

Opinion

[‘Closed’ democracy in N.Y. shuts me out](#)



By [Torsha Childs](#)

PUBLISHED: February 13, 2026 at 5:00 AM EST

I grew up in a Democratic household, steeped in conversations about democracy and civic duty. But at 19, when I left home and began to form my own political identity, I realized something uncomfortable: my democracy doesn't actually include me.

Today, my children and I — along with [more than 1 million independent voters in New York City](#) — are shut out of primary elections. Most of those voters, 54% — like myself and my kids — are voters of color. Perhaps it's fitting that [the date to change affiliation is tomorrow, Feb. 14, Valentine's Day](#), since New York has been stomping on the hearts of independents for decades.

DAILY NEWS

Let's be clear about how these elections are run: primaries in New York are taxpayer-funded and government-administered. The [New York City Board of Elections](#) and the [New York State Board of Elections](#) — both government agencies — organize, staff, and pay for these elections using public dollars. They aren't private club meetings; they are official functions of government.

In fact, millions of your tax dollars go directly into running primaries and even subsidizing campaigns. New York's public campaign finance programs draw from the state budget to provide matching funds to candidates — sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars — before and during the primary election. These funds come from taxpayers like you, me, and my kids who pay into the system but then have no say in how that money is used until the general election.

So let's call this what the primaries are: a taxpayer-funded, government-administered election system that excludes a significant portion of taxpayers from meaningful participation. That's not just unfair — it's fundamentally at odds with democratic principles.

By the time the general election rolls around — where anyone can vote — the nominees have almost always already been chosen in primaries closed to independents. So those public dollars and government-run elections are effectively staged without the voices of more than a million New Yorkers.

And the unfairness only deepens when you realize public support for expanding access is broad: about 80 % of New Yorkers support open primaries that let every registered voter — taxpayer or not — vote in the primaries they help pay for.

It's insulting to us as citizens — and as taxpayers — that a supposedly democratic process funded by all of us can so casually exclude us. My children, both thoughtful, engaged voters who research issues carefully, should have just as much say in choosing the candidates who shape our schools, housing policy, policing, and transit.

What makes this even more frustrating is how the Board of Elections and voter outreach efforts treat independents: as primary season nears, independents receive notices urging them to change their affiliation so they can participate — a tacit acknowledgment that the rules are excluding us, and that the loophole to participate is to leave our independent status behind. No other group of voters must endure such regular coercion.

DAILY NEWS

If democracy means anything, it means every voter counts — not just those who join one of two major parties. New York City must overhaul our antiquated, closed primary system. Until that day, my kids and I will keep paying into a system that, too often, pretends we don't matter — even though we pay for it. That's not democracy. Not here. Not anywhere.

Childs, who holds a doctorate of criminal justice in higher education, is a mother of four and deeply involved in community service in Brooklyn.