

New York Needs its Own Voting Rights Act

The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York

Although recent reforms have brought New York closer to becoming a more inclusive, multiracial democracy, there is still discrimination against voters of color and people whose first language isn't English, especially at the local level. As Black and Brown voters across the country face the greatest assault on their rights since the era of Jim Crow, we need New York to set the standard for state-level voting rights by adopting the **John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York** ("NYVRA").

New Yorkers Face Persistent Voting Discrimination

New York once had some of the most restrictive voting laws in the nation. Even today, voting discrimination — such as district lines that weaken Black and Brown voting power, inaccessible polling locations, inadequate language assistance for voters who don't speak English, and even outright voter intimidation — endures throughout the Empire State. And New York's registration and turnout rates still rank near the bottom. One reason why is that many voting rights abuses happen at the local level, where the legal tools and resources to investigate and prosecute wrongdoing aren't available.

(top) A line of people eager to vote stretched for nearly a mile soon after the polls opened on the first day of early voting in New York in October 2020. Photo by Ed Lefkowitz/VWPics/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

(bottom) People wait in a line to vote at the Queens Public Library during early voting for the U.S. Presidential election on October 24, 2020 in the Jackson Heights neighborhood in the Queens borough in New York City. Photo by Stephanie Keith/Getty Images



The NYVRA Will Protect Voters of Color and New York's Democracy

It's time for New York to set a new standard for protecting the right to vote. **The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York** ([S.1046A](#) / [A.6678A](#)) will do just that through:

Launching a "preclearance" program that puts the burden on local governments with records of discrimination to prove that certain voting changes won't harm voters of color before they can go into effect.

Providing new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting rules in court.

Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency.

Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction.

Instructing state judges to interpret election laws in a pro-voter way whenever possible.

Creating a central hub for election data and demographic information that will empower officials and community members to ensure accessible elections.

The NYVRA will help New York keep moving from WORST → FIRST when it comes to the right to vote.



The NYVRA Will Make New York a National Leader

The tremendous voter-suppression efforts that have arisen recently make this a perilous time for our democracy. Congress, the federal courts, and the states must stand up for voting rights. The whole nation needs New York's example. If passed, the NYVRA won't just help New York keep moving from worst to first when it comes to the right to vote: it will be the most comprehensive state-level voting rights act in the country, building on successful laws already on the books in California, Washington, Oregon, and Virginia. **NOW IS NEW YORK'S TIME TO LEAD.**