

FACT SHEET: BALLOTS FOR ALL

Improving Language Access for Nevada Voters

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, [Assembly Bill 321](#) was enacted, requiring all county and city clerks to send every active registered voter a mail ballot before a primary or general election. This was a massive win for Nevada voters in making our elections more accessible. However, for this benefit to truly reach every Nevada voter, election officials must offer ballots and voting materials in the languages that Nevadans read and speak. There is a great need for these services. Nevada voters are diverse, and that diversity is growing.

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Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) requires that a state or a local jurisdiction must provide voting materials to the following communities: American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian American, and Hispanic. All of these communities have historically faced barriers to the ballot box, but in order to qualify for a federal mandate, a community must meet a threshold of 10,000 citizens or make up 5% of the voting age of one of the groups listed in a local jurisdiction such as a county, city, or municipality; speak the same language; and be limited in English proficiency to be provided voting materials in another language, per Section 203 of the VRA.¹ The Department of Justice recognizes that by providing election information and materials, “all citizens will have an effective opportunity to register, learn the details of the elections, and cast a free and effective ballot.”²

CURRENT BILLS IN STATE LEGISLATURE

Voting Language Accessibility AB246,
sponsored by Assemblywoman Selena Torres

In Nevada, only two counties, Clark and Nye, are required per Section 203 of the VRA to comply with federal requirements. Washoe County is the only jurisdiction that voluntarily provides bilingual ballots and voting information in Spanish. [On December 8, 2021](#), the Department of Justice released these language determinations for jurisdictions required to comply with Section 203 of the VRA. Chinese speakers in Clark County and Spanish speakers in Washoe County have narrowly missed out on being covered by federal legal requirements that materials be offered in those languages.³

Counties in Nevada that are required to comply with Section 203 and the languages in which they provide election materials:

- Clark County: Spanish and Tagalog
- Nye County: Shoshone⁴


471,016 Nevadans who are over the age of 18 reported speaking a language other than English, and 135,442 have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. This is known as being Limited English Proficient (LEP).⁵ **A voter’s limited English proficiency should not restrict their right to vote.**

For a large number of Nevada voters, English is not their primary language, and they would prefer to receive election-related information in their native language. Nevada legislators have an opportunity, this session, to create a policy that goes beyond federal guidelines and creates a more inclusive democracy.


FACTS ON LANGUAGE IN NEVADA

Nevada voters are diverse, and that diversity is growing. The 2020 census ranked Nevada as the third-most diverse state in the country, with the fourth-largest population of residents who identify as Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and the fifth-largest population who identify as Hispanic.⁶ When compared to 2010 data, both communities have significantly increased in just a decade; the AAPI population grew 45.6%, and the Hispanic community grew 24.3%.⁷

- 29.9% of the population speak a language other than English at home.⁸
- 19.2% of the population is foreign-born, with 51.9% being naturalized citizens.⁹
- 471,016 Nevadans who are over the age of 18 reported speaking a language other than English, including 291,828 Spanish speakers and 179,188 speakers of other languages.
- 135,442 Nevadans over the age of 18 are LEP.¹⁰
- The top two non-English languages spoken in Nevada are Spanish (69%) and Tagalog (10%).¹¹
- In Nevada's rural counties—13 out of 15—more than 3% of the voting-age citizen population speak Spanish.¹²



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REFERENCES

1. [“Section 203 Language Determinations,”](#) U.S. Census Bureau, December 28, 2022
2. [“About Language Minority Voting Rights,”](#) United States Department of Justice
3. Ibid.
4. [“Nye County first in the nation to offer voting in Shoshone Language,”](#) Nevada Current, July 6, 2022
5. [Table S1601: Language Spoken at Home,](#) U.S. Census Bureau
6. [“2020 U.S. Population More Racially and Ethnically Diverse Than Measured in 2010,”](#) U.S. Census Bureau, August 12, 2021
7. [“Nevada Continued Double-Digit Population Growth,”](#) U.S. Census Bureau, August 25, 2021
8. [Table S1601: Language Spoken at Home,](#) U.S. Census Bureau
9. [Table DP02: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States,](#) U.S. Census Bureau
10. Ibid.
11. [Table B16001: Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over,](#) U.S. Census Bureau
12. [Table S1601: Language Spoken at Home,](#) U.S. Census Bureau

LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE ACCESS, AB246

If signed into law, AB246 will do the following:

- Require the secretary of state, county clerks/registrars, and city clerks to provide voting materials and election information in the preferred language of voters if a county has reached 5,000 or more voting-age citizens who speak the same primary language other than English.
- Enable Nevadans to vote and be provided with voter education materials and resources in their language of preference based on county or state population requirements in Spanish, Tagalog, Mandarin, or Shoshone. These resources and opportunities will include sample ballots, mail-in ballots, in-person voting, and Nevada's Effective Absentee System for Election (available for military members and their families and voters with disabilities). Audio will also be available for those languages that are not written languages.
- Establish a statewide toll-free telephone number for Nevada voters to receive translation assistance in the following languages: Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Shoshone.
- Require the secretary of state to conduct biennial data reviews based on the U.S. Census Bureau data or the self-reported language of preference by a Nevada voter and notify local election officials of the findings.
- Create a Language Access Advisory Committee Board. The secretary of state will appoint registrars from Washoe and Clark counties and one rural county clerk to help address language accessibility for voters in the state.
- Add other languages if the county meets the threshold of 5,000 or more voting-age citizens who speak the same primary language other than English or the county is eligible per Section 203 federal guidelines. It is important to note that voters will need to report their language of preference when they register to vote, which will be made possible through current bill language.

AB246, sponsored by Assemblywoman Selena Torres, will aim to ensure voter language accessibility through these measures and more.

Nevada's democracy benefits when our officials commit to and invest in holding elections in which all their citizens can participate, regardless of their ability to read or speak English. Together, our officials can ensure that Nevadans who do not speak English as their primary language and are LEP voters are given access to and are encouraged to participate in elections where they can vote comfortably and knowledgeably.