





FRONT LINE

PRIORITIES

Fighting for Fair Representation

The ACLU is blocking racial gerrymandering and minority voter dilution in the South.

When the U.S. Census Bureau finally released its detailed population data in August, states began the pivotal once-a-decade process of redrawing district maps for 435 congressional districts and 7,383 state legislative seats. As expected, the results have been alarming. Rife with political gamesmanship and gerrymandering, especially in the Southern states, the manipulated maps undermine the bedrock principle of equal representation. In the heated run-up to the November midterms, the ACLU is fighting for fair representation to make sure that voters are choosing their politicians and not the other way around.

Congressional and state legislative district maps determine the allocation of not only political power but also community resources. The threat to under-represented communities of color is especially acute, as corrupt redistricting can further dilute voting power and thwart efforts to block legislation

The ACLU is working to ensure voters choose their politicians and not the other way around.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

that sustains inequality. The ACLU is uniquely focused on litigating to make sure that fairer maps lead to more equitable representation. “These district lines are going to affect policies across the spectrum—abortion, LGBTQ rights, immigration, school policy—for a decade,” says Sophia Lin Lakin, deputy director of the ACLU’s Voting Rights Project. “We must ensure that Black and Brown voters have fairer opportunities to elect candidates that truly represent them at the state level.”

This redistricting cycle, the ACLU has been working in more than 30 states, from litigating unfair maps to advocating for increased transparency in the legislative process. In September, the ACLU filed a partisan gerrymandering lawsuit challenging Ohio’s newly drawn maps, which give extreme advantage to one party. In a huge victory, the Ohio Supreme Court ordered the redrawing of a new, constitutional map. In October, the ACLU and its partners filed a federal lawsuit challenging the South Carolina legislature’s delay in redrawing its maps, which denies the public time to evaluate the new maps before the primaries’ March filing deadline. The ACLU later challenged the state’s new racially gerrymandered House map. And in November, the ACLU was party to a pair of federal lawsuits objecting to Alabama’s racially gerrymandered maps as violations of the Fourteenth Amendment and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

The stakes are high, and the timeline crunched, since the census data used in redistricting was released four months late, and the 2022 primaries and general elections are fast approaching. But as more maps are released, the ACLU is filing lawsuits challenging maps that deprive communities of color of political power in Arkansas, Georgia, and other Southern states guilty of the practice in the past.

Fighting for equal representation has always been a fundamental part of the ACLU’s mission, beginning with the seminal 1964 Supreme Court case *Reynolds v. Sims* that established the “one person, one vote” principle. Voting access is a civil rights issue, and the preservation of civil liberties depends on fair representation. S.B. 8, the extreme abortion ban in Texas, is a clear example of what happens when officials elected via a gamed system don’t reflect their communities’ values. “Everybody is fighting as hard as they can to ensure that voting rights are protected and fairer maps are in place,” says Lakin. “It’s extremely important, especially at the state level, for all the policies we care deeply about.” —JAY A. FERNANDEZ

Every Native Vote Counts

The ACLU challenges two Montana laws that disenfranchise voters on reservations.

Rural reservations are some of the most isolated voter locations in the country. Last year, the Montana state legislature passed two new laws that make it even more difficult for Native voters to cast their vote. H.B. 176 ends same-day voter registration, and H.B. 530 blocks ballot collection on rural reservations. The ACLU, the ACLU of Montana, Native American Rights Fund, and the Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School are challenging the bills on behalf of Western Native Voice (WNV) and Montana Native Vote, organizations working to increase civic participation in Native communities, and four Tribal Nations.

ACLU Magazine spoke with Ronnie Jo Horse, executive director of WNV and a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, about her organization’s efforts to mobilize voters in Montana.

How did you get involved with WNV? What is your mission?

I first heard about Western Native Voice when I was in college. Our mission is to foster positive social change in our communities. We do this through leadership development, education, civic engagement, and public policy advocacy.



How do you mobilize Native voters?

We hire from within the communities we’re serving. It allows us to approach people with a sense of trust: “Oh, I know this person—they grew up in my community.” That really helps us mobilize voters. During the pandemic, we’ve been connecting virtually. We [hosted] a podcast on SoundCloud. We have an online registration portal.

What makes Montana’s most recent voter suppression laws so oppressive?

[Legislators] know that Native Americans are far from voter