Opinion
Guest Voices



Voters depart a polling place at McDonald Elementary School, Nov. 5, 2024, in Dearborn, Mich. (AP/Charlie Neibergall)



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May 6, 2026
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President Donald Trump and the U.S. Supreme Court have destroyed decades of progress in American democracy by gutting the Voting Rights Act last week and instituting a gerrymandering war to win more elections in red states.

The Democrats have responded by gerrymandering blue states. The result will be fewer Black candidates elected to office and fewer competitive elections where the voters have a real choice between the parties.

How did this happen?

Trump knows he and his supporters are going to be in trouble in the November midterm election. The party controlling the White House traditionally loses seats during midterm elections. These losses are greater if the president is unpopular, as is Trump currently. But the losses can only occur in districts that are competitive. It's very unlikely districts that are overwhelmingly Republican will go blue.

So now, Trump and other Republicans are trying to protect their majority in the House of Representatives by asking Republican officials in red states like Texas to redraw the House district lines to find him additional safe Republican seats.

The process of redrawing electoral district lines to favor one party is called gerrymandering, after Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry in 1812 backed a redistricting plan favoring his own party, the Democrat-Republicans. One of the

districts looked like a salamander, so the press combined the governor's name with salamander to produce the name "gerrymander."

In response to Trump's request for five additional seats in Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott pushed the redistricting plan through a special session of the state legislature. But then, voters in California and Virginia adopted redistricting plans that give Democrats additional House seats.

Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis is now trying to get additional House seats for Republicans even though the state constitution forbids partisan gerrymandering. Other Southern states are moving in the same direction.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Rucho* v. *Common Cause* in 2019 that partisan gerrymandering is legal under the U.S. Constitution. Whether it is legal under state law depends on a particular state's constitution and laws.

Legal or not, gerrymandering is bad for democracy. It means that in the general election, the voters have no choice in most districts because one party has an overwhelming majority so that the other party does not have a chance.

In addition, even if a state is evenly split across parties, gerrymandering can give a large majority of the seats to the party that controls redistricting. As the League of Women Voters and others have noted, gerrymandering "allows officials to choose their voters rather than voters choosing who represents them."

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Meanwhile the Supreme Court has been gutting the 1965 Voting Rights Act since before last week. In *Shelby County* v. *Holder* (2013), it struck down the requirement that states with a history of racial discrimination get federal approval for changes to their voting laws. *Brnovich* v. *Democratic National Committee* (2021) made it harder for plaintiffs to challenge voter suppression laws. And now *Louisiana* v. *Callais* requires proof of "intentional" racial discrimination to challenge redistricting, something very difficult to prove.

Race has been integrally linked to politics from the founding of the republic. Black people were excluded from voting through Jim Crow laws in the South. Even when they got the right to vote, racial animosity kept poor white voters from joining with

Black voters to improve their lot. Instead, after the Civil Rights legislation, white Southerners deserted the Democratic Party, and the party of Lincoln used fear of Black people as an organizing principle in both the South and the North.

The Republicans on the Supreme Court have put the final nail in the coffin of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Justices who claim to prize historical intent now interpret post-Civil War amendments to the Constitution as a defense of white rights. There is little hope that the Supreme Court will reverse itself in the near future. Nor is it likely Congress will reverse the court.

What then should voters do?

The solution is counterintuitive. Black and other Democratic voters in red congressional districts should register as Republicans.

If general elections are now irrelevant, it is necessary to vote in primaries, where the real decisions are made. It does not matter who the Democratic candidate is in a red district. Democrats should therefore register as Republicans and vote in Republican primaries so that they can influence who will be nominated.

Since turnout in primaries is notoriously low, Democrats could have a real impact in Republican primaries. The result would be the election of more moderate Republicans, since the candidates would have to appeal to an electorate that does not only consist of conservative ideologues, as is the case in Republican primaries today.

Black churches and civil rights leaders must legitimize this party switch if it is going to happen.

Of course, Republicans can play this game, too. Republicans can register as Democrats in blue districts and vote in Democratic primaries. This could result in the election of more moderate Democrats.

But American voters need to take back their power to influence American politics. The current system has disenfranchised both Black and white voters. And to take back power, it may be necessary to change your registration.