

Title: Katzenbach v. Morgan

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1966: U.S. SUPREME COURT ruling that literacy tests for voter registration had a strongly negative impact on the VOTING RIGHTS of AFRICAN AMERICANS and LATINOS.

A section of the VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 permitted immigrants from Puerto Rico to vote in U.S. elections so long as they had completed the sixth grade, regardless of whether their language of instruction was English or Spanish. Registered voters in New York City challenged the constitutionality of that section of the law on the grounds that the provision hindered enforcement of the city's own election laws, which required demonstrating literacy in English as a condition of voting. The registered voters further asserted that the section of the law in question did not represent appropriate legislation under the EQUAL PROTECTION CLAUSE of the FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT by which Congress could prohibit their enforcement of the state election laws, as only the judiciary could determine whether a state law was unconstitutional.

The U.S. SUPREME COURT disagreed with this construction of the balance of powers between Congress and the judiciary. The Court restated earlier case law holding that Congress had authority to impose prohibitions on states by appropriate legislation. Given that guideline, the Court determined that Congress had properly adapted the Voting Rights Act to the aims of the EQUAL PROTECTION CLAUSE, which, in this case, operated as a measure to protect New York City's Puerto Rican community from having to face discriminatory voting qualifications imposed by the state.

—*Angelyque P. Campbell*

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