



**Testimony of Andrea Senteno
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“The State of Voting Rights and Elections”

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Thank you, Ranking Member Morelle and Ranking Member Sewell for holding this important forum to address the pressing and urgent issues of voting rights in America today. My name is Andrea Senteno, and I am the Regional Counsel of MALDEF’s (“Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund”) Washington, DC Office, where we spearhead MALDEF’s federal policy efforts and litigation in the Southeast. For nearly 58 years, MALDEF has worked to promote the civil rights of all Latinos living in the United States. Described as the “law firm of the Latino community,” MALDEF promotes social change in the areas of immigrant rights, employment, education, voting rights, and freedom from open racial bias. I thank you for this invitation to appear before you today.

The Latino population in the United States has grown steadily over several decades. Latinos are now almost 20% of the total U.S. population.¹ They have been the nation’s largest racial or ethnic minority group since 2003.² Latinos have been a major driver of U.S. population growth since 2000. According to the Pew Research Center, “the nation’s population grew by 58.7 million people from 2000 to 2024, and Hispanics accounted for 56% of this increase[.]”³

Latinos are not only a major driver of population growth; they are also driving growth in the U.S. electorate. They account for roughly half of the increase in eligible voters in recent election cycles, including the period leading up to the 2024 presidential election.⁴ Latino citizens represented the largest racial or ethnic minority group of voting age in 2020 and are estimated to comprise approximately 15 to 16 percent of the eligible electorate today.⁵ An estimated 1.4 million Latino citizens became newly eligible to vote each year.⁶

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Hispanic Heritage Month: 2024* (Aug. 15, 2024), https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2024/hispanic-heritage-month.html?utm_source=copilot.com.

² See Press Release, *Hispanics Now Largest Minority Group*, U.S. Census Bureau (Jan. 22, 2003).

³ Gabriel Piña & Gracie Martinez, *Key facts about U.S. Latinos*, Pew Research Center (Oct. 22, 2025), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/10/22/key-facts-about-us-latinos/>.

⁴ Jens Maunel Krogstad et al., *Key facts about Hispanic eligible voters in 2024*, Pew Research Center (Jan. 10, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/01/10/key-facts-about-hispanic-eligible-voters-in-2024/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

The Latino Participation Gap

While Latino voting strength continues to increase, there also continue to be impediments to Latinos access to the ballot. Indeed, Latinos consistently have the lowest voter participation rates among racial groups. In the 2022 midterms, looking at data of voting-age citizens, only 37.9% of Latinos voted, compared to 57.6% of White citizens, 45.1% of Black citizens, and 40.2% of Asian citizens.⁷ In 2024, these participation gaps persisted: 50.6% of Latino citizens voted, compared to 70.5% of White citizens, 59.6% of Black citizens, and 57.1% of Asian citizens.⁸ Latinos, moreover, experienced the greatest drop in electoral participation from 2020 to 2024 among racial groups, with a 3.1% decline.⁹ Much of that decrease has come from young voters, where Latino men and women ages 18-29 experienced far greater participation falloffs than any other comparable group.¹⁰ For example, 56% of 18-29-year-old voting-eligible Latina women and 39% of 18-29-year-old voting-eligible Latino men voted in 2020, while only 37% of Latina women and 27% of Latino men in the same age bracket voted in 2024.¹¹

These gaps are the product of long-unaddressed socioeconomic disparities,¹² new registration barriers,¹³ increased voter roll purges,¹⁴ new strict voter ID laws,¹⁵ increased barriers to accessing

⁷ *How does voter turnout in the US differ by state, age, and race?*, USAFacts (Aug. 20, 2025), <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-many-americans-vote-and-how-do-voting-rates-vary-state/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Alberto Medina & Katie Hilton, *New Data: Nearly Half of Youth Voted in 2024*, Ctr. for Info. & Rsch. on Civic Learning and Engagement (April 14, 2025), <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/new-data-nearly-half-youth-voted-2024>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Daniel Laurison et al., *Income Inequality In U.S. Voting: A Visualization*, 9 *Socius* Jan. 2023 (highlighting the significant effect socioeconomic status has on turnout and how the relationship between turnout and income level worsened in 2020 as compared to 2008 and 2012), available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23780231231154358>; Gabriella N. Carmona, et al., *Sueño Incompleto: A History Of The Latino Wealth Gap In The United States*, UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Inst. & UNIDOS US (April 2026) (highlighting that the median Latino household holds less than one quarter of the wealth of white households), available at <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/LatinoWealth>.

¹³ *E.g.*, Aaron Mendelson & Ashley Lopez, *'The Restrictions Are Unbelievable': States Target Voter Registration Drives*, The Ctr. for Pub. Integrity (May 16, 2024) (growing list of states targeting voter registration drives), <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/who-counts/the-restrictions-are-unbelievable-states-target-voter-registration-drives/>.

¹⁴ *E.g.*, *Voter Purges*, Brennan Ctr. (highlighting massive increase in voter roll purges over the past 15-20 years), <https://www.brennancenter.org/topics/voting-elections/vote-suppression/voter-purges#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20two%20decades%2C%20jurisdictions%20have%20substantially.removed%20from%20the%20rolls%20between%202020%20and%202022> (last accessed Apr. 23, 2026).

¹⁵ *E.g.*, *Voter ID Laws by State 2026*, World Pop. Rev. (continuing increase of states imposing voter ID laws), <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/voter-id-laws-by-state> (last accessed Apr. 23, 2026); Jillian Andres Rothschild et al., *Who Lacks ID in America Today? An Exploration of Voter ID Access, Barriers, and Knowledge*, U. MD Ctr. for Democracy and Civic Engagement (Jan. 2024) (finding that 27% of Latino voters lack access to a current driver's license, compared to 18% of White voters, and that Latinos are the most likely group to have voting difficulties due to a lack of ID or mismatch between their current address and what appears on their ID), available at <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/pubs/Voter%20ID%202023%20survey%20Key%20Results%20Jan%202024%20%281%29.pdf>.

polling locations,¹⁶ and language access issues, including under-enforcement of language access provisions in the Voting Rights Act.¹⁷

These vote denial efforts are represented in attempts at the federal level to pass the SAVE Act, and similar legislation, which would require strict proof of citizenship requirements to register to vote in federal elections and further widen the Latino participation gap.¹⁸ While these efforts have failed at the federal level, documentary proof of citizenship or strict voter identification laws have recently been enacted in multiple states across the country.¹⁹

Barriers to the Ballot and Fair Representation

The voter participation gap for the Latino population is only one part of the problem for the Latino electorate. We also continue to see jurisdictions, from across the country and political spectrum, change their methods of election or draw electoral maps that dilute the voting power of Latinos who are registered and cast their ballots.²⁰

As these threats to Latino representation increase, the Supreme Court—for decades—has consistently and repeatedly chipped away at the Voting Rights Act and voting rights under the 14th and 15th Amendments. Indeed, many of these new methods of denying or diluting the Latino vote exist because of Supreme Court decisions over the past 30 years.

For example, prior to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, nearly seven million Latinos eligible to vote lived in jurisdictions subject to preclearance,²¹ with 5.7 million

¹⁶ E.g., Richard Salame, *Texas Closes Hundreds of Polling Sites, Making it Harder for Minorities to Vote*, The Guardian (Mar. 2, 2020) (analysis finding that Texas, over the course of approximately 10 years, consistently closed polling locations where Latinos experienced the greatest population growth in the state), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/02/texas-polling-sites-closures-voting>.

¹⁷ E.g., Angelo Ancheta, *Language Access and Voting Rights*, Demos (Oct. 2024) (highlighting “inadequate compliance” with and “weak implementation” of Section 203 of the VRA), https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/Language%20Access_December%20update.pdf.

¹⁸ SAVE America Act, S. 1383, 119th Cong. (2025).

¹⁹ See George Chidi, *Florida and Mississippi Governors Sign Proof-of-Citizenship Voting Bills*, The Guardian (Apr. 1, 2026) (four states have passed documentary proof of citizenship laws in 2026 as of April 1st), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/apr/01/florida-new-voter-id-laws-proof-citizenship>.

²⁰ E.g., Nina Perales et al., *Power on the Line(s) Making Redistricting Work for Us*, MALDEF, LDF & AAJC (May 2021) (highlighting instances of redistricting that unlawfully diluted the Latino vote), available at https://www.maldef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/FINAL-LDF_04142021_RedistrictingGuide-22e.pdf?_gl=1*_1ymf90v*_ga*_MTc4MzIxNTA1MS4xNzYxNzYzNTU5*_ga_M6Z3E3KHWG*_czE3NzY4ODQ2MTkkbzI3JGcwJHQxNzc2ODg0NjE5JGo2MCRsMCRoMA; Andrea Senteno et al., *Practice-Based Preclearance: Protecting Against Tactics Persistently Used to Silence Minority Communities’ Votes*, MALDEF, AAJC & NALEO (Nov. 2019) (highlighting instances of redistricting and changes to methods of elections that unlawfully diluted the Latino vote), available at https://www.maldef.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Practice-Based-Preclearance-Report-Nov-2019-FINAL.pdf?_gl=1*_1ymf90v*_ga*_MTc4MzIxNTA1MS4xNzYxNzYzNTU5*_ga_M6Z3E3KHWG*_czE3NzY4ODQ2MTkkbzI3JGcwJHQxNzc2ODg0NjE5JGo2MCRsMCRoMA.

²¹ Andrea Senteno & Erin Hustings, *Latinos and the VRA: A Modern Fix for Modern-Day Discrimination*, 5 MALDEF, NALEO, and NHLA (June 13, 2014), available at https://www.maldef.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Latinos_and_the_VRA.pdf.

eligible Latino voters residing in the covered states of Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, and 1.2 million Latino voters in covered localities within California, Florida, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, and South Dakota. As a result of the *Shelby County* decision, almost all 36 million eligible Latino voters are more vulnerable to discriminatory barriers to the ballot box and fair representation today.

Prior to the Supreme Court's divided decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, MALDEF relied heavily on the application of the Voting Rights Act's Section 5 pre-clearance requirements - particularly in Arizona, Texas, and portions of California - to deter and prevent voting rights violations against Latino voters, and to block any discriminatory proposals through the pre-clearance process. The loss of pre-clearance, and the inability to now comprehensively track electoral changes that potentially affect the right to vote, has made MALDEF's ability to respond to the growing attacks on the Latino electorate all that much more difficult. The continued narrowing of the ability of private voters to seek recourse for voting discrimination in the courts also means that Latino voters today have greater obstacles to protecting their constitutional and legal rights to access the vote. As we await a decision in the case *Louisiana v. Callais* from the Supreme Court regarding how Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act applies to remedy discriminatory vote dilution,²² it is critical that Congress continue to collect and consider the consistent evidence of voter discrimination across the country for voters today.

Voter discrimination continues to be a persistent problem for the Latino community, in part evinced by the continued work MALDEF has had to undertake to protect the right to vote in the courts:

- MALDEF challenged Texas's 2025 racial gerrymander, and after we won a preliminary injunction in the district court, Texas appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The stay entered by the Supreme Court, which allows Texas to use its racially gerrymandered congressional map in the 2026 election, raises serious concerns that states will enact racially discriminatory maps and then get away with it by claiming after the fact that the gerrymander was political.²³
- MALDEF currently has two petitions for certiorari pending in the Supreme Court related to restrictive state voting laws that conflict with the Voting Rights Act's guarantee that voters who are limited English-proficient, disabled, or low-literate can receive voting assistance from their person of choice²⁴
- MALDEF challenged an Arizona law that singled out naturalized U.S. citizen voters for registration cancellation.²⁵ We won and the trial court blocked Arizona from purging

²² *Louisiana v. Callais*, Nos. 24-109, 24-110 (U.S. Aug. 1, 2025) (order).

²³ See *Abbott v. LULAC*, 146 S.Ct. 418 (2025).

²⁴ Pet. for Writ of Cert., *Arkansas United v. Thurston*, No. 25-890 (U.S. Jan. 22, 2026); Pet. for Writ of Cert., *La Unión del Pueblo Entero v. Paxton*, No. 25-904 (U.S. Jan. 24, 2026).

²⁵ Complaint, *Promise Arizona, v. Hobbs*, 22-cv-01602-SRB (D. Ariz. Sept. 20, 2022), available at <https://www.maldef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Arizona-Complaint-09.21.22.pdf>.

voters within 90 days of a federal election and blocked county officials from submitting naturalized citizen voters to SAVE database checks simply based on a “reason to believe” that voter is not a U.S. citizen.²⁶

- MALDEF successfully defeated an attempted voter purge of almost 100,000 Texas voters when we sued Texas Secretary of State David Whitley for targeting naturalized U.S. citizens with false claims of fraud.²⁷ The case settled with an agreement that required state officials to change the way they identified voters for investigation of U.S. citizenship, so as not to run afoul of federal law or the U.S. Constitution.
- MALDEF regularly challenges redistricting maps and voting legislation that dilute or deny the Latino community’s right to vote under the 14th and 15th Amendments, or the Voting Rights Act. This remains an issue across the country. We have, in recent years, won successful challenges to redistricting maps in Illinois,²⁸ Washington,²⁹ and California.³⁰ We are currently challenging district maps used by Stanislaus County in California, under the federal Voting Rights Act.³¹

Barriers for Limited English Proficient Voters

The electorate is becoming more diverse and includes voters who may have limited English proficiency. More states and local jurisdictions are likely to eventually meet the federal threshold requiring that they provide election materials in a language other than English. There is still much more work to be done to fully ensure that language-minority voters can register and cast a ballot. Too many jurisdictions covered by the requirements of Section 203 to provide in-language voting materials for designated populations are still not providing those voting materials or assistance. We need more robust enforcement of these language-access protections and requirements under federal law. For instance, the federal government has only brought very few enforcement cases under Section 203 or Section 208 in the past decade. Organizations like MALDEF must work to fill that need for language-minority voters who are denied necessary assistance at the polls, including our work referenced above to ensure that states do not unlawfully restrict a voter who is limited English-proficient, disabled, or low-literate from receiving assistance from the person of their choice.

Studies have shown that Latino voter registration in jurisdictions covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act are 14%-16% higher than in jurisdictions with similar demographics but not

²⁶ *Promise Arizona, v. Hobbs*, 22-cv-01602-SRB (D. Ariz. Feb. 29, 2024) (order),

<https://www.maldef.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Promise-AZ-709-Amended-Order-2.29.24.pdf>

²⁷ Press Release, *Federal Court Halts Texas Counties From Purging Voters From Rolls*, MALDEF (Feb. 27, 2019),

<https://www.maldef.org/2019/02/federal-court-halts-texas-counties-from-purging-voters-from-rolls/>

²⁸ *McConchie. v. Scholz*, 567 F. Supp. 3d. 861 (N.D. Ill. 2021).

²⁹ *Palmer v. Hobbs*, 150 F.4th 1131 (9th Cir. 2025).

³⁰ *Luna v. Cnt’y of Kern*, 291 F. Supp. 3d 1088 (E.D. Cal. 2018).

³¹ *See Lopez v. Cnt’y of Stanislaus*, 2:25-at-515 (E.D. Cal. 2025).

covered by Section 203.³² Additionally, Latino voter turnout is on average 3% higher in jurisdictions covered by Section 203 as compared to similar counties without Section 203 coverage.³³ Robust language-access assistance helps close the voter registration and participation gaps for the Latino community, and we urge Congress to further ensure that all eligible voters, regardless of English-language ability, are able to vote.

Particularly in today’s political climate, rhetoric that explicitly or implicitly purports to claim that certain voters may not “look” like eligible citizen voters creates a credible risk of harassment and intimidation of U.S. citizens seeking to exercise one of their most fundamental rights. Pro-language assistance provisions and practices not only ensure that all voters are able to successfully participate in the political process, but effective language assistance also signals a philosophy of welcoming and including voters from all backgrounds. The failure to provide effective language assistance hampers the participation of language-minority communities in our democracy and erodes trust in our democratic systems.

Need for Congressional Action

The growing Latino population is too often seen by the political establishment as a threat in many places. As a result, we have seen an increase in efforts to disenfranchise the Latino electorate, including many naturalized citizens, and to limit the influence of our votes. Today, discriminatory election laws and systems must be challenged with litigation and struck down by a court. Stopping voter discrimination has become more difficult and more costly without the use of pre-clearance review to ensure voting changes do not have a retrogressive effect for minority voters in a jurisdiction.

In order to address the numerous barriers to voter registration and voting for Latino and other voters, Congress must pass H.R. 14, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. This legislation will provide the voters, including those from the Latino community, with necessary and effective tools to push back and prevent voter discrimination where it occurs and to ensure that every citizen’s voice and vote matters. MALDEF urges Congress to use its power to address the longstanding and new barriers that voters of color face when trying to participate in our democracy. Congress must exercise its constitutional power to ensure that every eligible citizen can cast their ballot effectively, including by passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and its reinvigorated pre-clearance process.

³² Bernard L. Fraga & Julie Lee Merseth, *Examining the Causal Impact of the Voting Rights Act Language Minority Provisions*, 1 J. of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics 1, 31-59 (Mar. 2016), available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-race-ethnicity-and-politics/article/abs/examining-the-causal-imp-act-of-the-voting-rights-act-language-minority-provisions/5710388D382A230F83AAA762010E90F8>.

³³ UCLA Voting Rights Project, *The Effects of Section 203 Language Access Coverage on 2016 and 2020 Election Turnout*, available at https://www.commoncause.org/california/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Section-203-Impact-on-Turnout_Data_Report-UCLA-VRP.pdf.