

# Texas Redistricting Clash Yields National Attention

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*Keywords* Texas, redistricting, gerrymandering, partisanship, FBI

## I. Overview

In Texas, a high-stakes political standoff has erupted after House Democrats fled the state in an attempt to deny Republicans the quorum needed to pass an unusual mid-decade redistricting plan. The proposed maps, coming from a pressure campaign waged by President Trump's political team, could add five new Republican seats to the U.S. house, bolstering the GOP's slim majority in the 2026 midterms. The walkout prevents the chamber from meeting its required attendance threshold, halting legislative business in the Texan House.

Republicans have launched aggressive measures to force Democrats to return to the state. Texas House speaker Dustin Burrows sought to have Illinois courts enforce arrest warrants against the absentee lawmakers, measures that are largely symbolic but could nonetheless be executed if the Democrats return to Texas. Governor Greg Abbott has asked the Texas Supreme Court to remove the House Democratic Caucus chair, while U.S. Senator John Cornyn announced that the FBI has agreed to assist in locating the missing members. The FBI's involvement signals an attempt by Republican leaders to bypass the limits on Texas law enforcement's reach beyond state borders, escalating a showdown that could influence national redistricting battles.

## II. History

Texas has considerable precedent for both abrupt redistricting efforts and quorum-breaking. Redistricting with the aim of benefiting a certain party or demographic, or gerrymandering, has been a frequent practice by both parties, particularly Republicans. This has sparked nationwide concerns regarding racial equality and voter choice. As a result of gerrymandering, Texas lawmakers are breaking quorum to pass redistricting.

Breaking quorum is the term for preventing legislative business by ensuring fewer than the minimum number of legislators required are present. Since their first walkout from the State Capitol in 1870, Texan lawmakers have periodically employed this tactic, even in cases as recent as 2021.

Nonetheless, repercussions for breaking the quorum have grown more stringent in recent years. While quorum-breaking in Texas now faces a fine of \$500 per day and a possible involvement of federal authorities, arrest warrants were loosely/not enforced in 2021.

## III. Policy Problem

### A. Stakeholders

The congressional map that the Texas Republicans hope to enact targets five Democratic-held districts, carefully cutting out Democratic areas and redistributing them to solidly Republican districts—a strategy known as cracking.

If the fleeing Texas Democrats were arrested or removed from office, their districts would face the loss of elected representation, potentially leaving constituents without a voice in ongoing legislative debates and further heightening partisan tensions, both statewide and nationwide. This would also set precedent for how far majority parties can go to compel attendance.

## IV. Policy Options

Ultimately, both parties are making it clear that this battle is about nothing other than winning control over Congress. Texas Republicans' mid-decade redistrictings has little precedent, affirming the party's determination to secure additional seats. In response, Texas Democrats have broken quorum to block the proposal even at the risk of losing district representation.

In the long term, both Democratic and Republican states are under pressure to redraw their maps to respond to Texas' mid-decade redistricting. Californian Governor Gavin Newsom has already announced a plan to push for a map that could erase up to five GOP-held seats if Texas's plan passes.

### B. Current Stances

Nationwide, Democrats have thrown their support behind their Texan counterparts, whether by offering asylum, making statements to the press, or announcing intentions to enact their own redistricting.

Nonetheless, sources explain that Texas Republicans lack universal support from their party. In Democratic strongholds such as California, Illinois, and New York, officials have proposed mirroring Texas' redistricting plan in their own states, which may put Republican legislators at an electoral disadvantage.

In response, Californian Republican Representative Kevin Kiley introduced a bill to prohibit mid-decade redistricting, protecting both blue state Republicans like himself and Democrats like those in Texas. In New York, Republican Representative Mike Lawler also introduced anti-gerrymandering legislation.

There are not many solid ways for Republicans to force quorum and pass the proposed redistricting. However, it is also unlikely that the Democrats have established an effective strategy to maintain their districts in the face of future efforts. The path forward will necessitate nationwide, bipartisan cooperation on the issue of redistricting, in order to prevent the national attention that is currently occurring.

But even if the FBI were to be involved, it is still unclear how breaking quorum could be considered a federal offense. As a response to federal involvement, the Texas Democrats could file a writ of habeas corpus to challenge their detention. Furthermore, although state troopers are the only law enforcement officers with jurisdiction, precedent makes it unlikely they will act, and the Democrats may simply remain out of state until the special session ends.

Democrats are also in a catch-22. Fleeing the state is not a sustainable strategy, amid Texas' other pressing concerns such as floods and criminal justice. In order to assert their partisan perspective and represent their constituencies on these issues, Democrats must eventually return to Texas. It is likely that their extended absence, despite knowing a victory is improbable, is intended to paint them as aggressive fighters and garner future support, but this must be backed up by their actions in-state.

Thus, with the respective dilemmas of Texas Republicans Democrats, decisive nationwide policy is needed. While Kiley or Lawler's bills are viable contenders, it is uncertain whether they will gain enough bipartisan support in light of both parties' extensive history of gerrymandering.

If Kiley's or Lawler's legislation is unsuccessful, an alternative could be increased opportunities for the minority party, or financial penalties not only for breaking quorum but for clearly discriminatory district plans. Either way, it is clear that the redistricting battle must be laid to rest.

## **V. Conclusions**

The mid-decade redistricting plan proposed in the Texas State Legislature has resulted in a high-stakes political maneuvering crucial to determining the majority party in Congress following the 2026 Midterm elections.

While Democrats have fled the state to oppose this measure, Republicans have responded with aggressive enforcement tactics, including calls for arrest warrants and possible FBI involvement although practical options to compel quorum remain limited. Without decisive action to resolve the standoff, this cycle of partisan antagonism risks wasting resources, undermining voter representation, and eroding trust in democratic institutions.

## **Acknowledgment**

The Institute for Youth in Policy wishes to acknowledge Josh Weinstein, Williana Serve, Matthew Jacob, Donna Kim and other contributors for developing and maintaining the Policy Department within the Institute.