



2.18.22

# Commentary

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana

## Mapping the Future: Redistricting Wrap-Up

### Contentious Session Yields Predictable Results

Louisiana lawmakers completed a three-week redistricting special session two days early with maps that largely maintained the status quo, cementing Republican majorities for another decade and expected to trigger lawsuits from civil rights organizations.

The House and Senate rejected efforts to add more majority-minority seats on maps passed for the U.S. House, state Senate, state House and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, despite a shrinking white population and increasing diversity across Louisiana.

A push to redraw the Louisiana Supreme Court districts for the first time in 25 years collapsed as lawmakers disagreed about the configurations of individual districts, whether to add a second majority-minority district and the general approach that should be used. Lawmakers weren't required to rework the Supreme Court districts.

The only map redesign that sailed through the session without controversy involved the Public Service Commission, the state's utility regulatory body.

The reworked district lines, if they aren't overturned by the courts or the governor, will take effect with the new terms of office for each elected body. For example, the new congressional lines would be in place for the upcoming fall elections.

The Legislature assumed lawsuits over the most contentious maps were all but inevitable, and many of the session's debates involved Republican and Democratic lawmakers laying the groundwork for that litigation.

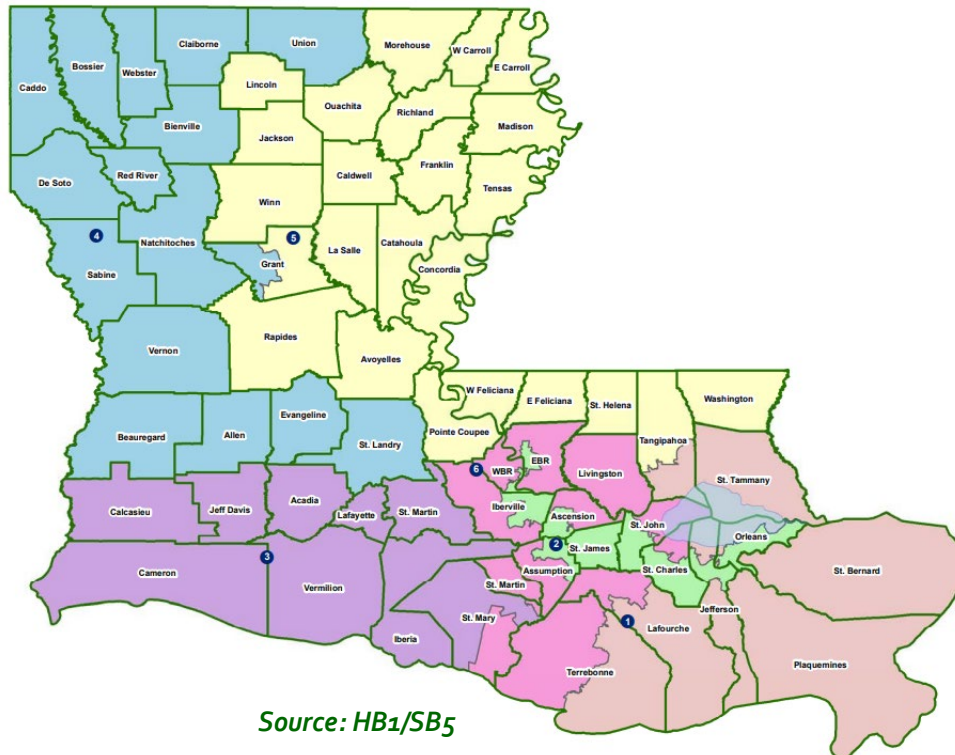
A handful of lawmakers crossed party lines to support maps, but many of the votes largely fell along racial lines, with Black lawmakers objecting to district configurations that didn't expand minority opportunities to run for office.

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana made [recommendations](#) ahead of the session aimed at transparency and fairness in the process. Many of those suggestions were ignored entirely, while others were only partially followed.

## What Passed

The House and Senate approved a [U.S. House](#) map that maintains the current configuration of the six districts. The redesign expands the two northern-based seats further into southern parishes because of population shifts and maintains one majority-minority district based in New Orleans and winding up the Mississippi River into Baton Rouge. Lawmakers passed two identical versions of the congressional map, sending both a House bill and Senate bill with the same configurations of the six districts to the governor's desk.

### *New Congressional Map*



The state [Board of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) will keep two majority-minority districts out of the eight elected seats in a similar design to the map that exists today. The [Public Service Commission](#) will continue to have one majority-Black district out of five.

The new [state Senate](#) map maintains 11 majority-minority districts out of 39. To account for population shifts over the last decade, the map moves the Shreveport/Bossier-area seat currently held by term-limited Republican Sen. Barrow Peacock to southeast Louisiana, creating a new seat representing parts of St. Tammany, Tangipahoa and Livingston parishes.

The new [state House](#) map keeps 29 majority-minority districts out of 105, with adjustments to reflect the latest Census data. A majority-Black seat centered in Natchitoches that is currently held by term-limited Democratic Rep. Kenny Cox is moved to New Orleans. A New Orleans district represented by Democratic Rep. Mandie Landry will no longer be majority-Black. A seat that represents a rural area north of Baton Rouge – currently held by Rep. Roy Daryl Adams, who has no party affiliation – will become a majority-Black district representing a portion of East Baton Rouge Parish to keep the status quo of majority-minority seats.

Republican leaders who sponsored the maps said they based their design decisions on geography, regional interests, efforts to keep the core of existing seats and redistricting laws.

PAR suggested lawmakers should draw maps that encourage more voter participation and acknowledge Louisiana's growing diversity. That didn't happen.

One-third of Louisiana's more than 4.6 million people are Black, and more than 40% of state residents identify as minorities, a percentage that grew over the last decade, according to Census data. Civil rights organizations and Black lawmakers pushed to create more majority-minority districts for all maps except the PSC, saying that was needed to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act.

GOP legislative leaders said they believed their maps followed the law. They argued that trying to create more majority-Black districts could dilute the minority population in existing majority-Black districts, making it harder to elect minorities to office, and could violate redistricting principles about keeping communities of interest together.

## Transparency

The session offered mixed results for transparency.

Lawmakers heeded PAR's calls to release corresponding maps with each proposed change to district lines and to give the public at least 24 hours ahead of a vote to review a bill and map when districts were heavily reworked or changed with amendments.

But the primary deals on most maps were worked out behind the scenes. Overwhelming public testimony at the pre-session "roadshow" hearings that called for adding a second majority-minority district to the congressional map was ignored.

Meanwhile, the Republican legislative leadership only provided information about BakerHostetler, the outside law firm enlisted to help with its redistricting work, and the taxpayer-financed contract after public records requests from the media and public pressure from Democratic lawmakers who weren't aware the outside counsel was hired. Meanwhile, one of the firm's lawyers was publicly quoted advising officials to avoid putting anything about redistricting in writing, raising further questions about transparency.

## Next Steps

Still unclear is whether Edwards will veto any of the maps passed by lawmakers. The Democratic governor didn't follow PAR's recommendation that he describe more clearly the guidelines of what redistricting legislation would prompt his veto. Instead, the governor said he wanted to wait until the maps reached his desk for review.

When questioned, he offered clues to possible decision-making. Edwards said he believed passing maps that don't add new majority-Black districts was "not right and not just." He singled out the congressional map as "problematic." But he also said disputes are likely to be decided in court, regardless of his veto choices.

Several of the major maps didn't pass with a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate, raising questions about whether lawmakers would be able to overrule the governor's veto. But the simple process of having a veto override session could delay the expected lawsuits. Meanwhile, if Edwards refuses to veto at least the congressional map, that could fray his relationship with Black lawmakers who are his regular allies.

No lawsuits are expected over the PSC districts, but civil rights groups have raised concerns about the other four maps that lawmakers passed.

Beyond litigation, lawmakers have talked of making another push to rework the state Supreme Court map – and possibly other court districts – in the regular session that starts March 14.

The maps drawn in the special session, if upheld, will affect elections for the next decade. While citizens had access to more information than in past cycles, their input didn't necessarily sway many of lawmakers' decisions.

## Redistricting Bills that Passed

Maps and demographic information can be found below the text in each bill.

Public Service Commission	HB2	<a href="https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248246">https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248246</a>
Board of Elementary and Secondary Education	HB3	<a href="https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248247">https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248247</a>
State House	HB14	<a href="https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248560">https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248560</a>
State Senate	SB1	<a href="https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248559">https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248559</a>
U.S. House	HB1/SB5	<a href="https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248568">https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1248568</a>

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