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*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

# JUSTICE SAID TO BE PROBING NEW YORK VOTE SUPPRESSION



By Thomas B. Edsall and Malcolm Gladwell

November 11, 1993 at 7:00 p.m. EST

Justice Department officials are investigating complaints of efforts to keep voting down in Democratic-leaning minority neighborhoods in the New York mayoral election Nov. 2, according to sources involved in the investigation.

Black Mayor David N. Dinkins (D) was defeated by Republican challenger Rudolph W. Giuliani in a contest that produced perhaps the most racially polarized voting patterns in the city's history.

Among the complaints are the placing of signs on telephone poles and walls in Latino areas warning that "federal authorities and immigration officials will be at all election sites. . . . Immigration officials will be at locations to arrest and deport undocumented illegal voters." It is unclear how the signs would intimidate naturalized U.S. citizens, the only immigrants eligible to vote.

The New York inquiry, which is being conducted by the voting rights section of the Justice Department, is in very preliminary stages. It coincides with a growing controversy over alleged suppression of black voters in the New Jersey gubernatorial election the same day.

On Tuesday, Edward J. Rollins, who managed the successful gubernatorial campaign of Republican Christine Todd Whitman, said he oversaw the expenditure of about \$500,000 in "walking around money" used largely to suppress the black vote.

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Whitman vehemently denied Rollins's claims, and Rollins subsequently said his own remarks were "inaccurate" and "not true."

In his original description of the campaign strategy, Rollins said, "We went into the black churches and basically said to the ministers who had endorsed {Democratic Gov. Jim} Florio: 'Do you have any special projects {charities}? We see you have already endorsed Florio. That's fine. But don't get up in the Sunday pulpit and preach . . . it's your moral obligation to vote on Tuesday, to vote for Jim Florio.' "

At the same time, Rollins said the Whitman campaign approached political workers for black mayors disenchanted with Florio and said, "How much have they paid you to do your normal duty. We'll match it, go home, sit and watch television. And I think to a certain extent, we suppressed their vote."

Whitman later denounced Rollins's description of the voter suppression drive as a complete fabrication, and Rollins, under pressure from the Whitman campaign, issued a statement declaring: "I went too far. My remarks left the impression of something that was not true and did not occur."

But the Rev. Keith Owens of the Kaighns Avenue Baptist Church in Camden, N.J., yesterday confirmed Rollins's original account. Owens said that several members of the Black Ministers Council of New Jersey described offers they had received from people identifying themselves as Republicans consistent with Rollins's description of the campaign tactic. "I received word this morning that some of our clergy had been approached," Owens said.

Further support for Rollins's original account came, perhaps inadvertently, from the governor-elect's brother, Dan Todd, who said a central goal of his sister's campaign was "getting out the vote on our side and keeping the vote light in other areas."

In a panel discussion taped by C-SPAN two days after the election and aired Wednesday night, Todd said that if his late father, former New Jersey GOP chairman Webster B. Todd, had seen the results in traditionally Democratic voting districts, he would have said, " 'This isn't New Jersey.' A Democratic statewide incumbent candidate doesn't come out of Hudson County {with} under 25,000 {votes}. A Democratic incumbent candidate doesn't break even in Middlesex. A Democratic incumbent candidate doesn't come out of Camden with only 40,000 votes. . . . There was a significant role played by the shoe-leather, street organization."

In the New York inquiry, Dinkins campaign officials have reported to Justice Department officials the licence plate number of a car containing four men who allegedly put up the signs about immigrant voting in the South Bronx. The license number has been traced by city police to the wife of a city police officer who lives in Rockland County, according to the New York Daily News.

In another incident, about 10 men who appeared to be homeless disrupted a voting site at a school in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a black and Latino area that Dinkins's strategists were counting on for a high voter turnout.

Daily News reporters said one of the homeless men said he had been paid \$60, although he could not identify the source of the cash.

Until Rollins's boast, vote suppression had received little public examination.

Former D.C. School Board member Calvin Lockridge, 60, who is awaiting sentencing on charges of tax evasion, said he has participated in Republican efforts to keep the African American turnout down in elections, particularly in his former home of Chicago.

"I know the strategy has been used, I know money has been passed," Lockridge said. "Since the {Richard M.} Nixon days, one strategy has been not to turn out the vote." Lockridge argued that nonvoting is a crucial technique in the exercise of power: "I don't believe blacks have the luxury of being Democrats or Republicans; the way to do it is to become the wedge vote."

Edsall reported from Washington, Gladwell from New York.



NOV 23 1993

# Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1993

CONTACT: Myron Marlin  
(202) 514-2007

**STATEMENT ON VOTER INTIMIDATION IN NYC**  
**BY JAMES P. TURNER, ACTING ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL**  
**FOR CIVIL RIGHTS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Department of Justice is aware that posters have been placed throughout New York City misinforming voters about the role of Federal officials in today's elections. We encourage New York voters to disregard these notices.

So that voters are not misled or intimidated by this information, the Department of Justice would like to set the record straight:

Federal observers are in New York to protect the rights of minority voters.

They are not there to enforce immigration laws. Federal observers are trained poll monitors whose sole responsibility is to observe and record activities at polling places to ensure that minority citizens are able to fully exercise their right to vote. No immigration officials have been posted at polling places.

The Department of Justice and the FBI are conducting an investigation to determine who prepared and posted these notices.

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In addition, we will investigate allegations that individuals are intimidating and harassing voters at polling places.

Voters encountering any discrimination at the polls or persons with information about the posting of these misleading notices are encouraged to call the federal examiners at 212-264-4890 or 212-264-9906. The examiners will be available through Thursday at this number.

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POLITICS NEW YORK CITY RUDY GIULIANI VOTER SUPPRESSION

# Rudy Giuliani Admits To 'Dirty Trick' That 'Kept Down The Hispanic Vote' In NYC Mayor's Race

“Republicans don’t do dirty tricks,” Steve Bannon protested before Giuliani replied, “Well, how about this one?”

By Matt Shuham

Apr 27, 2023, 04:57 PM EDT

Updated May 1, 2023



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During a podcast with former [Donald Trump](#) adviser Steve Bannon and failed Arizona gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, former Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani admitted to using a “dirty trick” that “kept down

the Hispanic vote” in New York City during his 1993 mayoral campaign.

Bannon and Lake laughed along awkwardly as Giuliani described the tactic, which he said spurred a Justice Department investigation and would likely be subject to prosecution today.

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The discussion occurred on Giuliani’s [“America’s Mayor Live”](#) program on Tuesday night. **(Video below.)**

After complaining, as he has [for years](#), that he’d been “cheated” when he lost New York City’s 1989 mayoral race, Giuliani recalled spending \$2 million on a “Voter Integrity Committee” for his next campaign in 1993. He ultimately beat then-incumbent Mayor David Dinkins [by around 53,000 votes](#).

When Giuliani first raised the scheme, Bannon sarcastically replied, “A dirty trick in New York City? I’m so shocked.”

Giuliani enthusiastically cut him off. “No, played by [Republicans!](#)” he said before explaining more.

“Republicans don’t do dirty tricks,” Bannon protested before Giuliani continued, “Well, how about this one?”

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“So they went through East Harlem, which is all Hispanic, and they gave out little cards, and the card said, ‘If you come to vote, make sure you have your green card because INS are picking up illegals.’

So they spread it all over the Hispanic...” Giuliani trailed off after Lake exclaimed, “Oh my gosh.”

America's Mayor Live (E132): American Patriots Steve Bannon & Kari Lake with Mayor Giuliani



INS, or the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, was the immigration enforcement agency precursor to various agencies now housed within the Department of Homeland Security.

Giuliani then described how he'd heard from his attorney that the Justice Department, then run by Attorney General Janet Reno, was investigating the scheme for potential civil rights violations.

Giuliani said he told his lawyer, Dennison Young, not to worry because “What civil rights do we violate? They don't have civil rights! All we did is prevent people who can't vote from voting. Maybe we tricked them, but tricking is not a crime.”

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Nowadays, the former Trump lawyer and New York City mayor acknowledged, he might face prosecution for the suppression tactic. “And that’s the way we kept down the Hispanic vote,” he concluded.

At that point, Lake butted in to clarify: “Not the legal vote, the illegal vote.”

“Of course!” Giuliani replied. “The Hispanic illegal vote, which takes away the Hispanic legal vote.”

Giuliani said Randy Levine, now president of the Yankees, and John Sweeney, a former U.S. congressman, led his “Voter Integrity Committee.”

Sweeney told HuffPost Giuliani’s claims were “nonsense” and said he and Levine ran a “legitimate” operation.

Levine, in a phone call Thursday, acknowledged that he and Sweeney ran Giuliani’s voter integrity team, describing it as focused on “getting poll watchers and attorneys when there was a dispute.”

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However, he said, he had “no knowledge” of the scheme Giuliani described on the podcast and that the voter integrity unit had nothing to do with it.

“My only knowledge was what was in the news back then and shortly after 1993,” Levine said. “I was never contacted by the Justice Department on this investigation because it was clear it did not come out of our operation.”

News reports and a government press release from the time roughly line up with Giuliani’s claims.

The New York Times, announcing Giuliani’s election win, [noted](#) that Dinkins had called a noon news conference on Election Day to accuse his opponent of “voter intimidation and dirty tricks,” including the charge that pro-Dinkins posters in English and Spanish were put up in Washington Heights and the Bronx. According to the article, the posters “suggested that illegal immigrants would be arrested at the polls and deported if they tried to vote.”

Giuliani said at the time the allegation had “nothing to do with my campaign,” the Times reported.



New York City Mayor David Dinkins gives his concession speech on Nov. 3, 1993, after narrowly losing to Rudy Giuliani. MARK PHILLIPS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A [press release from that Election Day](#) from James P. Turner, then the acting assistant attorney general for civil rights in the Clinton administration Justice Department, said the department was aware of “posters ... placed throughout New York City misinforming voters about the role of Federal officials in today’s elections.”

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The release encouraged voters to ignore the posters and stressed that no immigration officials were at polling places and that federal observers “are not there to enforce immigration laws,” but rather, to protect the rights of minority voters. The release also stated that the department would be investigating the posters and “allegations that individuals are intimidating and harassing voters at polling places.”

A few days after Election Day, [The Washington Post reported](#) that the Justice Department was probing complaints about efforts to suppress the vote in Democratic-leaning minority neighborhoods in New York City.

The report (authored by Thomas Edsall and Malcolm Gladwell), described various complaints about election incidents — including signs warning that “federal authorities and immigration officials will be at all election sites ... Immigration officials will be at locations to arrest and deport undocumented illegal voters.”

Then-Mayor Dinkins’ campaign recorded the license plate of a car carrying men that allegedly put up the signs, and police traced it to the wife of a policeman living in Rockland County, New York, according to the report. A separate incident reportedly involved multiple men disrupting a polling place in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a Black and Latino neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Another incident reported by The Washington Post matches Giuliani’s claim even more closely. The article states: “In East Harlem, Debra Wilson, a voter, said Giuliani workers sought to intimidate prospective voters by asking for their green immigration cards.”

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Giuliani celebrates as a supporter holds a newspaper with a headline declaring him the city's new mayor on Nov. 3, 1993. VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Writing in the socialist journal Against The Current shortly after the election, activist [Andy Pollack noted](#), “Cops put up phony Dinkins posters in mostly Dominican Washington Heights, saying the INS

would be checking voters’ documents at the polls. In some cases police themselves asked Latino voters for their passports.”

Finally, the journalist Wayne Barrett reported multiple times on the Giuliani campaign’s tactics. In 1998, five years after the election, [Barrett wrote](#) that Giuliani’s Election Day operation flooded polling places “with lawyers and off-duty cops and firemen to try to prevent a repeat of 1989.”

Three years later, Barrett noted of the 1993 race, “Giuliani’s election-day operation featured thousands of white off-duty cops, firemen, and corrections officers, assigned to ‘monitor’ black districts by Giuliani, which Dinkins denounced as ‘an outrageous campaign of voter intimidation and dirty tricks.’ The hubbub over these ads and tactics was forgotten overnight.”

It’s true that noncitizen migrants can’t vote in New York City elections — despite a change to the law passed by the city council in 2021, which was [struck down by a Staten Island judge](#).

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But voting rights activists have long said that voter suppression efforts aimed at that community, such as proof-of-citizenship requirements, can also suppress the votes of legal U.S. citizens of Latino descent.

In 1982, the Justice Department reached a consent decree with the [Republican Party](#) after a series of voter suppression efforts in New Jersey in the early ’80s, including off-duty law enforcement officers stationed at polling places in Black and Latino neighborhoods with “National Ballot Security Task Force” armbands.

The consent decree was [lifted](#) in 2018.

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