

Eliminating Barriers to Voting for the Latino Community and Protecting Voting Rights

Introduction

Latino communities in Georgia are experiencing significant growth. Between 2016 and 2020, the self-identified Latino electorate in Georgia grew by 57.5%, adding approximately 95,000 new voters for a total of more than 260,000.¹

Additionally, over 90% of the growth of Latinos in Georgia from 2010 to 2022 comes from U.S.-born individuals, many of them minors who will turn 18 in the next few years.¹ Despite this demographic surge, Latino voters face systemic barriers that hinder full participation in the electoral process. Challenges such as restrictive voting laws, lack of investment in outreach, limited language access, and underrepresentation in all branches of government undermine the democratic rights of this vital community.

Current Voting Rights Protections

At the federal level, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) prohibits voting practices that discriminate based on race or language minority status. Section 203 of the VRA mandates that jurisdictions with significant language minority populations provide bilingual voting materials. However, the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision weakened the VRA by removing the preclearance requirement, allowing states like Georgia to implement voting changes without federal oversight.²

In 2021, Georgia enacted Senate Bill 202 (SB 202), introducing measures such as stricter voter ID requirements, significant limitations on the request, completion, and submission of absentee ballots, and reduced access to ballot drop boxes. These changes have been widely criticized for disproportionately affecting voters of color, rural voters, and those who require assistance—all categories that include Latinos.³

Impact on the Latino Community in Georgia

1. Voter Suppression and Disenfranchisement

The implementation of SB 202 has raised serious concerns about voter suppression among low-income, rural, and assistance-dependent communities. Latinos have a median income nearly \$10,000 lower than the Georgia median of \$71,355, with an average household size of 3.4 people compared to the state average of 2.7—meaning household income is shared among more individuals. One in five Latinos live in poverty, which translates to limitations in flexibility and transportation to participate in the electoral process, especially as

polling locations and rules continue to change year after year.¹

Latinos are also overrepresented in low-income and essential occupations that do not allow time or compensation to vote. The law's restrictions on absentee voting and ballot drop boxes, along with new ID requirements, have created significant obstacles for Latino voters—particularly those with limited access to transportation or government-issued identification.³

2. Language Access Barriers

Despite federal mandates, language accessibility remains a significant issue. Many Latino voters encounter ballots and voting materials that are not available in Spanish—and when they are, the text is often so small it is difficult to read or hard to locate. Polling places frequently lack bilingual staff. This absence of language support leads to confusion and discourages participation among limited English proficient voters, many of them elderly or naturalized citizens.

In Georgia, only a handful of counties provide Spanish-language ballots and materials. Gwinnett County began offering Spanish ballots in 2017 after meeting federal requirements under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. DeKalb, Liberty, and Athens-Clarke Counties have opted in voluntarily; however, the availability of printed ballots and materials varies greatly. All other counties—including those with significant Latino populations—do not offer comprehensive Spanish-language voting materials or bilingual poll workers.⁴

3. Underrepresentation in the Government Sector

Latinos in Georgia are underrepresented in elected positions and in the government sector broadly. This results in a lack of visibility and belonging—a pervasive sense that “it is not for us”—and produces policies that do not adequately understand or address the community's needs. This underrepresentation contributes to a sense of political disenfranchisement and limits the community's influence on decisions that affect their daily lives.¹

4. Disinformation and Intimidation

Latino voters have been targets of disinformation campaigns that spread false information about voting procedures and eligibility. Additionally, some voters report experiences of intimidation at polling places, further deterring participation.⁵

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Latino community in Georgia faces multifaceted challenges that impede full participation in the democratic process. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts at both the federal and state levels to ensure equitable access to voting. Key recommendations include:

- **Restoring and Strengthening the Voting Rights Act:** Reinstate preclearance provisions to prevent discriminatory voting laws.

- **Enhancing Language Access:** Ensure compliance with Section 203 by providing bilingual voting materials and staffing. Federal, state, and local budgets should reflect funding allocations that allow local Boards of Elections to provide resources so all citizens can fully participate in elections at no extra burden to the voter.
- **Combating Disinformation:** Implement public education campaigns to counteract false narratives targeting Latino voters, delivered in multiple languages through traditional and nontraditional media, including community organizations as key partners.
- **Promoting Government Representation:** Support initiatives that encourage government offices to reflect the communities they serve—from hiring individuals from local communities to supporting Latino candidacies for public office.

By implementing these measures, Georgia can move toward a more inclusive and representative democracy that honors the rights and contributions of its Latino residents.

References & Sources

- [1] Latino Community Fund Georgia. (2024). State of Latinos in Georgia. <https://www.stateoflatinosga.org>
- [2] Shelby County v. Holder, 570 U.S. 529 (2013). Supreme Court of the United States.
- [3] Columbia Law Review. (2022). "Analysis of Georgia SB 202 and Its Impact on Minority Voters." <https://www.culawreview.org>
- [4] U.S. Department of Justice. Voting Rights Act, Section 203. Language Minority Provisions. <https://www.justice.gov/crt/language-minority-citizens>
- [5] Brennan Center for Justice. (2024). "Voter Suppression and Disinformation Targeting Latino Communities." <https://www.brennancenter.org>