



2024 PREVIEW

DEMOCRACY DEFENDED

A preview for a report on LDF's on-the-ground monitoring and advocacy throughout the 2024 primary and general elections

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(above) People arrive to vote at a polling station at St. David's Baptist Church in the 9th Ward area of New Orleans, Louisiana, on Election Day, November 5, 2024. Photo by SANDY HUFFAKER/AFP via Getty Images (cover) Supporters listen to a concession speech at Howard University on November 6, 2024 in Washington, DC. Photo by Brandon Bell/Getty Images

LDF Works to Defend Democracy and Grow Black Political Power

The 2024 general elections demonstrated increased attempts to threaten Black political power — but also historic growth of that same power. For the first time in U.S. history, a Black and South Asian woman was the presidential nominee for a major party. Black voters in Alabama and Louisiana gained new congressional districts and were able to elect their candidates of choice as a result of the Legal Defense Fund's (LDF) successful litigation in [Allen v. Milligan](#) and [Robinson v. Landry](#), respectively. Alabama now has two Black representatives serving simultaneously in Congress. And, over 100 years after one of the worst race massacres [in the country](#) took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, Tulsa elected its first Black mayor. Black voters in New York, Virginia, Connecticut, and Minnesota also acquired critical protections for fair voting access through the passage of [state voting rights acts](#), which LDF has played a leading role in helping enact.

Voters now have the opportunity to build on these positive developments and use them as motivation for further political engagement, beyond presidential elections. But in order for this nation to truly live up to its ideals and fulfill the demands of a multi-racial democracy, policymakers must address the remaining serious barriers to Black political participation.

In LDF's *Democracy Defended 2024* report, readers will find analyses of election-protection activities undertaken by LDF during the 2024 election cycle as well as recommendations for policymakers, election administrators, and community members to ensure fair access to the vote in future elections. The report proposes solutions to the issues identified during the most recent elections, including renewed calls for Congress to finally pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

LDF's on-the-ground monitoring and advocacy throughout the 2024 primary and general elections identified the following themes:

Criminalization of Voting and Voting Assistance

Black voters faced heightened scrutiny and [harsh penalties](#) for exercising their right to vote, and organizations aiming to help them register and vote likewise faced new restrictions. These dynamics threatened to diminish Black voter turnout. LDF is litigating restrictions on voter assistance in [Alabama](#), [Georgia](#), and [Texas](#). In Georgia, a law enacted in 2021 made it illegal to give voters food or water within 150 feet of a polling location while they wait in line. Through litigation, LDF [won](#) an injunction prohibiting enforcement in many Georgia counties of a similar ban that would have extended even farther than 150 feet from a polling location. Additionally, in 2021, Texas enacted Senate Bill 1, which limits nonpartisan organizations' ability to provide and deliver mail ballots to voters by criminalizing this assistance as "vote harvesting." On Oct. 15, 2024, [a federal judge](#) ruled that five provisions of Senate Bill 1 targeting voter assistance violate the Voting Rights Act (VRA).

Nonprofit organizations' critical work in ensuring that all people eligible to vote are able to register has become more difficult in recent years. In July 2024, [a new Louisiana election law](#) took effect that requires nonpartisan groups to register with the Louisiana secretary of state prior to holding voter registration drives. Similarly, in March 2024, Alabama's secretary of state [erroneously claimed](#) that a nonprofit's voter registration efforts, which were aimed at encouraging people of color, women, and young voters to register, were impermissible partisan activities. [Registration rates in Florida have declined substantially](#) following the April 2023 passage of a state law that heavily restricts third-party voter registration activities and imposes steep fines for any violations.

These laws criminalizing assistance with voter registration echo [similarly egregious actions](#) in U.S. history, such as the prosecution of [Maggie Bozeman and Julia Wilder](#) for providing absentee ballots for a 1978 school board election to Black residents of Pickens County, Alabama, who could not vote in person because they were homebound or elderly and/or they could not read. Their prosecution helped spur the reauthorization of the VRA in 1982.

Intimidation of Voters and Election Workers

The heightened tensions surrounding the 2024 elections, generated by highly divisive rhetoric, affected voters and election workers across the country and particularly impacted Black communities. [Researchers](#) found that election workers experienced an increase in threats, harassment, and insults in the lead-up to the 2024 elections. Counties throughout the country experienced high turnover of local election officials—[approaching 40%](#). And while there were slightly fewer reports of voter intimidation and harassment during voting periods in 2024 compared to 2020, there were still outrageous instances across LDF's focus states. In Florida, a man showed up at a polling location and [threatened voters with a machete](#). In Alabama, local law enforcement set up a speed trap just outside a polling location in a predominantly Black area and pulled over multiple people on their way to vote in the crucial hour before the polls closed. In Georgia, multiple bomb threats at polling locations led to the temporary closure of 13 polling locations, [many of which](#) were in majority-Black communities. Election workers in South Carolina and Texas were subjected to threats and assaults after asking voters to remove partisan apparel while voting.

No one should have to fear for their safety when exercising their fundamental right to vote or working in a polling place to ensure voters can cast their ballots. Threats of political violence have no place in democracy and should not be tolerated at any level.

Disinformation Targeting Black Voters

During the 2024 presidential campaign cycle, harmful and disruptive disinformation and misinformation campaigns targeted Black people via social media. According to a report from [Onyx Impact](#), disinformation spread in Black online spaces potentially reached more than 40 million people leading up to the 2024 elections. This startling trend echoed the [2016 election](#) cycle, when foreign actors weaponized social media platforms to promote misinformation and disinformation especially among Black communities in order to sow division, steer election outcomes, or suppress participation. The Onyx report explained that the primary sources of this disinformation in 2024 were online blogs, “Black manosphere” platforms, Black nativist groups, health skeptics, and some non-American Black media platforms. Their dangerous messages included narratives supporting civic disengagement and [anti-immigrant sentiment](#), along with the general stoking of division.

In the United States, Black people and other people of color are [more likely](#) than white people to rely on social media for news sources. This pattern makes the pervasive mis- and disinformation spread through social media leading up to the 2024 elections even more concerning. Young voters are also more likely to get their news from social media, making them vulnerable to these mis- and disinformation social media campaigns. The rapid rise and proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) and new tech tools designed to replicate human actions (“deepfakes”), and the comparative lack of regulation of such technologies, make more potential voters susceptible to deception from disinformation campaigns.

Election Administration and Infrastructure Problems

Black voters continue to have limited access to the ballot due to inefficient and ineffective election administration. Voters across LDF’s focus states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas experienced polling location changes with little to no notice, outdated information on polling location look-up tools, inadequate signage and lighting at polling locations, polling locations with parking and/or entrances that were inaccessible to voters with mobility impairments, voting machine equipment failures, and long lines due to insufficient polling locations and/or staffing. Long lines were particularly problematic in Alabama and Mississippi because there was no early voting and limited access to absentee voting. There was also a disturbing trend of partisan signs placed in front of and blocking official election signs intended to direct voters to their polling place.

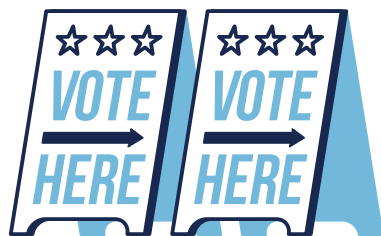
Although there were several advances to celebrate in 2024, weaknesses remain in the U.S. electoral system that threaten the participation and power of Black voters. Further protections are necessary to shore up the voters’ access to the ballot box — and policymakers, nonprofit organizations, and everyday Americans have a part to play in making them happen.

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Here are some of the lessons LDF learned during the 2024 election cycle:

1 More than ever, Black voters must leave no power on the table. Many of the barriers to the ballot witnessed in 2024 were rooted in systemic problems that have languished over the years due to a lack of action and oversight. Taking action to protect elections cannot have any off years, and waiting until the presidential and midterm cycles to politically engage or address existing issues is often too late. By building voting habits and a culture of civic engagement year-round, Black communities will be best positioned to exercise their power in the next presidential election in 2028, midterms in 2026, and those elections that are even sooner. Every election is important, including those for city, county, and school board positions. Voters have many crucial opportunities to have their voices heard, particularly in those states that have passed their own voting rights acts in the absence of comprehensive federal voting rights protections.

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2 Fair representation matters. Every 10 years, after a new census is completed, states and localities draw new maps for federal and state legislative districts, as well as for local offices such as school boards and city councils. Although the U.S. Constitution and the VRA mandate that these maps be drawn fairly and allow for equal representation, this has not always happened. Previously, under Section Five of the VRA, states with a history of voter discrimination had to undergo a “preclearance” process of federal approval for any new maps. But since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, this is no longer the case — leaving states and localities free to implement maps without proactive oversight.

Today, discriminatory maps continue to suppress the Black vote and limit Black voters’ opportunities for representation. Having the opportunity to elect candidates of choice matters not only for representation, but also for voter engagement. Voters are more engaged when they feel like their vote could make a difference. That’s why LDF successfully sued both the [State of Alabama](#) and the [State of Louisiana](#) under Section Two of the VRA, allowing for new majority-Black districts to be drawn in both states that enable Black voters to elect candidates of their choice which stimulates Black voter engagement. Comparing Black voter turnout in the newly drawn districts in Alabama and Louisiana to turnout in districts without a Black majority reveals the importance of fair congressional maps for driving Black political power. In Alabama’s March 2024 primary, turnout in the newly created congressional district was [more than double](#) the turnout for the 2022 primary. In the [November 2024](#) general elections, Alabamians elected two Black congressional representatives for the first time in the state’s history. In Louisiana’s November 2024 primary elections for Congress, the candidates

in both new districts received over half of the vote, eliminating the need for a runoff election in December. The percentage of Black voter turnout, as calculated by the number of Black voters divided by the number of Black citizen voting-age population (i.e. U.S. citizens in the district over the age of 18 in the district) was higher in each of the two majority-Black districts in Louisiana than in the four majority-white districts.

3 This moment demands regulation of the evolving technologies that drive disinformation. The emergence of AI, deepfakes, and new tools of disinformation threaten trust in civic institutions. Policymakers must modernize regulations and legislation at the federal, state, and local levels to address the evolving threats that technology poses. Furthermore, voters must learn how to distinguish between authentic and artificial information. Creating a more informed electorate, including through robust civic education that teaches voters to decipher credible from non-credible sources, is increasingly urgent — particularly as tech companies continue to abdicate responsibility for the content their platforms promote.

An intersectional framework is necessary to advance equity and Black political power.

4 Innovation in technology calls for modernized elections. While evolving technologies introduce new threats to democracy, they can also foster new opportunities to reach voters. For example, technology can provide up-to-date information about basic election administration, from poll site changes to how to efficiently navigate the voting process. Voting rights advocates may also responsibly leverage AI tools to identify patterns of false narratives and election sabotage threats. Researchers and advocates should consider such ethical optimization of AI technology tools to support, rather than undermine, democratic principles and civic awareness.

5 An intersectional framework is necessary to advance equity and Black political power. As mis- and disinformation strategies continue to capitalize on division, it is critical to center coalition-building across identities. [Recent research](#) by political science professor Maraam Dwidar, PhD, documents that organizations advocating for women, people of color, Native nations, and low-income communities frequently employ coalitional lobbying as a strategic approach to intersectional advocacy. Dwidar's research shows that this collaborative lobbying method is effective in creating more inclusive policymaking. Engaging in shared dialogue around topics of gender, nationality, sexuality, and the varied forms of division and discrimination that aim to undermine Black political power and divide communities is necessary in order to protect democracy.



Caption. Photo by Roberto Hernandez

6 **Sixty years since the passage of the VRA, lawmakers must prioritize a voting rights agenda.** The reverberations of the *Shelby* decision and the resultant lack of federal oversight of election changes were felt throughout the 2024 elections. Instead of taking urgent action to restore the full safeguards of the VRA, the federal government has pursued a variety of anti-democratic tactics. Congress has advanced policies like the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which would impose unnecessary and burdensome documentary proof of citizenship requirements, and the White House

has released similarly regressive executive orders. Defensive legal tactics by LDF and partners have been vital tools to counteract these efforts to undermine equal electoral opportunities, but proactive strategies remain necessary. For example, pro-democracy efforts to pass policies at the state level in the form of state voting rights acts and other advancements can further safeguard Black communities against threats of voter suppression. Advocates must continue and expand these campaigns to pass comprehensive voting rights legislation at every level of government in the years ahead.



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