, there's a determination whether
- the non-citizen is eligible for relief, and
- those are not discretionary. Those are issues
- of fact, except to the extent Congress has
- 18 specified them as discretionary, in which case
- they're not reviewable under (B)(ii).
- 20 But then, once someone is found to be
- 21 eligible, then the agency looks at whether to
- 22 grant relief, and the "granting of relief" --
- 23 this Court used that very phrase in St. Cyr --
- 24 refers to the second-stage decision --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: And -- and --

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1
                MR. FLEMING: -- whether to grant
 2
      relief.
 3
                JUSTICE KAGAN: -- do you have places,
      other places in the statute or in regulations
 4
     where that phrase means what you're saying it
 5
     means, which is, in other words, that it refers
 6
 7
      only to the stage 2 discretionary determination
      as opposed to the stage 1 eligibility
 8
     determination?
 9
10
                MR. FLEMING: I --
11
                JUSTICE KAGAN: And, again, I'm
12
      talking about this, you know, "judgment
     regarding the granting of relief" or "the
13
14
      granting of relief," whether that phrase is
15
      specifically used to invoke the step 2
16
     determination as opposed to the step 1
17
     determination?
18
                MR. FLEMING: So I think the best
19
      example for that, Justice Kagan, is the asylum
      carveout in (B)(ii), which does use the phrase
20
      "the granting of relief," and it carves out of
21
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the jurisdictional bar of (B)(ii) the granting

of relief under the asylum statute, and that

must refer to the second-stage discretionary

decision whether to grant asylum to someone who

2.2

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1 is eligible for asylum.
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- Why? Because the eligibility
- 3 requirements for asylum are not specified as
- 4 discretionary. So it would not make sense to
- 5 carve them out of (B)(ii) because they don't
- fall within (B)(ii) by their own terms.
- 7 The only thing that would otherwise
- 8 fall under (B)(ii) and, therefore, needs a
- 9 carveout is the second-stage discretionary
- 10 decision by the executive to grant asylum to
- 11 someone who is eligible for it, and that's why
- "the granting of relief" is used in (B)(ii).
- I think this -- this Court in St. Cyr
- 14 uses the words "the actual granting of relief"
- on pages 307 and 308 of the opinion, which, of
- 16 course, is not statutory, but it does show how
- 17 that -- how that language has been used to
- distinguish the second-stage granting of relief
- in the exercise of discretion as opposed to
- 20 eligibility.
- 21 There's also a provision that
- 22 distinguishes the two with respect to the
- 23 non-citizens' burdens of proof, and that's
- 24 1229a, subparagraph (c)(4)(A), which talks about
- 25 how the non-citizen has the burden to prove

- 1 eligibility in the first place but then
- 2 separately also whether they're entitled to
- 3 relief in the exercise of discretion.
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. --
- 5 MR. FLEMING: And --
- 6 JUSTICE BARRETT: Sorry, you can
- 7 finish.
- 8 MR. FLEMING: I -- I was simply going
- 9 to conclude if I may that, at the very least,
- 10 even if -- even if the Court believes that
- 11 there's a -- that there are reasonable
- interpretations on both sides, we're talking
- about a situation that's governed by the
- 14 presumption of reviewability.
- And so, you know, we -- we think this
- is -- we think that we're right in terms of the
- 17 best reading of the statute. But, at the very
- 18 least, under the presumption which this Court
- 19 just as recently as last year called well
- settled and strong, that, we think, breaks the
- 21 tie in our favor.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Fleming, I'm
- just wondering, you know, amicus says of both
- 24 your interpretation and the government's that if
- you make all of the preliminary determinations

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1 reviewable, that the jurisdictional bar doesn't
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- 2 -- or that the bar to judicial review doesn't
- 3 have that much work to do.
- 4 How do you respond to that?
- 5 MR. FLEMING: So we think that's
- 6 incorrect, Justice Barrett, and that's because,
- 7 before IIRIRA, before 1996, the -- the courts
- 8 were reviewing the second-stage determination
- 9 whether to grant relief in the exercise of
- 10 discretion, and we cite a number of those cases
- in Footnote 6 of our reply that, you know,
- 12 reversed the BIA or the immigration judge on an
- 13 exercise of discretion.
- 14 And that is what Congress through
- 15 (B)(i) was trying to get rid of, was trying to
- 16 say you can review, we believe, the -- the
- 17 eligibility factors.
- But, once someone is found to be
- 19 eligible, if the -- if the agency says,
- 20 nonetheless, we are going to deny relief in the
- 21 exercise of discretion, that is not reviewable,
- 22 except, you know, for purposes of -- of
- 23 subsection (d), it restored the possibility of
- 24 review for errors of law or constitutional
- errors.

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1 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, then I don't
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- 2 understand --
- 3 MR. FLEMING: But that is the work
- 4 that's being done.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: -- then I -- I -- I
- 6 don't understand where your argument is going
- 7 if the -- ultimately, what you want is
- 8 adjustment of status, right?
- 9 MR. FLEMING: Yes, Your Honor.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: And that's a
- 11 discretionary determination?
- MR. FLEMING: Yes.
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: And you want that
- 14 reviewed -- you want that overturned?
- 15 MR. FLEMING: Well --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Isn't that right?
- 17 MR. FLEMING: -- at the moment, what
- 18 we want is the Eleventh Circuit to review our
- 19 argument that the agency made an error in
- 20 finding Mr. Patel ineligible.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah.
- MR. FLEMING: And then, if that is
- 23 reversed, it would go back to the agency that
- 24 would then have to determine whether to grant
- 25 relief in -- in the exercise of discretion,

1 which is a determination that hasn't been made

- 2 yet.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Do you know how
- 4 many people apply for adjustment of status that
- 5 are found eligible but for whom the agency
- 6 exercises or the agent exercises discretion not
- 7 to grant adjustment of status?
- 8 MR. FLEMING: I'm afraid I don't have
- 9 those numbers, Justice Sotomayor. I'm not sure
- 10 they're reported in that level of detail. I
- 11 think you can find numbers as to the number that
- are granted and denied, but I'm not sure of any
- 13 statistics. The -- the government may be better
- able to answer this question that -- that parsed
- 15 it out.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Could you tell me
- 17 what the state of the law was in 2005 with
- 18 respect to (B)(i)? How had the circuits ruled
- 19 up to that point?
- MR. FLEMING: Before 2005, my
- 21 understanding is most of the circuits had said
- that review was possible of factual
- determinations to do with eligibility, which is
- 24 part of the acquiescence argument we make.
- 25 Again, we don't think that's

- 1 necessary, however, because, again, the focus
- 2 would have been on -- on 1996 and what it is
- 3 Congress was trying to accomplish then.
- 4 It's certainly true that Congress
- 5 could have changed things in 2005 if it wasn't
- 6 pleased with them.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Fleming, I
- 8 understand about the presumption of
- 9 reviewability, but this area, the exercise of
- 10 discretion by the Attorney General with respect
- 11 to immigration and refugee matters, there's --
- 12 there is a presumption also that the discretion
- is broad and in, to an unusual extent compared
- 14 to other areas, unreviewable.
- Don't those two presumptions kind of
- 16 cancel each other out, and we're left with just
- 17 reading the statute as it -- as it's written?
- 18 MR. FLEMING: I -- I don't think so,
- 19 Mr. Chief Justice, because we're talking about a
- 20 situation where -- I mean, we're not saying that
- 21 the discretion -- the discretionary decision
- 22 whether to grant relief is reviewable. We
- didn't even get to that stage in Mr. Patel's
- 24 case.
- We're talking about the application of

- 1 statutory factors that Congress has created, one
- of them being inadmissibility to the United
- 3 States, which is the one that's at issue here.
- 4 That's reviewable all the time because it is a
- 5 ground of removal.
- And the mere fact that it was charged
- 7 in this case as a bar to adjustment of status
- 8 rather than as a ground of removal doesn't
- 9 change the leeway that the BIA has to adjudicate
- 10 it. It's still taking Congress's --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I
- wonder, I mean, I think that's a argument based
- on the statute itself. I'm just suggesting that
- 14 presumptions don't seem to me to give too much
- 15 weight in this case because they do -- do cancel
- 16 out.
- 17 MR. FLEMING: Well --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You don't --
- 19 you don't dispute that there's a presumption in
- 20 -- in favor of discretion in the exercise of
- 21 admission, removal, that -- that breadth of
- 22 discretion to the Executive Branch here is quite
- 23 broad.
- 24 MR. FLEMING: I -- I -- I don't
- 25 know that I would agree with that, Mr. Chief

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1 Justice, certainly not when it comes to applying
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- 2 standards, factors, that are either factual or
- 3 legal that Congress has determined.
- I mean, the -- this Court
- 5 applied the presumption of reviewability in
- 6 Kucana, just last year in Guerrero-Lasprilla.
- 7 Those were interpreting these very same
- 8 provisions, and there was no suggestion that the
- 9 presumption had any less force in those cases or
- 10 that it should have any less force here because
- 11 the presumption implements the important
- 12 separation-of-powers consideration that we don't
- assume that Congress is allowing the Executive
- 14 Branch to have the last word on whether it's
- 15 complying with congressional mandates --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank --
- 17 MR. FLEMING: -- unless there's very
- 18 clear language.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- thank you,
- 20 counsel.
- Justice Thomas, anything further?
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Nothing for me,
- 23 Chief.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 25 Breyer?

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1 JUSTICE ALITO: Why isn't the most
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- 2 relevant context here the review by a court of a
- 3 decision by a lower-level tribunal?
- In that context, "judgment" has a
- 5 pretty clear meaning. There are judgments of
- 6 the district court it's -- that defined by the
- 7 federal rules of procedure, civil and criminal.
- 8 There are judgments of the courts of appeals.
- 9 There are judgments of this Court.
- 10 Why isn't that the most relevant
- 11 context?
- 12 MR. FLEMING: Because that's not how
- 13 the -- the word is used in the context of
- administrative law. The APA, 5 U.S.C. 551(6),
- 15 calls the order the final disposition of -- of
- 16 an agency in a matter other than rulemaking.
- 17 This Court in INS versus Chadha said
- the term "final orders" includes all matters on
- 19 which the validity of the final order is
- 20 contingent. The statute itself talks about
- 21 review of the final order.
- 22 Your Honor is quite right. If we were
- 23 talking about review of a district court, the
- 24 Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the
- judiciary code use "judgment" in that way.

- 1 In administrative law and especially
- 2 in immigration law, "judgment" is not used that
- 3 way.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, what is your
- 5 strongest point to show that this APA definition
- 6 applies under the INA?
- 7 MR. FLEMING: Oh. Well, if one looks
- 8 at 1252(a)(1): Judicial review of a final order
- 9 of removal is governed only by Chapter 158 of
- 10 Title 28, except as provided.
- 11 And that's -- that's the general grant
- of review in immigration cases, is review of a
- 13 final order of removal. And this Court -- and
- 14 -- and I -- I don't know of any other court that
- 15 has taken the view that --
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: But that's not what's
- 17 being reviewed here.
- 18 MR. FLEMING: Yes, it is, a final
- 19 order of removal --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, the adjustment
- 21 of status is the part of -- that you -- that
- 22 you're contesting.
- MR. FLEMING: Well, that's the --
- that's the issue we have appealed because there
- was a concession of removability, but the

1 immigration judge still entered a final order of

- 2 removal.
- JUSTICE ALITO: In -- in this con- --
- 4 in this particular case, but the two things
- 5 don't always go together.
- 6 MR. FLEMING: They generally do
- because, under the zipper clause, 1252(b)(9),
- 8 appeal of all issues that are -- that come up in
- 9 a removal proceeding are channeled into the
- 10 petition for review.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: They generally do.
- 12 They don't always.
- MR. FLEMING: I -- the only situation
- 14 I can think of where adjustment of status would
- 15 come up without a removal order would be in a
- 16 situation where someone has, for instance, a --
- is here lawfully, is not subject to being
- 18 removed, they're on a temporary visa, student
- 19 visa, employment visa, they marry a U.S.
- 20 citizen, and then they seek adjustment of status
- 21 by filing an application with U.S. CIS.
- 22 And if that's denied, normally you
- would expect, again, under the presumption of
- 24 reviewability and also under the APA, that you
- 25 would file an action in district court to

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1 challenge the legality of U.S. CIS's
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- 2 determination.
- 3 This is a major flaw in the Eleventh
- 4 Circuit's approach because the Eleventh Circuit
- 5 would say you can't challenge that at all, even
- 6 for an issue of law, because, in their view,
- 7 that is a judgment that is barred by (B)(i).
- 8 And the -- the notion that Congress
- 9 would have prevented any form of judicial
- 10 review, even for legal error, in a vast quantity
- of cases where adjustment of status is sought
- from is simply not plausible and would require
- much clearer language than we have here.
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 15 Sotomayor, anything further?
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Fleming, I -- I
- 19 think, in response to Justice Alito's question,
- 20 I'm -- I'm not sure why it matters to your
- 21 position very much what the word "judgment"
- 22 means, whether it means the final determination,
- 23 the official order, or something else.
- I mean, I understand why it matters to
- 25 the government, but why does it matter to you?

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1 As I understood your position, your position is
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- 2 just that the entire phrase "judgment regarding
- 3 the granting of relief" refers to the step 2
- 4 determination rather than the step 1
- 5 determination, and whatever "judgment" means,
- 6 whether it refers to the official order or some
- 7 kind of discretionary decision-making along the
- 8 way or both, your position would still stand,
- 9 wouldn't it?
- 10 MR. FLEMING: I -- I think that's
- 11 right, Justice Kagan. I was just trying to give
- 12 Justice Alito's question a fulsome answer and
- 13 also to make sure that there was no confusion,
- 14 that -- that we didn't -- to make sure that the
- 15 Court recognizes that we don't think "judgment"
- 16 as used here subsumes everything. We don't
- think that's a correct reading of how the word
- is used in immigration law.
- 19 But it's certainly true that even if
- 20 "judgment" means the ultimate final order, the
- 21 -- the thing that is made not reviewable by
- 22 (B)(i) is the judgment regarding the granting of
- 23 relief. And we think that is the second-stage
- 24 determination whether to grant relief in the
- 25 exercise of discretion to someone who has been

- 1 found to be eligible for it.
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: As opposed to the step
- 3 1 eligibility determination?
- 4 MR. FLEMING: Step 1 eligibility
- 5 determinations are reviewable. There -- there
- 6 could be a situation. If Congress in the future
- 7 wanted to say this one -- we're specifying this
- 8 as being in the discretion of the Attorney
- 9 General, then it would be unreviewable under
- 10 (B)(ii). But (B)(i) has nothing to say about
- 11 that.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 13 Gorsuch, anything?
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: In -- in the
- 15 removal context, where this arises, I just want
- 16 to make sure I understand the difference in the
- 17 two positions. Everything related to the
- 18 removal would be reviewable, and with respect to
- 19 the denial of discretionary relief, legal
- 20 questions and mixed questions, everyone in the
- 21 room, I think, agrees would be reviewable,
- 22 correct?
- MR. FLEMING: I believe that's right,
- 24 yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So only questions

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1 of historical fact or questions of fact -- I
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- 2 don't have to add the word "historical" -- is
- 3 the -- is the dispute here, review of those, is
- 4 that correct?
- 5 MR. FLEMING: Well, so as to -- as to
- 6 the --
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: In the removal
- 8 context.
- 9 MR. FLEMING: So, as to the -- so not
- 10 talking about denials of discretionary --
- denials of discretionary relief? I don't think
- there's a dispute as to what is reviewable in
- 13 terms of removability. So, if someone has
- 14 actually contested removability -- and let's
- 15 leave out the cases of criminal --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. On --
- 17 MR. FLEMING: -- criminal convictions.
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Sorry to
- 19 interrupt. On removability, I agree. On the
- 20 denial -- the denial of discretionary relief,
- 21 we're just talking about fact questions,
- 22 correct?
- MR. FLEMING: Yes.
- 24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's the dispute
- 25 here?

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1 MR. FLEMING: If any --
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- 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It's solely about
- 3 fact questions, because everyone agrees, I
- 4 think, that legal questions and mixed questions
- 5 will get judicial review.
- 6 MR. FLEMING: Yes, that's right, and
- 7 only fact questions at the -- at the first --
- 8 what I'm calling the first stage with respect to
- 9 eligibility requirements --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And on the fact --
- 11 MR. FLEMING: -- that's what the
- 12 definition is.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- questions, how
- 14 could an appellate court -- and this question
- 15 cuts both ways, so -- but how can an appellate
- 16 court look at a cold record and determine a
- factual error when it relates to credibility,
- 18 for example, or something like that? Just give
- me some examples where this will matter, I
- 20 guess.
- MR. FLEMING: Well, there -- as the
- 22 amici, the American Immigration Lawyers
- 23 Association and the EOIR judges, point out, it
- 24 -- it's not uncommon. I mean, the standard is
- 25 still substantial evidence. So most cases do

- 1 fail on the merits.
- 2 But it is not uncommon for courts of
- 3 appeals to find serious problems with how the
- 4 agency determines credibility. Credibility is,
- of course, a question of fact. This Court said
- 6 this in -- in Nasrallah. It's a factual issue
- 7 that is reviewable on appeal deferentially. We
- 8 don't dispute that.
- 9 But, you know, in this case, for
- 10 example, we think that the credibility
- 11 determination against Mr. Patel was sorely
- informed by the judge's misunderstanding of what
- was required in order to get a license in
- 14 Georgia. And, you know, we -- that -- that is
- an issue that we fully briefed to the Eleventh
- 16 Circuit. It didn't reach it because it believed
- 17 it lacked jurisdiction.
- 18 But I think this will matter in not
- very many cases, but in the cases where it does
- 20 matter, that is a very desirable result because
- 21 we do not want the agency to be making such
- 22 serious decisions on the basis of anything less
- 23 than substantial evidence.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- MR. FLEMING: Thank you, Your Honor.

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1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
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- 2 Barrett?
- 3 Thank you, counsel.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If I might, Chief?
- 5 I'm sorry.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Sure.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If they're going
- 8 to get review in the remove -- removability
- 9 context, why isn't that enough?
- 10 MR. FLEMING: Because -- because of
- 11 what happened in this case, Justice Sotomayor.
- 12 In this case, for reasons that the government
- trial attorney could not explain when asked by
- 14 the immigration judge, the government did not
- 15 charge this inadmissibility issue, the
- 16 misrepresentation of citizenship, as a ground of
- 17 removability. That was only raised as a defense
- 18 to adjustment of status.
- 19 Had they charged it as -- as a
- removability ground, we wouldn't be here because
- it would have gotten reviewed in that context.
- 22 But it was --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So why does that
- 24 matter? Meaning is it because no one now will
- 25 decide this issue?

1	MR. FLEMING: Unless this Court
2	reverses, no one other than the agency is going
3	to decide it. The agency will have been the
4	last word on an issue of inadmissibility, which
5	is an issue frequently reviewed by the courts as
6	either a fact question or a mixed question.
7	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.
8	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
9	counsel.
10	MR. FLEMING: Thank you, Your Honor.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Raynor.
12	ORAL ARGUMENT OF AUSTIN L. RAYNOR
13	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT IN SUPPORT
14	MR. RAYNOR: Mr. Chief Justice, and
15	may it please the Court:
16	Section 1252(a)(2)(B) precludes review
17	of any judgment regarding the granting of relief
18	under five enumerated provisions, as well as any
19	other decision or action of the Secretary or the
20	Attorney General, the authority for which is
21	specified to be in their discretion. By its
22	terms, that provision bars review of
23	discretionary determinations, not
24	non-discretionary determinations like the
25	question of fact at issue here.

- 1 Petitioners now largely agree with
- 2 that reading as a practical matter, conceding
- 3 that even discretionary eligibility criteria
- 4 will be reviewable under the second clause, if
- 5 not the first.
- 6 Amicus's principal counterargument is
- 7 that questions of fact are unreviewable because
- 8 they fall outside the scope of subparagraph (D),
- 9 which preserves review over questions of law.
- 10 That argument fails because this case involves a
- 11 scope of a different provision, subparagraph
- 12 (B)(i). This Court should reverse the judgment
- 13 below and remand for further proceedings.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Raynor, could you
- 15 tell me what -- how would the outcome -- or in
- 16 which cases would the outcome be different under
- 17 your analysis as opposed to Petitioners'
- 18 analysis or approach?
- 19 MR. RAYNOR: Justice Thomas, I think
- 20 the main difference is analytical at this point.
- 21 They concede, as my friend suggested this
- 22 morning and in Note 2 of their reply brief, that
- eligibility criteria, if they're specified to be
- in the Attorney General's discretion, will be
- 25 unreviewable under the second clause.

- 1 We would put those under the first
- 2 clause. We think the first clause, with its
- 3 phrase "judgment regarding the granting of
- 4 relief," is more naturally read to pick up those
- 5 discretionary eligibility criteria. But there
- 6 is an analytical difference.
- 7 JUSTICE THOMAS: One --
- 8 MR. RAYNOR: I don't want to put words
- 9 in my friend's mouth, but it may also be that
- 10 they think there's a higher level of
- 11 explicitness required for what counts as being
- in the -- specified in the discretion of the
- 13 Attorney General.
- 14 JUSTICE THOMAS: One final question.
- We agree that if you asked Mr. Patel whether he
- 16 checked the box in the -- for his app -- in his
- application for a license in Georgia, we agree
- 18 that's just looking at the application and
- 19 determine a fact, right? You checked that
- 20 you're a citizen?
- 21 MR. RAYNOR: That's correct. Whether
- 22 he checked the incorrect box is a question of
- 23 historical fact.
- 24 JUSTICE THOMAS: Okay. Now, whether
- or not he lied in checking the box, I want you

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1 to tell me why that is also a fact --
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- 2 MR. RAYNOR: It's a fact --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: -- as opposed to a --
- 4 a determination that includes some discretion.
- 5 MR. RAYNOR: I don't think findings of
- 6 historical fact like that include any measure of
- 7 discretion. There's a right answer and a wrong
- 8 answer to this particular question, did he tell
- 9 a lie, or did he not tell a lie?
- 10 JUSTICE THOMAS: So how is that a
- 11 fact?
- 12 MR. RAYNOR: It's a fact because it's
- 13 something about the state of the world at the
- 14 time that he acted, and it can be determined
- 15 either correctly or incorrectly.
- 16 JUSTICE THOMAS: So it's exactly like
- 17 checking the box?
- 18 MR. RAYNOR: Yes. In our view,
- 19 questions of subjective intent at the time an
- 20 action was taken are the same as did he check
- 21 the box or did he not check the box.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But how can that be?
- 23 Because it seems like credibility
- 24 determinations -- and Justice Kavanaugh alluded
- 25 to this -- require -- in contrast to when you

- 1 look at them in a cold record, require some
- 2 element of judgment, right? Like looking at
- 3 him, listening to his testimony, and drawing a
- 4 conclusion, you know, which requires the
- 5 exercise of some discretion about whether or not
- 6 Mr. Patel was telling the truth.
- 7 It just seems hard for -- it's hard
- 8 for me to see why that's exactly the same as
- 9 checking the box or not.
- 10 MR. RAYNOR: I agree it may be a
- 11 little more complicated of a factual inquiry. I
- don't think it's fair to say that it involves
- 13 discretion, though. If -- if the judge --
- immigration judge were to determine I think the
- evidence shows that this person lied, but I'm
- 16 going to exercise my discretion to find that he
- 17 told the truth, everyone would agree that that's
- 18 impermissible.
- 19 Questions of credibility are
- 20 traditionally treated as questions of fact. If
- 21 you look at Section 1229a, it specifies the
- 22 different criteria that a court should consider
- in assessing credibility, and they're all
- 24 factual considerations, although I -- I
- 25 acknowledge that it's a slightly more

- 1 complicated one than the question did he check
- 2 the box or not.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Didn't you just
- 4 give the answer in part by saying, generally, a
- 5 judge doesn't say I just think he lied. A judge
- 6 gives reasons for why he thinks the person lies,
- 7 and those reasons are supported by the record or
- 8 not, correct?
- 9 MR. RAYNOR: Correct. Yes. But I
- 10 don't --
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's why we
- 12 think of them as facts, as every judgment
- doesn't necessarily mean discretion.
- MR. RAYNOR: Yes. Agreed. There are
- multiple meanings to the word "judgment." Here,
- the statute uses the term "judgment" to include
- 17 a discretionary component, and that's evident
- 18 not just from the dictionary definitions that
- 19 were contemporaneous with the time, although
- those did include a discretionary component.
- 21 They define "judgment" as notion, estimate,
- 22 opinion.
- 23 But the statutory context also
- 24 indicates that the term "judgment" here includes
- 25 a discretionary component. The title says

- 1 Denials of Discretionary Relief. Even more
- 2 critically, the second clause refers to "any
- 3 other decision or action specified to be in the
- 4 discretion of the Attorney General or" -- "or
- 5 the Secretary."
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: But isn't your
- 7 argument that findings of fact never constitute
- 8 discretionary -- never constitute a judgment?
- 9 MR. RAYNOR: Our position is that
- 10 objective findings of historical fact will not
- 11 constitute a judgment within the meaning of this
- 12 particular provision. I'm not disputing that
- 13 colloquially it -- it might be used to refer to
- 14 findings of fact, but the contextual cues here
- indicate that that's not the case.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: So you -- you are not
- making the argument that simply looking at the
- 18 -- the dictionary definition of the term
- 19 "judgment" is sufficient to support your
- 20 position?
- 21 MR. RAYNOR: No, Justice Alito. The
- 22 dictionary definitions support our position.
- 23 They do define this to have a subjective
- 24 component, but they're not alone enough. And I
- 25 think the -- the most important contextual --

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                JUSTICE ALITO: Why do they support
 2
      your position at all? Because any factual
      determination involves some exercise of
 3
      judgment, doesn't it? Some are -- some involve
 4
      questions about which no reasonable person could
 5
      disagree, but many, like determination of
 6
 7
      credibility, involves consideration of a number
      of factors, and -- and it's very natural to say,
 8
 9
      in my judgment, this person was telling the
10
      truth or, in my judgment, this person was not
11
      telling the truth, right?
12
                MR. RAYNOR: It -- it is possible to
      speak in that way. The dictionary definition --
13
14
                JUSTICE ALITO: Is there anything odd
15
      about speaking in that way?
16
                MR. RAYNOR: Well, the dictionary
17
     definitions at the time tend to have a little
18
     more nuance to the meaning of the term
19
      "judgment." They define it in terms of
20
      subjectivity, discerning competing factors,
     weighing competing factors.
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2.2
                And the INA similarly consistently
23
     uses the term "judgment" in this way. The INA
     uses the term "judgment" 12 times outside of
24
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this provision. Eight of those times it's

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1 referring to a court judgment, which wouldn't
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- 2 apply here, and then two of those times it's
- 3 referring to a discretionary judgment, and it
- 4 uses --
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: What is your
- 6 definition of a "discretionary judgment"?
- 7 MR. RAYNOR: I think there it's just a
- 8 bootstrapping example. Congress is just making
- 9 absolutely clear that judgment has the
- 10 discretionary component.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: But what -- all right.
- 12 What is a "discretionary decision"? What is
- your definition of a "discretionary decision"?
- MR. RAYNOR: A discretionary decision
- in terms of identifying one for purposes of this
- statute would be something that is value-laden,
- 17 requires weighing of competing factors. There
- may often be a history of non-reviewability, as
- 19 there is with the hardship criterion. It may be
- 20 traditionally have been reviewed for abuse of
- 21 discretion under Pierce v. Underwood, looking at
- 22 those kind of factors.
- 23 And sometimes there will be an express
- 24 textual indicator that it's discretionary, for
- example, if the statute says "in the opinion of

- 1 the Attorney General" or "in the opinion of the
- 2 Secretary."
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, we treat
- 4 a credibility determination as a question of
- 5 fact. You don't have discretion, right? That
- 6 -- that's your position?
- 7 MR. RAYNOR: Correct, Mr. Chief
- 8 Justice.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But -- but
- 10 can't you have people who, when they're making a
- judgment about whether an applicant is lying or
- 12 not, somebody could say: I place a lot of
- weight on demeanor. I mean, if a person looks
- 14 nervous or something, I -- I tend to think she's
- 15 -- she's -- she's more likely lying.
- And somebody else says: No, I don't
- 17 do that. I don't regard it at all because I
- 18 think people applying for, you -- you know, this
- 19 type of relief, they're going to be nervous.
- 20 They're facing a lot of things.
- 21 Now isn't it an exercise of discretion
- 22 what type of criteria you apply in determining a
- 23 -- what you say is a -- ultimately a factual
- 24 question?
- 25 MR. RAYNOR: I don't think so, Mr.

- 1 Chief Justice, and I don't -- I don't think
- 2 there's any dispute that credibility
- determinations would be non-discretionary fact
- 4 questions.
- I don't want to get hung up too much
- on the colloquial meaning, though, because the
- 7 statutory context here is very important. And
- 8 the second clause this Court interpreted in
- 9 Kucana to cover "the same genre" of decisions as
- 10 the first clause, in other words, decisions made
- 11 discretionary by legislation.
- 12 And the only way to read those two
- 13 clauses together, as Kucana did, in this case,
- is our interpretation. We read the first clause
- to be limited to discretionary determinations
- and to cover all discretionary determinations
- 17 underlying the listed forms of relief.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So I guess I
- don't understand whether you've answered my
- question, is what would you call it if somebody
- 21 says, I put a lot of weight on -- on personal
- demeanor, and somebody else says, well, I don't
- 23 put any weight on demeanor? Isn't that an
- 24 exercise of discretion in determining a factual
- 25 issue?

- 1 MR. RAYNOR: No, Your Honor. I think
- 2 that would require a searching inquiry. They --
- 3 they would have to be paying close attention,
- 4 sorting what they find more persuasive or not,
- 5 but I don't think that we would say that they
- 6 have the discretion to choose what the right
- 7 answer is to this factual question.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Raynor --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But they have
- 10 the discretion to determine, I take it, that
- they're going to regard nervousness or they're
- 12 not going to regard nervousness.
- MR. RAYNOR: That's not typically how
- 14 this Court talks about credibility
- determinations. When it talks about complex
- 16 factual questions like this, it will review them
- 17 for clear error or substantial evidence. It
- 18 won't typically review them for abuse of
- 19 discretion. And I think the same approach is
- 20 appropriate here.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Raynor, I think
- 22 I'm a bit confused. The factual issue here is
- 23 not the ordinary kind of was he lying in the
- 24 legal proceeding, right, in which we usually
- say, oh, it's a credibility determination as to

- 1 whether he was lying on the stand.
- The factual issue here, if I
- 3 understand correctly, is whether he was -- what
- 4 his intent was when he checked the box. So it's
- 5 a question of historical intent. It's not a
- 6 question of his credibility in the particular
- 7 legal proceeding. Is that right?
- 8 MR. RAYNOR: I agree with that,
- 9 Justice Kagan. I don't want to run from the
- 10 fact that the immigration judge did find his
- 11 testimony to be non-credible. The judge did say
- 12 that. But I agree with you it is an objective
- 13 question of historical fact.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: But the -- the factual
- issue at issue here is not that. It's what --
- 16 what was his intent when he checked the box.
- 17 MR. RAYNOR: Correct. Did he tell a
- 18 lie or not.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but he's
- 20 asked questions about what his intent was,
- 21 right, and that can -- credibility comes into
- 22 that, right?
- MR. RAYNOR: In terms of assessing the
- answer to this historical question, the
- 25 immigration judge did consider his credibility

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1 on the stand.
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- JUSTICE KAGAN: But he's -- he's
- 3 always -- he's -- he's asked questions about a
- 4 lot of factual issues, right?
- 5 MR. RAYNOR: Yes.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: That doesn't make them
- 7 any less factual.
- 8 MR. RAYNOR: I agree.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: You know, did you
- 10 check the box with a pen or a pencil or did, you
- 11 know, I mean, and, I mean, the fact that he's
- 12 later asked questions and his credibility is --
- is at issue doesn't make the underlying factual
- 14 issue less factual.
- MR. RAYNOR: I agree, Justice Kagan.
- 16 And nobody is suggesting that the -- the -- the
- 17 --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, what are
- 19 you agreeing to? I mean, I don't understand.
- 20 Is it -- is it an exercise? You -- you think no
- 21 discretion is involved in examining credibility,
- 22 which is a predicate determination in
- 23 determining what you think the historical fact
- 24 is, right?
- 25 MR. RAYNOR: Credibility was important

- 1 here in determining the historical fact. That
- 2 won't always be the case. But I agree that it
- 3 was here.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I know,
- 5 but it'll be an exercise of discretion, for
- 6 example, if you think it is, the extent to which
- 7 you think it is pertinent.
- 8 MR. RAYNOR: Mr. Chief Justice, I
- 9 don't think this Court has traditionally
- 10 described credibility determinations as
- 11 discretionary determinations.
- 12 However, if -- if the Court were
- inclined to go this way, to agree with us that
- 14 this is limited to discretionary determinations
- but to be unsure about whether credibility fell
- 16 within that bucket, I think a remand would
- 17 probably be appropriate here.
- 18 That would be a second-order analysis,
- 19 because the first-line question is -- is does
- 20 this cover discretionary determinations.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah, yeah, all
- 22 right. But look -- look at the -- this -- the
- 23 discussion you've just been having.
- What I don't really see is the virtue,
- legal virtue, of taking the government's

- 1 position as compared with Mr. Fleming's.
- I mean, if those were the choices,
- 3 what you seem to have done, think about this,
- 4 step 1/step 2 is at least comprehensible to an
- 5 ordinary person and even to a judge. Okay? I
- 6 got that.
- And now what we're doing, we're going
- 8 to have, like we have in the code here, about
- 9 eight pages of tiny print in some of these
- things about what goes before "the Attorney
- 11 General may." I'll grant you the "may" could be
- 12 discretionary.
- 13 And you want to throw in the box
- 14 called discretionary things like good character,
- extremely unusual hardship, et cetera. And who
- 16 knows what else. We just have an example here.
- 17 So all we're going to do is introduce,
- if we take yours, a new issue, and this new
- issue is going to be whether any of these words
- 20 -- and there are loads of them -- fit within the
- 21 government's idea of special discretion or not.
- 22 And at that point, I foresee lots of
- 23 arguments of this kind. But all we need to say
- 24 is: Wait a minute. B has to do with the step 2
- 25 kind of discretion. And if you look through all

- 1 five, you find in the first sentence of each of
- 2 those five either the word "discretion" or at
- 3 least the word "may."
- 4 Do you see my question? How did the
- 5 government get to this point? I don't get it.
- 6 MR. RAYNOR: Justice Breyer,
- 7 respectfully, I don't think Petitioners'
- 8 position allows you to avoid this issue. They
- 9 concede that certain eligibility criteria will
- 10 be unreviewable under the second clause. So
- 11 you're going to have to do precisely the same
- 12 analysis, simply under the second clause.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: I don't think that
- 14 that's what they concede. They concede that
- under the second clause there may be overlapping
- 16 judgments. But they would say the initial
- 17 eliqibility criteria are always reviewable.
- Now, if -- if in the second -- if --
- if in the second stage the Attorney General or
- 20 the Secretary or whoever makes this decision,
- 21 you know, talks about overlapping issues, that's
- 22 what they've conceded. But their -- theirs is a
- 23 very simple line: Step 1, eligibility,
- 24 reviewable. Step 2, discretionary, not
- 25 reviewable.

Т	MR. RAYNOR: Justice Ragan, With
2	respect, their footnote says subsection (B)(i)
3	does not strip review of first-step eligibility
4	determinations. Review of such a determination
5	may be barred if it satisfied subsection
6	(B)(ii)'s requirement. And I think that's
7	JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I I think I
8	read that differently than you. I just read
9	them as saying, once you get to the step 2
10	stage, everything is not reviewable any longer,
11	but the step 1 stage, everything is reviewable.
12	MR. RAYNOR: I just don't think
13	there's it's inconceivable that that's their
14	actual position because certain eligibility
15	criteria are expressly in the Attorney General's
16	discretion. To take inadmissibility as an
17	example, some in some cases, the non-citizen
18	will seek waiver of inadmissibility at the
19	eligibility stage, and that's in the Attorney
20	General's discretion. The statute expressly
21	says that.
22	And if all step 1 questions are
23	reviewable, that means courts would be able to
24	review even waiver decisions. And I just don't
25	think there's any way to read the statute that

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1 that kind of thing is reviewable simply because
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- 2 it happens to fall under step 1.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Got it.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 5 Thomas, anything?
- JUSTICE THOMAS: No.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 8 Breyer?
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: No, thank you.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: What is the mens rea
- 11 requirement, if any, for the inadmissibility
- determination here? I don't have the statutory
- language in front of me, but my recollection is
- 14 that it says someone is inadmissible if the
- 15 person represents -- falsely represents being a
- 16 U.S. citizen. Isn't that what it says?
- 17 MR. RAYNOR: It does say that, Justice
- 18 Alito, but it also says for a purpose or a
- 19 benefit. And the Board of Immigration Appeals
- 20 has read that to mean that you have to make the
- 21 representation for the sake of obtaining the
- 22 benefit. So a mere mistake in checking the box
- 23 we wouldn't call --
- JUSTICE ALITO: So the -- the BIA has
- read in a mens rea requirement?

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1 MR. RAYNOR: That's correct. And we 2 --
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- JUSTICE ALITO: Okay.
- 4 MR. RAYNOR: -- we didn't challenge
- 5 that below.
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I do want to make
- 7 clear the difference between you and the
- 8 Petitioner is irrelevant to this case, correct?
- 9 MR. RAYNOR: That's correct. We both
- 10 agree that this particular fact question is
- 11 reviewable.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So the
- 13 conversation we've been having is more on a
- 14 theoretical level?
- 15 MR. RAYNOR: I don't know that it's
- 16 theoretical, Justice Sotomayor. I -- I do
- 17 think, if this Court's going to draw a line
- 18 between discretionary --
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But we don't have
- 20 to? That's what you're telling us. On the
- 21 facts of this case, we don't have to?
- MR. RAYNOR: I don't know that there's
- 23 any way that this Court could hold that fact
- 24 questions are reviewable without drawing some
- 25 kind of a line based on the text of the statute,

- 1 and the only one --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, but you're
- 3 conceding here that these are facts.
- 4 MR. RAYNOR: Yes, Justice Sotomayor.
- 5 But the -- the reason we think fact questions
- 6 are reviewable is because the term "judgment
- 7 regarding the granting of relief" only applies
- 8 to discretionary determinations.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan,
- 10 anything further?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Much of Ms. Meehan's
- article rests on the meaning of 1252(a)(2)(D),
- and, essentially, she says that ought to be read
- back into the provision that we're interpreting.
- 15 It says that law questions, constitutional
- 16 questions, are reviewable. The natural
- implication of that is that factual questions
- 18 are not. What is your answer to that?
- 19 MR. RAYNOR: Justice Kagan,
- 20 structurally, that's not how the statute works.
- 21 The statute establishes review bars, including
- this one, and then it carves out an exception in
- 23 subparagraph (D). And if a determination
- doesn't fall within the review bar in the first
- 25 place, you never need to reference subparagraph

- 1 (D).
- 2 So this was -- this was at issue in
- 3 Nasrallah, for example. The determination there
- 4 simply didn't fall within the review bar in the
- first place, so whether it fell within
- 6 subparagraph (D) was irrelevant. Sub --
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: If -- if Congress had
- 8 thought that there was review of these sorts of
- 9 factual issues, wouldn't it have been concerned
- in adding that provision that the implication
- 11 was to the opposite effect?
- 12 MR. RAYNOR: I don't think so because
- the provision actually says "shall not be
- construed." So, if anything, it's confirmatory
- of the existing circuit consensus. Eight
- 16 circuits had held that this was limited to
- 17 discretionary determinations. The REAL ID Act
- was what enacted subparagraph (D), and that was
- 19 nine years after IIRIRA enacted this (B)(i).
- 20 And there's just no indication that in the REAL
- 21 ID Act Congress meant to constrict or expand the
- 22 scope of the review bar in (B)(i).
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 24 Gorsuch?
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Has this been the

- 1 government's position since 1996 consistently?
- 2 MR. RAYNOR: No, Justice Kavanaugh.
- 3 This was our position starting in 2001. I
- 4 acknowledge that before 2001 the government took
- 5 the court of appeals' position. After St. Cyr,
- 6 when it became clear there might be
- 7 constitutional issues with that position, the
- 8 government flipped, acknowledged its flip in
- 9 light of St. Cyr, and argued for the position
- 10 that we have now held since that time.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And I guess one of
- 12 the questions that comes up -- and this follows
- on Justice Kagan's question -- is I think
- there's a little bit of a mismatch between the
- government's position starting in 2001 and the
- 16 statutory language of the provisions that
- include the subsequent REAL ID Act.
- 18 So I understand why the government in
- 19 2001 would have said St. Cyr, we need to do
- 20 something different. And the courts of appeals
- 21 cases were out there, as some of them were out
- there at that time as well.
- 23 But then what St. Cyr said was
- questions of law. It didn't say discretionary.
- 25 So the government's position seems to be a

- 1 little bit of a mismatch, which then becomes
- 2 more of a problem once you have the REAL ID Act,
- 3 the mismatch. Tell me how to work my way
- 4 through that.
- 5 MR. RAYNOR: Our constitutional
- 6 avoidance reading in 2001, you're correct, was
- 7 slightly overbroad with respect to the concerns
- 8 that St. Cyr identified, but that's because that
- 9 was the plausible way to read the text. There
- 10 really wasn't any way to read the text to just
- 11 exclude questions of law and precisely track the
- 12 concerns identified in St. Cyr. So we took the
- position in 2001 this is the best reading of the
- text, and it takes care of the concerns in St.
- 15 Cyr.
- Now, once that was justified as a
- 17 constitutional avoidance reading, the addition
- of subparagraph (D) ameliorating the
- 19 constitutional concerns doesn't retroactively
- 20 change what the best reading of the text is.
- 21 Clark v. Martinez says whether constitutional
- 22 concerns come or go, we're not going to change
- 23 our reading of the text.
- 24 And in the REAL ID Act, Congress left
- 25 intact the operative language here.

- 1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I guess the REAL
- 2 -- if the REAL ID Act had been present as of
- 3 '01, maybe the government would have adopted a
- 4 different position, but that's speculative, I
- 5 suppose.
- 6 Let me ask two -- sorry to prolong
- 7 this -- but two questions. What are the
- 8 problems if we adopt the Petitioners' position
- 9 and what are the problems if we adopt the
- 10 amicus's position from the perspective of the
- 11 government, which has had a consistent position
- 12 on this since 2001?
- MR. RAYNOR: Yes. With respect to
- 14 Petitioners, again, I think their position is
- largely aligned with ours, except for perhaps an
- 16 analytical distinction in they would put
- 17 discretionary eligibility criteria under (B)(ii)
- 18 rather than (B)(i).
- 19 So, if an inadmissibility waiver comes
- 20 up at the eligibility stage, for example, I
- 21 think they would acknowledge that's unreviewable
- 22 under the second clause but not the first.
- 23 That's purely an analytical difference.
- With respect to amicus, obviously,
- 25 there are large practical differences. As my

- 1 friend pointed out this morning, the starkest
- 2 practical difference is at the district court
- 3 level. When DHS makes these adjudications
- 4 outside of removal proceedings, there's going to
- 5 be no review whatsoever.
- 6 But then, of course, there's also a
- 7 practical difference at the court of appeals
- 8 stage in that we think factual questions are
- 9 reviewable --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On the --
- 11 MR. RAYNOR: -- albeit under a very
- 12 deferential standard of review.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- on the district
- 14 court point, what's the volume there?
- MR. RAYNOR: Unfortunately and
- somewhat surprisingly, there's not a lot of
- 17 clear data that is -- precisely tracks this
- 18 question. Based on some internal calculations,
- it appears that there were probably north of a
- 20 thousand challenges in district court to DHS
- 21 determinations in the past year.
- 22 Petitioners' reply brief at Note 8
- 23 cites some additional statistics, but those
- 24 don't precisely map onto 1255 adjudications. It
- includes a slightly broader set of adjustment

- 1 applications.
- 2 So I think it's fair to say that U.S.
- 3 CIS likely adjudicates or receives more
- 4 applications than does the Executive Office for
- 5 Immigration Review, but, unfortunately, I don't
- 6 have very good data on that question.
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 9 Barrett?
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: Just have one
- 11 question, Mr. Raynor, and this is following up
- 12 on Justice Breyer's point.
- I mean, the -- the virtue of both the
- amicus's position and the Petitioners' position,
- both positions are easily administrable, and
- 16 they both draw a bright line. I find the
- 17 treating the discretionary part -- as Justice
- 18 Breyer pointed out, it introduces complications
- 19 for courts, then have to figure out which bucket
- 20 something falls into.
- 21 And so, given that the bar also
- 22 applies to judgments regarding cancellation of
- 23 removal, can you just explain, you know, how the
- 24 court is supposed to decide whether the -- the
- 25 quality -- the -- the factor whether the removal

- 1 would result in exceptional and extremely
- 2 unusual hardship to spouse or child or parent,
- 3 how do -- how does a court decide
- 4 discretionary/non-discretionary?
- 5 MR. RAYNOR: There's --
- 6 JUSTICE BARRETT: Isn't that also
- 7 mixed fact and -- but it also has some
- 8 discretion mixed in?
- 9 MR. RAYNOR: Your Honor, we would not
- 10 agree that it's a mixed question of law and fact
- 11 under Guerrero, but there is some question about
- 12 that in the lower courts right now.
- In terms of identifying discretionary
- 14 determinations, you would look to several
- 15 factors. One is, does it include express
- 16 discretionary language, like "in the opinion of
- 17 the Attorney General"? The example you gave
- doesn't happen to include that language, but
- some hardship criteria, as, for example, under
- 20 1255, do include such language.
- 21 Then you would look at whether it
- requires value-laden decision-making, and you
- would also look at whether there was a history
- of non-reviewability.
- 25 For example, there was a fair amount

of pre-likika case law treating hardship
determinations as discretionary, and we think it
would be appropriate for the Court to look at
that in making that that determination.
I would just note, in terms of the
practical concerns here, the courts of appeals
have been doing this for 20 years. The
executive has stood behind this interpretation
for 20 years. And we obviously have a strong
interest in a practical line.
And, regardless of what you hold about
(B)(i), this type of parsing is indisputably
required under (B)(ii). (B)(ii) requires you to
identify precise criterion criteria and then
determine whether discretionary or not.
So courts are going to be doing this
under one of the two provisions.
JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
counsel.
MR. RAYNOR: Thank you.

Τ	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Ms. Meenan.
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF TAYLOR A.R. MEEHAN,
3	COURT-APPOINTED AMICUS CURIAE IN SUPPORT
4	OF THE JUDGMENT BELOW
5	MS. MEEHAN: Mr. Chief Justice, and
6	may it please the Court:
7	I'd like to come back to some of the
8	questions about an alternative meaning of
9	"judgment" and why that will still bar review
LO	here. But, before I do that, I'd like to start
L1	with what I think is the only correct meaning of
L2	"judgment" as used by Congress here in the
L3	jurisdictional bar.
L4	"Judgment" here means any decision
L5	with a connotation of formality or
L6	authoritativeness. That formal decision or
L7	judgment is the overall denial of discretionary
L8	relief. Like all judgments, it subsumes any
L9	discretion subsidiary determination made
20	along the way to denying relief. So whatever
21	the reasons leading to the denial of relief, the
22	resulting judgment is barred.
23	The only exceptions to that
24	jurisdictional bar are in subparagraph (d)'s
25	exceptions clause, precluding review of

Τ	constitutional	claims	and	questions	Οİ	law.
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- 2 Congress left no doubt in 2005 that
- 3 these are the only exceptions. How? By also
- 4 adding to the text of the jurisdictional bar.
- 5 In the jurisdictional bar itself,
- 6 Congress added, except as provided in
- 8 constitutional claims or questions of law, no
- 9 court shall have jurisdiction to review any
- 10 judgment regarding the granting of relief.
- 11 There is not a lurking third exception
- 12 for some findings of fact un-enumerated in
- either the jurisdictional bar or the exceptions
- 14 clause. To say that there is would be contrary
- 15 to the text of the statute, contrary to the
- 16 structure of the statute, and contrary to one of
- 17 IIRIRA's overarching purposes, to streamline
- 18 judicial review, here, leaving fact-finding in
- 19 the hands of the Executive Branch, consistent
- 20 with historical practice.
- 21 Mr. Patel's factual claim is
- 22 concededly not a question of law or a
- 23 constitutional claim. The Eleventh Circuit was
- 24 right to reject it on jurisdictional grounds.
- I welcome the Court's questions.

- 1 JUSTICE THOMAS: Ms. Meehan, you seem
- 2 to rely quite a bit on the clause "regarding the
- 3 granting of relief" as having a broadening
- 4 effect on judgment.
- 5 How would you interpret the statute if
- 6 that -- if that clause did not exist?
- 7 MS. MEEHAN: I -- I think I would
- 8 still interpret it the same, but -- but here is
- 9 why it needs to exist, especially for the
- 10 statute as written in -- in 1996.
- 11 The statute in 1996 was directed at
- 12 appeals from removal proceedings, and so that
- phrase, "regarding the granting of relief,"
- 14 under those five subsections, at its most basic
- 15 level is serving an identifying function,
- 16 because, in the removal proceeding, you will
- 17 have judgments regarding the granting of relief
- 18 under these five statutes.
- 19 You'll also have a removability
- decision, and perhaps you'll also have, say, the
- 21 denial of asylum. And what that phrase
- 22 "regarding" is doing is telling you the set of
- 23 decisions, the discretionary relief denial, that
- 24 is what is barred by the jurisdictional bar, but
- 25 the removability decision is still appealable.

- 1 And that's one of the -- the larger
- 2 problems with Petitioners' alternative reading,
- 3 that Congress should have just said final order.
- 4 Mr. Patel has every right to appeal the
- 5 removability decision. And if you say that he
- 6 can't appeal the final order of removal, that
- 7 brings along with it that removability decision.
- Now "regarding" also has a broadening
- 9 function. I think it's Congress's way of
- 10 explaining that a -- a judgment denying relief
- 11 for eligibility reasons stands on the same
- 12 footing as a judgment denying relief for
- discretionary reasons or perhaps a judgment
- denying relief for a mix of reasons falling into
- 15 either category.
- 16 It -- one way to think about it is
- 17 "regarding" was Congress's way of rejecting
- 18 Petitioners' interpretation here.
- 19 And -- and to Petitioners' argument
- 20 that -- that -- that "regarding" is -- is -- is
- 21 a term of art or is a way of thinking about
- 22 targeting those second-step decisions, I think
- 23 that's just wrong, and -- and Section 1252 shows
- us why.
- So, in the next subparagraph, in

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1 1252(b)(4)(D), Congress did exactly what
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- 2 Petitioners said it should have done here.
- In (b)(4)(D), regarding asylum,
- 4 Congress refers to the Attorney General's
- 5 discretionary decision whether to grant asylum
- 6 relief. And that comparison between
- 7 1252(b)(4)(D) and the much more categorical
- 8 language here in the jurisdictional bar, I
- 9 think, is the end of Petitioners' argument.
- 10 We don't assume that the language
- 11 Congress used in (b)(4)(D) is that same
- "regarding" language we here -- we see here in
- 13 the jurisdictional bar.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, I -- I
- don't understand your answer at all because I
- 16 don't see how your interpretation in the various
- 17 subdivisions you gave us give any meaning to
- 18 "regarding the granting of relief" whatsoever.
- 19 Congress need not have specified any
- judgment in (B)(i) as distinct from a decision
- or action in (B)(ii). Why didn't it just say
- 22 any decision or action? If -- it used different
- words, "judgment regarding," and it seems to me
- that if "decision or action" is as broad as you
- 25 claim it is, then "judgment regarding the

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1 granting of relief" has to be more narrow. You
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- 2 can't make it broad at the same time because,
- 3 otherwise, they would have used identical
- 4 language.
- 5 Second, I'm not sure how we ignore
- 6 neighboring subsections (a) and (c) that show
- 7 when Congress wanted to strip jurisdiction
- 8 broadly in the way that you want it to -- you
- 9 want it to strip both factual and legal
- 10 jurisdiction -- Congress knew how to do that in
- 11 (a) and (c), and it could have just copied that
- 12 language. Yet it used distinctive language
- 13 altogether.
- Then add to all of this, I think all
- of this means that, at best, the statute is
- 16 ambiguous. It's not clear. And if it's
- ambiguous, I don't know what to do with the
- 18 presumption favoring judicial review. That's so
- 19 well embedded in our jurisprudence. It's what
- 20 made us decide Kucana last year.
- 21 This makes no sense to me. So give me
- 22 a reason why Congress would do something
- 23 different in (B)(i) and (B)(ii) --
- MS. MEEHAN: Well, to your first
- 25 question --

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- that would give
- 2 -- that would give meaning to all of the words.
- MS. MEEHAN: To your first question,
- 4 Justice, I actually think looking at the full --
- 5 the context, I agree with you we should look at
- 6 the surrounding provisions and the differences
- 7 in language Congress used here. I think,
- 8 actually, once you do that, it all points in the
- 9 direction that the jurisdictional bar means the
- 10 overall denial of relief.
- 11 Second, with respect to (a) and (c),
- 12 those are -- those are helpful examples of
- 13 having to use different language for different
- 14 things.
- So I -- I read (a)(2)(A) actually as a
- 16 bit narrower. I think it's interesting that
- 17 Congress in that -- in that provision says "any
- individual determination" and doesn't say "any
- 19 judgment." And -- and when Congress says that,
- 20 they're reserving the right to -- to have a
- 21 legal challenge or whatever else about expedited
- 22 removal proceedings.
- 23 With respect to (c), the real problem
- is what I mentioned earlier with Justice Thomas.
- 25 You can't speak categorically like a final order

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of removal in subparagraph (b) in the
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- 2 jurisdictional bar here because, if you did
- 3 that, you'd be precluding Mr. Patel from
- 4 appealing anything related to the removability
- 5 decision.
- And -- and he's not -- he's not
- 7 subject to the criminal alien bar. He has every
- 8 right to appeal the criminal alien -- pardon,
- 9 the removability decision. And so what's left
- is Congress's choice of words to bar instead
- just the denial of discretionary relief.
- 12 And -- and -- and, again, "any
- 13 judgment" is much different here than any --
- "the Attorney General's discretionary judgment,"
- for example, in 1252(b)(4)(D) or "the Attorney
- 16 General's discretionary judgment" in 1226(e) or
- 17 the other examples that Petitioner and the
- government point to, where "judgment" is being
- 19 used as the object of the preposition, "in the
- judgment of someone."
- I would agree if the state -- if -- if
- 22 the provision here said something about "a
- 23 determination in the judgment of the Attorney
- 24 General," it's a closer case.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So give me a

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1 reason why Congress would want to separate out
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- 2 judicial review regarding factual matters on
- 3 removability, which it sort of -- it has
- 4 permitted, from those that have to do with the
- 5 decisions of agents like this.
- 6 MS. MEEHAN: Before 2005, I think,
- 7 arguably, what Congress was doing here was
- 8 prohibiting review of the entire denial of
- 9 discretionary relief. I think that's the
- 10 easiest way to make sense of the jurisdictional
- 11 bar then amended by the exceptions clause.
- 12 But even if that's not what Congress
- 13 was doing and it was just making fact review
- 14 different for removability or discretionary
- relief, one reason Congress might have wanted to
- do that is the removability decision itself has
- 17 higher stakes. There are greater due process
- 18 concerns. And so we would want to afford a
- 19 non-citizen the ability to appeal that in a way
- 20 that discretionary relief is but a matter of
- 21 grace. And so, in streamlining judicial review,
- 22 as one -- as was one of IIRIRA's overarching
- 23 purposes, Congress took off the table that fact
- 24 review.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.

1	JUSTICE KAGAN: Ms Ms
2	JUSTICE BREYER: Well, there's a part
3	you left out. I mean, I think Justice Sotomayor
4	brought up a set of relevant factors. Where
5	where I am at the moment, I I think it would
6	be very if you really ask the congressman
7	have you ever thought about this, he he
8	probably would say before St. Cyr we wanted no
9	review. At least I didn't. But that isn't what
10	they said.
11	And so then what we have now, we have
12	(D) and we have the St. Cyr, anti-St. Cyr review
13	or whatever. Then we go and you look at (A) ,
14	(B), and (C). Okay. When I read it, the music
15	of those words, look, the "any individual
16	determination or to entertain any other cause or
17	claim." God, it sounds like we really mean it.
18	And, of course, that makes sense
19	because, in my mind, those are people standing
20	up in line at Ellis Island or in the the
21	and we don't the courts don't look at visas
22	from given in Paris and we're not going to
23	have them look at the people in line in Ellis
24	Island either. We really mean it. Okay?
25	And then you look at (C), and these

- 1 are criminals. I mean, get rid of them. Okay?
- 2 And then we look at (B), and (B) uses
- 3 softer language. "Any judgment regarding the"
- 4 is softer language. Moreover, we look at the
- 5 title, and the first one in effect says the Line
- 6 at Ellis Island, and the third one says
- 7 Criminals, and the second one says Discretionary
- 8 Relief. Oh.
- And then we have awfully good reasons,
- which Justice Sotomayor brought up, to say, hey,
- 11 the Attorney General is supposed to decide this
- 12 discretionary deal. I mean, keep the courts out
- 13 of that.
- But that reason doesn't quite apply to
- 15 all the subsidiary fact things. So now we stick
- in (D) and maybe they carry along with it. I
- don't know how to do that, but it just looks
- 18 different to me.
- So, once it looks different, well,
- then you call in the presumption of review, you
- 21 see, and -- and I -- and once we get the
- 22 presumption in review, that sort of pushes
- 23 against what was a good brief. I mean, that
- 24 pushes the other way. Hmm.
- 25 And so I'm slightly stuck and I -- and

- 1 I'm slightly stuck on this presumption of
- 2 review. And I can see how to deal with the
- 3 government. You say, discretion, you know,
- 4 discretionary decision, which is that last
- 5 decision, stay here, my friend. And anything in
- 6 the 19,000 words in 1182(B) or wherever, that's
- 7 the same, and we don't have to decide what's the
- 8 same in this case.
- 9 So -- so I can see it both ways, but I
- 10 think that presumption is tough for you.
- 11 MS. MEEHAN: I'll take your questions
- in reverse order, Justice, which I -- I'd like
- to say something about the presumption of review
- 14 first. It hangs together a bit with the text,
- 15 right? So the -- the starting point here for
- 16 the presumption is this is a jurisdictional bar.
- 17 Right out of the gate, Congress has indicated
- 18 with clear language that it anticipates some set
- 19 of decisions will beyond -- will be beyond
- 20 review.
- 21 And then, when you combine that --
- 22 that observation that we have a juris- --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, still, Ms.
- Meehan, wouldn't the presumption apply in terms
- 25 of deciding what the scope of that provision is?

- I mean, it doesn't just disappear because we're
- 2 dealing with a review bar.
- 3 MS. MEEHAN: I -- I agree. I agree.
- 4 But this is unlike a case like Bowen, for
- 5 example, where the statute doesn't say one way
- 6 or another. It's silent. But -- but I agree.
- 7 So you combine that jurisdictional bar --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, not to press
- 9 the point if you agree, but, I mean, you might
- 10 think that Congress acts with the presumption in
- 11 mind, especially when it's doing a review bar,
- 12 as opposed to when it's silent.
- MS. MEEHAN: You might and in which
- 14 case you go to the next order of analysis, which
- is you exhaust every canon of construction.
- 16 That includes grappling with what subparagraph
- 17 (D) can possibly mean if subparagraph (B) means
- what the government says it means in particular.
- 19 And you're left with a clear -- you're
- 20 left with a clear implication -- or, pardon,
- 21 you're left with a clear conclusion that the
- 22 jurisdictional bar must mean the overall denial
- of relief. And if that is clear, there's no
- 24 reason to apply a presumption of review. It is
- 25 only a tiebreaker only if once you --

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1 JUSTICE KAGAN: I didn't mean to take
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- 2 you off of Justice Breyer's main point.
- 3 MS. MEEHAN: So the -- well, to
- 4 Justice Breyer's question, the -- the main
- 5 reason I would -- I would not apply the
- 6 presumption of reviewability here is because,
- 7 once you exhaust the canons of construction, I
- 8 do think the only correct way to read the
- 9 statute is as the Eleventh Circuit read it.
- 10 But even if you disagree with me on
- 11 that, this would be an awfully strange case to
- 12 apply the presumption of reviewability if you
- 13 consider the origins for the presumption of
- 14 reviewability, how it's ordinarily applied, and
- then historic reviewability of immigration
- 16 decisions more broadly.
- 17 The presumption of reviewability
- 18 largely originated with the APA. The -- the
- 19 purpose of it was to review questions of law
- about whether agencies were following their own
- 21 rules, whether they were following Congress's
- 22 rules. No one disputes here that Mr. Patel
- 23 could -- could appeal a question of law of that
- 24 order.
- But I am not aware of any of this

- 1 Court -- Court's cases in an immigration case
- where the Court has applied the presumption of
- 3 review to allow a petitioner to relitigate a
- 4 question of fact.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah, but, I mean,
- 6 we're going to -- if we take that view, we're in
- 7 the same mess as the other because, you know,
- 8 the APA has them all in the same place,
- 9 substantial evidence, on the record as a whole,
- 10 and that's in review law, fact. It's all in the
- 11 same place in the statute. And we start making
- these distinctions, at least if we don't have
- to, between a review for substantial evidence
- 14 and a review for -- that's a question of law
- and -- and -- really. I mean, it really is.
- 16 You call it a question of fact, but -- but, God,
- 17 I -- I can think we'll get into a mess or the
- 18 courts will get into a mess. Is this -- I've
- 19 not seen it distinguished, in other words, and I
- don't see why it should be.
- MS. MEEHAN: The best example of that
- 22 distinction is in McNary, which is helpfully an
- 23 immigration case where the presumption of review
- 24 was at issue. In McNary, the Court reviewed
- 25 what it called a generic question of statutory

- 1 interpretation about visas for these special
- 2 agricultural workers.
- 3 The Court went out of its way in
- 4 McNary to say, to be clear, we are not
- 5 reviewing, no one has asked us to review, the
- 6 merit of the individual applicants' applications
- 7 here. We are only reviewing the -- the more
- 8 abstract, the more generic question of what the
- 9 statute means, and then we're leaving it to the
- 10 agency to determine how to apply that in this
- 11 case.
- 12 And that is consistent with decades of
- this Court's case law and other federal courts'
- 14 case law acknowledging that they take executive
- 15 officials' facts as found. And the courts' only
- 16 role is to answer the questions of law that
- 17 would arise --
- JUSTICE BREYER: We actually say facts
- 19 as found, even if not supported by substantial
- 20 evidence?
- 21 MS. MEEHAN: St. Cyr is -- St. Cyr is
- 22 the best --
- JUSTICE BREYER: No, St. Cyr didn't
- 24 deal with that. It dealt with the law, and it
- dealt with what you have to have in habeas and

- 1 --
- MS. MEEHAN: On -- on page 306 of St.
- 3 Cyr, the Court actually distinguishes between
- 4 fact review and these historical habeas
- 5 decisions and questions of law. And I actually
- 6 take that passage of St. Cyr to mean that if Mr.
- 7 St. Cyr had come to this Court with a factual
- 8 dispute, the case would not come out the same.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah, but that's
- 10 habeas.
- 11 MS. MEEHAN: It -- it is habeas. And
- 12 -- and that -- that is only more helpful here.
- 13 So, if it is true that this Court was reluctant
- or unwilling or -- to -- to review factual
- 15 questions in a habeas case about an alien
- detained pending removal, then it must
- 17 necessarily follow that it would be odd to apply
- 18 the presumption of judicial review here for a
- denial of discretionary relief, a fact question
- 20 about the denial of discretionary relief.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Ms. Meehan, I want
- 22 to clarify the scope of your position. So isn't
- 23 it true that your position does lead to the
- 24 conclusion that, in district court, even legal
- 25 questions are not reviewable?

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                MS. MEEHAN: I -- I think that is --
 2
      that is the -- the right way to interpret the
 3
      statute as amended in 2005. So, before 2005, I
      -- I actually don't think that was true.
 4
                In 2005, one of the REAL ID Act
 5
 6
      amendments was to -- if you look at pages 10 and
 7
      11 of my brief, Congress adds the phrase
      "regardless of whether the judgment, decision,
 8
 9
      or action occurs during a removal proceeding."
10
      And the courts of appeals are relatively uniform
11
      that that means a petitioner must wait until
12
      they're placed into removal proceedings to
      dispute a -- a denial of discretionary relief.
13
14
                Now I -- I -- I think that is an issue
15
      of Congress's own making and could be something
16
      that Congress could -- could solve. There's a
17
      good reason why Congress wants that to be the
      case, which is exhaustion. But, before I say
18
19
      more about that, I would like to address some of
20
      the statistics questions and put it all in
21
      perspective.
2.2
                So, first off, this concern about U.S.
23
      CIS denials being -- not being immediately
      reviewable affects only one of the four
24
      categories of discretionary relief in the
25
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- 1 jurisdictional bar. As best I can tell, it
- 2 affects only adjustment of status. It doesn't
- 3 affect cancellation or some of the
- 4 inadmissibility waivers, including because
- 5 something like cancellation or voluntary removal
- 6 is only happening in the context of a removal
- 7 proceeding.
- 8 Second off, even for that set of
- 9 adjustment-of-status applicants, the vast
- 10 majority are unaffected by this. I think we're
- only dealing with a very small percentage. This
- 12 year alone, the average approval rate for one of
- 13 these U.S. CIS adjustment-of-status applications
- 14 has hovered around 87 percent. Two hundred and
- thirteen thousand adjustment-of-status
- 16 applications have been granted this year.
- 17 And of those 10 to 15 percent of cases
- of adjustment-of-status applications that are
- denied, again, there's good reason. Congress
- 20 expected those individuals to exhaust their
- 21 administrative remedies before involving the
- 22 courts of appeals, as Mr. Patel did here. He
- 23 applied for adjustment of status with U.S. CIS
- in 2007, 2008. Then he had a hearing before the
- 25 immigration court. Then he had an appeal before

- 1 the BIA. He has an opportunity to file a
- 2 reopening motion within a certain amount of
- 3 time, and only then does the Eleventh Circuit
- 4 get involved. And -- and, again, this is, I --
- 5 I think, what Congress anticipated by that
- 6 amended text in 2005.
- 7 There are additional issues with
- 8 Petitioners' and the government's interpretation
- 9 that are not what Congress -- that were not
- 10 problems of Congress's own making.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Ms. -- Ms. -- can I
- 12 stop you there and just can I take you back to
- 13 the basic question here, which is "judgment
- 14 regarding the granting of relief" and what that
- 15 phrase means.
- 16 And -- and I think, you know, you come
- 17 into this with a kind of good, ordinary meaning
- 18 argument. And I -- I take Mr. Patel to be
- 19 saying it's really not the ordinary meaning
- 20 here. This is a kind of term of art that refers
- 21 to the step 2 determination as opposed to the
- 22 step 1 eligibility functions.
- 23 And I -- I'm just going to give you a
- 24 bunch of places in which that language is -- it
- 25 -- it sort of supports his argument and -- and

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1 ask you for your response to it.
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- 2 So 1229a, which is the overarching
- 3 statute governing how removal proceedings work,
- 4 that statute basically breaks it down into two
- 5 steps, in just the way that Mr. Patel does, and
- 6 says the non-citizen has to prove that she
- 7 satisfies the initial eligibility requirements.
- 8 And then -- this is number 2 -- with
- 9 respect to any form of relief that is granted in
- 10 the exercise of discretion, that she merits a
- 11 favorable exercise of discretion. So the
- 12 granting of relief is in that part.
- Then, similarly, there's a regulation
- 14 that breaks the relief down into two steps and
- in that second step says it should be "granted
- in the exercise of discretion," a phrase that
- does not appear in the first step, which is
- 18 eligibility.
- 19 And then Mr. Fleming, I think, cited
- 20 1252(b)(4)(D), whether to grant relief under
- 21 1158(a) of the -- the asylum title, which pretty
- 22 clearly has to be about the -- the -- the
- 23 -- the second-stage inquiry rather than any
- 24 first-step factual issues.
- 25 Then -- I'm -- I'm sorry to do this to

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1 you -- but we several times, we in St. Cyr, in
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- 2 Bagamasbad, in Pereida very, very recently,
- 3 cases spanning nearly 50 years of immigration
- 4 law, all of them distinguish between eligibility
- 5 and the step 2 discretionary determination, and
- 6 all of them talk about the discretionary
- 7 determination as being about whether relief
- 8 should be granted.
- 9 So using that exact same language,
- 10 basically coming from the statute and appearing
- in all of our cases. So that's my question to
- 12 you. Sorry.
- MS. MEEHAN: I'll try to hit each of
- them, and then please tell me if I don't.
- So I -- I agree with you as a general
- 16 matter. Certainly, the Court has observed and
- then the statutes seem to observe that there are
- 18 eligibility questions or issues and there are
- 19 discretionary issues. I agree with that.
- Often, the reason that is so is the
- 21 Court here has had -- has had to make clear that
- 22 those eligibility considerations are a floor and
- that the Attorney General doesn't have
- 24 discretion always to -- to go beneath that
- 25 floor. You can't grant cancellation, for

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1 example, to someone who has committed an
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- 2 aggravated felony, and that floor remains.
- 3 I don't think those observations about
- 4 the two-step mean anything for the -- the
- 5 jurisdictional bar because Congress didn't, in
- 6 -- in codifying the jurisdictional bar, say
- 7 eligibility or say discretion.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: It's -- it's true, but
- 9 it keeps on using the word "granted." And --
- 10 and, you know -- excuse me, it -- it says, you
- 11 know, "granting relief," which is the phrase
- 12 that appears in the two-step -- in the
- 13 second-step part of all these provisions and our
- 14 cases rather than in the first step part. But
- we just don't talk about granting relief with
- 16 respect to making these eligibility
- 17 determinations.
- 18 MS. MEEHAN: I -- I agree with you
- 19 there, and I think this would be a much harder
- 20 case if the -- the word "regarding" and if the
- 21 word "any" were not involved.
- 22 But -- but I don't think the word
- 23 "granting" can carry that amount of weight, and
- 24 the -- the -- the reason for that is -- is how
- 25 Congress used "granting" in Section

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1 1252(b)(4)(D), whether to grant relief, or,
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- 2 here, a harder statute would be the granting of
- 3 relief in the discretion of the Attorney -- of
- 4 the Attorney General.
- 5 I -- I -- I don't think the granting
- of relief is necessarily limited to the second
- 7 step. If it were, the statute would be phrased
- 8 as the asylum statute is phrased in (b)(4)(D).
- 9 With respect to 1229a in particular,
- it's setting out a two-step for the immigration
- 11 courts. That is a provision that governs the
- 12 immigration proceedings.
- 13 But, even as this Court said in
- 14 Bagamasbad, the immigration court doesn't
- 15 necessarily need to do step 1. They can go
- 16 straight to step 2 and deny relief for
- 17 discretionary reasons, which would -- which
- 18 would be unreviewable.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, they could do
- that and that would be unreviewable. I guess
- 21 the -- the -- the point that Mr. Patel is making
- is that, when you're doing step 1, step 1 is not
- about the granting of relief, and so it is
- 24 reviewable.
- MS. MEEHAN: One way -- one way to

- 1 think about the difference between "the granting
- of relief" and "granting of relief," which I
- 3 think is the main textual problem with
- 4 Petitioners' argument, they're reading them the
- 5 same.
- 6 You -- if I told you we're making
- 7 decisions about -- we're making decisions
- 8 regarding the sending of astronauts to Mars, you
- 9 would know that means something different than
- 10 decisions regarding sending astronauts to Mars,
- 11 right? At least the latter feels a little bit
- 12 narrower. "The granting of relief" naturally
- encompasses decisions based both on eligibility
- 14 grounds and on discretionary grounds.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: So I take that
- 16 argument, you know, the/of as a different sort
- 17 of formulation, but -- but in a context in which
- 18 there's a review -- presumption of
- 19 reviewability, that starts looking like, whoa,
- that's a little bit fine for, you know, this
- 21 context.
- 22 MS. MEEHAN: As -- as this Court has
- 23 said, it -- there is both the presumption of
- 24 reviewability and there is an expectation with
- 25 jurisdictional bars that the Court will construe

- 1 the jurisdictional bar with strict fidelity to
- 2 its terms.
- 3 Just as much as the Court has to
- 4 preserve its power of review, Congress has its
- 5 power to restrict review. And, here, Congress
- 6 did so.
- 7 And think about "regarding the
- 8 granting of relief" as a way of eliminating that
- 9 ambiguity. "Regarding the granting of relief"
- 10 has that broadening effect, and it shouldn't be
- 11 read in isolation.
- 12 I -- I agree this might have been a
- harder case before 2005. But there's no way to
- understand the exceptions clause or there's no
- great way to understand the exceptions clause if
- 16 altogether any judgment regarding the granting
- of relief under these five discretionary forms
- doesn't mean the overall denial so that when
- 19 Congress, in the exceptions clause, restores
- 20 jurisdiction for constitutional claims and
- 21 questions of law, there's something to restore.
- In the -- in the government's view,
- 23 the -- the judgment has always excluded
- 24 questions of law and constitutional claims, and
- 25 that makes very little sense then why Congress

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1 would cross-reference the jurisdictional bar in
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- 2 the exceptions clause in 2005.
- 3 The presumption of reviewability
- 4 doesn't hang only on the phrase "regarding the
- 5 granting of relief." It requires interpretation
- of the whole statute. And once --
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Sorry. Keep
- 8 going.
- 9 MS. MEEHAN: And -- and once you do
- 10 that, I think there's more than a clear
- 11 statement that review here for this -- for
- 12 fact-finding is barred.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I pick up on
- 14 your reference there to the government's
- 15 argument and just get your reaction to what I
- think is the music of their argument?
- So you have the '96 act and they agree
- 18 with your position for the first five years.
- 19 Then St. Cyr comes along, 2001, and the Bush
- 20 Administration decides we need to interpret this
- 21 statute in a way to avoid the constitutional
- 22 problem, and they come up then, the government
- 23 comes up with its current position, the
- 24 discretionary position relying on the title and
- 25 other things.

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1 Then 2005, the REAL ID Act comes in,
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- 2 really talks again, like St. Cyr, about
- 3 questions of law and constitutional questions.
- 4 So a little bit of a mismatch with the
- 5 government's position. But I think what the
- 6 government's saying is we've now done it this
- 7 way through four administrations, for 20 years,
- 8 and the courts have interpreted it that way, and
- 9 at least after St. Cyr, we found enough
- 10 ambiguity in this, the title provision, other
- 11 things, of how they fit together, that our
- interpretation should be good enough.
- I think that's something. I don't
- want to put words in their mouths, what they're
- 15 saying. Why -- why do you think that isn't good
- 16 enough in this instance? We don't usually have
- the government coming in in an immigration case
- 18 through four administrations and saying, we want
- 19 courts to review issues.
- 20 MS. MEEHAN: I -- I don't think it's
- 21 good enough for two reasons. First, it doesn't
- 22 abide by the text, and, second, there are
- 23 serious workability issues.
- So, first, even if the statute was
- 25 unclear before 2005, the exceptions make it

- 1 clearer. And the way I -- I have made sense of
- 2 the government's mismatch, Justice Kavanaugh, is
- 3 the government is saying that Congress did
- 4 something along the following lines: In 1996,
- 5 Congress told everyone you can't eat junk food.
- 6 And then, in 2005, Congress said: Except you
- 7 can eat peas and carrots.
- 8 And if I told you you can't eat junk
- 9 food, except you can eat peas and carrots, that
- 10 doesn't make a whole lot of sense. You know
- 11 what does make sense? You can't eat junk food,
- but you can eat burgers and fries. And so junk
- food is the larger category. Burgers and fries
- 14 are in that category. They're the exception.
- 15 And, by implication, everything else is still
- 16 unreviewable.
- Now the workability problem: I think
- there's an alternative meaning of "judgment"
- 19 somewhere between -- there's obviously an
- 20 alternative meaning of "judgment" in the
- 21 dictionary definitions, something about forming
- 22 -- forming an opinion, a judgment call,
- 23 exercising judgment.
- 24 That's not the right use of "judgment"
- 25 here. I think, on the outcome, it fairly

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1 encompasses reviewability -- it fairly
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- 2 encompasses credibility. But the government
- 3 will have this Court walking into a circuit
- 4 split if it -- if it adopts that meaning.
- 5 A judgment call. Again, not the right
- 6 usage, completely unworkable. The Court would
- 7 have to be creating a federal common law of what
- 8 is too discretionary or not discretionary
- 9 enough.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 11 counsel.
- 12 Justice Thomas?
- 13 JUSTICE THOMAS: Nothing further.
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 15 Breyer, anything further? No?
- Justice Sotomayor?
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm assuming your
- answer to Justice Barrett was, yes, you admit
- 19 that your reading bars review by the district
- 20 court of questions of law, but we shouldn't care
- 21 too much because it's a very small number of
- 22 people that are affected by that?
- 23 MS. MEEHAN: It bars immediate review
- of questions of law in the same way this Court
- 25 in Reno versus AADC and Reno versus Catholic

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1 Social Services barred immediate review, but
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- 2 there will be some --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But I did think
- 4 that there are immediate consequences to this
- 5 failure to adjust. I thought the government
- 6 moves very slowly, and removal proceedings,
- 7 actual removal notices, take ages. But a
- 8 decision like this can affect a person's work
- 9 authorization, sponsoring of family members to
- 10 come here. It affects the pathway to
- 11 citizenships after three to five years. There's
- 12 a lot of consequences to not having immediate
- 13 review.
- MS. MEEHAN: I -- I agree there are
- 15 consequences. Those are consequences, I think,
- 16 Congress anticipated in amending the statute in
- 17 2005. It could correct those. And I think the
- 18 Court's decision in Reno versus AADC is exactly
- on point here, where there were immediate
- 20 constitutional claims, First Amendment claims
- 21 and Fifth Amendment claims, about the
- 22 government's selective prosecution, and the
- 23 Court here held that those claims would have to
- 24 wait. There couldn't be immediate review. It
- 25 would have to wait until the end of removal

- 1 proceedings.
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Tell me something
- 3 in the history of this statute or in the logic
- 4 of St. Cyr, which made very clear that on the
- 5 habeas statute at least, suspending review of
- 6 questions of law provides a constitutional
- 7 problem, and what the government's basically
- 8 saying to us, once they got St. Cyr, a reading
- 9 that precludes judicial review is not the best
- 10 reading one should give to a statute. You
- 11 should go back to the first principles and look
- 12 at the ambiguity and figure out what the best
- 13 reading not to do that is.
- And that's what they've come up with.
- 15 But your reading does exactly what the
- 16 government says we shouldn't do.
- MS. MEEHAN: Do -- do you mean with
- 18 respect to the U.S. CIS denial and any question
- 19 of law?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Yes.
- MS. MEEHAN: So, again, I -- I think
- 22 the statute is relatively clear that the review
- of that question has to wait until it has been
- 24 exhausted through the agency process and it's
- 25 before the court of appeals and it --

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1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, this has
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- 2 nothing to do -- well, I'm sorry. Go ahead.
- 3 MS. MEEHAN: And it -- and it's in a
- 4 petition for review. And it also has nothing to
- 5 do with the case here. Mr. Patel, again,
- 6 exhausted his administrative remedies. He got
- 7 review of his question of law in the Eleventh
- 8 Circuit. The only question here is whether fact
- 9 findings are beyond review. With respect to the
- 10 history, that's fully consistent with the
- 11 history.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: So the -- the
- 14 fast-food one is -- it's -- it's good, but isn't
- 15 -- isn't really the government or -- or Mr.
- 16 Patel saying, you can't eat fast food at lunch,
- 17 but you can eat burgers and fries at dinner?
- MS. MEEHAN: That's possible --
- 19 possibly that is what they're saying. I -- I --
- 20 I -- as with any hypothetical, it is imperfect,
- 21 and so then I just go right back to the text.
- 22 And the text speaks in a categorical way, in the
- 23 way that Congress didn't otherwise speak
- 24 categorically when referring to judgments,
- 25 discretionary judgments.

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1 And if there were any doubt about
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- 2 that, you've got to look at the transitional
- 3 rules. In the transitional rules, Congress took
- 4 a more modest approach, discretionary decisions.
- 5 The discretionary comes out in the permanent
- 6 rules, and we get "any judgment."
- 7 You can't read those two the same. So
- 8 even if we're having fast food sometimes and not
- 9 always, the transitional rules, I think, give us
- 10 an important key to that -- to the -- to the
- 11 text here.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 14 Gorsuch?
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: You're not going to
- like this question. Assume for the moment the
- 17 Court were to disagree with you. As between the
- 18 two other options, there's slight variations
- between the Petitioner and the government's
- 20 theories. But you -- you've -- you've raised
- 21 good metrics for us to measure any
- 22 interpretation on, the text and the workability.
- 23 Would -- would you care to grade the
- 24 two alternatives comparatively?
- 25 MS. MEEHAN: I -- I think that

- 1 Petitioners' -- the Petitioners' interpretation
- 2 doesn't abide by the text and has arbitrariness
- 3 problems. The government's interpretation
- 4 doesn't abide by the text and has workability
- 5 problems. There's actually an interpretation, a
- 6 fourth interpretation, lurking out there that
- 7 uses the government's definitions but doesn't
- 8 have the same workability problems.
- 9 So, if you'll permit me, I'll tell you
- 10 what the government-adjacent position is, which
- is, if you look at pages 16 and 17 of their
- 12 brief and if you look at that more informal
- meaning of "judgment," the formation of a -- the
- 14 formation of an opinion exercising discernment,
- 15 that clearly encompasses fact findings. The
- 16 fact-finding here is the best example of that.
- 17 The -- the immigration judge heard the
- 18 direct testimony of Mr. Patel, watched the
- 19 cross-examination, compared it to the record
- 20 evidence, and then, in his judgment, deemed him
- 21 not to be credible.
- You could adopt that more informal
- 23 interpretation. It's -- it's close to the
- 24 government's, but it's not unworkable so long as
- 25 you agree that a credibility determination is a

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1 judgment and not a non-judgment, as -- as the
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- 2 Court says.
- Now, in context, considering
- 4 everything else, I think that's a really
- 5 difficult interpretation after 2005, but it's
- 6 the second best alternative.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: That's the second
- 8 best. What's the third and the fourth?
- 9 MS. MEEHAN: I don't know if I would
- 10 take arbitrariness versus workability. I mean,
- 11 the arbitrariness problem in the Petitioners'
- 12 interpretation is real. The -- the Petitioners
- 13 explain there are fact findings all along the
- 14 way to denying discretionary relief. And the
- 15 government says half of them are reviewable and
- the other half aren't reviewable.
- I -- I think that's a -- that's a
- 18 difficult rule to adopt. I'm not sure which
- other one I would take. I -- and perhaps --
- 20 perhaps Petitioners' despite the arbitrariness
- 21 because it's -- it's administrable, but, again,
- 22 I think the text leaves us -- I'm having trouble
- 23 with your question because I --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I -- I -- I --
- MS. MEEHAN: -- find the text so

- 1 unambiguous.
- 2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I told you
- 3 weren't going to like it. So thank you very
- 4 much, counsel. I appreciate it.
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I just pick up
- 6 on your answer to the government's position,
- 7 which were -- as I described, the overall
- 8 situation was, one, text and, two, workability.
- 9 So, on text, if -- you gave a forceful
- 10 answer there. I think your argument is even
- after St. Cyr, they're scrambling, they do a new
- interpretation, maybe they get some leeway on
- 13 constitutional avoidance, but once Congress
- 14 responds to St. Cyr in 2005, the text is
- 15 sufficiently clear that they no longer have the
- 16 ambiguity hook to continue with that
- 17 interpretation. Is that --
- MS. MEEHAN: I think that's exactly
- 19 right. And one of the ways to think about the
- 20 -- the circuit courts before St. Cyr is they
- 21 were grappling with exactly what the government
- 22 says.
- 23 And what's nice about the 2005
- 24 amendment is Congress solves the problem for
- 25 everyone. Congress says no

- 1 discretionary/non-discretionary. There's -- you
- 2 know, there's no mention of it. But Congress
- 3 says we're going to give you a line between
- 4 constitutional claims and questions of law and
- 5 everything else going forward. And -- and,
- 6 importantly, courts -- other courts of appeal
- 7 since then have abided by that line.
- I think that's a way to understand
- 9 some of the confusion in 2001 that is no longer
- 10 with us today after 2005.
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then your
- other answer to the -- to the government's kind
- of overarching position was workability. I
- think they would respond, well, it's been 20
- years now, it's out there, and a lot of courts
- 16 were -- were getting along okay.
- You want to respond to that?
- MS. MEEHAN: I don't think the courts
- 19 are getting along okay. And if you look at the
- 20 Trejo decision from the Fifth Circuit that's
- 21 cited, I think, in all the briefs here, that's
- 22 the existing circuit split, it's the best
- 23 illustration of the unworkability of the
- 24 government's approach, where some circuits have
- 25 said some eligibility determination is too

- 1 discretionary; other circuits have said no, it's
- 2 not discretionary. And then, as I take Footnote
- 3 5 of the government's brief, they think there's
- 4 also somewhere in the middle where we can review
- 5 some parts because they're not discretionary but
- 6 not other parts, and I think that itself
- 7 illustrates the unworkability.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you very
- 9 much.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 11 counsel.
- 12 Rebuttal, Mr. Fleming.
- 13 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF MARK C. FLEMING
- ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
- MR. FLEMING: Thank you, Your Honor.
- 16 Ms. Meehan said that exhaustion would
- 17 have to be required, I think, in response to
- 18 Justice Barrett's question. For people who are
- 19 not removable, there is no further exhaustion.
- 20 The American Immigration Lawyers
- 21 Association brief gives the example of Dr. Abu
- 22 Zaid, whose case is stayed in the D.C. Circuit
- 23 right now awaiting the decision in this case.
- He has an H-1B visa. He's working as a doctor
- 25 at Augusta University Medical Hospital in

- 1 Georgia.
- 2 He's not going to go into removal
- 3 proceedings. He's here lawfully. He's trying
- 4 to get a green card so that he can have
- 5 permanent status here as opposed to temporary
- 6 status.
- 7 There is no further exhaustion he can
- 8 do. He has a final order of U.S. CIS denying
- 9 his application. The only way for him to get
- 10 review of that is not under the Eleventh
- 11 Circuit's vision of the statute but under ours.
- 12 Credibility is an issue of fact. In
- this Court's decision in Nasrallah, on page
- 14 1693, the Court says those factual issues,
- 15 regarding a Convention Against Torture order,
- 16 may range from the non-citizen's past
- 17 experiences in the designated country of
- 18 removal, to the non-citizen's credibility, to
- 19 the political or other current conditions of the
- 20 country. And the BIA in this very case referred
- 21 to the issues as factual reviewed for clear
- 22 error. That's on page 106 of the Petition
- 23 Appendix.
- Justice Kavanaugh raised the issue of
- 25 the REAL ID Act. I think what's important there

- is that the REAL ID Act was reacting to the fact
- 2 that St. Cyr had taken legal issues that were
- being pressed by people covered by (c), who had
- 4 qualifying criminal convictions, and put them
- 5 into habeas instead of into petitions for
- 6 review. REAL ID fixed that, moved them back
- 7 into petitions for review.
- 8 But it did not change the situation of
- 9 people like Mr. Patel, who are not subject to
- 10 (c) because they do not have criminal
- 11 convictions. Those people have always been able
- 12 to appeal factual matters, before IIRIRA and
- 13 after. REAL ID didn't change that. IIRIRA
- 14 didn't change that.
- 15 Finally, to clear up any confusion
- about the difference between our position and
- 17 the government's, and I -- I don't think our
- 18 position is arbitrary, with all respect to Ms.
- 19 Meehan. Our position, I think, is pretty clear,
- 20 which is that (B)(i) doesn't bar review of any
- 21 first step decision.
- Now I -- I -- I think -- we admit
- 23 because I think we have to that under the
- language of (B)(ii), Congress could, if it
- 25 wished, pluck out an individual eligibility

1 requirement and specify in the statute that that

- 2 is in the discretion of the Attorney General.
- 3 And, if it were to do that, then there would be
- 4 no review under (B)(ii).
- 5 And now I think we -- I think Kucana
- 6 supports this. However, that is not just a
- 7 theoretical distinction from what the government
- 8 is doing. There is a real practical distinction
- 9 there, and that is because the government seems
- 10 to think, as the colloquy has demonstrated, that
- 11 some of the factors where the statute doesn't
- 12 specify the Attorney General's discretion are
- 13 somehow, in -- according to some nebulous
- 14 multifactor test, sufficiently discretionary
- that they should fall under (B)(i).
- 16 But the question then becomes a sharp
- one of administrability, how do you determine
- 18 whether something is discretionary under their
- 19 view of (B)(i). We think our line is clear.
- 20 Theirs is not.
- But, as everyone recognizes, for Mr.
- 22 Patel, that issue does not have to be resolved.
- 23 Everyone agrees that his appeal is of a
- 24 non-discretionary factor.
- We would respectfully submit the

Т	decision of the Eleventh Circuit should be
2	reversed.
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
4	counsel.
5	Ms. Meehan, this Court appointed you
6	to brief and argue this case as an amicus curiae
7	in support of the judgment below. You have ably
8	discharged that responsibility, for which we are
9	grateful.
10	The case is submitted.
11	(Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the case
12	was submitted.)
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