No. 19-7333

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

EDUARDO LUIS MARTINEZ-PAZ, PETITIONER

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

BRIEF FOR THE UNITED STATES IN OPPOSITION

NOEL J. FRANCISCO
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record

BRIAN A. BENCZKOWSKI
Assistant Attorney General

MICHAEL A. ROTKER
Attorney

Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001
SupremeCtBriefs@usdoj.gov
(202) 514-2217

QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether this Court's decision in Almendarez-Torres v. United States, 523 U.S. 224 (1998), should be overruled.

ADDITIONAL RELATED PROCEEDINGS

United States District Court (N.D. Tex.):

United States v. Martinez-Paz, No. 17-CR-592 (Sept. 19, 2018)

United States Court of Appeals (5th Cir.):

United States v. Martinez-Paz, No. 18-11263 (Oct. 17, 2019)

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OPINION BELOW

The opinion of the court of appeals (Pet. App. A1-A3) is not published in the Federal Reporter but is reprinted at 780 Fed. Appx. 180.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the court of appeals was entered on October 17, 2019. The petition for a writ of certiorari was filed on January 15, 2020. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. 1254(1).

STATEMENT

Following a guilty plea in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, petitioner was convicted on one count of unlawful reentry after removal, in violation of 8 U.S.C. 1326(a) and (b)(2). Pet. App. B1. The district court subsequently amended the judgment to reflect conviction under 8 U.S.C. 1326(a) and (b)(1). Id. at A2. Petitioner was sentenced to 45 months of imprisonment, to be followed by one year of supervised release. Id. at B2-B3. The court of appeals affirmed. Id. at A1-A3.

1. Petitioner is a citizen and national of Mexico. Presentence Investigation Report (PSR) ¶ 7. He was removed from the United States in 1999 and 2013. PSR ¶¶ 8-9. Petitioner's 1999 removal followed a Texas state conviction for sexual assault of a child, while his 2013 removal followed Texas state convictions for burglary of a habitation and engaging in organized criminal activity. Ibid.

Petitioner reentered the United States in 2015. See PSR ¶ 7. On October 20, 2017, petitioner was arrested on federal immigration charges, and he admitted that he had illegally reentered the United States. Ibid. A grand jury indicted petitioner on one count of unlawful reentry after removal, in violation of 8 U.S.C. 1326(a) and (b)(2). Indictment 1-2. Petitioner pleaded guilty to the charge without a plea agreement. PSR ¶ 4.

2. Section 1326(a) generally makes it unlawful for an alien to reenter the United States after having been removed unless he obtains the prior consent of the Attorney General (or the Secretary of Homeland Security, see 6 U.S.C. 202(3)-(4), 557). The default maximum punishment for that offense is a term of imprisonment of two years, followed by one year of supervised release. 8 U.S.C. 1326(a); 18 U.S.C. 3559(a)(5), 3583(b)(3). If, however, the alien's removal followed a conviction for a "felony," then the maximum term of imprisonment is ten years, and the maximum term of supervised release is three years. 8 U.S.C. 1326(b)(1); see 18 U.S.C. 3559(a)(3), 3583(b)(2). And if the alien's removal followed a conviction for an "aggravated felony," then the maximum term of imprisonment is 20 years, and the maximum term of supervised release is three years. 8 U.S.C. 1326(b)(2); see 18 U.S.C. 3559(a)(3), 3583(b)(2).

The Probation Office determined that petitioner had at least one prior conviction for an aggravated felony and that petitioner was therefore subject to the penalty provisions in Section 1326(b)(2). PSR ¶ 59. The Probation Office calculated an advisory Sentencing Guidelines range of 46 to 57 months of imprisonment and one to three years of supervised release. PSR ¶¶ 60, 62. Petitioner objected to the Probation Office's report, arguing that none of his prior convictions qualified as an "aggravated felony." Def.'s Objections to PSR 1-4. Petitioner further argued that because the indictment did not specifically allege that he had a

prior felony conviction, he was subject only to sentencing under 8 U.S.C. 1326(a), which provides for a maximum of two years of imprisonment and one year of supervised release. Id. at 5. Petitioner acknowledged, however, that the latter argument was foreclosed by this Court's decision in Almendarez-Torres v. United States, 523 U.S. 224 (1998). Ibid. In Almendarez-Torres, this Court held in the context of a similar constitutional claim arising from a Section 1326 prosecution that a defendant's prior conviction may be found by the sentencing court by a preponderance of the evidence as a sentencing factor, rather than charged in the indictment and found by the jury beyond a reasonable doubt as an element of the offense. See 523 U.S. at 239-247.

The district court sustained petitioner's first objection, agreeing that, under then-governing circuit precedent, his prior convictions were felonies but not aggravated felonies, and that petitioner was subject to sentencing under Section 1326(b)(1), rather than Section 1326(b)(2). 9/19/18 Sent. Tr. Pt. 2, at 8. The court overruled petitioner's second objection, deeming it foreclosed by Almendarez-Torres. Ibid. The district court sentenced petitioner to 45 months of imprisonment, to be followed by one year of supervised release. Pet. App. B2-B3. The judgment reflected that petitioner had been convicted and sentenced under Sections 1326(a) and (b)(2). Id. at B1.

3. The court of appeals affirmed in relevant part in an unpublished, per curiam decision. Pet. App. A1-A3. During the

pendency of the appeal, the court of appeals remanded the case to the district court to enter an amended judgment reflecting that petitioner had been sentenced under Section 1326(b)(1), rather than Section 1326(b)(2). Id. at A2. The district court entered an amended judgment, and the court of appeals dismissed petitioner's appeal as moot insofar as it challenged the judgment's reference to Section 1326(b)(2). Ibid. The court of appeals then affirmed the amended judgment, determining that Almendarez-Torres barred petitioner's claim, and that subsequent decisions of this Court did not overrule that decision. Id. at A2-A3.

ARGUMENT

Petitioner contends (Pet. 5-9) that this Court should overrule Almendarez-Torres v. United States, 523 U.S. 224 (1998). The Court has recently and repeatedly denied numerous petitions for writs of certiorari raising that issue.[1] The same result is

[1] See, e.g., Dominguez-Villalobos v. United States, No. 19-6500 (Mar. 9, 2020); Conde-Herrera v. United States, No. 19-6795 (Mar. 9, 2020); Ortega-Limones v. United States, No. 19-6773 (Mar. 2, 2020); Castro-Lopez v. United States, No. 19-5829 (Feb. 24, 2020); Suaste Balderas v. United States, No. 19-5865 (Feb. 24, 2020); Enriquez-Hernandez v. United States, No. 19-5869 (Feb. 24, 2020); Gonzalez-Terrazas v. United States, No. 19-5875 (Feb. 24, 2020); Castaneda-Torres v. United States, No. 19-5907 (Feb. 24, 2020); Arias-De Jesus v. United States, No. 19-6015 (Feb. 24, 2020); Espino Ramirez v. United States, No. 19-6199 (Feb. 24, 2020); Pineda-Castellanos v. United States, No. 19-6290 (Feb. 24, 2020); Martinez-Mendoza v. United States, No. 19-6582 (Feb. 24, 2020); Herrera-Segovia v. United States, No. 19-6094 (Jan. 27, 2020); Rios-Garza v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 278 (2019) (No. 19-5455); Collazo-Gonzalez v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 273 (2019) (No. 19-5358); Phillips v. United States,

warranted here.[2]

1. More than two decades ago, this Court held in Almendarez-Torres that, under Section 1326(b), a defendant's prior conviction is a sentencing factor rather than an element of an enhanced unlawful-reentry defense. 523 U.S. at 228-239. The Court further held that the statute, as so construed, does not violate the Constitution. Id. at 239-247.

In keeping with Almendarez-Torres, this Court held in Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466 (2000), that the Sixth Amendment requires any fact "[o]ther than the fact of a prior conviction" to be submitted to a jury and proved beyond a reasonable doubt (or admitted by the defendant) when it increases the penalty for a crime beyond the otherwise-prescribed statutory maximum. Id. at 490. The Court has since repeatedly affirmed

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140 S. Ct. 270 (2019) (No. 19-5150); Esparza-Salazar v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 264 (2019) (No. 19-5279); Capistran v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 237 (2019) (No. 18-9502); Riojas-Ordaz v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 120 (2019) (No. 18-9616); Dolmo-Alvarez v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 74 (2019) (No. 18-9321); Betancourt-Carrillo v. United States, 140 S. Ct. 59 (2019) (No. 18-9573); Boles v. United States, 139 S. Ct. 2659 (2019) (No. 18-9006); Miranda-Manuel v. United States, 139 S. Ct. 2656 (2019) (No. 18-8964); Aguilera-Alvarez v. United States, 139 S. Ct. 2654 (2019) (No. 18-8913); Herrera v. United States, 139 S. Ct. 2628 (2019) (No. 18-8900).

[2] Several other pending petitions for writs of certiorari raise the same question. See Mendez v. United States, No. 19-7102 (filed Dec. 18, 2019); Cortez-Rogel v. United States, No. 19-7088 (filed Dec. 23, 2019); Pacheco-Astrudillo v. United States, No. 19-7104 (filed Dec. 23, 2019); Guerrero-Saucedo v. United States, No. 19-7220 (filed Jan. 6, 2020); Sanchez-Miranda v. United States, No. 19-7322 (filed Jan. 16, 2020).

that the Sixth Amendment rule announced in Apprendi applies only to penalty-enhancing facts "[o]ther than the fact of a prior conviction." Ibid.; see United States v. Haymond, 139 S. Ct. 2369, 2377 n.3 (2019) (plurality opinion); Mathis v. United States, 136 S. Ct. 2243, 2252 (2016); Descamps v. United States, 570 U.S. 254, 269 (2013); Alleyne v. United States, 570 U.S. 99, 111 n.1 (2013); Southern Union Co. v. United States, 567 U.S. 343, 358-360 (2012); Carachuri-Rosendo v. Holder, 560 U.S. 563, 567 n.3 (2010); James v. United States, 550 U.S. 192, 214 n.8 (2007); Cunningham v. California, 549 U.S. 270, 274-275 (2007); United States v. Booker, 543 U.S. 220, 244 (2005); Blakely v. Washington, 542 U.S. 296, 301-302 (2004).

2. Petitioner contends (Pet. 5-8) that Almendarez-Torres is inconsistent with this Court's Apprendi line of decisions. That is incorrect. As the Court observed in Almendarez-Torres, recidivism "is a traditional, if not the most traditional, basis for a sentencing court's increasing an offender's sentence." 523 U.S. at 243; see id. at 230 (describing recidivism to be "as typical a sentencing factor as one might imagine"). "Consistent with this tradition, the Court said long ago that a State need not allege a defendant's prior conviction in the indictment or information that alleges the elements of an underlying crime, even though the conviction was 'necessary to bring the case within the statute.'" Id. at 243 (quoting Graham v. West Virginia, 224 U.S.

616, 624 (1912)) (emphasis omitted). "That conclusion followed, the Court said, from 'the distinct nature of the issue,' and the fact that recidivism 'does not relate to the commission of the offense, but goes to the punishment only.'" Id. at 243-244 (quoting Graham, 224 U.S. at 629) (emphasis omitted).

"The Court has not deviated from this view." Almendarez-Torres, 523 U.S. at 244 (citing Oyler v. Boles, 368 U.S. 448, 452 (1962), and Parke v. Raley, 506 U.S. 20, 27 (1992)). Indeed, Apprendi itself recognized "a vast difference" between "accepting the validity of a prior judgment * * * entered in a proceeding in which the defendant had the right to a jury trial and the right to require the prosecutor to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt," and allowing a judge rather than a jury to find in the first instance facts that "'relate to the commission of the offense' itself." 530 U.S. at 496 (quoting Almendarez-Torres, 523 U.S. at 244); see, e.g., Jones v. United States, 526 U.S. 227, 249 (1999) (explaining that because a prior conviction "must itself have been established through procedures satisfying the fair notice, reasonable doubt, and jury trial guarantees," it is "unlike virtually any other consideration used to enlarge the possible penalty for an offense").

A rule requiring that prior convictions, relevant only to sentencing, be alleged in the indictment or found by a jury would also be "difficult to reconcile" with the Court's "precedent

holding that the sentencing-related circumstances of recidivism are not part of the definition of the offense for double jeopardy purposes." Almendarez-Torres, 523 U.S. at 247 (citing Graham, 224 U.S. at 623-624). And such a rule would serve little practical purpose. A defendant's prior conviction is "almost never contested," id. at 235, and a defendant who has previously undergone the criminal process that resulted in the conviction cannot plausibly claim to be surprised by the conviction's existence or its use to enhance his sentence for a later crime, cf. United States v. Resendiz-Ponce, 549 U.S. 102, 108 (2007) (describing the notice functions served by indictment).

The rule that petitioner advocates also could invite substantial "unfairness." Almendarez-Torres, 523 U.S. at 234. "As this Court has long recognized, the introduction of evidence of a defendant's prior crimes risks significant prejudice." Id. at 235; see, e.g., Old Chief v. United States, 519 U.S. 172, 185 (1997) ("[T]here can be no question that evidence of the name or nature of the prior offense generally carries a risk of unfair prejudice to the defendant."); Spencer v. Texas, 385 U.S. 554, 560 (1967) (observing that evidence of prior crimes "is generally recognized to have potentiality for prejudice"); cf. Spencer, 385 U.S. at 563-565 (holding that the Due Process Clause does not require bifurcated proceeding when jury resolves recidivist sentencing issues).

Petitioner errs in contending (Pet. 8) that this Court's decision in Alleyne, in particular, "seriously undercuts the view * * * that recidivism is different from other sentencing facts." This Court held in Alleyne that "any fact that increase[d] the mandatory minimum is an 'element' that must be submitted to the jury." 570 U.S. at 103. But as petitioner recognizes (Pet. 7), the Court in Alleyne also made clear that it was not "revisit[ing]" Almendarez-Torres. Alleyne, 570 U.S. at 111 n.1. And since Alleyne, the Court has denied numerous petitions for writs of certiorari asking the Court to overrule Almendarez-Torres. See p. 6 n.1, supra.

3. In any event, as Justice Stevens recognized, even if Almendarez-Torres was wrongly decided, "there is no special justification for overruling" it. Rangel-Reyes v. United States, 547 U.S. 1200, 1201 (2006) (Stevens, J., respecting the denial of the petitions for writs of certiorari). Almendarez-Torres's rule, which applies only to "the narrow issues of fact concerning a defendant's prior conviction history, * * * will seldom create any significant risk of prejudice to the accused." Ibid. Indeed, here, petitioner does not suggest (Pet. 5-9) that the government would have been unable to prove beyond a reasonable doubt his prior illegal-entry conviction. In these circumstances, "[t]he doctrine of stare decisis provides a sufficient basis for the denial of certiorari." Rangel-Reyes, 547 U.S. at 1201-1202.

CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully submitted.

NOEL J. FRANCISCO
Solicitor General

BRIAN A. BENCZKOWSKI
Assistant Attorney General

MICHAEL A. ROTKER
Attorney

MARCH 2020