Voter Suppression in New York City
Making Voting More Accessible in Our City

Presented by: Ana LuoCai, Tim Hunter, Jennifer Martinez, Lauren Lee, Alexa Quitian
1846 - New Yorkers votes against an amendment to the state constitution that would grant black men the right to vote

1855 - Political machines in Tammany Hall try to manipulate elections

1869 - New York ratifies the 15th Amendment in April 1869, only to rescind it in January 1870, and did not ratify it again until 1970

1908 - City officials seek to suppress the Jewish immigrant vote by holding voter registration on Saturdays and on the holiday of Yom Kippur, days Jews observe

1921 - New York State passes a law requiring an English literacy test to vote

1989 - Advocates successfully argues that 300,000 voters had been wrongfully purged from the voter rolls and needed to be reinstated

2013 - City Council redistricting map arises controversy; groups pose their own redistricting map that will boost voter turnout rather than dilute it

2015 - City Council drafts legislation that would allow all legal residents, regardless of US citizenship, the right to vote in city elections

2016 - NYC Board of Elections illegally wipes off 200,000 voters off the rolls
Important Figures/Local Positions
State Senator Myrie

- State Senate Chairman of committee on elections
- Recently elected in the 2018 elections after unseating a member of the IDC
- Introduced and passed Early Voting in NYS
- Also introduced comprehensive voting reform included in the NS John Lewis Voting Rights Act
Executive Director Michael Ryan

- Executive Director of Board of Elections Michael Ryan
- BOE is responsible for maintaining who is registered; however, thousands of voters have been purged even in recent years
- They have asked for additional funds to ensure the integrity of future upcoming elections as well

Executive Director Michael Ryan
Q1- After recently winning your primary, what are your views on the many problems that occurred with absentee ballots in the past elections?

“I believe that the DOB did the best that they can. It was clear that communication between them and the USPS wasn’t uniform. The fact that prepaid envelopes didn’t receive a postmark date was a key component to the primaries. As a result, we saw a lot of voter disenfranchisement, and people were still forced to go to the polls… In the interest of protecting democracy, it is imperative for us to rectify the situation.”

Q2- In what ways do you think NYS can be better at making voting a more inclusive process?

“NYS has a lot of proposals, such as same-day voter registration, Automatic Voter registration… For the first time, we can take a look at initiatives such as rank choice voting. We are finally getting to see some of these things implemented instead of them just being ideas. We need to look at the legislation that we have and identify how we can make sure it upholds our democracy.”
Interview #1- Assembly Member
Diana C. Richardson (Cont.)

Q3- What will you be doing as an Assembly Member to ensure that your community is safe while voting?

I will ensure my constituents are safe by promoting early voting, absentee ballots, and keeping them informed. Enacting a robust digital campaign while coordinating on the ground engagement. Handing PPE to poll workers and voters on the day of the elections. Safety is of paramount importance. The MTA uses the phrase “knowing before you go”, and voters need to know their ED, polling sites, and other important information in advance to makes the voting process seamless. We want voting to be quick but efficient this year, and I hope we learn from our mistakes in the primary.
Interview #2 * - Councilmanic Aide for Council Member Carlos Menchaca

Q1- Since Menchaca is Immigration Chair, how do you think immigration relates to elections?

Menchaca is trying to push for immigrants to get their voices heard regardless of whether they can vote; if immigrants are vocal and civically engaged, that can put issues relating to immigration in the spotlight and highlight the urgency to vote for issues/candidates that support immigration.

Participatory budget is an example of voting power—anyone can vote on the budget regardless of citizenship status; as long as you live in the district + community, you can vote on the budget. The budget is allocated to community resources in the CM’s district.

In terms of endorsements of candidates running for office, he can potentially influence the eligible-voter population in his district (which are largely immigrant communities) to vote for a candidate that largely supports immigrant communities.
Q2- Does the CM’s office do anything to encourage voter participation?

There are voter registration forms in the office, which are offered in multiple languages. These include Spanish, Chinese, Arabic [main languages in the district RE: language access]. This increases accessibility, and therefore, voter participation.

Q3- Is there anything you believe City Council can do to encourage better voter participation/turnout/improvement of access?

Menchaca’s social media needs to be loud about the importance of voting. At the same time, people don’t always use social media, so he would have to remember other avenues of conducting outreach. It’s important to remember that in Menchaca’s district, a low-income district, not everyone has internet access.

*These are merely the interviewee’s views, not that of Council Member Carlos Menchaca (pictured above)*
Looking Forward

Advocacy Groups/Agencies

ACLU (NYCLU): fights to make voting easy and accessible for all New Yorkers by advocating for reform to the policies, processes, and practices of how New Yorkers vote

LWVNYC: Hopes to empower voters and protect democracy

NYCBOE: Conducts elections, voter outreach & education

Let NY Vote: fights to improve our elections by making registering and voting more accessible and equitable for every eligible New Yorker
How to get involved

- Donate to organizations (like the advocacy groups mentioned!)
- Increase personal awareness and civic engagement
- Encourage peers to become civically engaged
- Start at home, make sure your family is also aware of how they can be politically and civically active
- Search for your own sources
  - Don’t always stick to the same outlets/news sources!