

Attorney General Eric Holder
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Thank you for inviting me today. Since leaving the Department of Justice, I've dedicated myself to ending gerrymandering and protecting free and fair elections. Along with Barack Obama and Nancy Pelosi and Terry McAuliffe, I helped establish in 2017 the National Democratic Redistricting Committee as the first-ever centralized effort dedicated entirely to fair redistricting.

The impetus for our work was born out of the 2012 elections. Despite Democratic Congressional candidates winning 1.4 million more votes than their Republican counterparts nationwide, not only did Republicans hold on to the speaker's gavel, but they held a 33-seat majority in the House.

Let's be clear: this result was a function of unprecedented, technology driven, partisan and racial gerrymandering. Many have asked me to define gerrymandering. The answer is simple. Gerrymandering is cheating. In that 2012 election, the American people were cheated. The will of the voters was thwarted. As a result, there was, and has been, a significant impact on American public policy, affecting everything from housing to health care and climate change to reproductive rights. Time after time, policies have been enacted that do not have the support of the majority of the American people.

While that moment was a wake-up call for most of us who believe in America, others took a different lesson from it. Too many people in the Republican Party have become comfortable with bending or breaking the rules of our democracy. And gerrymandering is now central to their electoral strategy.

In the most recent election, Democrats won more than 60% of their congressional seats in states with a neutral independent commission or a court-adopted fairly drawn map. In contrast, Republicans won about 60 percent of their seats in states where they alone control the map-drawing process. Put simply, gerrymandering is pivotal to how Republicans have held on to power in Congress and in state legislatures across the country.

But as each of you know, gerrymandering doesn't work in statewide elections. In those races, efforts to silence the people look much different: It looks like taking constitutional powers away from newly elected Democratic governors in states like Wisconsin and North Carolina. It looks like hijacking state boards of election. It looks like putting up election deniers as candidates for key election administration offices and state supreme court seats. And, most worrisome, it looks like trying to overturn the results of free and fair elections.

The violent insurrection on January 6th was the most visible effort, but the legal strategy to void thousands of legitimate votes in Justice Riggs's election – many of them from veterans and active duty service members – is no less nefarious.

It would be convenient to look at Donald Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election as an isolated incident - a one off. Too many Americans, and far too many so called leaders, have fallen into that trap. The truth is even more chilling and consequential.

Our democracy is being assailed by powerful forces at both the national and the state levels that are seeking to gain power, and are willing to hold onto that power, at any cost. This is about the acquisition and maintenance of power by any means necessary.

Right now, we have the fairest, but not yet fair, national congressional map the country has seen in a generation — one that allows both parties to compete for the House majority. Don't take my word for it – that's the

verdict from independent data experts and even the *New York Times*. We got here by:

Enacting fair redistricting reforms and independent redistricting commissions.

Enforcing the Voting Rights Act before the US Supreme Court to finally give Black voters equal representation in Alabama and Louisiana.

And refusing to give up in Wisconsin, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, and other states, where work still remains to be done to achieve fairness.

In response to a fair 7-7 Congressional map in battleground North Carolina, Republicans stole three congressional districts with a judicially sanctioned, egregious gerrymander. Partisan or ideological State Supreme Court justices in that state cast aside their very own recent precedent to make possible a gerrymandered 10-4 congressional delegation. Politicians were allowed to choose their voters.

It doesn't end there. Do not lose sight of this. Your colleagues are even attempting now to alter who is counted in the decennial census that will take place in 2030.

As long as there are cracks for the opponents of democracy to seep through, they will do all they can to exploit these weaknesses for their own gain. There are ways to end this escalating danger to our democracy: the passage of federal legislation protecting all voters against partisan and racial gerrymandering and the strengthening of the Voting Rights Act to meet the nationwide challenges we now confront.

Those challenges are apparent today. We are facing the most brazen mid-decade redraw of Texas's congressional map imaginable. It is "just a very simple redrawing, we pick up five seats." Those aren't my words; they are President Trump's. Proudly declaring he wants a map redrawn to preempt and predetermine our next federal election. Chilling.

Right now, as I mentioned, we have the fairest national congressional map the country has seen in a generation — one that allows both parties to compete for the House majority. But there is still significant work to be done, and new threats to free and fair elections continue to crop up every day. Republicans are scared of facing the voters after taking health care away from millions of Americans and giving a massive tax cut to the billionaires who clearly don't need it. These anti-democracy forces are resorting to blatant cheating to hold onto power in Congress before a single ballot is cast in the 2026 midterms. It is up to us to stop them and to preserve a system that has made this nation exceptional.

Thank you for having me here today to discuss what I believe are truly existential issues that confront American democracy.