

Louisiana: Which way forward for the anti-Landry movement?

written by Gregory E. Williams
October 23, 2023



Sept. 12, 2022, march for abortion rights in New Orleans. Photo: Louisiana Abortion

Dismal statistics

Mothers, neonates, and infants die at high rates in Louisiana. That's been documented for years. A [2023 report](#) by the United Health Foundation shows that it's getting worse: They ranked Louisiana 48 out of 50 states for worst health outcomes for women and children. The death rates are increasing faster than national averages. The only states ranking lower are Arkansas and Mississippi.

The data from 2016 to 2021 reveal that, for Louisiana, infant mortality increased by 5%. Child mortality increased by 16%. The Louisiana Department of Health [reported in 2019](#) that Louisiana ranks 47 out of 48 states for maternal mortality.

These are dismal statistics, and they contain within themselves all the other dismal statistics relating to the state, like a hellishly repeating fractal. Reflected here is all the systemic racist violence (the death rates are much higher for Indigenous and Black mothers, infants, and children); it reflects the war of the rich on the working class, with poverty being high (poor white people are not doing well here, let it be noted); it reflects the mass incarceration; it reflects the fact that the oil and gas companies are poisoning the water we drink and the very air we breathe.

So, what's the use of a 'war on woke'?

With our quality of life being so low and getting worse, it's hard to fathom how anyone could imagine that things could be made any better by policing who uses what bathroom or censoring classroom discussions of race; such attacks only make our lives worse, as is evident from Ron DeSantis' tenure as Florida's governor.

Nevertheless, far-right bigot Jeff Landry is now governor-elect. He asserted in his victory speech that "today's election says that our state is united." He wants us to think he has a mandate to rule.

Is that true? Voter turnout hardly demonstrated mass enthusiasm for his Ron DeSantis-style “culture war” politics, centered on attacking trans people and other oppressed groups on behalf of the capitalist class.

He got only about half (51%) of the vote, and that’s just the start of the election turnout story. Very low voter turnout meant that only 35.8% of the state’s 3 million registered even went to the polls. In Orleans Parish, voter turnout was just 27%. Put another way, 64.2% of registered voters didn’t vote. Yet another way: Only 18% of registered voters voted for Landry. So much for a state united around him.

On the other hand, the fascistic right wing was activated, and we know that it only takes a small number of them to shift the balance of power – not least of all because they’re well-funded. For example, one person, book-banning Landry lackey Connie Nichols Phillips – who faced a sheriff’s department summons for assaulting a library supporter outside of a St. Tammany Parish council meeting – filed over 150 library book complaints in that parish.

Phillips is what has been called a “serial filer.” That’s typical of the book-banning movement nationally. Nationwide, a mere [11 people filed 60% of library book challenges](#) in 2021-2022. However, with the backing of Landry, she and the group she co-founded, the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project, led a successful campaign to ram through a [bill to restrict minors’ access to library books](#). The cooked-up controversy was based on scapegoating queer and trans people.

We know who he serves

Landry was a state representative and has been attorney general since 2016. While in office, he has demonstrated what his politics are about and which class he serves (the rich). As an oil and gas millionaire, Landry has consistently promoted the interests of fossil fuel profits, even as the state suffers catastrophic effects of climate change. He has fomented hatred of Muslims and LGBTQ+ people, even though [his](#)

[own brother is gay](#) (some “family values”). He championed the near-total abortion ban, which is now in effect after the overturn of Roe v. Wade. In 2018, [he supported a lawsuit](#) jeopardizing Medicaid coverage for some 850,000 people in the state with preexisting conditions.

During the gubernatorial campaign, he stated emphatically that he opposed raising the state’s \$7.25 an hour minimum wage and even that the minimum wage should be abolished. That would make his donors happy!

Landry’s path to the governor’s mansion

As the current attorney general, Landry has made a name for himself, energizing the ranks of the far right by attacking oppressed groups and the working class. While acting as the state’s top cop, he paved his way to the governor’s mansion, using the whole past year – at least – to campaign. He got the coveted Trump endorsement. This year, he and the Louisiana Republican Party [paid nearly \\$22,000](#) over the course of a few months to Trump’s Mar-a-Lago for fundraising events there. Between 2019-2022, his campaign spent \$54,000 at a Trump-owned hotel in Washington, D.C.

He spent \$9 million on TV ads. But all that paid off because he raised far more money than any other candidate. And as we know about U.S. elections, candidates pay to play.

Before all that happened, the Republican Party eschewed norms and endorsed Landry the moment he announced his campaign last year – before any other Republican candidates came forward. The anti-democratic thrust of this is glaring and is even commented upon in the bourgeois press.

What about the Democratic Party?

The Democrats didn't galvanize anybody or offer an alternative vision to Landry's anti-woke campaign. The state party was effectively absent throughout the campaign season. In the days following the election, editorials and news segments are filled with [calls for the leadership to resign](#).

Even if they had expended more energy on their candidate, Shawn Wilson, it is not clear that voters would have been moved. They've had a Democratic governor for eight years and have not seen much change in their lives except for the worse. And he's an anti-abortion Democrat, no less!

We also have a Democrat in the White House. While offering nothing to the millions of people struggling to get by in this country, Biden just got on television and said he wants to spend many more billions of our tax dollars on U.S. wars and the militarized southern border. He's building part of Trump's border wall.

Whatever the case, it is evident that the Democratic Party will not come to save us as Landry and the Republican supermajority state legislature intensify the attacks on working class and oppressed communities. People should vote if they want to. There have been bitter but righteous struggles for voting rights, and the far right is trying to roll back those rights across the country. But we're going to have to organize ourselves in the streets.

What kind of movement is needed?

We can sum up some things we know. A) Quality of life in our state is low and getting worse. B) The "war on woke" will do absolutely nothing to improve our condition and will only lead to more harm; C) There was no groundswell for Landry. He won the governorship by spending a huge amount of money to activate a small section of extreme right-wing voters at a time when much of the state appears to be disillusioned with electoral politics. D) Landry represents the interests of the rich

and no one else. We know what his politics are because they have been on display for all the years he has held office. E) With his track record - aided by the Republican supermajorities in the state legislature - he will likely unleash far-reaching and vicious attacks on the population. F) The Democratic Party is not coming to our rescue.

This sounds rather bleak, but there may be some advantages in the situation. We are not without fighting organizations. There is already an anti-Landry movement.

In the aftermath of the Trump-stacked Supreme Court's overturn of Roe v. Wade, groups like the [Louisiana Abortion Rights Action Committee](#) hit the streets with a clear message about the danger of Landry. The action has not just been in New Orleans. Various groups have protested the attacks on queer and trans people at the capitol in Baton Rouge and confronted Landry at the gubernatorial debate held in Lafayette. [Participating organizations](#) in that action included Real Name Campaign NOLA, Reproductive Freedom Acadiana, Louisianahbrah, DSA Southwest Louisiana, and Socialist Unity Party/Struggle - La Lucha.

Local fightbacks alone will not be enough. We can learn from these recent experiences and deepen our connections across the state. We should link up now, not waiting for the attacks to come. But as they do come, we will have more opportunities to carry out exposure of Landry and the racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic capitalist class that he represents.

We should be able to join forces with everyone who is struggling, for example, with [Rise St. James and other activists](#) who have bravely struggled and won major victories against the petrochemical plants destroying their communities along the Mississippi River; these are largely working-class and Black activists who are living at the heart of the contradiction, where racism and environmental degradation meet.

We need to be ready to forge connections and find ways to bring working-class people who are not already activists into the movement and to develop them as leaders. We will need a united movement that can serve as a “tribune of the people,” as Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin put it; that is to say, a movement, with movement organizations, that can respond to every attack on the people no matter what it is and serve as the people’s mouthpiece.

Unionization rates are low in Louisiana, but we do have unions. We’ll need them. If Landry is emboldened enough to attack Medicaid again, we’ll need all the forces of the working class to fight back.

And God forbid, but what about the next hurricane? What struggles will emerge then with Landry in the governor’s mansion?

One more thing. A Louisiana-only movement may not be enough. Landry is part of a wave of far-right, really fascist politicians, not just limited to the U.S. But we can see the trend right in neighboring states like Texas, with Greg Abbott; Tate Reeves in Mississippi; Kay Ivey in Alabama; and DeSantis in Florida. We must build a united movement across the country and especially across the South.

Many of us who are active in the New Orleans LGBTQ+ and women’s struggles participated in the Oct. 7 [National March to Protect Trans Youth](#) in Orlando, Florida. We met people from across the country and Florida itself. We learned from Floridians’ struggles and raised our voices so that they don’t have to face DeSantis alone. I am convinced that this type of national organizing is the way forward. I’m convinced that when we fight Landry in the coming period, Orlando and people from many other states will have our backs.

