SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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JOHN H. MERRILL, ALABAMA)
SECRETARY OF STATE, ET AL.,)
Appellants,)
v.) No. 21-1086
EVAN MILLIGAN, ET AL.,)
V. EVAN MILLIGAN, ET AL., Appellees. JOHN H. MERRILL, ALABAMA SECRETARY OF STATE, ET AL., Petitioners, V. MARCUS CASTER, ET AL.,) bock
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JOHN H. MERRILL, ALABAMA	9
SECRETARY OF STATE, ET AL.,)
Petitioners,)
V. RIEV) No. 21-1087
MARCUS CASTER, ET AL.,)
Respondents.)
Pages: 1 through 122	_
Place: Washington, D.C.	
Date: October 4, 2022	

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16	<u>-</u>	-
17	Washington, D.C.	
18	Tuesday, October 4,	2022
19		
20	The above-entitled matter	came on for oral
21	argument before the Supreme Court	of the United States
22	at 10:04 a.m.	
23		
24		
25		

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3	Montgomery, Alabama; on behalf of the
4	Appellants/Petitioners.
5	DEUEL ROSS, ESQUIRE, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of
6	the Appellees.
7	ABHA KHANNA, ESQUIRE, Seattle, Washington; on behalf
8	of the Respondents.
9	GEN. ELIZABETH B. PRELOGAR, Solicitor General,
10	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; for the
11	United States, as amicus curiae, supporting the
12	Appellees/Respondents.
13	Appellees/Respondents. TOC.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:04 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 21-1086,
5	Merrill versus Milligan, and the consolidated
6	case.
7	Mr. Lacour.
8	ORAL ARGUMENT OF EDMUND G. LACOUR, JR.
9	ON BEHALF OF THE APPELLANTS/PETITIONERS
10	MR. LACOUR: Mr. Chief Justice, and
11	may it please the Court:
12	Alabama conducted its 2021
13	redistricting in a lawful, race-neutral manner.
14	The state largely retained its existing
15	districts and made changes needed to equalize
16	population. But that wasn't good enough for the
17	plaintiffs. They argue that Section 2 of the
18	Voting Rights Act requires Alabama to replace
19	its map with a racially gerrymandered plan
20	maximizing the number of majority-minority
21	districts.
22	But Section 2 requires an electoral
23	process equally open to all, not one that
24	guarantees maximum political success for some
25	over others Section 2 does not and cannot

- 1 obligate Alabama to abandon district lines
- 2 enveloping the undisputed longstanding community
- 3 of interest in the Gulf to be replaced by
- 4 district lines dividing black and white with
- 5 such racial precision that Alabama could never
- 6 have constitutionally drawn those lines in the
- 7 first place.
- 8 Yet, that is what Alabama has been
- 9 commanded to do here: redraw its districts to
- 10 subordinate traditional districting principles
- 11 to race. The only way to add second
- majority-minority district to Alabama's plan is
- 13 to make race the non-negotiable criterion.
- 14 Plaintiffs' illustrative plans prove the point.
- 15 They offer only one way to get that second
- 16 majority-black district: split Mobile County
- 17 and divide the Gulf by race. Their new versions
- of Districts 1 and 2 then stretch the width of
- 19 the state to group together black voters from
- 20 disparate areas as far west as Mobile and as far
- 21 east as the Georgia border.
- 22 The District Court relied on these
- outlier plans to invalidate the state's
- 24 neutrally drawn map, and that was legal error.
- 25 Requiring states to scrap neutral plans in favor

1 of plans drawn on account of race set Section 2 2 at war with itself and with the Constitution. 3 The Court should make clear that if a state's plan is the product of the state's 4 neutral districting principles, the plan is 5 6 equally open to all voters. Because Alabama's 7 2021 plan is such a plan, Plaintiffs' claims fail. 8 I welcome the Court's questions. 9 JUSTICE THOMAS: What would you use as 10 a comparator? I -- I assume that your problem 11 12 is that the comparator here was -- had race as a non- -- as non-negotiable. What would you use 13 as a comparator if even if you thought that 14 15 there might be some vote dilution problems with your plan? 16 MR. LACOUR: The -- the plan that 17 would be the adequate comparator would be one 18 that respects all of our traditional districting 19 20 principles as much as our own map but then has 21 some different racial outcome, similar to what 22 the Court has proposed in Cromartie 2, for 23 example. The -- that sort of map can actually 24 show that there's a problem with our map, but if

you are discriminating in favor of one racial

- 1 group, then that map cannot show that our map
- 2 was discriminating against that group. It --
- 3 it's a flawed control.
- 4 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, don't you think
- 5 there's an overall problem with -- in these
- 6 dilution cases of determining at the beginning
- 7 what the comparator should be?
- 8 MR. LACOUR: Yes, Your Honor. I
- 9 think, as this Court noted both in the Holder v.
- 10 Hall plurality and in Brnovich, benchmarks are
- 11 critical in any Section 2 case.
- 12 And we proposed a benchmark to the
- 13 Court. Plaintiffs have not proposed any
- 14 benchmark other than perhaps maximization or
- proportionality. But, of course, Section 2
- 16 rejects a proportionality baseline, and this
- 17 Court has wisely rejected maximization and
- 18 proportionality because they lead to
- 19 constitutional problems.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you agree that the
- 21 benchmark you propose has never been recognized
- 22 by this Court as the benchmark that's
- 23 appropriate in these kinds of cases?
- MR. LACOUR: I -- I don't think so,
- Justice Kagan. First, I mean, going back to

- 1 Gingles, I think the benchmark there even for
- 2 multi-member districts was neutrally drawn
- 3 single member districts, not racially
- 4 gerrymandered single member districts.
- 5 And then, when you continue --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Of course, you're
- 7 requiring that there be that kind of benchmark.
- 8 The question is not whether it's permissible.
- 9 You are requiring that there be a race-neutral
- 10 benchmark, and I'm asking whether that
- 11 requirement has ever been stated in our
- 12 precedents.
- MR. LACOUR: think that's what Bush
- 14 v. Vera, what Abrams and what LULAC were all
- 15 pushing towards when they said you must account
- 16 for traditional districting principles. I don't
- 17 know why you would even account for them except
- 18 that if a plaintiff's failure to account for
- 19 them in their map -- if -- if plaintiffs fail to
- 20 account for them in their map, then their map
- 21 can't really shed any light --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel --
- MR. LACOUR: -- on whether there's a
- 24 problem.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I guess I ask because

- 1 what strikes me about this case is that under
- 2 our precedent it's kind of a slam dunk if you
- 3 just take our existing precedent the way it is,
- 4 and the three judges below all found this. The
- 5 three judges below said this is an easy case.
- 6 It's not one of the hard ones. It's not one of
- 7 the boundary line cases.
- 8 It was clear that the plaintiffs
- 9 satisfied the Gingles preconditions. It's --
- 10 and -- and past that, you know, you're looking
- 11 at a state where there are -- 27 percent of the
- 12 population is African American but only one of
- 13 seven districts where there is incredible
- 14 racially polarized voting, where there is a long
- 15 history of racial discrimination in the state.
- 16 Put all that together and it seems
- 17 clear that under our existing precedents, the
- inquiry is complete in just the way that the --
- 19 that the -- that the court below found.
- 20 And, you know, it seems to me that
- 21 you're coming here, and it's totally your right
- 22 to do it, but really saying, change the way we
- look at Section 2 and its application.
- MR. LACOUR: Absolutely not, Your
- 25 Honor. And, respectfully, I thought this was

- 1 the -- this is such an edge case. This is a
- 2 case where the plaintiffs have come forward with
- 3 an expert who said it's hard to draw a second
- 4 majority-minority district by accident. It's a
- 5 case where the named plaintiff, Evan Milligan
- 6 himself, showed it's hard to do it on purpose.
- 7 He runs an Alabama-focused
- 8 redistricting nonprofit. He had a team of
- 9 trained map drawers try to draw a second
- 10 majority black district in Alabama and they
- 11 couldn't do it. That's at page 511 of the Joint
- 12 Appendix.
- 13 JUSTICE JACKSON: So, I'm sorry, can I
- 14 just help? I don't understand. Are you saying
- that the Gingles preconditions as we ordinarily
- 16 understand them were not satisfied in this case?
- 17 MR. LACOUR: Yes, Your Honor. I think
- 18 that LULAC says --
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: And how so? How so?
- 20 MR. LACOUR: LULAC says quite clearly
- 21 account for traditional districting principles,
- 22 such as maintaining communities of interest and
- traditional boundaries. There's an undisputed
- 24 traditional -- rather an undisputed community of
- interest in the Gulf, the district court found

- 1 that the Gulf community is a community of
- 2 interest, and it's not maintained. So I think
- 3 it's open and shut under LULAC.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I'm sorry. So
- 5 you're saying Step 1 was not satisfied in this
- 6 case because the ordinary redistricting
- 7 principles -- I thought this was about a
- 8 race-blind algorithm, so now I'm confused.
- 9 So what -- what is the problem? And
- 10 let me just -- let me tell you why I think that
- 11 matters, because much like what Justice Kagan
- was suggesting, we have to figure out whether
- you are claiming that we need to change Gingles
- in some fundamental way or whether you're just
- saying that these plaintiffs didn't satisfy
- 16 Gingles in the way that we normally understand
- 17 it.
- 18 I thought you were saying Gingles Step
- 19 1 needs to be retooled to require some showing
- of a comparison with a race-neutral -- or,
- 21 excuse me, a race-blind algorithm.
- 22 And so then my question was: Okay,
- 23 well, you would bear the burden, I think, of
- 24 showing that there's a problem with the way that
- 25 we're doing it now, that -- the way that Gingles

- 1 is working, and that a race-blind algorithm
- 2 actually produces a better result insofar as
- it's better implementing what Congress intended 3
- or it is required by the Constitution. 4
- All of those are pretty heavy burdens, 5
- I think, in this situation. So are you asking 6
- 7 us to reconsider what is happening with Gingles
- 8 to require that challengers compare their
- 9 original map at Step 1 with a race-blind
- algorithm? 10
- algorithm?

 MR. LACOUR: The -- the algorithms are not essential. They're very helpful and 11
- 12
- illuminating in this case because the Milligan 13
- 14 plaintiffs brought them themselves.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: What do they 15
- illuminate? 16
- MR. LACOUR: They show that this is 17
- what you would expect a race-neutral map drawer 18
- to produce, and --19
- 20 JUSTICE JACKSON: Why does that
- 21 matter? I thought Congress's statute said we
- 2.2 don't care about intent. So the race-neutral
- nature of this goes to whether or not Alabama 23
- 24 intended the result, and I take your point that,
- no, you didn't. So what difference does it make 25

1 what a race-neutral algorithm would do? 2 MR. LACOUR: It matters for at least 3 three reasons, Your Honor, and this Court -- I mean, every time that a Section 2 case has come 4 before this Court and you've had to consider 5 that interaction between Section 2 and the equal 6 7 protection clause, you've reversed for someone using too much race and find too --8 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you think that Section 2 sets out an intent standard? 10 MR. LACOUR: Your Honor, I think that 11 obvious -- it's undisputed that intent is 12 relevant. Intent has not been rendered 13 14 irrelevant. 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Sure. You know, nobody disputes that intent isn't relevant. 16 question is, is intent required? And when I 17 read your brief, the -- all over it, you suggest 18 19 that intent is required. And I thought that we have said on numerous occasions that intent is 20 not required, and the reason we've said it on 21 2.2 numerous occasions is because that's what 23 Congress said. 24 We once long ago said that intent was

required in Voting Right -- in the Voting --

- 1 Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, and Congress
- 2 immediately slapped us down and said no, we
- 3 didn't mean that and made clear in the language
- 4 of the statute that it was incorporating a
- 5 results test, an effects test.
- 6 And yet your -- your -- your
- 7 arguments, as Justice Jackson has suggested,
- 8 really say that that's wrong and that there
- 9 needs to be a showing of intent in order to make
- 10 out a Section 2 violation.
- 11 MR. LACOUR: Two points on that. I
- 12 will that recognize there there's certainly
- dicta in the Court, Section 2 precedent
- 14 suggesting that there doesn't have to be a
- 15 showing of intent.
- 16 What we have laid out in the brief is
- 17 what we think the best reading of the text,
- 18 which, when the Court -- when Congress decided
- 19 to put in 2(b), that language from Whitcomb and
- 20 from White v. Regester, they were importing that
- 21 invidious discrimination test.
- 22 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, to make this a
- 23 question of dicta in the cases when you have
- 24 Congress saying results in and then setting out
- 25 an entire subsection about what it means to

- 1 result in unequal access to the political
- 2 process, and then Gingles says, well, we
- 3 acknowledge that this was a response to Bolden,
- 4 where we held that proof of discriminatory
- 5 intent was required, and we say Congress revised
- 6 Section 2 to make clear that a violation could
- 7 be proved by showing discriminatory effect
- 8 alone.
- 9 And then we said it in Chisom. And
- 10 then we said it recently as a year ago -- I
- 11 dissented from this decision, but Brnovich says
- the fact that Section 2 does not demand proof of
- discriminatory purpose is one of the points of
- 14 law that nobody disputes.
- MR. LACOUR: Correct. And, Your
- 16 Honor, our position we've laid out and the Court
- obviously does not have to reach that in this
- 18 case because we do think that the plaintiffs
- 19 have brought such an edge case here that it
- should be easy to resolve on narrower grounds,
- 21 but they imported from Witt and from White v.
- 22 Regester what the Senate factor -- what the
- 23 Senate report referred to as the White Results
- 24 Test.
- 25 Well, if you look back at White and if

```
1
     you look back at Whitcomb, they say invidious
 2
      discrimination half a dozen times.
                                          Justice
 3
      White explained in his dissent in Mobile that
 4
      they were requiring -- the plurality was
 5
     requiring some sort of smoking gun proof
      identifying the exact official, and Justice
 6
 7
      White's position was no. Circumstantial
      evidence can be enough to infer invidious
 8
     discrimination --
 9
10
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel --
                             -- and that's exactly
11
                MR. LACOUR:
12
     what he said --
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I guess
13
14
15
                MR. LACOUR: -- in Rogers v. Lodge.
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- do you --
16
17
      do you agree with the solicitor general's
      statement in the government -- the federal
18
19
     government's brief that they -- you can take
      into account the factors that you're most
20
21
      concerned about, which is the computer
```

race-neutral criteria, that you can take those

circumstances point, but they do not show any --

simulations that show the effects of

into account under the totality of the

2.2

23

24

- do not undermine the proposition that there's no
- 2 requirement of showing intent?
- 3 MR. LACOUR: I think you can certainly
- 4 take them into account at the totality of
- 5 circumstances stage. If you look at the
- 6 district court's opinion here, though -- and one
- 7 other thing I'd note, in Brnovich, this Court
- 8 emphasized that the legitimate state goals are
- 9 critical at that totality of the circumstances
- 10 stage.
- 11 And I think, in a single member
- 12 districting contest -- context, it's especially
- important that the Court be putting those
- 14 legitimate goals front and center for at least
- 15 two reasons.
- 16 First, as this Court has said in every
- 17 redistricting opinion that you've issued,
- 18 redistricting is one of the most difficult and
- 19 complex things that a legislature has to
- 20 undertake and it's an area where courts are not
- 21 particularly well-suited to come in and
- 22 second-guess.
- But second and even more importantly,
- 24 single member districting is uniquely zero sum.
- So, if someone brings a challenge to

- 1 an early voting period and says it's 10 days but
- 2 really should be 20 and they prevail and get 10
- 3 more days, no one is harmed on account of race.
- 4 The minority voters who prevailed and the
- 5 majority voters can both take advantage of that.
- 6 Similarly, if you challenge multi-member
- 7 districts and you replace them with neutral
- 8 single-member districts, no one's worse off on
- 9 account of race.
- 10 But, if you have a neutral plan and
- 11 someone comes in and upsets it to racially
- 12 gerrymander it in favor of one racial group,
- well, necessarily you're going to be harming
- 14 some other group on account of race.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, why are you
- 16 saying --
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Counsel --
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- it's a neutral
- 19 plan, counsel? I -- I don't understand. The
- 20 Gingles preconditions are designed to establish
- 21 that there may actually be race discrimination
- 22 working in this particular situation, right? We
- 23 have, as Justice Kagan pointed out, not just the
- initial hypothesis, which, by the way, is how I
- 25 look at the first step. I don't think the first

- 1 step is, you know, creating some sort of a
- 2 comparator or anything of the sort.
- 3 The first step is a burden on the
- 4 plaintiff, on the challenger, to show that their
- 5 hypothesis that another district could be drawn,
- 6 another minority -- majority-minority district,
- 7 is even feasible given the empirical numbers in
- 8 the situation, all right?
- 9 So, if we accept that, that's step
- 10 number one, and it contains an assessment of
- 11 things like racial segregation in housing
- 12 because you have to have enough of these people
- pushed in, compacted in this district, right?
- MR. LACOUR Mm-hmm.
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: So we already have
- this idea that there's some problem because we
- 17 have racial segregation in housing at Step 1.
- Then Step 2 is asking, do we have a
- 19 problem in the sense that people are voting in
- 20 racially polarized ways? Step 3 is also that
- 21 kind of dynamic. Do we have a situation in
- 22 which the, you know, majority group is always
- voting in the same way?
- 24 These are really tough things to
- establish, and, collectively, they show that

- 1 it's not neutral, the situation that we are
- 2 approaching in this situation. We're talking
- 3 about a situation in which race has already
- 4 infused the voting system.
- 5 So can you help me understand why you
- 6 think that the world of, you know, race-blind
- 7 redistricting is -- is really the starting point
- 8 in this situation?
- 9 MR. LACOUR: Well, let's think about
- 10 why you have a compactness inquiry in the first
- 11 place. It's to make sure that no one is being
- 12 harmed on account of a lack of compactness. And
- that's why traditional districting principles
- 14 are part of this inquiry too, so no one is being
- 15 harmed --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I don't think so. I
- 17 think it's to show that you have racial
- 18 segregation in housing happening in this
- 19 situation, that you have enough people who are
- in, you know, marginalized groups that another
- 21 district is possible.
- 22 And why is that happening? Because
- 23 people are being segregated in effect, in
- 24 effect, as Judge -- Justice Kagan pointed out,
- 25 right? We're not talking about intent. We're

- 1 talking about the effect of what's happening on
- 2 the ground in these jurisdictions.
- 3 MR. LACOUR: Two points.
- 4 First, on the segregation point, if
- 5 there really was that compact segregated part of
- 6 Alabama to draw that second black district, they
- 7 wouldn't have had to split Mobile for the first
- 8 time ever, gone 170 miles northeast up to
- 9 Montgomery, and then dipped a hundred miles to
- 10 the southeast to Dothan, Alabama.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: Okay. So that's a
- 12 different argument.
- JUSTICE ALITO But, counsel, you
- 14 have a --
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Counsel, you have made
- 17 a number of arguments. Some of them are quite
- 18 far-reaching, and you've been questioned about
- 19 some of those already in the argument today, but
- 20 let me make sure I understand your -- your basic
- 21 argument, your least far-reaching argument.
- 22 And as I understood it, the argument
- is that the first Gingles precondition requires
- 24 the showing that there can be a reasonably
- 25 configured majority-minority district. It's not

2.2

- 1 just any old majority-minority district. It has
- 2 to be reasonably configured. And reasonably
- 3 configured means something more than just
- 4 compact. It means a district that is the type
- of district that would be drawn by an unbiased
- 6 mapmaker.
- 7 Now a plaintiff in a case like this
- 8 can attempt to satisfy that first condition
- 9 simply by coming forward with a district that is
- 10 majority-minority, but that doesn't end the
- inquiry because, if it can be shown, as you
- 12 claim the computer simulations in this case
- 13 show, that that is not the kind of district that
- an unbiased mapmaker would ever draw, then the
- 15 first Gingles precondition is not satisfied.
- 16 Now that's how I understood your --
- 17 your basic argument. Am I right on that?
- MR. LACOUR: Yes. Yes, Your Honor.
- 19 But you could also consider that at the totality
- 20 of the circumstances --
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: And you could consider
- it at the totality of the circumstances.
- MR. LACOUR: Mm-hmm.
- 24 JUSTICE ALITO: But your most basic
- argument is not at war with Gingles. You have

- 1 quarrels with Gingles, but your most basic
- 2 argument fits right into Gingles.
- 3 MR. LACOUR: Absolutely. And in
- 4 LULAC, the Court recognized the compactness
- 5 inquiry lacked some precision. Obviously --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, Mr. Lacour --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel --
- 8 MR. LACOUR: -- some precision was
- 9 needed.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- it only -- with
- 11 Gingles if Gingles meant reasonably configured
- in the way that Justice Alito suggests.
- MR. LACOUR: Mm-hmm.
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: But there's no
- indication in Gingles or in any of our cases
- 16 that the Court did mean reasonably configured in
- 17 the way that Justice Alito suggests.
- 18 Reasonably configured meant take a
- 19 look at a district. Does the district have sort
- of reasonable lines, or are you doing something
- 21 totally crazy? Does the district, you know,
- 22 incorporate communities of interest? Does it --
- 23 you know, does it make sure that traditional
- 24 districting criteria are satisfied?
- 25 If you can come in with a map that

- 1 looks like that, which plaintiffs here did --
- 2 nobody contests that even, or maybe you do. I
- 3 don't know. Certainly, the judges below found
- 4 that question very easy.
- 5 Then you go on. This is just a
- 6 precondition to show that you have a map that
- 7 accords with traditional districting criteria.
- 8 They had that map.
- 9 MR. LACOUR: With -- with respect,
- 10 first, again, I'm not sure why the Court has
- 11 ever spoken about traditional districting
- 12 principles and reasonable configuration, or at
- 13 least the Court has never suggested that a map
- that the state could never enact itself under
- the Equal Protection Clause is somehow
- 16 reasonably configured. If they came forward
- with a Cooper v. Harris map or the Bethune-Hill
- 18 map --
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: But why is that --
- MR. LACOUR: -- surely, that's not
- 21 reasonably configured.
- 22 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- the question at
- 23 Step 1, counsel? Why is that the question -- at
- 24 Step 1, we're not even worried about the state's
- 25 map. We're asking the -- the -- the

- 1 challengers, it's a burden on the challengers,
- 2 can you sustain your hypothesis that under
- 3 traditional redistricting principles we can have
- 4 a map that is drawn the way we ordinarily draw
- 5 maps and has a majority of minorities?
- It's not about the state's map at 1.
- 7 So I don't understand why we would have to
- 8 ensure that the challengers' map conforms with
- 9 other legal requirements.
- 10 MR. LACOUR: With respect, this whole
- 11 case is about the state's map. The whole
- 12 Section 2 inquiry should be about the state's
- map. And there's something bizarre with the
- 14 fact that, like, we have to somehow show that
- 15 there's something so wrong with their map --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, counsel --
- 17 MR. LACOUR: -- that our map gets to
- 18 stand.
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- it's like -- it's
- 20 like -- it's like the burden-shifting tests that
- 21 this Court has in all kinds of other
- 22 discrimination. It's like McDonnell-Douglas,
- 23 right? At Step 1, the challengers have to do
- 24 something.
- MR. LACOUR: Mm-hmm.

1 JUSTICE JACKSON: And in this case, 2 they have to do something really hard. They 3 have three different hurdles that they have to jump over in order to even get us to question 4 Alabama's maps. And at Step 1, they have to 5 6 show this empirical thing. And I don't 7 understand why you are now suggesting that the Step 1 has to also relate to the legality of 8 9 that map. That's not the ultimate map that it's going to be, right? Even if they win, Alabama 10 has the opportunity to put out its own map. So 11 they're just doing a particular thing at Step 1. 12 And I don't understand your -- your argument. 13 MR. LACOUR: With respect, Your Honor, 14 15 this Court has said account for traditional districting principles, and if they get to leave 16 17 a few of those aside, then that hurdle becomes very low. And -- and maps that Evan Milligan 18 himself couldn't have conceived of somehow clear 19 20 that hurdle --21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, may I? 2.2 JUSTICE ALITO: Suppose --23 MR. LACOUR: -- and then state and --24 sorry, Justice Sotomayor. 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Finish answering,

- 1 but then come to me.
- 2 MR. LACOUR: And, in effect, in this
- 3 case and in multiple circuits, lower courts are
- 4 treating Gingles 1, 2, and 3 as the whole ball
- 5 game. So, if you're going to leave Gingles 1 as
- 6 this very easy to satisfy precondition, well,
- 7 then all the more important for you to consider
- 8 the state's legitimate purposes --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel?
- 10 MR. LACOUR: -- at the totality stage.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now may I get to
- 12 that?
- MR. LACOUR: Yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. First
- of all, I followed the district court's
- 16 findings, the three judges, extensive record.
- 17 They found that the Respondents' maps -- or the
- 18 Respondents' map respected traditional
- 19 districting better than the state's map in
- 20 medium compactness, continuity, respect for
- 21 political subdivisions, and the desire to keep
- 22 together existing communities of interest.
- You dispute that. We can go into the
- 24 record. There is a fight here, however, over
- what's a continuing existing community of

- 1 interest. You sit or you've been arguing that
- 2 Mobile and what's the other county?
- 3 MR. LACOUR: Mobile and Baldwin
- 4 Counties.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Baldwin, that
- 6 they're a community of interest. Why? They
- 7 have a, I think it's French and Spanish
- 8 background. Just so happens that all of those
- 9 people are white. And you've never split those
- 10 communities. The Black Belt has all black
- 11 people or not all but mostly black people.
- 12 MR. LACOUR: Fifty-six --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So --
- MR. LACOUR -- 56.6 percent.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Yeah. Mobile and
- 16 Baldwin have a majority white. That black
- 17 community, through the decades, has been split
- 18 three or four ways. Now the question is, why?
- 19 What the district court did was to
- look at that community and say: It may be
- 21 black, but that's irrelevant to what constitutes
- 22 a community of interest. It's not merely its
- 23 race. It's its socioeconomic background, it's
- 24 educational level, it's occupation. It's all of
- 25 the things that one would look at to define a

1 community of interest. 2 And that community of interest should 3 be held together because, just like Mobile and Baldwin, assuming -- and the district court 4 didn't -- held that you hadn't met your burden 5 6 on that actually being a community of interest, 7 but even if you wanted to keep it that way, my 8 question to you is, assume I accept that as a community of interest. Why isn't the map that 9 the district court relying on race neutral? 10 MR. LACOUR: There's a lot --11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's looking at 12 community of interest. If you -- and I think 13 what the district court said was that 14 historically it the maps you've drawn in the 15 past had discrimination sort of built in. 16 MR. LACOUR: Justice Sotomayor, 17 there's a lot to unpack there, a few premises I 18 think I need to clear up as a factual matter, 19 20 and then I'd be happy to get to the legal point. 21 First, the district court did find at 22 page 180 of the Milligan stay appendix that 23 there is a Gulf Coast community of interest. 24 They found Representative Bradley Bern's

testimony to be helpful. That's at page 122.

```
1
                So there's no dispute there that there
 2
      is a community of interest, nor -- nor could
 3
      there be.
 4
               Second --
 5
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I -- I think there
     was a difference of opinion about that, but --
 6
7
               MR. LACOUR: I -- I think --
 8
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- we can go -- we
 9
      can qo --
               MR. LACOUR: -- I think we have two --
10
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: further
11
     assuming that it --
12
               MR. LACOUR: we have two undisputed
13
      communities of interest.
14
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right.
15
               MR. LACOUR: We've got the Gulf.
16
17
      We've the Black Belt.
18
                Second, there's --
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So why can you not
19
      -- why can you put precedents on keeping one
20
     together but not keeping the other together --
21
22
               MR. LACOUR: So --
23
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- breaking it up
24
     by three or four?
25
               MR. LACOUR: -- two responses to that.
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1
                One is I don't think courts are very
 2
     well-positioned to judge how -- which community
 3
      of interest should be weighed in which way --
 4
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, if -- if --
                MR. LACOUR: -- in a particular map.
 5
                But, second --
 6
 7
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- if -- if the
 8
      Respondents' maps are better at compactness,
 9
      continuity, respect for political subdivision,
      why are they worse than what the state has done
10
11
      or suspect?
                MR. LACOUR: They -- they are not
12
               The Districts 2 and 2 are far less
13
      better.
      compact, and Dr. Duchin testified that the
14
15
      reason for that
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And 1 or 2 might
16
17
     be, but there's always going to be something
      that's a little less on medium they said it
18
19
     was more compact.
20
                MR. LACOUR: Well, on average, and
21
      that's because they completely restructured the
22
     north of the state, Districts 5 and 4, which are
23
     not at issue at all here, to build up a
24
      compactness budget that could then be spent at
25
      the bottom of the state, which --
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1
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That -- that's not
 2
      what the district court found. I mean, but
      putting this aside, let's go back to my
 3
      fundamental question.
 4
                I thought the issue under Section 2
 5
     was whether or not a particular racial minority
 6
 7
     has -- as a result, can equally participate. If
 8
      that's the case, and on all the factors the
 9
     district court looked at, it concluded that the
      Black Belt community, which is a community of
10
11
      interest, was inappropriately cracked --
               MR. LACOUR: Your Honor --
12
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- in three or
13
      four districts, why isn't that actionable under
14
15
      Section 2?
               MR. LACOUR: Your Honor, there is no
16
      finding - it shows up a lot in my friend's
17
     briefs, but there is no finding that we cracked
18
19
      the Belt -- Black Belt, absolutely not a finding
20
      that we cracked the back -- Black Belt.
21
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, how can it
     not be if you're not keeping together a
22
23
      community of interest the way you did --
24
               MR. LACOUR: Because --
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- with Mobile and
25
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- 1 Baldwin?
- 2 MR. LACOUR: -- Your Honor, the -- the
- 3 Black Belt, as both plaintiffs and their experts
- 4 testified, stretches from Texas to Virginia. We
- 5 can't keep the whole Black Belt together. And
- 6 those 18 --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You already have
- 8 one long district in your plan.
- 9 MR. LACOUR: Yes. And as Bill Cooper,
- 10 the plaintiffs' expert, the Caster plaintiffs'
- 11 expert explained, that's because the Tennessee
- 12 River runs east to west up there. It has always
- 13 been --
- 14 JUSTICE SCTOMAYOR: And the Black Belt
- 15 runs east to west as well.
- 16 MR. LACOUR: Correct, but the rivers
- in the southwest of the state, the Tom Bigley,
- 18 the Alabama, and the Mobile, they run north to
- 19 south and they drop off in the port. And that's
- 20 why Shalela Dowdy, one of the Milligan
- 21 plaintiffs, testified that when Mobile's doing
- 22 well, then everyone regardless of race in the
- 23 Mobile area and even in the Black Belt counties
- 24 directly north of there is doing well. So
- 25 they're -- they're proving our case for us.

1 JUSTICE ALITO: Are there enough 2 people in the Black Belt to constitute a 3 district by itself or --MR. LACOUR: No, Justice --4 JUSTICE ALITO: -- was it -- was it 5 necessary in their proposed District 7 to reach 6 7 up into -- into Montgomery and pick up black areas there in order to get over the 50 percent 8 9 mark? MR. LACOUR: Yes. That's why it goes 10 up into Jefferson County. As I mentioned, the 11 18 core Black Belt counties are only 12 56.6 percent black, only 566,000 people. So 13 it's very difficult to draw a district. Plus, 14 15 because it spans the state, you can't draw one district that puts them all in there together. 16 Otherwise, you're going to strand too many 17 people south of there and you can't have 18 contiquous districts. 19 20 And on this point of who does better 21 or not in the Black Belt, the district court did 22 not find that their plans do better on the Black 23 Belt. They said they do at least as well. 24 would have been clearly erroneous to find that they do better because our plan puts those 18 25

- 1 core counties into three districts. Every one
- of their plans puts them into at least three
- 3 districts, with the exceptions of --
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: May I ask for order?
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why don't we
- 6 wait until we get -- get back.
- 7 Counsel, you've been asked a lot of
- 8 questions on the nature of your submission. I'm
- 9 not sure you've had a full opportunity to
- 10 respond.
- 11 What exactly is your submission under
- 12 Section 2 that, in particular, the relation
- 13 between the computer analysis that you've
- 14 submitted and why your argument is not an effort
- 15 to resuscitate the intent test that Congress has
- 16 rejected under Section 2?
- MR. LACOUR: Well, Your Honor, we
- think that, as I mentioned before, intent is not
- 19 irrelevant. Even the Milligan plaintiffs agree
- 20 at page -- I don't have the page right in front
- 21 of me -- page 20 in their brief that Section 2
- 22 requires evidence relevant to the issue of
- 23 intentional discrimination.
- Well, we've got phenomenal evidence
- 25 that they brought forward, and this was another

- 1 fact I need to clear up because the United
- 2 States and both sets of plaintiffs got it wrong
- 3 in their briefs. But Dr. Imai, he was their --
- 4 he was the Milligan plaintiffs' expert who was
- 5 working with the 2020 data.
- 6 And he drew 10,000 -- three sets of
- 7 10,000 maps. The third set guaranteed one
- 8 majority black district of 50 to 51 percent,
- 9 razor thin, leaving as many black voters as
- 10 possible to find in the other six districts and
- 11 form a second majority-minority district, then
- 12 contiguity equal population, keep counties
- 13 together, stay relatively compact, don't pair
- 14 incumbents and then prioritize communities of
- 15 interest.
- 16 And they've said again and again that
- 17 he didn't take into account communities of
- 18 interest. That is flatly wrong. He did. And
- 19 so what he was told to do by the Milligan
- 20 plaintiffs was to prioritize putting the Gulf
- 21 counties together and prioritize putting the 23
- 22 Black Belt counties together.
- When he did that, he had one majority
- 24 black district that was preprogrammed, and then
- 25 the second highest BVAP district averaged about

- 1 36 percent.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But I guess,
- 3 to get to the basic point, in what way do your
- 4 simulations, which you required to be
- 5 race-neutral, why does that seem to require an
- 6 intent test?
- 7 In other words, you seem to say what
- 8 was wrong with the other simulations is that
- 9 they took race into account. And the state
- 10 rejected that to look for the -- the neutral
- 11 plans.
- 12 That sounds to me like something
- that's looking for intent. You say there was no
- intent because every time we ran the simulation
- 15 without taking race into account, this is what
- 16 it came up with.
- 17 And my understanding of our -- our
- 18 cases is that you don't have to show intent. So
- 19 what is the significance of your computer
- 20 simulations?
- MR. LACOUR: Well, a -- a few points,
- 22 Your Honor. I mean, if you inject race as a
- 23 traditional districting principle, which is what
- both plaintiffs' map drawers said they did.
- 25 They treated race as a traditional districting

- 1 principle. It's going to have that hydraulic
- 2 effect and it's going to make it harder to
- 3 comport with traditional districting principles
- 4 and you're going to end up with a map that's not
- 5 going to do as well.
- 6 Also, I mean, intent is not
- 7 irrelevant. If we've shown conclusively that
- 8 we're achieving our legitimate goals, that has
- 9 to factor in. I think even the dissent in
- 10 Brnovich said a Section 2 plaintiff needs to
- 11 show that it's not possible for the state to
- 12 achieve its legitimate goals in some way.
- And -- and it's -- we've shown that.
- 14 It is impossible for us to achieve undisputably
- 15 legitimate goals of keeping the Gulf together,
- of maintaining our preexisting district lines in
- 17 a large amount, and keeping relatively compact
- 18 districts that someone could look at from
- 19 Alabama and recognize why they were drawn that
- 20 way without looking and seeing the price.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 22 JUSTICE JACKSON: But, counsel, what
- 23 about the --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 25 counsel.

1	Justice Thomas, it's your turn.
2	Justice Alito?
3	JUSTICE ALITO: No.
4	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
5	Sotomayor?
6	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I find it
7	interesting that you're touting Dr. Imai's
8	studies when, below, you vehemently objected to
9	his studies on the basis that the studies were
LO	incomplete and didn't take into account all of
L1	Alabama's guidelines.
L2	MR. LACOUR: Yes Your Honor. And
L3	that's a very easy answer to give. We took into
L4	account the preexisting district lines as
L5	traditional boundaries, so to speak. He did
L6	not. And so his map couldn't reveal
L7	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that begs
L8	MR. LACOUR: whether race defined
L9	things.
20	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: that begs
21	MR. LACOUR: But
22	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: the question.
23	MR. LACOUR: but plaintiffs, none
24	of their map drawers cared at all about
2.5	preexisting district lines. So they took into

- account -- he took into account the same things they were taking into account, and when he did,
- 3 without also putting race into account, that's
- 4 the one thing he didn't take into account, then
- 5 you come back with maps that come nowhere close
- 6 to creating a second majority-black district,
- 7 which shows that race was the criteria and that
- 8 could not be compromised. I mean, it's textbook
- 9 predominance.
- 10 We could have never drawn those maps
- 11 constitutionally. And, again, just to get back
- 12 to, like, the general confusion here, it puts us
- in an obvious rock and hard place. They're
- 14 using maps we could have never drawn to force us
- to draw maps that, like, again, we couldn't have
- 16 ever drawn.
- 17 So that cannot be how the equal
- openness mandate of Section 2 works. It needs
- 19 to work in harmony with the equal protection
- 20 mandate of the Constitution, not in conflict.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: General, some of your
- 23 arguments, I think not all of them, but some of
- 24 your arguments would strongly indicate that
- 25 Alabama could enact a plan with no

- majority-minority districts.

 majority-minority districts.

 majority-minority districts.

 majority-minority districts.

 majority-minority districts.

 left of the current of the curr
- 5 because core retention is one of those
- 6 principles.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: What do you mean,
- 8 under the current guidelines?
- 9 MR. LACOUR: The 2021 guidelines that
- 10 the bipartisan redistricting committee approved
- 11 and handed over for our -- for our --
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: On -- on your current
- 13 guidelines. I'm not interested in Alabama's
- 14 current guidelines. I'm interested in whether
- 15 you think, as a matter of federal law, as a
- 16 matter of the Voting Rights Act, you are
- 17 prohibited from enacting a plan that has zero
- 18 majority-minority districts.
- 19 MR. LACOUR: I think it would depend
- 20 on sort of the guidelines that are being
- 21 proposed there and the motivations. This Court
- 22 said in LULAC breaking up an existing district
- is -- is inherently suspect. And so that would
- 24 be a much stronger case.
- 25 And I'll note LULAC is actually the

1 only published opinion of this Court where you 2 found a Section 2 violation, and --3 JUSTICE KAGAN: So you think that 4 there are circumstances -- I mean, this is important to me because some of your arguments 5 6 sweep extremely widely, maybe most of them --7 that there are circumstances in which a population that is 27 percent of the state's 8 population could essentially be foreclosed from 9 electing a candidate of their choice anywhere? 10 11 MR. LACOUR: Your Honor, there's 12 always going to be that intensely local appraisal to see what was going on there. 13 Obviously, if we had had these guidelines and we 14 15 passed a map that took us from one down to zero, where we retained the cores of Districts 1 16 17 through 6 but not District 7, that would be an 18 easy case. That would be LULAC all over again. 19 It would be an easy case to bring. And, also, I don't think --20 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: So it all depends on -- you know, just it all depends? 22

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MR. LACOUR: Well, it all depends on

what Section 2 is trying to get at. And I don't

23

24

25

think --

1 JUSTICE KAGAN: Okay. Well, I think 2 what Section 2 is trying to get at is it's 3 trying to ensure equal political opportunities. That's what -- so let me just use that as a 4 seque to my last question, which is that, you 5 6 know, this is an important statute. It's one of 7 the great achievements of American democracy to achieve equal political opportunities regardless 8 9 of race, to ensure that African Americans could have as much political power as -- as 10 That's a pretty big white Americans could. 11 12 deal. And it was strengthened, this statute, 13 in 1982 when this Court interpreted it too 14 15 narrowly for Congress's taste, and Congress said no, we didn't mean that at all and made this 16 17 into a results test. Now, in recent years, this statute has 18 19 fared not well in this Court. Shelby County 20 looks at Section 5 and it says no, Section 5, we 21 don't need that anymore, and one of the things 22 it says is we have Section 2. 23 And then Brnovich comes along, and that's a Section 2 case, and the Court says: 24 You know what, Section 2, they're really 25

- 1 dilution claims. You know, this is a denial
- 2 claim, and -- and so we can construe that very
- 3 narrowly. But, of course, there's just all
- 4 these cases that are dilution claims. That's
- 5 really what Section 2 is about.
- 6 And now here we are, Section 2 is a
- 7 dilution claim, this -- you know, the classic
- 8 Section 2 dilution claim. And you're asking us
- 9 essentially to cut back substantially on our 40
- 10 years of precedent and to make this too
- 11 extremely difficult to prevail on.
- 12 So what's left?
- MR. LACOUR: Justice Kagan, the Voting
- 14 Rights Act has achieved tremendous gains. In
- 15 2016, for example, Alabama, black voters turned
- out at 4.6 points higher than white voters, even
- though nationwide that gap was 2.3 percent the
- other direction. In 2018, much the same story.
- 19 We had the second highest black registration in
- 20 the country, second only to Mississippi. So I
- 21 think we need to not lose sight of that.
- 22 In terms of what Section 2 is supposed
- to be doing, I think the problem here is we're
- 24 kind of in like a third generation of vote
- 25 dilution claims. You have the multi-member

1 districts is generation 1. Generation 2 was 2 getting rid of the racial gerrymanders. 3 generation 3 is let's impose the racial gerrymanders, which I don't think Section 2 was 4 ever designed to do. It's what's led to all 5 6 this confusion and this tension between an equal 7 openness statute and equal protection mandate. And we're just saying, like, that 8 cannot be what it means. Whatever it means, it 9 can't be that we have to obliterate 10 longstanding, unprecedented -- I mean undisputed 11 communities of interest in favor of districts 12 that sort of arch across the state to connect 13 people from Mobile and Dothan, which no neutral 14 15 map drawer would ever do. And, obviously, it 16 was not the concerns of the 1982 Congress. JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you. 17 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice 19 Gorsuch? 20 Justice Kavanaugh? 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I interpreted your 2.2 argument in the briefs similarly to Justice 23 Kagan and Justice Alito, that you had a broad 24 argument which struck me as asking us to rewrite

Gingles in -- in a variety of ways, and then a

- 1 narrower argument focused on compactness,
- whether the new majority-minority district
- 3 proposed here was reasonably compact.
- 4 Assume just for the sake of argument
- 5 that we don't rewrite Gingles and then focus on
- 6 the compactness of the proposed
- 7 majority-minority district. I mean, you get to
- 8 this on page 66 of your brief, and you say with
- 9 respect to compactness, "the question is whether
- the newly drawn district alone is sufficiently
- 11 compact or whether the minority population is so
- 12 sprawling that any majority-minority district
- 13 cannot be reasonably configured."
- I agree completely that that is the
- 15 question. I did not find much help on the
- 16 answer. And this is your opportunity to -- to
- 17 -- to answer that question.
- 18 Why is it -- why do you think it's so
- 19 sprawling, given that it does respect a
- 20 community of interest in the Black Belt, that it
- 21 can't be a new majority-minority district?
- MR. LACOUR: Two points on that,
- 23 Justice Kagan. As I was noting -- I mean
- 24 Justice Kavanaugh, I apologize.
- Their maps actually don't do any

- 1 better for the Black Belt, and that wasn't their
- 2 goal. So, if you look at Duchin Plan B, I
- 3 believe it is, that's at 3a of the U.S. brief's
- appendix, she splits the Black Belt four ways, 4
- among four districts, those 18 core counties. 5
- 6 And not to be outdone, Mr. Cooper, the Caster
- 7 plaintiffs' map drawer, in his Plan 6, that's at
- 8 9a, he splits them five ways.
- So we do just as well as them with the 9
- Black Belt, but we also keep together --10
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But isn't the
 -MR. LACOUR: the Gulf Coast 11
- 12 question --
- 13
- community of interest 14
- 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Sorry to
- interrupt. Isn't the question whether the new 16
- 17 district is reasonably compact, reasonably
- configured? 18
- 19 MR. LACOUR: Correct. And as this
- 20 Court has said --
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And so, on that,
- 22 you look at respecting county lines, for
- 23 example, right? That's an important one.
- 24 this did. This new district did just as well,
- 25 if not better, in respecting county lines. At

- 1 least that's the argument. So I want to hear
- 2 your response to that.
- 3 Then the overall shape of the new
- 4 district, the argument on the other side is:
- 5 Well, that looks similar in shape to a lot of
- 6 other districts that are in the state plan as
- 7 well.
- 8 So you don't have the kind of Shaw v.
- 9 Reno bizarre map, and you don't have county
- 10 lines being split more -- but respond to this if
- 11 you want -- split more than the state plan
- 12 already split county lines
- 13 So then the question is, why is this
- 14 district not reasonably compact? And I will be
- 15 candid, for both sides, I don't really know how
- to measure reasonably compact. That's why I'm
- 17 looking -- I mean, that's very -- there's been a
- 18 lot written about it and I've read a lot. It's
- 19 very hard to measure. But county lines are one
- of the -- one of the measures.
- 21 MR. LACOUR: Well, three of the Duchin
- 22 plans split more counties than necessary. The
- 23 Cooper plans keep them together but the same
- 24 number of splits. Six is the minimum --
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. If it's --

MR. LACOUR: -- you have to have. 1 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- the same number 3 of splits, why is it not reasonably compact? MR. LACOUR: Because they ignore other 4 traditional districting principles. So like 5 6 we -- as we noted, preexisting district lines, a 7 core retention has been something the state has given effect to for a long time. This Court in 8 9 Karcher said that is a legitimate goal in redistricting. 10 And the district court said: 11 you don't have to account for that traditional 12 districting principle because that would make it 13 really hard to satisfy Gingles. Well, but 14 15 that's the whole point of the traditional districting principles inquiry, is -- is -- is 16 17 not to make it easy. It's to make sure that what they come up with is essentially playing by 18 19 similar rules as the state. 20 And -- and they just got to set aside 21 the ones that they didn't like that got in the 22 way. That can't be what reasonably configured 23 means or what account for traditional 24 districting principles means. 25 And they say, well, there's no

- 1 precedent for taking into account core
- 2 retention. That's not true. If you go back to
- 3 Abrams, I mean, after Miller, with the max back
- 4 -- max black plan foisted upon Georgia in the --
- 5 after the 1990 census, it was sent back to the
- 6 district court, who was forced to end up drawing
- 7 a map for Georgia's 11 congressional districts.
- 8 Georgia at that time, just like
- 9 Alabama today, was 27 percent black population.
- 10 And the judge was trying to comply with Section
- 11 2, including this compactness inquiry, and so he
- 12 said let's look at the traditional districting
- principles of the state. And one of those was
- 14 retaining the cores of preexisting districts.
- 15 And so he built that into his
- 16 compactness analysis and, as a result, concluded
- 17 it's only possible in Georgia --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Doesn't that make
- it a bit of a non-retrogression principle, which
- 20 Section 2 really was not designed to do?
- MR. LACOUR: No, Your Honor. I -- I
- 22 think, if you can find something wrong with
- those preexisting cores, then -- then maybe you
- 24 get to set them aside, and there are some states
- who don't care about preexisting cores and they

- 1 couldn't take advantage of this.
- But, in Georgia, they indisputably did
- 3 take into account preexisting cores. In
- 4 Alabama, we indisputably do too. When the
- 5 Democrats controlled the legislature in 2002 and
- 6 Senator Hank Sanders from Selma, Alabama,
- 7 proposed the 2002 map, it looked a lot like the
- 8 1992 map.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Last -- last
- 10 question. You've referred a couple times to
- 11 maximization and proportionality, but my
- 12 understanding is that compactness, the
- 13 compactness requirement, was the critical part
- of this inquiry under Gingles that prevents the
- 15 statute from being maximization or
- 16 proportionality because you can't just group
- 17 together people throughout the state in an
- 18 attempt to maximize or seek proportionality. It
- 19 has to be reasonably compact.
- 20 So doesn't the compactness requirement
- 21 mean that it's not a simple maximization or
- 22 proportionality requirement if the compactness
- 23 requirement is properly applied?
- 24 MR. LACOUR: If it's properly applied
- and they actually have to take into account our

- 1 traditional districting principles, but I'd like
- 2 you to imagine yourself as a legislator --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think I should
- 4 -- I should let others question now. Thanks.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 6 Barrett?
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Lacour, I think
- 8 I'm struggling in the same way that some others
- 9 have about narrowing down exactly what your
- 10 argument is. You know, I -- I disagree with you
- and agree with Justice Kagan's characterization
- of the intent point. Our precedent and the
- 13 statute itself says that you don't have to show
- 14 discriminatory intent, so put that aside.
- MR. LACOUR: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: I had understood
- 17 your argument, your primary argument, to be much
- 18 narrower, and I want to make sure now that I'm
- 19 understanding it because now I'm questioning
- 20 exactly where you're going.
- I had understood you to be saying that
- 22 the first Gingles factor requiring reasonably
- 23 configure -- a reasonably configured map that
- 24 showed more majority-minority districts, that
- 25 that had to be race-neutral, that it was not

- 1 reasonably configured if it wasn't, and that our
- 2 precedents have never -- have left the question
- 3 open, they've never said one way or another
- 4 whether you could use race as a prerequisite.
- 5 Here, you know, there was testimony
- 6 below that it was impossible to get to the two
- 7 majority-minority districts if you didn't take
- 8 race into account. There's the quote from the
- 9 plaintiffs' expert saying that you can't get
- there on accident, which is why ic's important
- 11 to do it on purpose.
- MR. LACOUR: Yes.
- 13 JUSTICE BARRETT: I understood your
- 14 argument to be that the first Gingles factor
- 15 required the plaintiffs to come forward with a
- 16 racially neutral map showing an increase in
- 17 majority-minority districts because that was the
- 18 way to establish a baseline from which equal
- 19 opportunity could be judged in the totality of
- 20 the circumstances test.
- MR. LACOUR: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: And I understood you
- 23 to be saying that you are being asked, all
- 24 states are being asked to navigate the rock and
- 25 the hard place of the Fourteenth Amendment and

- 1 the Voting Rights Act and that if you were
- 2 forced to adopt a map proposed by the plaintiffs
- 3 that was racially gerrymandered because race was
- 4 predominant in its drawing, that you would be
- 5 violating the Fourteenth Amendment.
- 6 Therefore, the first factor of Gingles
- 7 required to get past the hurdle that Justice
- 8 Jackson was talking about, to get past that
- 9 hurdle, it required race neutrality.
- 10 Is that your central argument?
- 11 Because you've been talking a Yot about the
- 12 farther-reaching arguments
- MR. LACOUR: Yes, that -- that is our
- 14 core argument that it -- it cannot be that they
- can come forward with a map that we would never
- 16 be allowed to draw, call it reasonably
- 17 configured and then force us to draw a map we
- would never be allowed to constitutionally draw.
- 19 You can think of that either -- the
- 20 problem is either race predominance or the
- 21 problem is, when race enters in to the equation,
- 22 then traditional districting principles
- 23 necessarily have to yield, which is what the
- 24 district court found on page 214 of the Milligan
- 25 stay appendix, non-racial considerations had to

- 1 yield to race.
- 2 So you -- you -- you can look at
- 3 either as the problem is race predominance or
- 4 the problem is you can't maintain -- you can't
- 5 account -- properly account for traditional
- 6 districting principles if you treat race as one
- 7 of those principles and necessarily force the
- 8 other ones to yield, but I think it's six in one
- 9 hand, half a dozen in the other.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: What about our
- 11 precedents that say that satisfying the Voting
- 12 Rights Act is a compelling interest on the part
- of the states? Doesn't that get you out of the
- 14 Fourteenth Amendment problem?
- MR. LACOUR: This Court has tellingly
- only ever assumed that compliance with Section 2
- is a compelling interest. And we don't think
- that race-based remedies would be a narrowly
- 19 tailored remedy for whatever --
- 20 JUSTICE BARRETT: What if -- what if
- 21 we -- well, I think we might have done more than
- 22 assume it. So if -- if we -- let's just stay
- 23 with me and assume that we have so held.
- If we have so held, do you lose?
- 25 MR. LACOUR: I -- I don't think we

- 1 lose. I think -- I mean, I think there are
- 2 going to be some cases where Section 2 violation
- 3 lines up with an equal protection clause
- 4 violation and might satisfy strict scrutiny.
- 5 So, for example, if there's race in the lines,
- 6 then, yeah, you have to have a race-based remedy
- 7 to take the race out of the lines.
- 8 But I don't think there's a
- 9 sufficiently compelling interest here based on,
- 10 for example, the showing that they made, where
- 11 they really just showed some broad-based
- 12 societal discrimination. They didn't show
- anything wrong with our maps. So it -- it
- 14 cannot be that that is specifically identified
- 15 discrimination that could justify using race to
- 16 change our map.
- 17 mean, you can go through that entire
- 18 250-plus pages of opinion from the district
- 19 court and really kind of miss our map
- 20 altogether, other than the fact that it doesn't
- 21 produce a second black district. And that just
- 22 shows how far afield the Section 2 inquiry
- 23 really has come in this case.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice

- 1 Jackson?
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. I am so, so
- 3 glad for Justice Barrett's clarification because
- 4 I had the same thought about what you were
- 5 arguing, and I'm glad that you clarified that
- 6 your core point is that the Gingles test has to
- 7 have a race-neutral baseline or that the -- the
- 8 first step has to be race-neutral.
- 9 And -- and what I guess I'm a little
- 10 confused about in light of that argument is why,
- 11 given our normal assessment of the Constitution,
- 12 why is it that you think that there's a
- 13 Fourteenth Amendment problem? And let me just
- 14 clarify what I mean by that.
- I don't think we can assume that just
- 16 because race is taken into account that that
- 17 necessarily creates an equal protection problem,
- 18 because I understood that we looked at the
- 19 history and traditions of the Constitution at
- 20 what the framers and the founders thought about
- 21 and when I drilled down to that level of
- 22 analysis, it became clear to me that the framers
- themselves adopted the equal protection clause,
- the Fourteenth Amendment, the Fifteenth
- 25 Amendment, in a race conscious way.

1 That they were, in fact, trying to 2 ensure that people who had been discriminated 3 against, the freedmen in -- during the reconstructive -- reconstruction period were 4 actually brought equal to everyone else in the 5 6 society. 7 So I looked at the report that was 8 submitted by the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, which drafted the Fourteenth 9 Amendment, and that report says that the entire 10 point of the amendment was to secure rights of 11 the freed former slaves. 12 The legislator who introduced that 13 amendment said that "unless the Constitution 14 15 should restrain them, those states will all, I 16 fear, keep up this discrimination and crush to 17 death the hated freedmen." That's not -- that's not a 18 race-neutral or race-blind idea in terms of the 19 20 remedy. And -- and even more than that, I don't think that the historical record establishes 21 2.2 that the founders believed that race neutrality 23 or race blindness was required, right? They drafted the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which 24 specifically stated that citizens would have the 25

- 1 same civil rights as enjoyed by white citizens.
- 2 That's the point of that Act, to make sure that
- 3 the other citizens, the black citizens, would
- 4 have the same as the white citizens. So they
- 5 recognized that there was unequal treatment,
- 6 that people, based on their race, were being
- 7 treated unequally.
- 8 And, importantly, when there was a
- 9 concern that the Civil Rights Act wouldn't have
- 10 a constitutional foundation, that's when the
- 11 Fourteenth Amendment came into play. It was
- 12 drafted to give a foundational -- a
- 13 constitutional foundation for a piece of
- 14 legislation that was designed to make people who
- 15 had less opportunity and less rights equal to
- 16 white citizens.
- 17 So with that as the framing and the
- 18 background, I'm trying to understand your
- 19 position that Section 2, which by its plain text
- is doing that same thing, is saying you need to
- 21 identify people in this community who have less
- 22 opportunity and less ability to participate and
- ensure that that's remedied, right? It's a
- 24 race-conscious effort, as you have indicated.
- 25 I'm trying to understand why that violates the

- 1 Fourteenth Amendment, given the history and --
- 2 and background of the Fourteenth Amendment?
- 3 MR. LACOUR: The Fourteenth Amendment
- 4 is a prohibition on discriminatory state action.
- 5 It is not an obligation to engage in affirmative
- 6 discrimination in favor of some groups vis-à-vis
- 7 others.
- 8 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, but as -- the
- 9 record shows that the reason why the Fourteenth
- 10 Amendment was enacted was to give a
- 11 constitutional foundation for that kind of
- 12 effort, for the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which
- was doing what the Section 2 is doing here.
- 14 MR. LACOUR Right. Which --
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: Which said, by its
- 16 terms, that other citizens have to be made equal
- 17 to white citizens, and people were concerned
- 18 that that didn't have a constitutional basis, so
- 19 they enacted the Fourteenth Amendment.
- 20 MR. LACOUR: Well, this Court has
- 21 specified -- and I don't take the Plaintiffs to
- 22 be arguing that Shaw should be overruled or that
- 23 Adarand should be overruled. That -- you have
- 24 to have -- before the government goes forward
- 25 and -- and actually uses race to, like, move

- 1 people around into districts, for example, you
- 2 have to have specific identified discrimination
- 3 to justify that. And --
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: And isn't that the
- 5 work of the Gingles factors? That's what all
- 6 the factors are trying to do.
- 7 MR. LACOUR: Not if they're allowed to
- 8 sacrifice our principles to come up with their
- 9 maps. And if they're allowed to use race --
- 10 this is the point I was making earlier -- if
- 11 they're allowed to use race to create their
- 12 maps, then their maps can't show discrimination
- in our map.
- 14 If you're trying to show that black
- 15 Alabamians are being treated unequally through
- 16 the 2021 plan well, you need a plan that is
- 17 neutral so you can -- it can be that control
- group and show you what's wrong with our plan.
- 19 But if you're coming forth --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: You're saying you
- 21 need that as a constitutional matter because
- that's what the Fourteenth Amendment requires?
- MR. LACOUR: As an evidentiary matter.
- 24 So --
- 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: So we don't have a

- 1 problem that the Constitution is creating. It's
- 2 as an evidentiary matter, we have to have
- 3 neutrality.
- 4 MR. LACOUR: Well, no, Your Honor, if
- 5 -- if their evidence is bad, then you run the
- 6 risk of replacing a neutral plan with a plan
- 7 drawn on account of race, which would create its
- 8 own Section 2 violations. I think a white
- 9 Republican in Mobile or a black Republican in
- 10 Mobile, for that matter, who's gerrymandered
- into the new District 2 and connected with
- 12 people on the Georgia border would have a
- 13 Section 2 claim himself because his vote has
- 14 been abridged on account of race.
- So you can't read Section 2 that way.
- 16 Equal openness and equal protection need to line
- 17 up. And they don't under Plaintiffs' approach.
- 18 And we need a benchmark because obviously we
- 19 need some clarity in this space. We've offered
- 20 a benchmark. I have seen no benchmark in the
- 21 briefs from the United States or the Plaintiffs,
- 22 and -- and maybe they can illuminate that for us
- 23 in just a moment.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 25 counsel.

1	Mr. Ross.
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF DEUEL ROSS
3	ON BEHALF OF THE APPELLEES
4	MR. ROSS: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
5	it please the Court:
6	There is nothing race-neutral about
7	Alabama's map. The district court's unanimous
8	and thorough intensely local analysis did not
9	err in finding that the Black Belt is a historic
10	and extremely poor community of substantial
11	significance. Yet, Alabama's map cracks that
12	community and allows white block voting to deny
13	black voters the opportunity to elect
14	representation responsive to their needs.
15	Rather than argue clear error, Alabama
16	asks us to ignore statutory stare decisis and to
17	rewrite Section 2's text. But the Voting Rights
18	Act is a remedial statute that Congress has
19	twice reenacted since Gingles, and its
20	application here raises no constitutional
21	concerns.
22	That is because Plaintiffs' maps show,
23	consistent with Bartlett, that it is possible to
24	draw maps that look very similar to Alabama's
25	own Board of Education map and that increase

- 1 opportunities for minority voters, while
- 2 satisfying traditional and state redistricting
- 3 criteria at least as well as Alabama's map.
- 4 Nothing in the text of Section 2
- 5 allows Alabama to avoid liability by offering up
- 6 these post hoc rationalizations of simulations
- 7 and core retention for maps that result in
- 8 discrimination. In fact, Alabama called
- 9 simulations fundamentally flawed for not
- 10 reproducing its own map and for not
- 11 incorporating all traditional redistricting
- 12 criteria.
- 13 At Gingles 1, this Court requires us
- 14 to use sample plans that Alabama is not
- 15 ultimately obligated to adopt, but those plans
- 16 need not be the ultimate remedy. And that's
- 17 because, as this Court said in Brnovich, Section
- 18 2 looks at the totality of the circumstances,
- 19 not, as Alabama would have it, the totality of
- 20 just one.
- 21 Section 2 is not an intent test or
- 22 about putting on racial blinders. It is about
- 23 equal opportunity, opportunity that Alabama's
- 24 map denies black voters. Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, do

- 1 you agree with the Solicitor General's statement
- 2 in -- in her brief -- I don't know exactly what
- 3 the page is -- that the argument that your
- 4 friend on the other side makes about the -- the
- 5 race-neutral simulations, that argument can be
- 6 taken into account under the totality of the
- 7 circumstances?
- 8 MR. ROSS: Your Honor, I think
- 9 simulations are about intent and they're not
- 10 about results. But if it were to be taken into
- 11 account as a part of the totality of the
- 12 circumstances, I think it could be a factor that
- goes to the -- an issue of remedy. And here we
- 14 know that Dr. Duchin conducted simulations using
- 15 race as one factor among many others and said
- that she could create literally thousands of two
- 17 districts with majority-minority districts. And
- even Imai, where he used race-blind simulations,
- 19 came out with plans that looked very similar to
- 20 the Singleton plan, which allowed for two
- 21 crossover districts where minority voters would
- 22 have a fair chance to elect their candidates of
- 23 choice in at least two districts.
- 24 JUSTICE ALITO: Can I ask you about --
- 25 can I ask you about the first Gingles

- 1 precondition? What the Court -- what the Court
- 2 said exactly in Gingles was that there must be a
- 3 sufficiently large -- that the minority group
- 4 must be "sufficiently large and compact to
- 5 constitute a majority in a reasonably configured
- 6 district." It didn't say in a reasonably
- 7 compact district. It said reasonably
- 8 configured.
- 9 So would you agree that whether a
- 10 district is reasonably configured takes into
- 11 account more than simply whether it is compact
- 12 but also whether it is a -- the kind of district
- 13 that a -- an unbiased mapmaker would draw?
- MR. ROSS: Your Honor, again, Section
- 2, as you know, is about intent and not --
- doesn't speak -- or, excuse me, is about results
- and doesn't speak to intent. And so, you know,
- 18 with respect to the biases of a mapmaker, I'm
- 19 not sure if that's relevant.
- 20 But I will say, as this Court has
- 21 acknowledged, that Gingles 1 does take into
- 22 consideration compliance with traditional
- 23 redistricting criteria. And those redistricting
- 24 criteria that the state -- that this Court has
- listed are compactness, contiguity, respect for

- 1 communities of interest and political
- 2 subdivisions. And the district court found on
- 3 all of those that Plaintiffs' plans meet or beat
- 4 Alabama.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: So even if a computer
- 6 simulation that takes into account all of the
- 7 traditional districting standards would almost
- 8 never, in a million simulations, it would never
- 9 produce a second majority-minority district,
- 10 this first Gingles factor is satisfied?
- MR. ROSS: Your Honor, I -- that's not
- 12 the case here. Again, Plaintiffs' expert --
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO Yeah, it's a
- 14 hypothetical. If that were the --
- MR. ROSS: I understand, Your Honor.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: If that were the case.
- 17 Would the first Gingles criteria be --
- 18 requirement be satisfied?
- 19 MR. ROSS: Your Honor, I -- I'm not
- 20 sure because this Court said in Bartlett that
- 21 plaintiffs were required to draw an additional
- 22 majority-minority district. And so perhaps it
- 23 would go to the fact that -- you know, that
- 24 maybe you can't have a remedy that meets Gingles
- 25 1, but I would also say that you have the option

- of drawing a narrowly tailored district where
- 2 race may predominate, as this Court recognized
- 3 in Bethune-Hill.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: So you think that the
- 5 first factor is satisfied, the first requirement
- 6 is satisfied, if it's possible -- you set out to
- 7 draw this Second District, you want to maximize,
- 8 and if you can do that, you satisfy the first
- 9 factor?
- MR. ROSS: Not at all, Your Honor.
- 11 We're -- we -- we're not saying that satisfying
- 12 Gingles 1 requires maximization. And as I said,
- 13 you know, it's certainly possible that if you
- 14 can show that it's truly impossible to draw a
- 15 compact district then, no, you wouldn't get a
- 16 second -- you wouldn't satisfy Gingles 1.
- 17 And I think what's important here is,
- 18 you know, Plaintiffs' expert said it's possible,
- 19 numerically, to draw three districts, but she
- 20 didn't set out to do that. What she set out to
- 21 do was to draw districts that look very much
- 22 like Alabama's map. And this is not, again, the
- 23 map that anyone has to adopt. It's an
- 24 illustrative map. There are maps out there in
- 25 the Campaign Legal Center amicus brief, in -- in

- 1 the Singleton plan that -- that don't require
- 2 maximization.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if you could --
- 4 if she could draw three, then why wasn't -- why
- 5 isn't that required?
- 6 MR. ROSS: Because this Court has --
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: Because that would
- 8 exceed the proportion of black voters in
- 9 Alabama?
- 10 MR. ROSS: Not at all, Your Honor. My
- 11 point was merely that numerically it's possible
- 12 to draw more, but plaintiffs aren't asking for
- 13 that. Plaintiffs aren't even asking for a map
- 14 --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, suppose you did.
- 16 Would you satisfy the first Gingles factor?
- 17 MR. ROSS: I don't think you could.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Here is a map -- we
- 19 come forward, here is a map, it produces three
- 20 majority-minority districts, and it's compact.
- 21 It's reasonably -- reasonably compact. So
- 22 you've got to -- you satisfied the first factor.
- MR. ROSS: No, Your Honor, because you
- 24 need to look at -- perhaps you could satisfy the
- 25 first factor, but I don't -- it's unlikely that

- 1 you would be able to -- to meet the other
- 2 factors.
- JUSTICE ALITO: What if you could?
- 4 MR. ROSS: In De Grandy, this Court
- 5 said --
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: What -- what if you
- 7 could?
- 8 MR. ROSS: Your Honor, I don't think
- 9 that Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act at all
- 10 requires maximization. And, here, you couldn't
- 11 meet Gingles 1 and so we're not in any way
- 12 suggesting that.
- 13 And one other -- Your Honor, you know,
- 14 what plaintiffs are really looking for is not
- 15 any sort of guarantee of a second
- 16 majority-minority district. As I said, we'd be
- 17 satisfied with something like the Singleton
- 18 plan, which Alabama's expert said would give
- 19 black voters at least a fair chance, not even a
- 20 guaranteed chance to elect their candidates of
- 21 choice in the Second District. That's merely
- 22 what -- what plaintiffs are looking for.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, if we
- 24 were to say, as opposing counsel is now
- claiming, that you have to show the possibility

- of a Second District on a race-neutral map, do
- we vacate and remand? Do you have enough below
- 3 to win even under that standard?
- 4 MR. ROSS: Your Honor, you know, I'm
- 5 not sure what Mr. Lacour means by a race-neutral
- 6 standard. I think, certainly, it is -- this is
- 7 up on a preliminary injunction. And so, if
- 8 there were a standard that became a new
- 9 standard, then we would, you know, like it to be
- 10 remanded.
- 11 I think that any standard that
- 12 requires some sort of race blindness, as Alabama
- is saying, would not only make it difficult for
- 14 plaintiffs to satisfy Gingles 1 but would make
- 15 it difficult for states to draw, you know, the
- 16 435 congressional maps that we have.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now opposing
- 18 counsel in his summation was talking about the
- 19 idea of race neutrality. Section 2 was really
- 20 at a -- aimed at a results test, equal
- 21 opportunity or participation.
- 22 Section 2 is not being used that
- widely, is it? I read Amici Chen's brief, and
- 24 he says that there's only been 31 vote dilution
- 25 cases that resulted in merits decision over the

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1
      last two redistricting cycles, that's out of 435
 2
      plans, and that only eight were successful.
                MR. ROSS: I believe that that's true.
 3
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And Gingles itself
 4
     makes this remedy available only in an extreme
 5
 6
      circumstance where voters are polarized
7
      completely and where there's no crossover
 8
     between the races, correct?
 9
                MR. ROSS: That's correct, Your Honor,
      and --
10
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And -
11
                           -- where you meet the
12
                MR. ROSS:
13
      totality.
                JUSTICE SCTOMAYOR: -- so Alabama
14
      itself is unique in that regard, isn't it?
15
                MR. ROSS: Absolutely, Your Honor.
16
17
     There's racially polarized voting in Democratic
      and Republican primaries, there's racially
18
19
     polarized voting in general elections, and
20
      there's a very recent history of racial
      discrimination in Alabama that may not exist in
21
2.2
      other states.
23
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That was --
24
                JUSTICE JACKSON: And, counsel --
25
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- that was part
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Т	of the totality of circumstances, the district
2	court found
3	MR. ROSS: Yes, Your Honor.
4	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: to suggest your
5	describing Alabama's cracking of the black
6	district for decades, correct?
7	MR. ROSS: Yes, Your Honor. And I do
8	want to point out that on on the stay
9	appendix at page 177, the district court did
10	find that Alabama cracked the Black Belt.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
12	counsel.
13	Justice Thomas?
14	MR. ROSS: Thank you.
15	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
16	Justice Sotomayor, anything further?
17	Justice Kagan?
18	Justice Gorsuch?
19	Justice Kavanaugh?
20	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The the other
21	side says that the proposed districts are not
22	reasonably compact, and, as I was mentioning, I
23	think compactness is the key under our
24	precedents to interpreting Section 2 correctly
25	and the equal protection requirements.

1 And they say the district is too 2 sprawling to be considered reasonably compact or reasonably configured. And I just want to get 3 your response to that because I think that's the 4 critical point here. 5 MR. ROSS: Yes, Your Honor. Again, I 6 7 think the district court's findings, which are subject to clear error, made clear that 8 9 plaintiffs' plans met or beat Alabama on the compactness requirement. 10 With respect to, you know, Alabama's 11 allegation that our map goes -- that our plan 12 goes across the state, so does some of Alabama's 13 plan. And, again, Alabama's own Board of 14 15 Education map, which was drawn at the same time using the same redistricting criteria, which in 16 17 Alabama's guidelines includes race, created virtually the same district that also spreads 18 19 across the state. 20 And then, Your Honor, you -- you had a 21 question earlier about, you know, what these 22 traditional redistricting guidelines are. This 23 Court in Perry versus Perez recognized that, you 24 know, they -- when you're drawing remedial maps, that you have to take into consideration state 25

- 1 and local redistricting criteria, except those
- 2 -- to the extent those criteria violate Section
- 3 2.
- 4 And, here, core retention is -- is
- 5 nearly always going to violate Section 2.
- 6 And -- and our plans tried to take those into --
- 7 that factor into account as much as possible
- 8 without perpetuating the violation.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 11 Barrett?
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: Just one question.
- 13 If we interpret Gingles Step 1 as you propose,
- is the result of the test to say that a state
- must maximize so long as it can do so in
- 16 reasonably compact districts?
- MR. ROSS: Not at all, Your Honor.
- 18 This Court has recognized for 30 years that
- 19 maximization is not necessary. And just because
- 20 you can draw an additional district doesn't mean
- 21 that you would satisfy any of the other
- 22 traditional -- or, excuse me, any of the other
- 23 racial polarization, a totality of the
- 24 circumstances, and that's why this Court in
- 25 De Grandy added in proportionality as -- as a

- 1 part of the totality so that it prevented
- 2 maximization from being a -- a goal of Section
- 3 2.
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 6 Jackson?
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: And I would take it
- 8 that that is why this whole Gingles scheme has
- 9 been thought of as self-liquidating in a way.
- 10 It's because, you know, it -- it only triggers
- in situations in which you have this
- 12 compactness, you know, presumably due to the
- 13 racial polarization or stratification of the
- 14 kind of district and people are continuing to
- 15 vote in racial block -- racially blocked ways,
- but if that stopped happening, if what we all
- want, which would be people to spread out and
- 18 live among one another and vote based on their,
- 19 you know, own views as opposed to along racial
- 20 lines, then we wouldn't have a Section 2
- 21 violation, is that correct?
- MR. ROSS: That's exactly correct,
- 23 Your Honor. And, you know, I think it's really
- important to take a look at the Stephanopoulos
- 25 brief, which -- which makes that point, and also

1 the computational redistricting amicus brief, 2 which makes the point of how, you know, using 3 computer simulations are really not the way to get at the issues that Gingles 1 is -- is 4 concerned with. 5 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 7 counsel. MR. ROSS: Thank you, Your Honor. 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Ms. Khanna. 9 ORAL ARGUMENT OF ABHA KHANNA 10 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS 11 Mr. Chief Justice, and 12 MS. KHANNA: may it please the Court 13 Alabama seeks to upend the Section 2 14 standard that has governed redistricting for 15 nearly 40 years. But Alabama's novel theories 16 not only defy statutory text and precedent, they 17 would cause profound upheaval for courts, 18 states, and minority voters. 19 20 Requiring a race-blind demonstration 21 at Gingles 1 would bury courts in litigation, in 22 new litigation challenging maps created in 23 reliance on the existing standard. 24 mistake, nearly every majority-minority district

would become a litigation target.

_	Alaballa 5 Tellance on uncested
2	simulations would unravel decades of progress
3	and take us back to a time with little to no
4	minority representation at the federal, state,
5	and local levels.
6	This Court should reaffirm its
7	established Section 2 standard because it works.
8	It limits the scope of liability and it ensures
9	that with increased progress comes decreased
10	enforcement. In many places, racially polarized
11	voting and racial segregation are declining,
12	making satisfaction of Gingles impossible, but
13	as three judges agreed that is not yet the case
14	in Alabama.
15	I welcome the Court's questions. And
16	I'll pick up where
17	JUSTICE KAGAN: Ms. Khanna
18	MS. KHANNA: Yes?
19	JUSTICE KAGAN: is there some
20	scholarship or or empirical evidence of,
21	if if this if the Alabama argument about
22	having to produce a race-neutral map at Gingles
23	1, if that's their core argument, as General
24	Lacour said, and you just suggested that that
25	would lead to a very substantial decrease in

- 1 majority-minority districts, how substantial?
- 2 Is there good evidence about that?
- 3 MS. KHANNA: I believe that the -- the
- 4 amicus brief from Professors Chen and
- Stephanopoulos talks about various studies that 5
- 6 have been done that would show that if we were
- 7 to apply these -- these race-blind simulations,
- they would obliterate a number of 8
- 9 majority-minority districts.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: A number, like how 10
- 11 many?
- MS. KHANNA: I I -- I --12
- JUSTICE KAGAN Or -- or what -- you 13
- Is it a quarter? know, is it half? 14
- 15 anybody know?
- MS. KHANNA: I don't have the exact 16
- numbers in front of me, unfortunately. I do 17
- 18 know that at least in the -- for instance, in
- 19 one of the -- the state houses of Alabama, they
- 20 mentioned that it would cause a decrease of
- 21 some, you know, three to seven majority-black
- 2.2 districts.
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: Why -- why is it that
- 24 that happens? I mean, I -- I think, you know,
- 25 one way, when you read these briefs, that you

- 1 might react to them is, like, how hard could it
- 2 be to come up with a race-neutral map, given all
- 3 these computer simulations? I think that that's
- 4 a kind of understandable reaction to it.
- 5 So what's the answer to that?
- 6 MS. KHANNA: I think there is a couple
- 7 of answers, Your Honor. First of all, when a
- 8 lot of these districts were drawn pursuant to
- 9 the Voting Rights Act, including in Alabama
- 10 itself, 1992 was a Court-ordered plan where CD 7
- 11 was created for the first time.
- 12 So these districts were not
- 13 necessarily drawn in this -- an idea that they
- 14 had to be race-blind or race-neutral. They were
- 15 solving a problem of racial discrimination that
- 16 they were looking at race in order to solve that
- 17 problem. They were not necessarily drawn in a
- 18 race-neutral way.
- 19 I also think that these -- the fact
- 20 that these simulations are not capturing these
- 21 existing -- these communities and these
- 22 districts, many of which have been in place for
- 23 many -- for a long time, goes to the fundamental
- 24 flaw of overly relying on these simulations.
- 25 And I think that it's important to recognize,

1 you know, a lot of -- a lot of stock has been 2 put in these simulations in the course of this appellate argument, but as -- as my friend 3 recognized, these were -- these were deemed by 4 the state to be fundamentally flawed below. 5 6 And there's a few reasons why it is 7 just -- in both impractical -- as a practical matter and a policy matter, these simulations 8 9 just are not any kind of gold standard. They are not this objective race-neutral benchmark 10 that -- that anyone might think that they are. 11 They are the result of a host of very subjective 12 decisions going into the process about which 13 considerations to take into account and how to 14 15 quantify them. JUSTICE ALITO: Did --16 JUSTICE BARRETT: But then let --17 18 JUSTICE ALITO: -- you understand 19 Alabama's argument to be that the plaintiffs 20 have to show that the map they come forward with 21 is race-neutral or that if the state -- I mean, 2.2 it may be that the plaintiff can satisfy its 23 burden of production with respect to the first 24 Gingles requirement by coming up with any map 25 that is reasonably -- that can be proffered as

- 1 reasonably configured, but that if the state
- 2 then comes up with the sort of simulations that
- 3 occurred here, which were done, by the way, by
- 4 Plaintiffs' experts, right, not by the state's
- 5 experts, then when the Court has to decide
- 6 whether the first Gingles factor is satisfied,
- 7 it can take those into account?
- 8 MS. KHANNA: To answer the question of
- 9 what do I understand the state's position to be,
- 10 I have to say I'm not entirely sure. I think it
- 11 did -- it varies. Perhaps maybe my
- 12 understanding varies depending on the brief and
- on what has been argued here today.
- 14 JUSTICE ALITO: Okay. Well, suppose
- it is what I just said, that it's not the burden
- of production; it's the ultimate burden of proof
- if the state chooses to come forward with this
- 18 kind of evidence.
- 19 MS. KHANNA: I think that the -- the
- 20 problem with this kind of evidence, and -- and
- 21 setting aside for a second the fact that it
- doesn't actually purport to do what the state
- 23 might think it purports to do, is -- is that it
- really has nothing to do with the Gingles
- 25 inquiry in some ways. Gingles inquiry is a

- 1 basic demographic question about how big is the
- 2 back -- black population and where are they
- 3 located?
- 4 And when this Court discussed the
- 5 Gingles 1 standard in -- in Bartlett, it
- 6 emphasized that the point of the Gingles 1
- 7 standard was to create an objective
- 8 administrable rule not just for courts and
- 9 litigants but also for states themselves.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: But you think
- 11 reasonably configured -- this is an important
- 12 distinction to me, at least between
- 13 compactness, which I understand to mean just
- 14 geography, and configuration. Do you think that
- 15 the first Gingles factor is just about
- 16 compactness, or does it take into account other
- 17 things?
- MS. KHANNA: I believe the first
- 19 Gingles factor takes into account a variety of
- 20 traditional districting criteria --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Okay.
- 22 MS. KHANNA: -- just as the district
- 23 court mentioned below. And here on those --
- 24 almost every single metric, the illustrative
- 25 plans meet or beat the enacted plan.

1	Whether or not some hypothetical
2	simulations, many of which are not even in the
3	record, may or may not have come up with that
4	exact configuration doesn't answer the question
5	that that Plaintiffs are tasked with, which
6	is, is it possible? We came into court and
7	showed yes, it is possible based on the
8	demography of Alabama.
9	And, again, that is just the initial
10	threshold screening, after which we have to go
11	through a gauntlet of objective and qualitative
12	and quantitative
13	JUSTICE ALITO: Well okay. Put
14	aside whether or not these are good simulations
15	But if you have a simulation that takes into
16	account all of the traditional districting
17	factors but does not take into account race or
18	any proxy for race, such as a community of
19	interest that is defined by race, and you can't
20	get a majority an additional
21	majority-minority district when you do that
22	simulation, what's the consequence?
23	MS. KHANNA: I don't believe there is
24	a consequence at Gingles 1. That would be a
25	wholesale rewrite of the standard just all of a

- sudden to say that mere -- that coming into 1
- 2 court with a map that a district court is able
- to find is reasonably configured on a variety of 3
- metrics is not enough. 4
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, how can it be 5
- 6 reasonably configured if you can't get that map
- 7 with a computer simulation that takes into
- account all of the traditional race-neutral 8
- 9 districting factors? That's -- that's kind of
- my -- what -- what I don't get -- T can't 10
- understand. How can that be reasonably 11
- 12 configured?
- d? MS. KHANNA: Well, certainly -- I 13
- understand the hypothetical is that this -- this 14
- is some kind of perfect simulation that is able 15
- to separate out race -- race-based criteria or 16
- 17 racial proxies. Even if we existed in that
- world, and I think it's clear we do not, 18
- 19 ultimately the -- the test is to show how can
- 20 you come in with a map, not a million maps, not
- 21 10 percent of a million maps; it's what is
- 22 possible, not necessarily what is probable.
- And as long as plaintiffs are able to 23
- 24 show, to meet that -- that basic demographic
- threshold question, making -- I think turning 25

- 1 Gingles 1 into its own trial within a trial,
- 2 making it a battle of the simulations experts
- 3 would be entirely contrary to what this Court
- 4 intended in Bartlett.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Ms. Khanna, I
- 6 thought -- I thought your answer was going to be
- 7 that the reason why we don't have those
- 8 simulations or need those simulations or that
- 9 they have nothing to do with Gingles is because
- 10 the question of configuration is not about the
- 11 intent of the mapmaker, that when Justice Alito
- 12 says we're looking at the configuration that
- 13 could be drawn by an unbiased mapmaker, the
- 14 suggestion, I think is that we care about
- whether or not the person who's drawing the map
- is trying to discriminate against the people who
- are being reconfigured or -- do you understand
- 18 what I'm saying?
- MS. KHANNA: Yes, Your Honor.
- 20 JUSTICE JACKSON: And so the reason
- 21 why it's irrelevant at Gingles step 1 is because
- 22 intent is not being considered at Gingles step 1
- 23 per what Congress has told us about how the
- 24 Section 2 is supposed to work. Am I right about
- 25 that?

1 MS. KHANNA: That's absolutely 2 correct, Your Honor. The intent behind a 3 Gingles 1 demonstration has nothing to do with 4 the ultimate finding of liability --JUSTICE ALITO: Well, wait. Well, 5 6 forget about intent. So you -- we're looking at 7 results. What are the results when you do a computer simulation that takes into account all 8 race-neutral districting factors that have been 9 accepted by this Court? And the result is --10 not the intent. This is a computer. It doesn't 11 have any intent. The result is that you don't 12 get the second minority -- majority-minority 13 district. 14 15 MS. KHANNA: I think the reason why that doesn't actually answer the question, Your 16 17 Honor, is because the simulations actually generate more questions than they answer. Even 18 19 if you were to charge it with taking into account race-neutral criteria, there is a lot of 20 subjectivity in going into how you even code 21 2.2 that. 23 The -- Alabama's expert here below 24 acknowledged that that -- did not testify that 25 our maps were not reasonably compact and

- 1 acknowledged there is no bright-line rule. So
- 2 even inputting those criteria into a computer
- 3 algorithm requires coming up with some
- 4 bright-line rules that don't currently exist.
- Instead, what we have is a
- 6 reasonableness -- reasonableness inquiry that
- 7 the district court provided here by looking at a
- 8 variety of criteria to determine whether or not
- 9 the Gingles 1 test is satisfied.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 11 counsel.
- 12 Justice Thomas, anything further?
- 13 Justice Alito?
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I do, counsel.
- Justice Alito gave the game away when
- 16 he said race-neutral means don't look at
- 17 community of interest because it's a proxy for
- 18 race. Regrettably, that is what it is in many
- 19 situations. That's why Mobile and Baldwin are
- 20 together, no matter what they talk about being
- 21 around a river or not. That has very little to
- 22 do with anything other than race, that they come
- 23 generations later from Germany -- from France or
- 24 Spain.
- 25 But the point that he's making turns

- 1 Section 2 on its head, doesn't it, because
- 2 there's no such thing as racial neutrality in
- 3 Section 2. It's explicitly saying that a
- 4 protected group must be given equal
- 5 participation, correct?
- 6 MS. KHANNA: Yes, Your Honor.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so
- 8 indifference to racial inequality is exactly
- 9 what Section 2 is barring or prohibiting,
- 10 correct?
- MS. KHANNA: Yes, Your Honor.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Having said that,
- assuming that you could draw a racially neutral
- 14 map that did take into account true community of
- interest, do you believe that the maps, that you
- 16 didn't meet that burden below?
- 17 MS. KHANNA: I don't believe that
- 18 question was ever asked because it's never been
- 19 posed to plaintiffs, states, or courts that the
- 20 Gingles 1 standard required a race-blind
- 21 showing.
- The Gingles 1 question is a
- 23 demographic question about where is the minority
- 24 population, and I think it would be -- it would
- 25 certainly be the first time this Court has

- 1 instructed that plaintiffs actually have to tie
- one hand behind their demographer's back and
- 3 blind him to the actual demography of the state.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I do -- I do
- 5 remember the Milligan expert testifying as to
- 6 whether he could draw a race-blind algorithm and
- 7 whether it could produce a map with two majority
- 8 black districts. And the expert testified it
- 9 certainly could, correct?
- 10 MS. KHANNA: I think that's right,
- 11 Your Honor, and that's the -- what goes to show
- that these algorithms, and as we hear from the
- 13 Milligan plaintiffs' expert, as well as several
- of the amici here, the algorithms, when properly
- interpreted, will -- will encompass what is
- 16 possible.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The problem you
- 18 can't do is keep core -- the historically core
- 19 districts because that's infused with the racial
- 20 inequality, correct?
- MS. KHANNA: Yes. The problem with
- 22 the core preservation is somehow this trump
- 23 card, is both a practical one and a policy one.
- As a practical matter, when Gingles
- 25 and Bartlett require plaintiffs to come into

1 court with a -- with a -- with a new district, 2 it's -- it's by nature a district that has not 3 yet been drawn. It is a new map that's going to be different. 4 And as a policy matter, this goes 5 6 precisely to why Congress adopted a results test 7 in 1982 to begin with, which was so that we -the states could not utilize old ways of doing 8 9 things and entrench discriminatory schemes just by perpetuating them over the course. 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you. 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan? 12 Justice Gorsuch? 13 Justice Kavanaugh? 14 15 Justice Barrett? JUSTICE BARRETT: I just want to 16 17 return to the questions about the computer simulators. So you were saying that they're 18 19 inherently subjective because it depends on how 20 you weight factors and what factors you put in. 21 I just want to be sure I understand 2.2 what you mean by that, because it seems to me 23 that, if you can generate, if there's no limit 24 on how many maps the computer simulator can 25 generate, surely that gives them the option to

- 1 weigh in all kinds of different ways. 2 And it also seems to me, and maybe I'm 3 misunderstanding Alabama's proposal, but it also seems to me that under Alabama's view of the 4 statute, the plaintiff satisfies Gingles 1 by 5 6 coming in with one map that was drawn without 7 taking race into account. So why, if there's no limit to the 8 9 number of maps you can generate and the different factors you can weigh so long as race 10 isn't one, why would that be an unreasonable 11 burden for a plaintiff to shoulder? 12 MS. KHANNA: For several reasons, Your 13 14 Honor. First, I think it's important to 15 recognize that there are a handful of college 16
- professors who even have the expertise to run
 these simulations in the first place.

 So, if you're all of a sudden going to
 infuse what was supposed to be an objective and
 administrable test at the outset with this
 highly specific and highly technical
 requirement, that would essentially be
- 25 JUSTICE BARRETT: Well -- well, let me

delegating VRA enforcement to the handful of --

- just be clear. I don't -- I would not propose
- 2 and I don't understand Alabama to propose either
- 3 that you have to use these maps at Step 1.
- I mean, it seems to me that you could
- 5 satisfy that race-neutral test by just having a
- 6 map drawer come in and say, I drew this and I
- 7 didn't do it in an effort to get two
- 8 majority-minority districts. That wasn't my
- 9 non-negotiable goal. So I don't -- I don't -- I
- 10 wasn't suggesting that.
- I was just asking the technical
- 12 question. You said that these computer
- 13 simulations are not neutral by definition
- 14 because they require subjective judgments in the
- 15 programming. So if you could answer that.
- MS. KHANNA: Yes, Your Honor.
- 17 The subjective judgments in the
- 18 programming are basically about what
- 19 considerations to have in the first place. We
- 20 know that the ones at issue here did not include
- 21 a host of considerations. How do you quantify
- 22 some of those considerations, like communities
- of interest and compactness?
- It's not like we have a bright-line
- 25 rule that says a point 3 district is or is not

- 1 compact. You have to come to some kind of
- 2 agreement or decision among the experts or among
- 3 the Court on what these factors are.
- 4 How do we weight the various factors?
- 5 Do some get more importance depending on
- 6 their -- where they fall in the state's
- 7 traditional districting criteria, as well as put
- 8 it in their guidelines or something else?
- 9 How do we interpret the results? Does
- it need to be a million, 2 million, 3 trillion?
- 11 As we learned from the computer scientists'
- 12 amicus brief, there could be trillions and
- 13 trillions, that certainly will at some point
- 14 come up with at least one possible
- 15 configuration.
- 16 Or we can just use this test that this
- 17 Court has always established, which is as long
- as you come into court with a map that shows the
- 19 potential to draw a majority black district that
- 20 is reasonably configured according to the
- 21 state's traditional districting principles, then
- that is sufficient to get past just the first
- 23 post and not the gauntlet of remaining factors
- 24 after that.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
2	Jackson?
3	JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. So following
4	up on Justice Barrett's question, setting aside
5	the practicalities of the map-making process,
6	which is basically what you've been focusing on,
7	I think the question is, why should we make the
8	Gingles 1 challengers do that?
9	In other words, it seems as though
LO	some of my colleagues are asking the question
L1	if you know, if you have a million maps and
L2	you can generate a million maps, why shouldn't
L3	we require that one map be drawn in a
L4	race-neutral way?
L5	And I actually think the question is,
L6	why should we require at Gingles Step 1 that a
L7	map be drawn in a race-neutral way? And there
L8	are two possibilities, right?
L9	It's one possibility is because
20	that's what Congress would have wanted, but when
21	I read Section 2, I don't see that Congress is
22	requiring race neutrality.
23	In fact, the language beyond equally
24	open is equally open by participation of members
25	in a particular class of citizens in that its

- 1 members have less opportunity than other
- 2 members. So it seems as though Congress is
- 3 authorizing the consideration of race.
- And then the second question is, all 4
- 5 right, why should we do this? Because the
- 6 Constitution requires some sort of race
- 7 neutrality, and based on my colloquy with --
- with -- with your friend on the other side, I 8
- 9 think that the Constitution doesn't require it.
- 10 So am I -- do I have the question
- right, why should we require this, or does 11
- Justice Barrett have the question right, why 12
- shouldn't we? 13
- MS. KHANNA: I -- I think all of the 14
- questions are correct. Fundamentally, there's 15
- 16
- no basis -- (Laughter.) 17
- 18 MS. KHANNA: -- for -- there's no
- 19 basis for injecting this new -- this new
- 20 simulation standard or race-neutral standard
- 21 into Gingles 1. It was not the purpose of -- of
- 22 the Section 2 standard that's created by
- 23 Congress. It is not at all required under the
- Constitution. 24
- 25 It would be a brand-new principle that

really doesn't serve any end, the end result 1 2 is -- the end result gets us to the exact same place that we have right now, which is, is it 3 possible to show up in court with a district 4 5 that meets these criteria? And to, you know -- and, here, where 6 7 we talk about what does -- what does the usual map drawer in Alabama draw, what's considered a 8 sprawling district in Alabama, the best place to 9 look is to the very guidelines that -- that my 10 friend on the other side specifically mentioned. 11 And those guidelines take into account 12 contiguity, compactness, political subdivision 13 boundaries, precincts, all of these things that 14 our maps performed as good or better and they 15 also take into account race, and they say that 16 complying with the Voting Rights Act shall come 17 before anything else and specifically including 18 19 core preservations and communities of interest. 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 21 counsel. 22 MS. KHANNA: Thank you, Your Honor. 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: 24 Prelogar.

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF GEN. ELIZABETH B. PRELOGAR
2	FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
3	SUPPORTING THE APPELLEES/RESPONDENTS
4	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Mr. Chief Justice,
5	and may it please the Court:
6	The district court's factual findings
7	make this an extreme and atypical case of vote
8	dilution. Voting in Alabama is intensely
9	racially polarized, about as stark as anywhere
10	in the country.
11	The history and effects of racial
12	discrimination in the state are severe. Black
13	voters are significantly underrepresented and
14	they're sufficiently numerous and compact to
15	form a majority in a reasonably configured
16	district, as the district court specifically
17	found.
18	Section 2's results test was designed
19	for this kind of case. For that reason, Alabama
20	isn't asking the Court to apply Section 2 as
21	it's been applied for the past 40 years.
22	Instead, Alabama is asking the Court to
23	radically change the law by inserting this
24	concept of race neutrality and effectively
25	limiting Section 2 to intentional

- 1 discrimination.
- 2 That approach would delete the text
- 3 that Congress added in 1982 to cover results.
- 4 It disregards nearly four decades of this
- 5 Court's precedent, and it would have drastic
- 6 real-world consequences.
- 7 Under the state's approach, nothing
- 8 would stop Alabama and many other states from
- 9 dismantling their existing majority-minority
- 10 districts, leaving black voters and entire
- 11 swaths of the country with no ability to elect
- 12 their preferred representatives.
- The Court should reject that
- 14 destabilizing and atextual interpretation of
- 15 Section 2.
- 16 I'd like to turn if I could to the
- 17 questions that Justice Barrett and Justice
- 18 Jackson were just asking about the narrower form
- of Alabama's argument and specifically whether
- it makes sense to put plaintiffs to the burden
- of showing that they can draw their maps in a
- 22 race-neutral way.
- 23 And I think the problem with that
- 24 approach is that it's contrary to the text,
- 25 would be unworkable in practice, and it also is

- 1 unnecessary to address the concern Alabama's
- 2 raising about unconstitutional districts.
- 3 So if I could just unpack that a
- 4 little bit. Specifically, with respect to the
- 5 text, the problem with using race neutrality as
- 6 the touchstone here is that's inherently focused
- 7 on motives or purposes in designing the
- 8 districts, and I think one thing that has been
- 9 clear for the past four decades, ever since
- 10 Congress amended the statute, is that that is no
- 11 longer the necessary requirement under Section
- 12 2.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, what about
- 14 equal opportunity? So that's my concern. You
- know, as Judge Easterbrook said in the Seventh
- 16 Circuit, that you have to have a baseline.
- 17 Equal as to what? And if the vote is going to
- 18 be diluted, you know, it's diluted as compared
- 19 to what, to the opportunity? I mean, I think --
- 20 I think that's the part of the statute that
- 21 concerns me, thinking about neutrality.
- 22 Because I -- I agree with you that it
- does not require intent. I agree with you about
- 24 the results test. But the equal opportunity is
- 25 what I'm thinking of.

1	GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think to
2	focus on that in particular, the statute goes on
3	specifically to define what it means by equal
4	opportunity, Justice Barrett. And it's setting
5	up a comparison between two groups of voters.
6	Specifically, do minority voters have less
7	opportunity than other members of the
8	electorate? So it's right there in the statute
9	creating the the baseline or the comparison
10	group.
11	Now, I get that that's what I think is
12	the easy part of the equation, and then it just
13	raises the question of when you can say that
14	minority voters have less opportunity within the
15	terms of the statute. And there I think the
16	Gingles framework already guides courts to the
17	relevant factors to take into account. It's the
18	three preconditions and then the rigorous
19	analysis of the totality of the circumstances
20	that's critical to making that quintessentially
21	legal judgment of when there's less opportunity.
22	But if I could pick up on the idea as
23	well of why I think it would be so unworkable in
24	practice to try to inject this idea of race
25	neutrality, you know, the whole function of the

1 first Gingles precondition is to require 2 plaintiffs to show that you can intentionally 3 create a majority-minority district. And if they have to do that without taking any account 4 of race, then they effectively have to kind of 5 6 stumble into the district by accident. 7 And I think that will inevitably lead to running these kinds of simulations that have 8 9 been discussed at length this morning that are incredibly complicated to try to operationalize 10 11 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- in practice. 13 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: If -- if the race neutral simulations are as bad as you say, 15 why do you say they should be taken into account 16 17 at the totality of the circumstances inquiry? 18 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, I think it's 19 a really critical distinction, Mr. Chief 20 Justice, because what I'm pushing back on here 21 is the idea that you should transform Gingles 1 22 by always requiring this as necessary evidence 23 in every case. But -- but --CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But you 24 25 haven't really --

Τ	GENERAL PRELOGAR as we said in our
2	brief
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: said you
4	shouldn't make this necessary but you can still
5	consider it because it shows this or this.
6	You've really said it doesn't show anything at
7	all and, in fact, it is bad.
8	So how does it in other words, it's
9	not much of a sop to them to say, oh, we'll look
LO	at that in the totality of the circumstances
L1	case.
L2	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, I think it
L3	can be relevant in the totality of the
L4	circumstances specifically to push back against
L5	any allegations of intentional discrimination
L6	that might have been made in a case and because
L7	it tracks the factor that this Court already
L8	enumerated as one relevant consideration, which
L9	is whether the state's policy is tenuous.
20	So this is a totality test, a
21	statutorily prescribed totality test. We're not
22	suggesting that the evidence would be wholly
23	irrelevant, but I do think that it would be a
24	an incredibly complicated obstacle to try to
25	litigate these cases if it were necessary at

1 Gingles step 1 for the plaintiffs to duke it out 2 amongst their experts and debate about all of 3 the things to feed into the algorithm to -- to identify whether it's --4 5 JUSTICE ALITO: You're --GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- truly race 6 7 neutral. 8 JUSTICE ALITO: You're suggesting that 9 the -- the argument is that the plaintiff has to run these simulations and show that the district 10 that they proffer is race neutral. But why is 11 that the argument? Why isn't -- why -- why 12 isn't the argument that the plaintiff can 13 satisfy its burden of production by coming 14 15 forward with the kind of maps that they came forward here, but that's not the end of the 16 17 court's consideration of the first Gingles factor? And if there is other evidence showing 18 19 that this map is not the kind of map that would be drawn based on other traditional -- based on 20 21 traditional race-neutral factors, then the 22 Gingles -- and the court is persuaded of that, 23 then the Gingles -- the first Gingles condition is not satisfied? 24

GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, our concern

1 is with packing this into the first Gingles 2 precondition itself because that is meant to 3 function as a relatively straightforward threshold screen on the plaintiffs' allegations, 4 essentially to pressure-test whether the 5 6 plaintiffs can even draw a reasonably configured 7 district --8 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, isn't --9 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- to ask --JUSTICE ALITO: As -- as a practical 10 matter, in every place in the south, and maybe 11 in other places, if the first Gingles factor, 12 first Gingles condition, can be satisfied, will 13 not the plaintiffs always run the table? Where 14 -- where can they win? They're not going to win 15 on whether the minority group is politically 16 cohesive. They're not going to win on whether 17 the majority votes as a bloc, which may be due 18 19 to ideology and not have anything to do with 20 race. It may be that black voters and white 21 voters prefer different candidates now because 22 they have different ideas about what the 23 government should do. Where is the -- where can 24 the state win once it gets past -- once it loses on the first Gingles condition? 25

1	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think the state
2	can win on any other of the relevant factors in
3	the totality of the circumstances. And I want
4	to resist strongly this idea that any time
5	plaintiffs have been able to satisfy that first
6	Gingles precondition, they automatically prove
7	their case.
8	This is a rigorous burden on
9	plaintiffs. Of course, they have to show the
LO	patterns of racially polarized voting in the
L1	second and third preconditions, and courts then
L2	go on to look at all of the relevant
L3	circumstances in the totality analysis.
L4	And if you actually look at actual
L5	results in these cases, there are are
L6	steadily decreasing Section 2 claims that are
L7	filed in the first place. And then it's not as
L8	though plaintiffs always prevail in those
L9	claims. Courts routinely reject them because
20	the other factors aren't satisfied.
21	So I think it would just be incorrect
22	to suggest at the outset that simply by virtue
23	of showing that first threshold screen the
24	plaintiffs are going to be able to run the
25	table And I want to make clear that the

- 1 Gingles preconditions only screen out meritless
- 2 cases. They're never dispositive of liability
- 3 in and of themselves.
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You -- you -- I'm
- 5 sorry.
- 6 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Go ahead, Justice
- 7 Kavanaugh.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You said the
- 9 Gingles first precondition is straightforward.
- 10 Compactness is, I think, the central issue in
- 11 the first precondition, and I find that not
- 12 always so straightforward. And I wanted you to
- 13 tell me why you think this proposed district or
- they've proposed something that is reasonably
- 15 compact or reasonably configured.
- 16 In your brief on 16 and 17, I think
- 17 you identify it lacks the bizarre shapes that
- 18 the Court has found problematic and performs at
- 19 least as well as the plan in respecting existing
- 20 political subdivisions, so kind of a comparison
- 21 to the state's plan.
- 22 Anything else you would identify that
- 23 should be part of the compactness inquiry?
- 24 Because the states and the plaintiffs and the
- 25 district courts are all struggling, I think,

Τ	with now do you measure compactness? And that's
2	why I think this is such a difficult inquiry
3	under just taking current law.
4	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think it is
5	certainly the case that it's an inherently
6	factual question, and it requires, as this Court
7	has said, an intensely local appraisal of all
8	the facts and circumstances in the jurisdiction.
9	But I would point, in particular, to
LO	the district court's comprehensive analysis of
L1	this. And what the court did is look at every
L2	traditional redistricting criteria in Alabama,
L3	compactness, contiguity, equalizing population
L4	across districts, respect for the political
L5	subdivision boundary lines, municipalities, not
L6	splitting counties, as you mentioned, and
L7	protecting communities of interest as
L8	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: When you
L9	GENERAL PRELOGAR: well as
20	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: When you use
21	"compactness" there as the first of those, were
22	you referring to how big the district is?
23	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes, it's generally
24	a geographic compactness inquiry, both of the
25	district itself but also of the minority

- population that would be drawn together within
 that district. And the -- the court here
- 3 applied a number of different measures.
- 4 As your question indicated, there are
- 5 several different metrics in how to measure
- 6 compactness in redistricting litigation. The
- 7 court here went through all of them, and it said
- 8 that down the line looking at the traditional
- 9 districting criteria, these districts, as my
- 10 friend said, performed as well or better than
- 11 the enacted plan on nearly all of the relevant
- 12 criteria.
- And that's, of course, something this
- 14 Court has recognized as reviewable only for
- 15 clear error. So to the extent that you think
- 16 that this is a tough question and maybe a
- 17 different fact finder could have reached a
- 18 different result, I think that's precisely why
- 19 the Court has recognized that the district
- 20 court's decision merits a substantial amount of
- 21 deference in this kind of area.
- I'd like to, if I could, try to
- 23 complete my answer on why I think trying to
- incorporate race neutrality into the first
- 25 Gingles precondition is also unnecessary. If I

- 1 understand the state's argument correctly, the
- 2 state is suggesting that this is the way to
- 3 ensure that a state is not required to draw an
- 4 unconstitutional racial gerrymander on the back
- 5 end at the remedial stage.
- 6 And I think the problem with that
- 7 argument is it ignores that there are already, I
- 8 would say, four independent checks in existing
- 9 doctrine that ensure the state will never be put
- 10 in that position.
- 11 The first thing is the fact that the
- 12 Gingles first precondition already requires that
- 13 the district not be bizarrely shaped. It has to
- 14 be reasonably configured. So we're in a world
- where there would never be a -- a illustrative
- 16 plan that itself constituted that kind of
- 17 behemoth district that the Court disapproved in
- 18 cases like Shaw.
- The second thing I would point to is
- that the state is wrongly equating any use of
- 21 race in the redistricting process with an
- 22 unconstitutional action. And that ignores the
- 23 careful lines this Court has drawn in the Shaw
- line of cases to make clear that it's only when
- race predominates, when it's the overriding and

- 1 dominant rationale, that the state has to
- 2 justify its map under strict scrutiny. And --
- 3 and here it bears emphasis the district court
- 4 specifically found race did not predominate.
- 5 And that's another thing that's reviewed for
- 6 clear error.
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if -- if a
- 8 computer simulation can produce this second
- 9 majority-minority district only by insisting
- 10 that -- that that district be created,
- 11 subordinating all the other districting factors
- 12 to race, isn't that predominance?
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, the way that
- 14 this Court has described the predominance
- 15 standard is that the -- the state has basically
- 16 subjugated all other traditional districting
- 17 criteria. It's often revealed by the fact that
- 18 the district is bizarre by any measure and is
- irregularly shaped, although that's not an
- 20 absolute requirement.
- 21 But I think that the first Gingles
- 22 precondition already guards against that
- because, of course, to satisfy Step 1 of the
- framework, the plaintiff has to come in with a
- 25 reasonably configured district at the outset.

1	JUSTICE ALITO: I don't really
2	understand your answer to my question. If a
3	computer program can produce this district only
4	by making the creation of that district the sine
5	qua non and subordinating everything else, isn't
6	that the very definition of of predominance?
7	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I I think not as
8	this Court has articulated the standard. So the
9	Court has recognized, for example, or has never
10	suggested that simply because you intentionally
11	create a majority-minority district, that
12	automatically means in every case that race
13	predominated. And in the Bethune-Hill case, the
14	Court specifically remanded a case where there
15	had been a 55 percent target used for the
16	district court to make a finding on
17	predominance.
18	So I don't think that that is
19	inevitably the answer. And the reason for that
20	is because it's often possible to give great
21	attention and weight to other districting
22	criteria. That's specifically what the
23	plaintiffs' experts did here according to the
24	district court's factual findings.
25	JUSTICE JACKSON: And not just

- 1 possible, required. I mean, there's not a
- 2 subordination of the other districting criteria.
- 3 It's as if -- you know, in a hypothetical world,
- 4 it's as if there are 50 normal, you know,
- 5 regular traditional criteria, and the computer
- 6 runs the 50, and the challenger's experts run
- 7 the 50 and they add race, and the question -- as
- 8 -- as criteria 51.
- 9 And the question I would think from
- 10 the standpoint of predominance would be, is the
- 11 consideration of that one additional factor,
- which would necessarily produce different maps
- 13 because, if you change one small part of an
- 14 algorithm, you would see that you might have
- 15 different results.
- 16 So, fine, we have different results
- 17 because the experts use 51 criteria and the
- 18 computer used 50, but the question I think is
- whether just the use of that extra one, because
- it differentiates, means that it predominates.
- 21 And I don't think that's what -- what Shaw means
- 22 when it says predominant.
- 23 Am I right about that or --
- 24 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes, I think you're
- 25 exactly right, Justice Jackson. And the Court,

1 in fact, in this line of cases has said that 2 legislators are always aware of race when they draw district lines. 3 That alone isn't a basis to condemn 4 their maps or even subject it to strict scrutiny 5 6 specifically to ensure that federal courts 7 aren't too readily called in to superintend the 8 state line-drawing process. And so I think that this Court's 9 precedents rightly recognize that states deserve 10 a measure of flexibility in managing all of the 11 12 competing interests that go into districting decisions, and that can quite properly include 13 obligations under the Voting Rights Act. 14 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 16 counsel. Justice Thomas? 17 Justice Alito, anything further? 18 19 Justice Sotomayor? 20 Justice Kagan? 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you -- do you --22 I'm going to ask you a question about Alabama's argument, and maybe I should have asked it to 23 24 Alabama's lawyer, but he can listen, and you're

25

there. So --

1	(Laughter.)
2	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I'll do what I can.
3	JUSTICE KAGAN: do you understand
4	why Alabama should be satisfied with this idea
5	if you can just produce one race-neutral map? I
6	mean, if the theory here is that you can run
7	millions of these programs and that we care
8	about race neutrality for any of the reasons
9	that Alabama suggests we ought to at the first
10	step of Gingles, at the first precondition, why
11	would one be enough?
12	If you ran one, shouldn't the state
13	come back and say, well, you need more than one
14	in a million? Surely, like, you should have a
15	hundred. Surely you should have a thousand.
16	Surely, it should be the median map. I mean,
17	why one?
18	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think this is
19	exactly the undertheorized aspect of Alabama's
20	approach here because they don't try to answer
21	any of those questions either about how you
22	operationalize the standard and agree upon how
23	to program the algorithm to take account of all
24	of the complex constellation of redistricting
25	criteria or how you interpret the results along

- 1 the lines you were suggesting. Is -- is one map
- 2 enough? Do you need a hundred, a thousand?
- 3 They don't say.
- 4 And I think that that just
- 5 demonstrates that this is an incredibly untested
- 6 form of evidence. It's never been required in
- 7 Section 2 litigation. And I think trying to
- 8 insert this as an insuperable requirement in
- 9 Gingles Step 1 would cause all kinds of
- 10 complicated litigation and battles of the
- 11 experts about how to even interpret and run
- 12 those types of simulations.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 14 Gorsuch?
- Justice Kavanaugh?
- 16 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Are you aware of
- any efforts in Congress to alter how the first
- 18 Gingles precondition applies in redistricting
- 19 cases?
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I'm not aware of
- 21 any current proposals in Congress to do that.
- 22 And, actually, I think this is a critically
- important point, Justice Kavanaugh, because, of
- 24 course, this is a statutory interpretation case.
- This Court has emphasized that stare

- decisis considerations have their greatest force
- 2 here. And it's the Voting Rights Act. It's not
- 3 an area where the Court's decisions have flown
- 4 under the radar or escaped notice.
- 5 Congress has not hesitated to step in
- 6 and alter the statute when it's been
- 7 dissatisfied with this Court's interpretation.
- 8 That was the whole point of the 1982 amendments.
- 9 So I think that's Exhibit A of the principle
- 10 here.
- 11 And far from disrupting or disturbing
- 12 the Gingles framework in any way, Congress has
- 13 repeatedly left Section 2 untouched while it's
- amended other aspects of the statute.
- 15 And in the 2006 amendments, the House
- 16 report specifically noted that Congress did not
- intend any departure from Gingles or its
- 18 progeny.
- 19 So I think that those stare decisis
- 20 considerations really weigh heavily in the
- 21 balance here.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 24 Barrett?
- 25 Justice Jackson?

1	Thank you, counsel.
2	Mr. Lacour, rebuttal?
3	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF EDMUND G. LACOUR, JR
4	ON BEHALF OF THE APPELLANTS/PETITIONERS
5	MR. LACOUR: Thank you. I've got five
6	quick points. I'll try to get through all of
7	them.
8	Justice Kavanaugh, to your point, it
9	is not a departure from Gingles to clarify.
10	This Court didn't depart from Gingles and
11	De Grandy when it recognized the importance of
12	proportionality. You didn't depart from Gingles
13	when you added traditional districting
14	principles to the analysis when the Court
15	started focusing on single member districts. So
16	we are not asking for Gingles to be overruled or
17	changed in any dramatic way. We just need some
18	clarification.
19	And a couple points about the clear
20	error or the standard of review. When it comes
21	to compactness, that was a legal error because
22	they left out important traditional districting
23	principles and and said that's fine, you only
24	have to account for some of the traditional
25	districting principles, not all of them.

1	It's it's very easy to satisfy
2	Gingles if you get to play by completely
3	different rules, and Gingles just isn't going to
4	do anything useful if that's the case.
5	When it comes to predominance, that's
6	a legal error. Just like in Bethune-Hill, just
7	like in ALBC, that's reviewed de novo.
8	Now the main point, I mean, courts can
9	the Court can resolve this case by clarifying
LO	that race cannot be the non-negotiable principle
L1	as part of Section 2 liability.
L2	Simulations are not required. We just
L3	need to make sure that plaintiffs are coming
L4	forward with some sort of evidence that
L5	resembles what you would think a race-neutral
L6	map drawer would do within the confines of the
L7	equal protection clause because, if you read
L8	Section 2 to be inconsistent with Cooper and
L9	Bethune-Hill, then our maps are always going to
20	be in court.
21	And we've got a real live example of
22	this with the Louisiana case that's pending
23	before this Court as well. Back in the '90s,
24	they drew two majority black districts. Twice
25	district courts said that's racial

- 1 gerrymandering and tossed them out. So then
- 2 they drew one majority black district, and now
- 3 this year they were -- their -- their map is
- 4 again preliminarily enjoined for failure to draw
- 5 two majority black districts. I think it's a
- 6 perfect example of just how the states are
- 7 caught in the middle here.
- 8 And it's because the plaintiffs don't
- 9 have a clear test. We -- we -- maximization is
- 10 not the test. Proportionality is not the test.
- 11 Some smattering of seven factors doesn't provide
- 12 sort of guidance we need either. That only
- identifies broad societal discrimination, not
- 14 the sort of discrimination needed to justify
- 15 race-based map drawing.
- 16 So, if you return to the text, there
- 17 really is no better test that ensures equal
- 18 opportunity and equal openness than a map that
- 19 looks like what you would expect a neutral map
- 20 drawer to draw, consistent with the equal
- 21 protection clause.
- I mean, imagine for a second that you
- are a member of the Georgia legislature and all
- your guidance on Section 2 and the equal
- 25 protection clause comes from the district court

- 1 opinion below. You would be completely in the
- 2 dark.
- 3 You know that you can account for
- 4 traditional districting principles, but,
- 5 apparently, one of your most important
- 6 communities of interest there in the Gulf is not
- 7 a sufficient community of interest to justify
- 8 drawing a neutral map.
- 9 You know that you've maintained cores
- 10 of your districts and that Supreme Court in
- 11 Abrams even said that's fine as part of the --
- the Gingles 1 analysis, but the district court
- said, well, here, it's not going to be the case.
- 14 So your map is going to end up in
- 15 court again and again. That cannot be the case.
- 16 We need some sort of guidance from this Court.
- 17 In sum, the purpose of the Voting
- 18 Rights Act is to prevent discrimination and to
- 19 foster our transformation to a society that is
- 20 no longer fixated on race, but plaintiffs would
- 21 transform that statute into one that requires
- 22 racial discrimination in districting and carries
- 23 us further from the goal of a political system
- in which race no longer matters.
- Neither the text nor purpose of the

1	Act supports that vulcanizing approach, and the
2	Constitution forbids it. If Section 2 is to
3	apply to single member districts, then only a
4	race-neutral benchmark furthers the VRA's goals
5	of and its equal openness touchstone.
6	And because Alabama's neutrally drawn
7	plan is equally open to all voters, it complies
8	with Section 2. Thank you.
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
10	counsel. Thank you, other counsel. The case is
11	submitted.
12	(Whereupon, at 11:58 a.m., the case
13	(Whereupon, at 11:58 a.m., the case was submitted.)
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