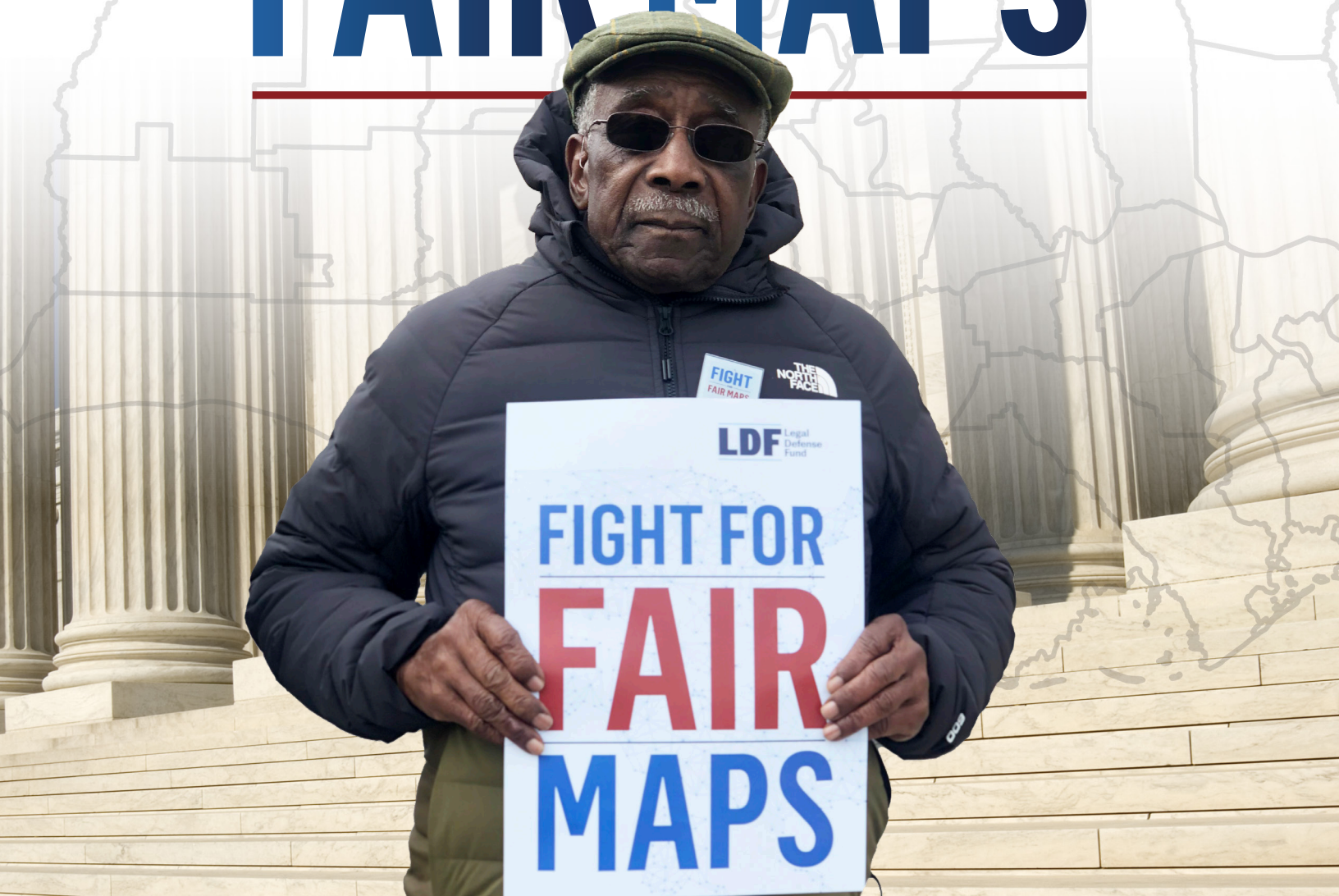
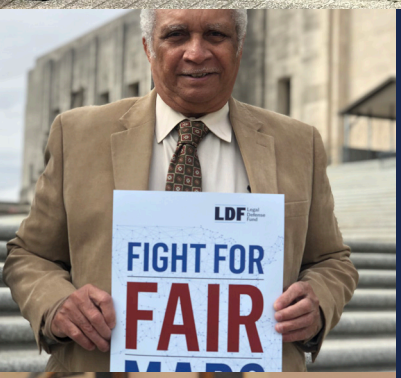
LDF Legal Defense Fund

LOUISIANA'S FIGHT FOR FAIR MAPS





For years, Louisianians have organized, legislated, and litigated for the promise of a fair and representative congressional map.

LOUISIANA'S FIGHT FOR FAIR CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

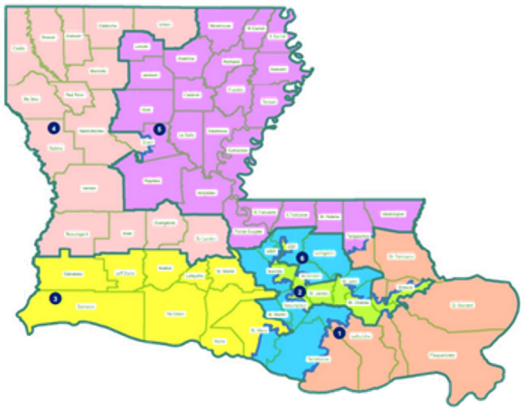
From their communities, to state legislative chambers, and all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, Black Louisianians have united to demand legislative districts that reflect their unique interests. For too long, their opportunities have been shaped by Louisiana's repeated history of discrimination. Their march to a fair congressional map has been long and winding.

The 2020 Census revealed that Louisiana's Black population increased to one third of the state's population. Community members and civil rights attorneys mobilized across the state to call for fair and representative maps at public hearings hosted by state lawmakers. Specifically, they urged lawmakers to pass maps that complied with the protections of the U.S. Constitution and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), which prohibits state and local governments from using any voting procedure that "results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen...to vote on account of race or color." They noted that current patterns of discrimination in Louisiana required the state to enact a new congressional map with two districts designed to ensure Black voters would have an equal opportunity to elect their candidate of choice.

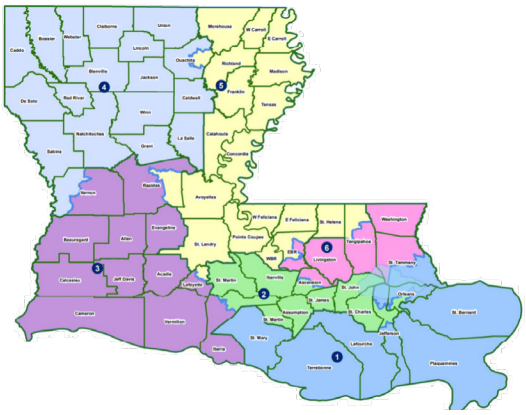
However, when tasked with passing a new map for the state's six congressional districts in 2022, the Louisiana Legislature passed a map, HB1, that had only one majority-Black district and failed to provide fair representation to Black voters. Shortly after, individual Black voters including Dr. Press Robinson, Edgar Cage, Dr. Dorothy Nairne, Bishop Edwin René Soulé, Dr. Alice Washington, Reverand Clee Earnest Lowe, Commissioner Davante Lewis, Martha Davis, and Ambrose Sims, along with organizational plaintiffs Power Coalition for Equity and Justice and the NAACP Louisiana State Conference, filed a lawsuit, *Robinson v. Landry* (then *Robinson v. Ardoin*), challenging the map as a violation of Section 2. The *Robinson* Plaintiffs argued that Louisiana's map violated Section 2 by weakening Black Louisianians' voting power.

After years of litigation, federal courts gave the Louisiana Legislature until the end of January 2024 to pass a map that complied with the VRA. During a special legislative session ending on January 19, 2024, the Legislature passed a map that included a second majority-Black district, SB8. However, unlike the maps the *Robinson* plaintiffs endorsed in the courts and at the state capitol, SB4, which placed the new district along the Mississippi Delta between Baton Rouge and Monroe, SB8 created a new majority-Black district by connecting communities in Baton Rouge and Shreveport, following the Red River and I-49. Legislators cited political priorities for this choice—namely, preserving the districts of preferred and powerful incumbents.

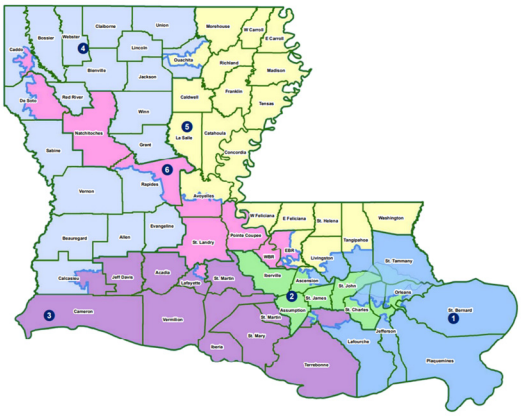
2022 Enacted Map (HB1)



Robinson Plaintiffs' Proposed Map (SB4)



2024 Enacted Map (SB8)



Shortly after SB8 became law, a group of "non-African American voters" filed a new lawsuit, *Callais v. Landry*, challenging the enacted map as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. The *Callais* Plaintiffs claimed that "race was the sole reason" for the passage of the map. The *Robinson* Plaintiffs quickly intervened in *Callais* to defend the rights of Black voters to have a fair and representative map in 2024—and beyond.

After a three-day trial, a divided panel of three federal court judges overturned the map. The majority held that legislators improperly prioritized race, and that the map was not narrowly designed to comply with the VRA, despite the *Robinson* federal court rulings. The *Robinson* Intervenors and State Defendants quickly appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and asked the Court to pause the District Court's order until after the 2024 elections.

On May 15, 2024, the Supreme Court granted an emergency stay, pausing enforcement of the district court's decision and allowing the 2024 elections to proceed on the districts drawn in SB8, with two majority-Black districts. On the eve of the federal elections, November 4, 2024, the Supreme Court noted probable jurisdiction in *Louisiana v. Callais*, affirming that the Court would hear oral arguments on the merits of the case and determine the fate of the map moving forward. Oral argument was held on March 24, 2025.

Months after the oral argument, the Court made the rare decision to hold the case to be reargued rather than issue a ruling. This time, the Justices asked parties to provide supplemental briefing on the narrower question of whether Louisiana's intentional creation of a second majority-minority congressional district violated the 14th and 15th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. In weighing this question, the Court will be forced to grapple with how decades of settled law applies to Louisiana's map. The outcome of the case, however, will not only impact Louisiana, but will also serve as a decisive inflection point in our nation's commitment to protecting voting rights for communities nationwide.

THE WINDING PATH TO FAIR CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS CONTINUES...

SEPT. 2021
La. Legislature begins redistricting roadshow hearings after 2020 Census count reveals 1/3 Black pop.

FEB. 1, 2022
La. Legislature convenes for special session on redistricting

FEB. 18, 2022
Legislature passes map with only 1 majority-Black district out of 6

MAR. 10, 2022
Governor John Bel Edwards vetoes the map

MAR. 30, 2022
Legislature overrides the veto, and *Robinson* Plaintiffs file suit under Sec. 2 of the Voting Rights Act

MAY 9-13, 2022
District Court hearing on Plaintiffs' Motion for Preliminary Injunction

JUNE 6, 2022
District Court grants Plaintiffs' Motion for Preliminary Injunction

JUNE 18, 2022
Legislature convenes but fails to pass new map

JUNE 28, 2022
U.S. Supreme Court puts case on hold pending outcome of similar Alabama case (*Allen v. Milligan*)

JUNE 8, 2023
U.S. Supreme Court rules in favor of Black voters in Alabama, upholding Sec. 2 of the VRA

JUNE 26, 2023
U.S. Supreme Court allows Louisiana case to continue

OCT. 6, 2023
5th Circuit oral argument to defend the Preliminary Injunction Order

NOV. 2, 2023
5th Circuit vacates *Robinson* injunction, deeming a new map can and should be enacted for 2024

JAN. 15, 2024
Legislature convenes to try to pass a new map

JAN. 19, 2024
Legislature passes a map with a second majority-Black district extending from Baton Rouge to Shreveport

JAN. 22, 2024
Governor Jeff Landry signs the new map into law

JAN. 31, 2024
Callais plaintiffs file suit saying map violates the 14th Amendment as a racial gerrymander

FEB. 7, 2024
Robinson plaintiffs move to intervene in *Callais* to defend the new map

MAR. 15, 2024
District Court finally allows *Robinson* litigants to join the case and defend the map

APR. 8-10, 2024
District Court joint preliminary injunction hearing and trial in Shreveport, La.

APR. 30, 2024
2 of 3 District Court judges vote to overturn the new map

MAY 1, 2024
Robinson intervenors file notice of appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court

MAY 8, 2024
Robinson team asks U.S. Supreme Court to let map stay in place for 2024 elections

MAY 15, 2024
U.S. Supreme Court allows map to stay in effect for 2024 elections

NOV. 4. 2024
U.S. Supreme Court combines cases as *Louisiana v. Callais* to determine map's fate after 2024 elections

NOV. 5, 2024
Congressional elections held on map with two majority-Black districts

MARCH 24, 2025
U.S. Supreme Court oral argument in *Louisiana v. Callais*

JUNE 27, 2025
U.S. Supreme Court defers decision and assigns case for reargument.

AUGUST 8, 2025
U.S. Supreme Court asks for briefing on constitutionality of majority-minority district

AUGUST 27, 2025
State defendants effectively flip sides, leaving *Robinson* Intervenors to defend the map and VRA

OCTOBER 15, 2025
Second Supreme Court oral argument scheduled in *Louisiana v. Callais*

Legislative Record | *Robinson* Litigation | *Callais* Litigation

TALKING POINTS

LOUISIANA CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING MESSAGES

- The right to vote is the cornerstone of American democracy and the Voting Rights Act (VRA) is one of our strongest tools for protecting it. Section 2 of the VRA, which prohibits racially discriminatory voting policies and district maps, is among the Act's most important features.
- This year marks 60 years since the passage of the VRA. This history-making statute marked the beginning of a transformation in our pursuit of a multiracial democracy. Finally, Black people and other voters of color could more equally engage in the political process.
- Since its passage, the VRA has been a critical tool to push back against formidable forms of racial voter suppression — from literacy tests, to poll taxes, and racially dilutive electoral maps.
- Yet just as Black people and other voters of color have made gains in the political arena, suppression tactics have evolved. Black people's political power remains under attack by majority-white legislatures while core protections of the VRA have been undercut by U.S. Supreme Court decisions.
- Voter assistance restrictions, polling site closures, onerous registration requirements, and other policies disproportionately burden voters of color. Maps that dilute the voting strength of communities of color remain among the most persistent threats to a fair and representative democracy.
- *Louisiana v. Callais* is the latest attempt to erode the VRA's protections by attempting to limit Section 2's application in the redistricting process and the promise of fair maps. This effort to weaken our ability to challenge and remedy racially discriminatory maps is an affront to the communities who fought for generations to be heard at the ballot box.
- The VRA was passed and repeatedly reauthorized by bipartisan majorities in Congress to root out racial discrimination in our elections, of which our country has a long and well-documented history. In states like Louisiana, these legacies continue today and make the political process less open to Black communities. As a result, these communities suffer from unresponsive representation and neglect of their unique needs and interests. Section 2 is a critical checkpoint to guard against this form of racial discrimination.
- Louisiana established a second majority-Black congressional district because multiple federal courts found that the VRA required a new map that reflected Louisiana's diverse population and responded to persistent racialized politics and discrimination. The new map meant that Black people, who make up one-third of Louisiana's population, could finally have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.
- Inclusive representation is foundational to a healthy democracy. It ensures that all communities, regardless of race, have a seat at the table for policy decision-making.
- While Louisiana's map was shaped with other political priorities at the forefront (like protecting Louisiana's powerful incumbents, including Speaker Johnson), the map finally also accounted for Section 2's protections, allowing Black voters to elect candidates who genuinely represent their communities' concerns and interests.

- In *Callais*, opponents of Louisiana's map do not only aim to overturn it. They now seek to pit critical civil rights protections against one another, claiming that attempting to address racial discrimination under Section 2 is itself discriminatory and violates the 14th and 15th Amendments—the very constitutional provisions adopted in the wake of the Civil War to protect against discrimination in voting. The VRA was later passed to enforce these exact constitutional principles.

- This case is not just about Louisiana. It is about whether communities of color across the country can have meaningful representation.

- The stakes could not be higher as we approach a decision. When the Supreme Court chose to rehear cases in the past, it was often a signal of deeper engagement, with the results that have expanded, not contracted, constitutional protections. Some of the most important rulings in American history were reargued, including *Brown v. Board, Roe v. Wade,* and *Miranda v. Arizona*.

- The Court is listening closely, and now we must all tune in. The promise of the VRA and our right to a free, fair, and representative democracy hang in the balance.

FIGHT FOR FAIR MAPS

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