

Missouri governor to sign legislation implementing gerrymander and ballot initiative crackdown

Julian Blackwood, Leon Fields
26 September 2025

Missouri Governor Mike Kehoe announced on September 25 that he will sign the congressional redistricting plan, known as House Bill 1, at a private event on Sunday, September 28.

The measure all but guarantees the Republican party seven of the state's eight seats in the US House of Representatives, up from the six it currently holds.

Kehoe called the special session on August 29 to redraw the map following weeks of pressure from Donald Trump and the White House for Republican-led states to pursue mid-decade gerrymanders to maintain the party's control of Congress in the face of massive opposition to its policies.

The other measure passed in the special session will make it nearly impossible to amend the state constitution through ballot initiatives, currently the only official avenue for workers to express their political opposition to the Republicans' reactionary policies at the state level. This measure would need to be approved by a majority of voters in the 2026 elections.

Just as Texas Governor Greg Abbott redrew congressional districts at Trump's urging, Kehoe's "Missouri First" map slices up urban working-class and minority populations to dilute their vote and fortify Republican control. Trump himself publicly urged Missouri Republicans to pass the plan "AS IS."

Trump and the Republicans are pulling out all the stops to prevent the Democrats from retaking control of the US House in the 2026 elections, a real possibility given the widespread hatred workers have for Trump's policies, reflected in a recent Gallup poll indicating only 29 percent of Americans are satisfied with the country's direction.

The new map's effect will be felt most acutely in

Kansas City, the largest city in Missouri, which will likely see Democratic Representative Emanuel Cleaver lose his seat. Under the redistricting plan, working class voters, including majority black and immigrant neighborhoods in the former 5th district would be carved up into the majority-Republican 4th and 6th districts, with some heavily Republican areas along the Missouri River added to the 5th district in exchange.

In St. Louis, Democratic-leaning areas remain concentrated in the 1st district, the seat held by Wesley Bell, while surrounding districts are to be reconfigured to shore up Republican support.

The new gerrymandered map has generated opposition. On September 10, thousands protested at the state capitol and several lawsuits and ballot initiatives have been filed in response.

One lawsuit is asking the court to declare Missouri's new congressional map unconstitutional since the new map is using the same 2020 census, which is forbidden under the Missouri constitution. Under the state constitution, redistricting may only occur once a decade. Groups around the Democratic Party are also circulating petitions to force a referendum vote on the new map, with a deadline of December 11 on gathering signatures.

Legislators also took aim at ballot initiatives, which have been employed in recent years to pass measures bitterly opposed by the Republicans. This was how Medicaid expansion was achieved in 2020, how the minimum wage was raised in 2018, and how cannabis was legalized in 2022. One of the most significant votes occurred in 2024, when abortion was again legalized by constitutional amendment, overriding the ban on abortion that went into effect following the

Supreme Court's overturn of *Roe v. Wade*.

Republicans now hope to close off this process. Instead of a simple statewide majority, under the new requirements, amendments would need a majority in every congressional district, in addition to a majority statewide. In practice this means as little as about five percent of voters concentrated in one rural district could veto a reform supported by millions across Missouri. Urban workers in Kansas City and St. Louis could win overwhelmingly on issues like healthcare or abortion rights, only to see their victory nullified by a conservative minority.

Amendments proposed by the legislature itself would not face these hurdles.

What is taking place in Missouri is part of a coordinated national strategy. In Texas, Abbott rammed through mid-decade maps under Trump's instruction, targeting Democratic districts in Houston and Austin to tilt the balance of power permanently toward the right. In Ohio, Republicans spent years trying to raise barriers to citizen-led amendments—including a failed 2023 referendum that would have required 60 percent approval for any amendment to pass, an effort widely seen as aimed at blocking the abortion-rights vote later that year—and continue to pursue additional curbs.

Democrats have responded with their own partisan gerrymanders. In California Governor Gavin Newsom, a potential 2028 presidential candidate, is attempting to erase five Republican seats by suspending California's independent redistricting commission, which was originally created by voters in 2010.

The assault on democratic rights in Missouri stands in a long line of such measures in American history. After the Civil War, the Reconstruction amendments briefly extended the franchise to formerly enslaved people and opened the possibility of a more democratic society. But the bourgeoisie, terrified of a united working class, soon imposed Jim Crow laws, literacy tests, poll taxes and racially gerrymandered districts to gut those gains.

In the 20th century, Democrats and Republicans alike manipulated electoral boundaries and voting rules to protect their bipartisan domination over official politics, while pushing the battles over democracy into courts and commissions where the results were predetermined. What is taking place today—the combination of redistricting and the effective veto over ballot initiatives—represents the latest stage in this

reactionary tradition. The American ruling class, confronted with deep social crisis, is incapable of responding to even the most elementary democratic sentiments.

The Democrats, far more fearful of the emergence of a mass movement outside of their control than they are of the building of a presidential dictatorship by the fascistic Republican Party, limit themselves to lawsuits, petitions and their own anti-democratic maneuvers. This is because both parties are beholden to Wall Street and the military-police-intelligence complex and share responsibility for the assault on democratic rights. They have gerrymandered when it suited them, and they accept the legitimacy of measures that disenfranchise their own voters so long as capitalist stability is preserved.

The “gerrymandering wars” are not just partisan squabbles but part of the breakdown of democracy under capitalism.

The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to either of the parties of big business. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class: rank-and-file committees in workplaces, neighborhoods and schools that unify workers across racial and geographic lines. These committees must link the fight against disenfranchisement to the broader struggle against the capitalist system, the source of fascism, inequality, and imperialist war.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact