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Georgia Senate GOP Passes Map to Retain Republican Majority

Georgia Senate Republicans are pushing through a map designed to maintain their strong majority in the chamber.

By [Associated Press](#)

Nov. 9, 2021

Save



Sen. John Kennedy (R-18, Macon) introduces SB 1 EX in the Senate Chambers during a special session at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta on Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021. The hearing was a step toward votes on new political maps for the state House, state Senate and Congress during a once-a-decade redistricting session of the General Assembly. (Hyosub Shin/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP) THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

By JEFF AMY, Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — [Georgia](#) Senate Republicans pushed through a map Tuesday on a 34-21 party line vote designed to maintain their strong majority in the chamber, despite Democratic cries that the plan doesn't reflect Georgia's nearly 50-50 partisan split and denies opportunities to nonwhite voters.



Sen. John Kennedy, a Macon Republican who chairs the Senate Reapportionment and Redistricting Committee, said the map accomplished “the hard work that has to be done once a decade.” He noted the new map splits 29 counties, down from 39 counties now.

“When you look at it, it is obvious it is not gerrymandered,” Kennedy said. “The districts are compact and contiguous.”

The map is projected to keep 59%, or 33, of the Senate’s 56 seats in GOP hands. That’s down from 34 right now. Democrats say that’s too many, considering President Joe Biden carried Georgia with a narrow majority last year and nonwhite people make up most of the new Georgians added in the last decade.

"This map is designed to shore up the shrinking political power of the majority. As proposed, it fails to fairly reflect Georgians diversity," said Sen. Elena Parent, an Atlanta Democrat.

The General Assembly must redraw electoral districts at least once every decade to equalize populations following the U.S. Census. Georgia added more than a million people from 2010 to 2020, with urban districts generally growing and rural districts generally shrinking.

A House committee on Tuesday voted for a map projected to 98 Republicans, or 54% of the lower chamber's 180 members. The full House could vote on that measure Wednesday.

The Senate Republican map seeks to protect all incumbents, except for two Republicans who are running for statewide office. To offset population losses in south Georgia, the proposal removes Sen. Tyler Harper's district and relocates it to Gwinnett County. Harper, of Ocilla, is running for agriculture commissioner. The plan also dismantles Sen. Bruce Thompson's district and relocates it from Cherokee and Bartow counties to Roswell and Sandy Springs in north Fulton County. Thompson, from White, is running for labor commissioner.

Both those new districts might be won by Democrats, but Republicans shifted a district held by Democrat Michelle Au of Johns Creek to take in more Republican territory, possibly imperiling her.

Democrats have attacked the changes to Au's district as violating federal law requiring districts that allow nonwhite voters to choose their favored candidates.

"It's our responsibility to ensure the people in this room are a good reflection of the people in this state," Au said. "This map before us does not represent the Georgia of today. It does not see Georgia for who we have become."

Democrats also alleged Tuesday that the Republican plan violates the Voting Rights Act by drawing a district in parts of Henry County that reduces Black voting population. The move protects Republican Sen. Brian Strickland of McDonough. Kennedy said Republicans didn't draw another minority district in Henry County to protect neighboring majority-minority districts.

Because the U.S. Supreme Court has disallowed lawsuits based on partisan gerrymandering, federal legal challenges are likely to only succeed on racial bias claims.

"You can either go ahead and get it straight right now, or we'll see you in court," said Sen. David Lucas, a Macon Democrat.

Republicans repeatedly noted that a GOP majority in 2010 passed maps that withstood legal challenges, while Democrats, including some still serving in the General Assembly, voted in favor of Democratic-slanted maps that were overturned by a court following the 2000 Census.

"Nine of your Senate colleagues, either in the House or Senate, voted for the illegal, unconstitutional violations of the Voting Rights Act, worst form of modern gerrymandering," said John Albers, a Roswell Republican.

Democrats also complained about how quickly the process had moved, saying people hadn't been given enough time to weight in.

"Why were they drawn so fast?" said Sen. Lester Jackson, a Savannah Democrat. "Why couldn't they have some input?"

The Senate map now goes to the House for more debate. However, Georgia's House and Senate traditionally haven't interfered in how the other chamber draws its districts. This means the Senate vote could be the final meaningful action on that chamber's map. This will be the first time in decades that Georgia lawmakers won't be required to get federal approval of their maps after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a portion of the Voting Rights Act.

Follow Jeff Amy on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/jeffamy>.

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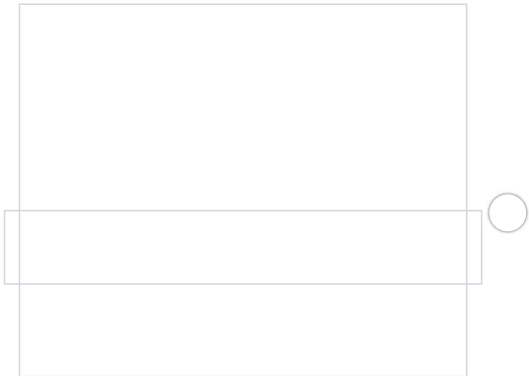


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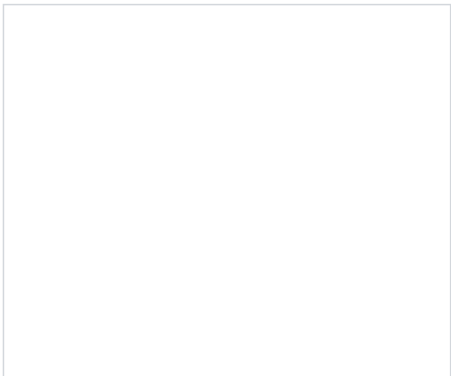
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