

Redistricting 101 and the Fight for Fair Representation After *Callais*

What is *Louisiana v. Callais*?

Louisiana v. Callais is a U.S. Supreme Court case decided on April 29, 2026, impacting fair representation for voters of color. The decision struck down Louisiana's congressional map containing two majority-Black districts and gutted Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. It attempts to weaken our democracy by giving states a green light to enact discriminatory maps through redistricting and gerrymandering. But voters still have power, from the local level to the halls of Congress, to enact change and create an inclusive and reflective democracy.

What is redistricting?

Redistricting is the process of dividing states, counties and other areas into districts used to elect government officials.

In many states, the state legislature is responsible for drawing district lines for congressional and state legislative districts. In some states, that power is given to an independent commission made up of everyday citizens. Sometimes, maps are ordered to be redrawn by courts if they are found to violate state or federal law. At the local level, cities and counties typically draw their own districts, such as county commission, city council or school board districts.

What is gerrymandering? How do I know if it's happening in my state?

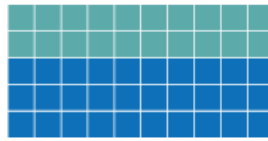
Gerrymandering is when district lines are drawn to give one political party or group of voters an unfair advantage over another.

It can happen in two ways: by concentrating (or "packing") a group of voters into one dense district to reduce the number of districts where they could have influence, or by spreading (also called "cracking") those voters across many districts to prevent them from reaching a majority in any one district. In a gerrymandered map, politicians choose their voters, not the other way around.

Gerrymandering can "crack" or "pack" voters based on political preference (partisan gerrymandering) or race (racial gerrymandering). The Supreme Court has said racial gerrymandering can be challenged in federal court, while partisan gerrymandering cannot be challenged in federal court (though it can be challenged in some state courts).

Although the Supreme Court treats racial and partisan gerrymandering like separate problems, they often go hand in hand. In states and localities where most voters of color support one political party and most white voters support another (as is the case in many states, including much of the South), drawing maps to disadvantage a political party can also effectively hurt voters of color.

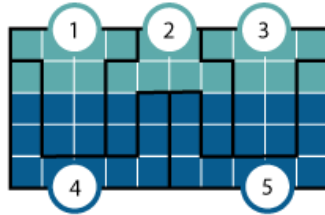
50 PRECINCTS
40% Teal
60% Blue



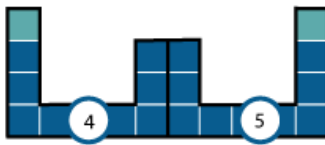
A POSSIBLE DISTRICT PLAN

Here is a district plan that could be drawn to make sure that more teal legislators are elected than blue ones:

5 Districts
3 Teal
2 Blue
TEAL WINS



THE PACKED DISTRICTS

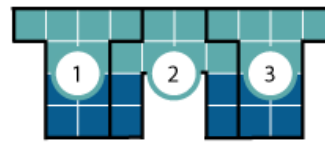


In each of these two districts, blue voters are packed, because out of 10 precincts, 9 are blue and 1 is teal. This means that the blue voters will elect their candidate with 90% of the vote, but they only needed 51 votes to win.

In each district:

- Surplus votes: The blue party has 39 surplus votes
- Lost votes: The teal party has only 10 lost votes

THE CRACKED DISTRICTS



In each of these three districts, blue voters are cracked, because out of 10 precincts, 6 are teal and only 4 are blue. This means that teal voters win each of their districts with 60% of the vote, while all of the 40% of blue voters votes are lost.

In each district:

- Surplus votes: The teal party has 9 surplus votes
- Lost votes: The blue party 40 lost votes

What is the Voting Rights Act?

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) is a federal law that aims to eliminate race discrimination in voting and elections. Often called the “crown jewel” of the Civil Rights Movement, the VRA was the product of persistent, organized advocacy by Black civil rights leaders across the American South, like Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Representative John Lewis, and Amelia Boynton Robinson, among many others.

The VRA outlawed several discriminatory practices from the Jim Crow era, the period from 1877 to the mid-1960s when southern states enacted laws to enforce segregation and disenfranchise Black Americans. And it created powerful legal tools to challenge voter suppression laws and unfair maps that reduced the ability of voters of color to meaningfully participate in the political process.

In later years, Congress updated and reaffirmed support for the VRA multiple times with overwhelming bipartisan agreement.

What is Section 2 of the VRA?

[Section 2 is a key provision of the VRA](#) that allows people to challenge unfair electoral maps or voter suppression laws in court. It prohibits any voting procedure or political map that limits the ability of voters of color to participate in the political process on equal terms with white voters.

After the VRA first passed in 1965, states and localities could no longer use poll taxes or literacy tests to disenfranchise voters of color. So, they turned to other parts of the voting process, like redistricting, to draw districts that diluted the voting power of Black voters and other communities of color.

That's why, in 1982, Congress amended Section 2 to provide stronger protection against racial discrimination in redistricting. The amendment clarified that voting laws with a discriminatory *effect*, not only those with a discriminatory *intent*, violate Section 2.

Since then, advocates have had a powerful tool to fight back against voting districts that unfairly drown out the political power of Black communities and other racial minority groups. Because of Section 2, districts across the country have been redrawn to ensure voters of color have an equal opportunity to elect their preferred candidates, producing more equitable representation at every level of government.

But in recent years, the Supreme Court has weakened Section 2 in several cases, significantly limiting its protections against racial discrimination in all aspects of the voting process. *Louisiana v. Callais* is the latest of these cases.

What did the Supreme Court decide in *Louisiana v. Callais*?

With its 6-3 decision in *Callais*, the Supreme Court effectively gutted Section 2's protections against discriminatory district lines that prevent voters of color from having an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

In *Callais*, the Supreme Court changed how legal claims challenging discriminatory maps under Section 2 must be analyzed. Among other things, challengers must now show that legislators *intended* to discriminate against racial minority groups, instead of showing only that the maps had a discriminatory *impact* on those voters. This will be particularly difficult to do in states where voters of color and white voters tend to support different parties, a pattern common across the South and much of the country.

In effect, the Supreme Court made it much harder for communities of color to challenge maps that unfairly dilute their political power.

How does the *Callais* decision affect my right to vote?

Voting rights have been under attack in recent years, including through laws that make it harder to cast a ballot, like strict voter identification laws, burdensome and discriminatory proof of citizenship requirements, polling place closures, and restrictions targeting absentee and mail voting.

The impact of the *Callais* decision is different but no less important — *it means that when people of color do vote, their vote may not have as much power as it should.*

What does the *Callais* decision mean for my right to vote? Why are states like Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee and more drawing new maps?

By weakening Section 2's protections against racial discrimination in the redistricting process, the Supreme Court's decision in *Callais* gives states the power to draw districts to reduce minority representation, so long as they claim that they are doing so for *partisan* purposes.

In response to *Callais*, several state governments have moved swiftly to redraw their congressional maps to eliminate districts where people of color make up a majority of voters and create more districts that align with their partisan political goals.

But this decision is about more than just Congress. Section 2 protects against racial discrimination in state and local districts, too — including for state legislatures, city councils and school boards. With Section 2 weakened by *Callais*, fair representation for voters of color is threatened at all levels of government.

What other protections do voters have after *Callais*?

Voters still have many other protections against illegal and unfair election laws. The VRA still prohibits voter intimidation and provides support for voters with disabilities and those who don't primarily speak English. The federal constitution protects against discriminatory voting practices, and many state constitutions do the same.

There are also other federal laws, like the National Voter Registration Act, that protect against unfair voting laws. And, in the days since the Supreme Court's decision in *Callais*, multiple lawsuits have been filed to address the shocking and illegal efforts by many states across the South to redraw their maps.

Who can fix this?

This is an undeniably challenging time. But the solution is us. And there are many things we can do, from the local level all the way up to Congress.

At the local level, we can educate our neighbors about this decision and raise awareness in our schools, churches and community organizations when politicians attempt to dilute the political power of voters of color. We can join local chapters of organizations that monitor redistricting in our states, such as the NAACP, LULAC, Common Cause and the League of Women Voters, and join efforts to fight for fair maps, such as the ACLU's [Democracy Defender Task Force](#) and the [Good Trouble Lives On Weekend of Action](#).

When politicians do try to gerrymander, we can be engaged in the redistricting process directly: show up to public hearings, submit fair maps for the legislature to consider, join demonstrations, demand that the map-drawing process be transparent, and make calls and submit comments identifying how our communities will be harmed by discriminatory districts.

Officials often face real pressure when constituents push back. And if the map ends up in court, a robust public record is helpful in a legal challenge.

We can also proactively call on state legislatures to pass bills like [state voting rights acts](#), which include protections against racial discrimination in local redistricting and other aspects of the voting process. Advocates can also push for policies that take the power to draw district lines away from self-interested politicians and put them in the hands of voters, such as through [independent redistricting commissions](#).

Congress has the authority to enact laws regulating federal elections and prohibiting states and localities from discriminating against voters of color in federal, state and local elections. For example, using its power under the U.S. Constitution, Congress could pass federal legislation making partisan gerrymandering illegal and prohibiting states from engaging in mid-decade redistricting.

Why your vote still matters, even after *Callais*.

Your vote still matters, and your vote still has power. Our leaders are entrusted to carry out the will of the people — not seize power and disregard the rule of law. As a voter, you can send a clear message to politicians who want to use the Supreme Court’s ruling to threaten the freedom to vote after elections are already underway: Voters get to choose our elected officials, not the other way around.

It’s clear that voters still have power in our democracy. For example, local elections, which affect our daily lives, are often decided by very small margins. Statewide races — such as for U.S. senators, governors and other statewide officials — cannot be gerrymandered. There are many more elections this year, including in states that are racing to redraw maps, where voters have the chance to support policies that will help create a more inclusive and reflective democracy.

Every election is an opportunity to hold our leaders accountable and show them that the voters will not be silenced.