

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

In the  
United States Court of Appeals  
For the Eleventh Circuit

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No. 25-12903  
Non-Argument Calendar

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LEON FRANSCECO BENJAMIN,

*Plaintiff-Appellant,*

*versus*

OMAYA DANIQUE GORDON,  
R. TIMOTHY HAMIL,  
KRISTINA HAMMER BLUM,  
MIRIAM ARNOLD-JOHNSON,  
ROBERT D. WALKER, et al.,

*Defendants-Appellees.*

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Appeal from the United States District Court  
for the Northern District of Georgia  
D.C. Docket No. 1:25-cv-02035-TRJ

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Before NEWSOM, ABUDU, and ANDERSON, Circuit Judges.

## PER CURIAM:

Leon Benjamin, proceeding pro se, appeals a dismissal of his complaint, arguing that the district court erroneously dismissed his entire complaint for lack of subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine—a rule that prohibits federal district courts from hearing challenges that are tantamount to appeals of state-court judgments. See *Rooker v. Fid. Tr. Co.*, 263 U.S. 413 (1923); *Dist. of Columbia Ct. of Appeals v. Feldman*, 460 U.S. 462 (1983). On appeal, Benjamin argues that the district court erred by failing to address each of his claims individually. After careful review, we vacate and remand.

Benjamin’s complaint alleges 13 claims, including those arising under both state law and the U.S. Constitution, and named 13 separate defendants involved with his child-custody proceedings in Gwinnett Superior Court. He seeks declaratory and injunctive relief, as well as monetary damages.

We review de novo a district court’s conclusion that it lacks subject matter jurisdiction. *Behr v. Campbell*, 8 F.4th 1206, 1209 (11th Cir. 2021). A court must dismiss an action sua sponte if it “determines at any time that it lacks subject-matter jurisdiction.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3).

Under the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, “federal district courts lack jurisdiction over ‘cases brought by state-court losers complaining of injuries caused by state-court judgments rendered before the district court proceedings commenced and inviting district court

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review and rejection of those judgments.” *T.M. v. Univ. of Md. Med. Sys. Corp.*, 146 S. Ct. 1739, 1743–44 (2026) (quoting *Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Saudi Basic Indus. Corp.*, 544 U.S. 280, 284 (2005)). The doctrine flows from “the statutory limitations of federal district courts’ jurisdiction.” *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1210.

We have emphasized that this “doctrine occupies ‘narrow ground’” and rarely applies. *Id.* at 1209. The doctrine “bars all appeals of state court judgments—whether the plaintiff admits to filing a direct appeal of the judgment or tries to call the appeal something else.” *Id.* at 1211. But to qualify as an “appeal” for purposes of *Rooker-Feldman*, the claim must “at its heart challenge[] the state court decision itself.” *May v. Morgan Cnty.*, 878 F.3d 1001, 1005 (11th Cir. 2017). In other words, “*Rooker-Feldman* applies” only “[i]f the source of the plaintiff’s injury is the state-court judgment itself.” *Efron v. Candelario*, 110 F.4th 1229, 1236 (11th Cir. 2024).

In *Nicholson v. Shafe*, we held that the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine applies only to instances where the state-court proceedings have ended. 558 F.3d 1266, 1274–75, 1278–79 (11th Cir. 2009). But the Supreme Court recently abrogated *Nicholson* in part. *T.M.*, 146 S. Ct. at 1746–50 & n.2. Specifically, the Supreme Court held that the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine bars federal district court jurisdiction over “cases brought by state-court losers complaining of injuries caused by state-court judgments rendered before the district court proceedings commenced” and seeking “district court review and

rejection of those judgments,” “regardless of whether those judgments are final trial-court judgments or those of a State’s highest court.” *Id.* at 1744, 1752.

Here, as an initial matter, *T.M.* confirmed that the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine applies to final state-court judgments, even trial-court judgments, regardless of appeal status. *Id.* at 1748–49. Because Benjamin was (and is) a “state-court loser[] complaining of injuries caused by state-court judgments rendered before the district court proceedings commenced” and seeking “district court review and rejection of those judgments,” the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine can apply regardless of the status of his state appeal. *Id.* at 1744, 1748.

Importantly, too, our precedent makes clear that district courts must complete a claim-by-claim *Rooker-Feldman* analysis, deciding “whether resolution of each individual claim requires review and rejection of a state court judgment.” *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1213. In *Behr*, the plaintiff filed a 30-count complaint against 18 defendants, raising federal- and state-law claims that arose out of state-court child-custody proceedings, including an allegation that the mother of his children and other defendants had conspired to deprive him of custody. *Id.* at 1208–09. Soon after the complaint was filed, “the district court . . . dismiss[ed] the [entire] case for lack of subject matter jurisdiction” under the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine because the claims were “presented or adjudicated by a state court or inextricably intertwined with a state court judgment.” *Id.* at 1209 (quotation marks omitted). On appeal, we emphasized that the

district court erred by failing to ask “whether resolution of each individual claim requires review and rejection of a state court judgment,” when it instead asked “whether the whole complaint seems to challenge a previous state court judgment.” *Id.* at 1213.

*Behr* controls this case. Much like the district court in *Behr*, the district court here broadly found that all of Benjamin’s “claims center on his contention that the orders issued in state court proceedings are void.” *Compare* Dist Ct. Order at 3–4, Dkt. No. 42 *with Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1213. The district court thus erred by failing to conduct a claim-by-claim analysis when dismissing the complaint under the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine.

While the district court is correct that Benjamin sought a declaratory judgment that “the orders issued in state court proceedings are void,” Dist. Ct. Order at 3, the district court’s analysis ignores that Benjamin also requested both compensatory and punitive damages and preliminary and permanent injunctions halting all further ultra vires proceedings. *See* Compl. at 5, Dkt. No. 3; *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1213–14. Benjamin’s requests for damages and prospective relief barring future proceedings are forms of relief that do not require that an earlier state court judgment be modified or overturned. *Id.* at 1210, 1212. Although Benjamin’s complaint fails to connect the counts to specific forms of relief, making it difficult to match his claims to his requested relief, our review of his complaint reveals that at least some of his claims are not barred under *Rooker-Feldman*.

In sum, we hold that the district court erred when it dismissed Benjamin’s complaint without completing a claim-by-claim *Rooker-Feldman* analysis.<sup>1</sup> The allegations within at least portions of the complaint would not require a reversal or alteration of a state-court order, meaning that the district court erred in dismissing the entire complaint pursuant to the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine.

For the reasons explained, we vacate and remand for further proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.

**VACATED AND REMANDED.**

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, while *Rooker-Feldman*’s scope is more limited, “[o]ther preclusion and abstention doctrines remain alive and well,” *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1214, as do immunity doctrines. Defendants in this case have asserted on appeal numerous alternative bases upon which this Court could affirm the district court’s dismissal of the claims against them. Nevertheless, in *Behr*, we decided not to address any other potential basis for review because “the district court dismissed the [ ] complaint solely based on *Rooker-Feldman*,” and it is usually “better to leave th[o]se arguments to the district court to consider in the first instance.” *Id.*; see also *Callahan v. U.S. Dep’t of Health & Hum. Servs.*, 939 F.3d 1251, 1266 (11th Cir. 2019) (this Court is “a court of review, not a court of first view”). Because the district court here dismissed solely based on *Rooker-Feldman*, we leave the adjudication of these alternative bases to the district court on remand—just as this Court did in *Behr*.