

OPINION

Protect the vote for all New Yorkers

By Fulvia Vargas-De León

New York Daily News • Mar 31, 2022 at 5:00 am



Listen to this article

Even as we see a mounting number of partisan voter suppression laws pass across the country, most New Yorkers believe this is not a problem for us, that our state's voter protections are solid. But the truth is that our electoral system is cracked, especially for Latinos and other racial and language minorities, which form a growing part of our electorate.

In New York City, where almost [three in every 10 residents identifies as Latino](#), many Hispanics have been the target of unjustified voter roll purges, and Spanish speakers have often found themselves effectively blocked from the voting booth because there are not enough interpreters.

FEEDBACK

Our LatinoJustice volunteers for Cada Voto Cuenta, a bilingual nonpartisan voter protection initiative, saw this first-hand on Election Day 2020. Volunteers outside an East Harlem public housing complex were told by two Puerto Rican voters who did not speak or read English well that the city had neglected to provide *any* interpreters at that polling site for several election cycles. This, in El Barrio.

Passing the [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York](#) now would give our

Privacy - Terms

state — where one in five residents is Latino — the opportunity to confront these and other challenges to build a robust, inclusive and equitable democracy for all.

The NYVRA would strengthen our state’s protections against racial discrimination at the polls not only by expanding assistance for language-minority voters, but also by strengthening laws against voter intimidation and oversight to ensure that local governments are enforcing existing voter protection laws.

Passing this in New York, which has led efforts to enact progressive policies that seek to make our electoral system truly accessible to all, is especially important as the federal version of this law remains in limbo.



FEEDBACK

Voters enter the polling site in Harlem, in Manhattan in 2019. (Barry Williams for New York Daily News)

Some measures of the New York bill, especially those related to language access, go beyond what is currently provided by the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.

For example, while the VRA requires language assistance for districts with

Privacy - Terms

communities with at least 5% or 10,000 potential voters who speak a particular language and have limited English proficiency, the NYVRA lowers that threshold to 2% and 4,000 respectively, for those who speak English “less than very well.” That would clear the way for language access support in many more counties in our state where Spanish speakers and other language communities are growing.



The Daily News Flash

Weekdays

Catch up on the day's top five stories every weekday afternoon.



Since the Supreme Court in 2013 effectively invalidated Section 5 of the national 1965 Voting Rights Act, removing requirements for checks and balances to guarantee that changes in voting laws and policies do not discriminate against racial and language minority groups, we've witnessed unfettered and coordinated efforts to suppress the vote of Black and Brown people.

For example, a 2016 voter purge of “inactive” voters in Brooklyn that removed 122,454 registered voters from the rolls [was found to have](#) disproportionately affected voters with surnames identified as Hispanic, or those who lived in Latino-majority districts. The protections afforded under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, known as “preclearance” — [which covered Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan](#) — would quite likely have prevented this wrong.

FEEDBACK

In New York, with a majority non-white population, voters continue to need the protections that strong preclearance measures provide, and that the NYVRA would bring back. Between 1990 and 2005, Section 5 protections for those three New York City boroughs [blocked 67 changes](#) that would have created barriers for Puerto Rican, Chinese-American and African-American voters.

The Brennan Center [estimated](#) about 2 million fewer voters would have been purged over the 2012-2016 election cycles if they were still subject to

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

~~purged over the 2012-2016 election cycles if they were still subject to~~

preclearance. Beyond blocking direct access to the vote, these purges hurt our

democratic process by extinguishing voters' confidence and willingness to participate in elections.

As the Legislature and the governor debate New York's budget, they must keep these needs front and center. The state Senate's budget included funds needed to implement and enforce the law. It is imperative that the Legislature not only prepare to pass the NYVRA, but also include the necessary funding to support its implementation.

The NYVRA can serve as a vital firewall to extinguish, curtail, and prevent any nefarious practices that diminish New Yorkers' right to vote. Let's bring it on.

Vargas-De León is associate counsel at LatinoJustice PRLDEF.



You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Residential Foundation Repair Cost In Saugus May Surprise You

Foundation Company | Search Ads

New Anti-Snoring Device Leaves Doctors Baffled In United States

SilentSnore

The Actual Cost of One Day Full Mouth Dental Implants May Surprise You

Dental Implants | Search Ads

FEEDBACK

Find A Partner Who Might Make Your Dreams Come True

Dating Sites | Search Ads

The Cost of Dental Implants May Change Your Mind About Them

Privacy - Terms

Dental Implants

Fix Leaking Basement Wall? Saugus Residents Could Benefit From 2022 Prices

Structural Foundation | Search Ads



Copyright © 2021, New York Daily News

SUBSCRIBE NOW
Get full access

FEEDBACK

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)