

Louisiana governor suspends primary election to enforce new congressional gerrymandering

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The suspension of congressional primaries in Louisiana, ordered by Governor Jeff Landry April 30, marks a major new step in the political crisis in the United States. For the first time in US history, a governor has postponed a statewide election in order to seize an advantage for his party, rather than because of a genuine emergency.

The action directly violates the US Constitution, which assigns the determination of the “Times, Places and Manner” of congressional elections to state legislatures, not to governors. Landry’s executive order is thus facially unconstitutional, and was immediately challenged on that ground by Democratic Party-aligned legal groups.

According to the complaint filed by the Elias Law Group, headed by Democratic election lawyer Marc Elias, “If the governor is permitted to declare any ‘emergency’ he wishes to justify canceling an election that is already underway, it would set a precedent that would fundamentally and forever subvert the people’s ability to trust and rely on an orderly democratic system.”

“What is happening in Louisiana right now is both a redistricting power grab and a dry run for authoritarian election subversion this fall,” Elias added. In other words, it tests the waters for a far more sweeping intervention against the midterm general election, already foreshadowed by Trump in his notorious claim that his administration was so successful, “When you think of it, we shouldn’t even have an election.”

Landry’s action is radically different from previous suspensions of primary elections. (No US general election has ever been postponed, even during the Civil War, or in 1814, only a few months after British troops had occupied Washington D.C. and set fire to the US Capitol).

The state of Louisiana postponed primary voting in New Orleans and a few other locations in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the state. New York state suspended the primary in which voters were going to the polls on September 11, 2001, after hijacked airliners struck the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan, killing nearly 3,000 people. The state of Florida delayed primary voting in Miami-Dade County after Hurricane Andrew tore through that area in 1992. And a dozen states moved back their primaries in 2020 after the eruption of the COVID pandemic, most by legislative action

rather than executive decree.

No state has done what Landry has announced. The governor postponed the upcoming May 16 primary—in which voters had already begun to cast ballots by mail—until July 15, or “such time as determined by the Legislature.”

His purpose was to give the legislature time to redraw congressional district maps, following the Supreme Court decision in *Louisiana v Callais*, issued April 29, that the congressional district boundaries in the state constituted a “racial gerrymander.” In its 6-3 decision, the ultra-right high court majority gutted Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, one of the last remaining enforcement provisions in the landmark legislation passed in 1965.

Republican Party officials indicated they would draw boundaries that would threaten the reelection chances of two black Democrats, Cleo Fields, whose district runs along the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge north to Shreveport, and Troy Carter, whose district is based in New Orleans. This could shift the balance in the state’s congressional delegation from 4-2 Republican to 5-1 or even 6-0. Black voters make up about one-third of the state’s electorate, and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris won 38.2 percent of the Louisiana vote in 2024.

The postponement applies only to House races. The May 16 primary will be held for all other contests, but any votes cast for congressional candidates will not be counted. The Republican nomination for US Senate is hotly contested, with incumbent Senator Bill Cassidy challenged by two more right-wing candidates, Representative Julia Letlow and state treasurer John Fleming. Cassidy voted in 2021 to impeach Trump for instigating the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. Trump has endorsed Letlow, who has a narrow lead in pre-election polls.

Several other southern states are preparing to follow Louisiana’s lead and redraw their maps to eliminate some or all Democratic-held seats, all of them in black-majority districts. The governors of Tennessee and Alabama have called emergency sessions of their state legislatures for this purpose.

In Tennessee, Republicans propose to eliminate the only Democratic seat, based in Memphis, following the precedent set in 2022 when the other Democratic-held district, based in Nashville, was carved up.

In Alabama, a recently created second majority-minority district would be erased, potentially leaving Representative Terri Sewell the state's only Democrat in the House.

Alabama is constrained by previous Supreme Court decisions that bar using the revised map, which would eliminate the district of Democrat Shomari Figures. State attorney general Steve Marshall filed motions before the court April 30 to lift lower-court orders that prevent redistricting until after the 2030 census.

The Supreme Court majority seems in a hurry to accommodate Trump's demand for rapid redistricting in favor of the Republicans. On Monday, May 4, the court majority allowed Louisiana to proceed immediately with the proposed gerrymander, waiving the 32-day period normally in effect for the enforcement of its rulings.

The impending actions in Louisiana, Tennessee and Alabama will intensify the redistricting war between the two major capitalist parties, touched off by Trump's demand last year that the state of Texas shift five seats from the Democrats to the Republicans.

Republicans hide their brazen gerrymandering behind bogus claims of race neutrality. The Democrats offer the perspective of identity politics, which elevates race above class and asserts that capitalist politicians can represent workers if they share the same skin color, regardless of the social chasm between the super-rich and the rest of the population.

Many of the black-majority congressional districts in the southern states were created after the 1990 census, which provided the basis for redistricting in 1992. Black Democrats joined forces with Republicans to create majority-minority districts, but for opposite political purposes. The black Democratic politicians wanted safe seats for themselves, and the number of southern black Democrats in Congress jumped from eight to 20 as a result. Republicans supported this because the remaining districts, a much larger number, had a reduced proportion of minority voters, favoring the Republicans. These changes contributed significantly to the Republican takeover of the House in 1994, for the first time in 40 years.

The current conflict represents a disruption of that right-wing consensus, with the transformation of the Republican Party into the political instrument of an aspiring dictator-president. Trump's fascist diatribes on social media, branding the capitalist Democratic Party as the "lunatic left," or even "communist," have political implications. Trump seeks not a favorable division of seats in Congress, but the delegitimization of any political opposition, even of the purely nominal character offered by the Democratic Party.

In the vicious infighting between two reactionary capitalist parties, neither side defends democratic principles of any kind. The staggeringly anti-democratic character of the gerrymandering is proof of this. In Florida, where a 20-8 Republican delegation could be shifted to 24-4, Republicans could hold 86 percent of the seats in the House, although

Trump won the state in the presidential election with 56 percent of the vote. Similarly, in Virginia, Democrats could hold 91 percent of the state's congressional seats (10 out of 11), but Kamala Harris only carried the state with 52 percent of the vote.

Up until the Supreme Court decision on Louisiana, the rival gerrymandering efforts had effectively canceled each other out, with the Republicans set to gain five seats in Texas, four in Florida, and one each in North Carolina and Missouri. The Democrats countered with measures intended to shift five seats in California, four in Virginia, and one in Utah.

None of these supposed gains are guaranteed, particularly if there is a large swing against Trump and the Republicans, which has been indicated in current polling. Democrats are presumed the favorite to retake control of the House, where the Republicans hold only a three-vote majority.

Polling of Senate races suggests that the Democrats could also overturn the current 53-47 Republican majority in the upper house, with Republican seats in Maine, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida, Texas, Iowa, Nebraska and Alaska considered at some risk. Democratic-held seats in New Hampshire, Georgia, Michigan and Minnesota are also seriously contested.

A report in the *Washington Post* Tuesday said that White House staff was being prepared for the likelihood that the Democrats would win at least the House, and thus be in a position to conduct hearings and issue legally binding subpoenas. According to the *Post* account, "The White House Counsel's Office is giving private briefings to the administration's political appointees on how to best prepare for congressional oversight as staff begin to brace for the likelihood of significant Democratic victories in the November midterm elections, according to two people briefed on the topic."

While such measures are politically routine, there is little doubt that far more sinister preparations are under way ahead of the midterm election set for November 5. This includes efforts to rig the vote through gerrymandering and legislative atrocities like the Save America Act, which could disenfranchise millions of US citizens, and to intervene outright through the mobilization of troops and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents at the polls. Trump could even declare the elections "stolen" and overturn the results entirely by issuing executive orders from the White House or invoking the Insurrection Act.



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