

HOW THE NYVRA TAKES ACTION ABOUT AT-LARGE ELECTIONS

The NYVRA protects your rights as a New York voter

The 2022 John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York sets a new standard for protecting voters of color at the state level. To learn about all its key provisions, visit www.naacpldf.org/new-york-voting-rights-act/.

What is an "At-Large Election"?

- In an at-large election, all voters cast ballots for all town council or school board positions at the same time. In a district-based election, towns and school boards are divided into election districts, and voters from each district vote only for the representatives for the district they live in.

How can New York voters use this protection?

- Speak up! The NYVRA makes it easier for any New Yorker to challenge at-large election systems in court, or to alert local government of potential discrimination and encourage them to fix it.

THE NEW YORK VOTING RIGHTS ACT



Why can at-large elections be discriminatory?

- Because all voters select all positions in an at-large election, 50.1% of the voters can control 100% of the outcomes. Such systems are known to produce discriminatory outcomes when voters of color are in the minority and white voters tend to support different candidates.
- This means that at-large elections can prevent town councils and school boards from reflecting the diversity of the community as a whole, denying communities of color an equal voice when important decisions are debated and made.

How can the NYVRA help?

- The NYVRA makes it easier for voters to identify and change at-large election structures that deny a community of color a fair chance to elect candidates of their choice in local government.
- Under the NYVRA, New Yorkers challenging at-large election systems only need to prove that the system's effects are discriminatory, or that voting in the jurisdiction is polarized by race -- not that the at-large system is intentionally racist or discriminatory itself.

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Will this protection really impact how jurisdictions hold elections?

- Likely yes! This protection is modeled partly on the California Voting Rights Act, adopted in 2002, which has since led to almost 90 city governments and over 150 school districts across the state making the change from at-large to by-district local elections.

EXAMPLES OF IMPACT

CALIFORNIA

California's state-level voting rights act, which partly inspired these NYVRA provisions, has successfully increased diversity of city councils and helped reduce the voter turnout gap by race.

WASHINGTON

In Washington, which adopted its own state-level voting rights act in 2019, three Latino voters successfully used those protections to challenge Franklin County's at-large election system, which had never elected a Latino candidate, despite the County's almost 50% Latino population. Beginning in 2024, Franklin County will use single-member district election systems, including the first ever majority-Latino district in the county.

How do you know if your local elected body uses at-large elections?

- Check your voting guide! If candidates for an elected body are listed by district numbers, your jurisdiction likely holds elections by district. You can also ask your local elections officials how seats are elected in your town.
- There's a strong chance your local school board is elected at-large -- more than 99% of school board seats in New York are -- and some town councils and other seats are, too.

YOUR NEW RIGHTS UNDER THE NYVRA EXPLAINED. LEARN ABOUT AT-LARGE ELECTIONS.

LEARN ABOUT THE KEY PROVISIONS OF THE NYVRA:
naacpldf.org/new-york-voting-rights-act