



1819 NEWS

Allen Mendenhall: Electoral arithmetic Alabama can't ignore

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 09.21.26



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There is a species of civic scandal so mundane, so free of the melodrama Americans have come to expect from their politics, that it tends to pass unremarked outside the county where it occurs. Consider Fort Deposit, Ala. (population 1,225), a town whose principal distinction, prior to last year, was sitting atop the highest ground between Montgomery and New Orleans.

In August 2025, Fort Deposit held a municipal election in which, as a defeated candidate for mayor pointed out, the town's voter rolls exceeded its adult population – a discrepancy that, in a more innocent age, might have been dismissed as clerical untidiness.

It was not.

A circuit judge in Lowndes County [found](https://www.lowndessignal.com/news/fort-deposit-council-election-results-annulled-35011) (<https://www.lowndessignal.com/news/fort-deposit-council-election-results-annulled-35011>), that hundreds of absentee ballots were cast unlawfully, set the election aside, and ordered a new one for January 2026. This April, the state attorney general announced [felony charges](https://1819news.com/news/item/fmr-ft-deposit-mayor-jacquelyn-boone-city-council-candidate-arrested-for-absentee-ballot-fraud-in-2025-municipal-election) (<https://1819news.com/news/item/fmr-ft-deposit-mayor-jacquelyn-boone-city-council-candidate-arrested-for-absentee-ballot-fraud-in-2025-municipal-election>), against the town's former mayor and a former city council candidate for unlawful use of absentee ballots.

One is tempted to file this under local color; one should resist the temptation.

Fort Deposit sits in Lowndes County, a rural crescent that Alabama's newly redrawn congressional map has folded into the Second District, now represented by U.S. Rep. Shomari Figures (D-Montgomery), who faces a competitive re-election fight this November against Republican State Rep. Rhett Marques (R-Enterprise) in a seat drawn, on paper, to favor Republicans.

This is not to suggest that anyone in that contest has done, or intends to do, anything untoward. It's merely to observe what James Madison understood, and the citizens of Lowndes County are relearning: that institutions built to withstand ambition are more reassuring than assurances that ambition will behave itself.

A town where the registrar cannot distinguish living voters from dead ones is a poor sentinel for a congressional district decided, as this one likely will be, by a comparatively modest margin.

The good news – and American conservatism has never been shy about noticing when institutions work as designed – is that Alabama’s Legislature has spent the past several years doing the unglamorous work of hardening its election machinery against precisely this sort of decay: voter ID requirements, list-maintenance statutes, tighter rules on who may handle another citizen's absentee ballot.

The Heritage Foundation, my employer, has just released its updated [Election Integrity Scorecard](#)

([https://electionscorecard.heritage.org/?](https://electionscorecard.heritage.org/?gl=1*8wh4vd*_gcl_au*MjE2Mzc5Nzg0LjE3ODI4NDQ1ODM.*_ga*MTgwNTAwNTE0NS4xNzgyODQ0NTg0*_ga_W14BT6YQ87*czE3ODk1MDY0MTY)

[_gl=1*8wh4vd*_gcl_au*MjE2Mzc5Nzg0LjE3ODI4NDQ1ODM.*_ga*MTgwNTAwNTE0NS4xNzgyODQ0NTg0*_ga_W14BT6YQ87*czE3ODk1MDY0MTY](https://electionscorecard.heritage.org/?gl=1*8wh4vd*_gcl_au*MjE2Mzc5Nzg0LjE3ODI4NDQ1ODM.*_ga*MTgwNTAwNTE0NS4xNzgyODQ0NTg0*_ga_W14BT6YQ87*czE3ODk1MDY0MTY)

which grades every state across 15 categories, among them voter identification, the accuracy of registration rolls, rules governing absentee ballots and vote trafficking, observer access, vote-counting procedures, and post-election audits.

Alabama ranks third in the nation. It scores particularly well on voter ID implementation, on the accuracy of its voter registration lists, and on its management of absentee balloting – the very categories that, had they been enforced with equal rigor in Lowndes County last August, might have spared Fort Deposit its indictment and its now-unfortunate name recognition.

Herein lies the lesson Fort Deposit teaches more vividly than any legislative debate could: A state may write excellent laws and still watch them fail at the level of a single small-town registrar’s office. Alabama’s high marks on paper did not, by themselves, prevent absentee ballots from being harvested in a town of barely more than a thousand souls; what caught the fraud was a losing candidate willing to do arithmetic, a judge willing to act on it, and an attorney general willing to prosecute.

The scorecard measures the quality of the state’s statutes. It cannot measure the vigilance of the people who must invoke them, county by county, election by election, which is precisely the point Heritage’s own report is careful to make, stating that “even the best laws are not worth much if responsible officials do not enforce them rigorously.” It concludes that it’s “up to the citizens of each state to make sure that their elected and appointed public officials do just that.”

Are you up for the task, fellow citizens?

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