



The Black Belt Bulletin

ISSUE 15 | JUNE 30, 2023 | FOCUS ON VOTING RIGHTS



Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act Upheld!

On June 8, 2023, in a surprise decision (*Allen v Milligan*), the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that Alabama had diluted the power of Black voters in drawing congressional voting maps, reaffirming the power of Section 2 of the landmark Voting Rights Act many thought was in peril of being completely gutted.

“I’m hoping that this is a time where our elected officials choose to put Alabama on the right side of the Voting Rights Act.” – Evan Milligan



Evan Milligan (pictured speaking at podium), the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit, speaks with reporters following oral arguments at the Supreme Court in Washington. Source: AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, File

The central focus of the argument concerned voting maps redrawn by state lawmakers after the 2020 census, which packed most Black voters throughout the Black Belt into one voting district; thus, leaving only one majority Black Congressional district in a state with seven congressional districts and a **Black voting-age population that had grown to over 26%**. The Plaintiffs argued that State officials who created the current maps exerted too much control over the redistricting process, effectively engineering their own victories

or decreasing the advantages of the opposing party, by assigning voters of particular political persuasions and backgrounds to a single district. Indeed, the current electoral map reflects that nearly 55% of voters in Alabama’s 7th Congressional district are black, while only 31% of voters in the other (6) Congressional districts throughout the State are black.

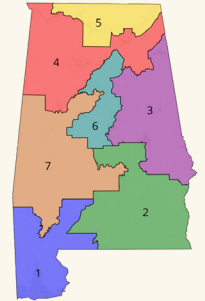
The Alabama case was part of a nationwide series of legal battles over redistricting (i.e., “Gerrymandering”), which has often resulted in diluting the voting power of growing “majority minority” communities, much to their political disadvantage especially when it comes to policy-making decisions. The ruling in Milligan will go into effect and current electoral maps must be drawn for the 2024 election cycle, which may potentially allow Black voters to elect another Congressional representative of their choice (2 total) – monumental progress. The Alabama decision may also affect cases in other states, such as Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina who are currently engaged in legal challenges to their electoral maps that reflect similar inequities in voter representation.

In welcoming the decision, Attorney General Merrick Garland stated, “The decision rejects efforts to further erode fundamental voting rights protections and preserves the principle that in the United States all eligible voters must be able to exercise their constitutional right to vote free from discrimination based on their race.” As this unfolds over the new few months, communication, civic engagement, and individual participation (overall) in this process throughout the communities of the Black Belt will be crucial; and the BBCF will be an active partner in supporting the region when and wherever needed.

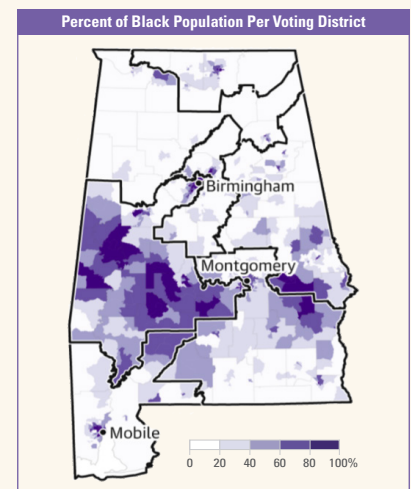
Sources: abcnews.go.com (6/8/2023); apnews.com (6/27/23); davesredistricting.org (Maps); theguardian.com (6/8/23); nytimes.com (06/08/23); washingtonpost.com (6/12/2023)

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT MAPS IN – ALABAMA –

The state of Alabama is currently divided into **seven** congressional districts, each represented by a member of the United States House of Representatives. The current congressional districts map has only one majority Black district in a state where more than one in four residents are Black.



Black voters are packed into the state’s 7th congressional district, where they represent approximately 55% of the voting population.



The courts ruled that to fix the Voting Rights violation, the new plan must have a 2nd district that is majority Black or close enough to majority Black to give Black voters an opportunity to elect a representative of their choice. This decision sets up the state’s first significant revamp of its congressional districts since 1992, when Alabama was ordered by the courts to create its 1st majority-Black district.

