

## Texas Revives Redistricting Strategy to Bolster House Majority

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Texas Republicans are preparing to redraw congressional district maps in a special session, aiming to reinforce their U.S. House of Representatives majority ahead of the 2026 elections. This effort mirrors the bold and controversial redistricting push of 2003 that shifted the political landscape in their favor for decades.

Two decades after the initial battle over congressional boundaries, Texas Republicans are once again mobilizing to reshape the state's political map. The move comes as the Republican Party holds 25 of Texas's 38 seats in the United States House of Representatives, a key bloc in maintaining the party's narrow national majority. Party leaders in Washington are urging Texas Governor Greg Abbott to initiate a special legislative session to implement a new redistricting plan. The goal: gain additional seats and solidify their hold on the House ahead of what is expected to be a competitive midterm cycle.

The last time Texas attempted a mid-decade redistricting, in 2003, the results were far-reaching. That campaign, driven by then-Representative Tom DeLay, led to a Republican surge from 15 to 21 congressional seats. The effort, which involved cross-state drama, legislative walkouts, and a Supreme Court case argued by future U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, became a defining moment in modern redistricting politics. At the time, Democrats held a majority of the state's delegation, a dynamic that has since shifted decisively.

Former Representative Martin Frost, a Democrat who lost his seat in the 2004 election following the redrawing, described the move as a "classic power play." Speaking candidly this week, Frost added, "When you have the votes, you can do whatever you want." The upcoming redistricting push appears to follow that same philosophy, with national Republicans hoping to pick up as many as five additional seats in Texas.

However, the situation today differs significantly. In 2003, Republicans were underrepresented; now, with 25 out of 38 seats around 66 percent, they already command a solid majority in a state where President Donald Trump won roughly 56 percent of the vote. That presents a challenge: to carve out more Republican-leaning districts, mapmakers may be forced to weaken current strongholds, potentially placing incumbents in competitive territory.

Representative Troy Nehls, a Republican from Texas who won re-election in 2024 with 62 percent of the vote, expressed his willingness to contribute to the party's broader goal, even if it makes his race closer. "I'm a team player," Nehls said. "I'm willing to give up some of that for the good of the order."

In the 2021 redistricting cycle, which followed the United States Census Bureau's once-a-decade population count, Texas Republicans opted to fortify existing districts rather than expand aggressively. That strategy delivered near-perfect results, with all 25 GOP members winning by double digits. Still, party leaders are now considering a more ambitious

approach, despite legal uncertainties and the looming threat of lawsuits from political opponents.

Democrats, meanwhile, argue that any aggressive remapping could backfire. Representative Suzan DelBene of Washington, who chairs the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), warned that dismantling Democrat-held seats would inevitably dilute Republican districts. Citing 2018 data, she noted that Democratic candidates improved their margins in key Texas races, signaling vulnerability in any forced redrawing.

Texas's history with redistricting is long and complex. After a deadlock in 2001, courts intervened to assign two additional seats to Republicans. But it wasn't until Tom DeLay mobilized statehouse efforts, including flipping control of the Texas House of Representatives, that the 2003 mid-decade redistricting succeeded. That effort sparked a political drama that included Democratic lawmakers fleeing to Oklahoma to block a vote.

Despite the resistance, the new maps were implemented, ending the careers of several senior Democrats and further consolidating Republican strength. Yet the strategy had consequences. DeLay faced a criminal indictment for improper fundraising, ultimately stepping down from Congress. A state court later overturned the conviction, but the political damage had already been done.

Now, with the filing deadline for 2026 just months away, concerns are mounting within Republican ranks about rushing a plan through the legislative process. Representative Beth Van Duyne, who won her 2024 race with 60 percent of the vote, said that while she's confident in her ability to win in a more competitive district, the lack of clarity around proposed maps is troubling. "We've talked among our delegation, but we don't know the details yet," she said.

National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) Chair Richard Hudson expressed hope that Texas lawmakers would carefully consider the implications of redistricting, especially for incumbents in safe districts. "I have no role," Hudson stated, "but I certainly hope they're taking that into consideration."

As the redistricting battle heats up, one lesson from history remains clear: in Texas politics, few fights are ever truly settled.