

## US Supreme Court Dismisses Louisiana Electoral Map Dispute Based on Race



The U.S. Supreme Court has dismissed a Republican bid to defend a Louisiana electoral map that had faced allegations of racial discrimination. The case centered around the possibility of creating a second majority-Black congressional district in the state. The justices dismissed the appeal made by Louisiana Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin, upholding a federal judge's ruling that the Republican-drawn map likely violated laws by discriminating based on race.

The Supreme Court initially took up the case in the previous year but put it on hold until a ruling was issued in a similar case from Alabama on June 8. The federal judge in the Louisiana case, Shelly Dick, had instructed the state legislature to create two House districts with a majority of Black voters, potentially bolstering the Democratic Party's prospects in the upcoming congressional elections. The justices' brief order dismissed the case "as improvidently granted" and allowed the matter to proceed to the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for review before the 2024 congressional elections in Louisiana.

The Supreme Court's decision also lifted the previous order that had blocked Dick's ruling in favor of the plaintiffs, allowing ongoing litigation over a replacement map. Abha Khanna, an attorney representing some of the plaintiffs, expressed confidence in their chances of success and the progress of the case. On the other hand, Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry's office, representing the Republican side, vowed to pursue an appeal at the 5th Circuit, expressing trust in a thorough review based on legal merits.

The redrawing of electoral districts occurs every ten years in the United States to reflect changes in population as measured by the national census. In most states, the party in power undertakes redistricting, leading to allegations of partisan manipulation for political advantage. Democrats have accused Republicans of leveraging their control over state legislatures to draw electoral maps that undermine the influence of minority voters, particularly Black voters. Republicans, however, argue that race should have limited consideration in drawing electoral maps.

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In February 2022, the Louisiana legislature passed the contested map, which Democratic Governor Jon Bel Edwards subsequently vetoed. The governor criticized the plan for neglecting to include a second district with a Black majority, despite Black voters constituting nearly one-third of the state's population. The legislature overrode the veto, prompting Black voters and civil rights groups to file two lawsuits challenging the map's legality. The plaintiffs argued that the Republican-drawn map packed a significant number of Black voters into one district while dispersing the remaining voters among five other districts, rendering their voting power insufficient to elect preferred candidates.

One of the lawsuits contended that the Republican-drawn map perpetuated Louisiana's historical pattern of disenfranchising and discriminating against Black citizens to maximize political power for white citizens. The plaintiffs highlighted the adverse impact of racially polarized voting, which consistently resulted in the electoral defeat of Black-preferred candidates in Louisiana. In her ruling, Judge Shelly Dick determined that the Republicans' map likely violated the Voting Rights Act, a longstanding legislation utilized to combat racially biased actions in voting and redistricting.

The Supreme Court's ruling on June 8 in the Alabama case, with two conservative justices siding with the three liberals in the majority, further bolstered the lower court's decision. The court affirmed that the Republican-drawn map of Alabama's seven House districts had diminished the voting power of Black Alabamians in violation of the Voting Rights Act.

The dismissal of the Louisiana case by the U.S. Supreme Court carries significant implications for the ongoing debate surrounding electoral map manipulation and racial discrimination. As the matter proceeds to the 5th Circuit, the focus will shift to further legal deliberations, potentially shaping the electoral landscape of Louisiana for the upcoming 2024 congressional elections.

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