

The Supreme Court Rewrote the Rules of Redistricting Seven Months Before the Midterms. Here's What That Means for Your Vote.

By Ashwini Kotaru — *Progressive Power*

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Control of the U.S. House this November may hinge less on which candidates voters choose than on which districts they are allowed to choose them in. Since mid-2025, nine states have redrawn their congressional maps outside the normal ten-year cycle, an unusual wave of mid-decade redistricting most Americans have never had to think about. In April 2026, the Supreme Court made that wave far easier to ride, sharply narrowing the Voting Rights Act protection that had constrained how far states could go.

Here is what actually happened, what it means for the House majority, and why it matters even if you don't live in one of the states redrawing its lines.

What the Court actually decided

On April 29, 2026, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in *Louisiana v. Callais* that Louisiana's congressional map, which included a second majority-Black district drawn to comply with the Voting Rights Act, was itself an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. The Court held that states have broad latitude to draw district lines, including for partisan advantage, but ruled that Louisiana lacked a sufficiently compelling justification to draw a district using race as a factor, even when that district was created to satisfy the Voting Rights Act's own requirements.

The practical effect, as election-law scholars and voting rights groups across the political spectrum have described it, is to narrow Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act to cases where a state can be shown to have intentionally discriminated, a far higher bar than the “results” standard that has governed redistricting litigation for more than 40 years. In dissent, Justice Elena Kagan wrote that the ruling leaves the Voting Rights Act “all but a dead letter,” as the Brennan Center's analysis of her dissent has characterized the line. About a week later, the Court took the additional, unusual step of fast-tracking formal certification of its judgment, well ahead of the 25-plus days normally allowed for rehearing petitions, clearing the way for Louisiana to adopt a new map for the 2026 elections even as early voting was already underway in the state. Louisiana subsequently canceled its scheduled primary to accommodate the new map.

It is worth stating plainly that reasonable people read this differently. The majority and its supporters describe the ruling as restoring a colorblind approach to redistricting and correcting what they see as decades of courts requiring race-based line-drawing. Voting rights advocates describe the same ruling as removing the last meaningful check on a state's ability to dilute the political power of Black and

Latino voters, so long as it can point to a partisan rather than explicitly racial motive. Both readings are represented below.

The scoreboard: what has already moved

Mid-decade redistricting did not begin with Callais. Texas, California, North Carolina, Ohio, and Utah had already enacted new congressional maps before the decision came down, largely at the encouragement of the Trump administration, which has pushed Republican-controlled legislatures to redraw lines mid-decade to help protect the party's narrow House majority. Texas's revised map, passed in August 2025, is intended to create up to five additional Republican-leaning seats. California responded with Proposition 50, approved by voters in November 2025 by a wide margin, redrawing the state's map to create up to five additional Democratic-leaning seats. Not every mid-decade effort succeeded: Missouri's new map has been signed into law but remains contested, facing a veto referendum on the November 2026 ballot and lawsuits seeking to delay its use, and Virginia's attempt at a Democratic-favoring map failed in court and did not take effect for this cycle.

Callais accelerated the pace rather than starting it. In its wake, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Tennessee moved to redraw or further redraw their maps ahead of November, with Tennessee's legislature passing a new map narrowing a longstanding Memphis-based Black-majority district within about two weeks of the decision. Independent election forecasters now put the number of states that have enacted new congressional maps for this cycle at nine: Alabama, California, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah. That count is heavily lopsided by who drew the lines, not evenly split — seven or eight of the nine maps were drawn by Republican-controlled legislatures, with California's the clear exception.

The net partisan effect of all this redrawing is, perhaps surprisingly, closer to a wash than either party's rhetoric suggests, despite that lopsided count. As of mid-September 2026, election forecaster Decision Desk HQ projects Democrats hold roughly a two-in-three chance of winning House control, and its modeling finds Democrats gaining an average of about two seats across the nine redistricted states, even though seven of those nine maps were drawn by Republican-controlled legislatures. That is a reminder that redistricting is not simply a story about which party benefits on net; it is a story about which specific communities lose their ability to elect a representative of their choice, regardless of the top-line seat count.

As many as 20 of the 62 sitting members of the Congressional Black Caucus could see their districts redrawn or their reelection chances diminished this cycle — not because voters changed their minds, but because the lines around them changed.

Who this actually affects

At the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's annual legislative conference in September 2026, members described this cycle in unusually direct terms. As many as 20 of the Caucus's 62 sitting members could see their districts redrawn or their reelection prospects diminished this year, according to figures discussed at the conference. In Louisiana, the state's newly adopted map reduces the number of Black-majority districts from two to one, out of six total seats, despite a Black population share of

roughly 30 percent. In Alabama, a redrawn district represented by Rep. Shomari Figures saw its Black voting-age population fall from nearly 49 percent to 39 percent.

This is not a partisan talking point in isolation; it is a description of what narrowing Section 2 protection was always going to do in states with a history of racially polarized voting; the same legal mechanism that once required states to draw districts giving minority communities a fair chance to elect a candidate of their choice no longer reliably applies. Whether that outcome is a correction of prior overreach or an erosion of hard-won protection is precisely the question dividing the Court's majority from its dissent, and Congress from itself.

Some voting rights advocates have framed the ruling as a forcing function rather than only a setback. NAACP Legal Defense Fund president Janai Nelson called it “an invitation to do something much bolder and broader,” and other scholars at the same conference floated structural ideas of their own, including multi-member proportional districts, Supreme Court expansion, and judicial term limits. Separately, groups including the Brennan Center have renewed calls for Congress to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore a nationwide preclearance-style review. None of these responses can move without congressional action, which is itself contingent on the outcome of the very elections being contested under the new maps.

The through-line

Two claims can both be true at once, and both matter for how this story should be told. It is true that the net partisan impact of this year's redistricting wave looks smaller than the loudest voices on either side suggest, and that Democrats remain favored to win the House regardless of how the maps shake out. It is also true that for a specific, identifiable set of communities, chiefly Black voters in Southern and mid-South states, this year's map changes represent a real and measurable loss of representation, decided by courts and legislatures rather than by voters. A responsible telling of this story holds both facts at once rather than collapsing into either “it doesn't matter” or “it changes everything.”

This is also, unusually for a legal story, one with a firm and fast deadline. Unlike most Supreme Court rulings, whose effects unfold over years of lower-court litigation, Callais was fast-tracked specifically so its effects would be felt in November 2026. There is no waiting this one out.

What you can do

- **Check whether your district changed.** Several states redrew lines mid-cycle; confirm your current congressional district and polling place well before Election Day rather than assuming last cycle's information still holds.
- **Follow the litigation in your state, if any is pending.** Several of the newly enacted maps, including Louisiana's and Texas's, remain subject to ongoing legal challenges that could still affect this year's ballot.
- **Contact your senators on the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.** It is the primary legislative vehicle aimed at restoring the protections Callais narrowed, and its prospects depend entirely on the outcome of the election it is meant to affect.

- **Support nonpartisan election-protection efforts in affected states.** Organizations tracking these map changes in real time, such as the Brennan Center and the Campaign Legal Center, are a faster and more reliable source than social media for what has actually changed in your specific district.

Sources: Louisiana v. Callais, 608 U.S. ____ (2026); Council on Foreign Relations; SCOTUSblog; Congress.gov Congressional Research Service, LSB11431; Brennan Center for Justice (analysis of the Callais dissent and VRAA advocacy); Campaign Legal Center; Ballotpedia, "Redistricting ahead of the 2026 elections"; Decision Desk HQ 2026 forecast (as of Sept. 14, 2026); Maryland Matters, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation conference coverage (Sept. 2026); Democracy Docket; Axios; ABC News; PBS NewsHour; Wikipedia, "2025–2026 United States redistricting" and "2026 Tennessee redistricting."