

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

In the
United States Court of Appeals
For the Eleventh Circuit

No. 26-11293
Non-Argument Calendar

THEODORE SABIR,

Plaintiff-Appellant,

versus

JOY SABIR,

Defendant-Appellee.

Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Middle District of Alabama
D.C. Docket No. 2:25-cv-00359-ECM-KFP

Before JILL PRYOR, BRANCH, and ED CARNES, Circuit Judges.

PER CURIAM:

Theodore Sabir, proceeding pro se, appeals the district court's dismissal of his complaint for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction. The court concluded that the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine

barred all of Sabir's claims.¹ He contends that federal jurisdiction exists based on his allegations that his divorce proceedings in state court violated his constitutional rights.

"We review de novo the district court's determination that it lacks subject matter jurisdiction," *Behr v. Campbell*, 8 F.4th 1206, 1209 (11th Cir. 2021), and consider the well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true, *Watson v. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, 159 F.4th 1234, 1252 (11th Cir. 2025). Because Sabir is a pro se litigant, we liberally construe his pleadings in the district court and his briefing on appeal. See *Timson v. Sampson*, 518 F.3d 870, 874 (11th Cir. 2008). Even so, we will not "rewrite an otherwise deficient pleading in order to sustain an action." *Campbell v. Air Jam. Ltd.*, 760 F.3d 1165, 1169 (11th Cir. 2014) (quotation marks omitted).

The Supreme Court has defined the boundaries of the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, explaining that under it, "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 review and rejection of those judgments." *Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Saudi Basic Industries Corp.*, 544 U.S. 280, 284 (2005) (quotation marks omitted); see also *T. M. v. Univ. of Maryland Med. Sys. Corp.*, 608 U.S. 668, 688 (2026). The Court has emphasized that this

¹ See generally *Rooker v. Fidelity Trust Co.*, 263 U.S. 413 (1923); *D.C. Ct. of Appeals v. Feldman*, 460 U.S. 462 (1983).

is “the narrow ground occupied by *Rooker–Feldman*.” *Exxon Mobil*, 544 U.S. at 284; *T.M.*, 608 U.S. at 679.

We apply a “claim-by-claim approach” to determine whether *Rooker-Feldman* applies, evaluating “whether the resolution of each individual claim requires review and rejection of a state court judgment.” *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1213. We have cautioned that *Rooker-Feldman* is narrowly construed and that “it will almost never apply.” *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1212. “But almost is not never.” *Efron v. Candelario*, 110 F.4th 1229, 1235 (11th Cir. 2024). At its heart, *Rooker-Feldman* is “a limited doctrine that applies only when litigants try to appeal state court losses in the lower federal courts.” *Behr*, 8 F.4th at 1214. This case fits within the narrow limitations of the doctrine.

In his amended complaint, which is the operative one, Sabir asked the district court to vacate or amend a state court award of alimony and child support. He generally alleged that the state court rulings against him violated his procedural due process and equal protection rights. He asked the district court to reconsider his state court case “with full evaluation of all evidence.” He alleged that his due process rights had been violated because the state court judge (1) miscalculated his income by including church funds and (2) wanted to hear some testimony without a court reporter present. He also alleged that he saw the state court judge “high-five” his ex-wife and her attorney and exchange family photographs, which “creat[ed] an appearance of favoritism.” He asserted an equal protection claim based on the allegation that the judge

didn't consider his ex-wife's "gainful employment," which produced "an inequitable award." He also complained about the state court's calculation of certain marital debts and assets and its decision not to sanction his ex-wife.

Sabir contends that he is seeking independent review of constitutional injuries. But, to grant him any relief, the district court would have to review and reject the state court's judgment. See *Efron*, 110 F.4th at 1236 (explaining that when determining if *Rooker-Feldman* bars claims, "[w]hether a state court judgment caused the plaintiff's injury remains the question for a federal court regardless of the form in which the plaintiff brings his or her claims"). Sabir is "complaining of injuries caused by, and is seeking relief from, the state-court judgment itself," and that means his case in federal court "falls within the narrow ground occupied by *Rooker-Feldman*." *T. M.*, 608 U.S. at 679 (quotation marks omitted). The district court did not err in dismissing his claims for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction.

AFFIRMED.