Thousands rally in capital

Leaders warn of voting and civil rights rollbacks

David Hood-Nuno
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – More than six decades after the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and declared his dream for a more just America, thousands gathered in Washington on Aug. 28 to warn that voting rights and other freedoms he fought and died for are once again under threat.

Civil rights leaders invoked the same demands he made from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial so many years ago: that the fight for equality remains unfinished.

The event, called "March on Washington 2026: Defend the Vote," drew several thousand people to the National Mall, including union members, students, members of Black Greek-letter organizations, and attendees of all ages who traveled from across the country.

The march comes after the Supreme Court weakened a key provision of the Voting Rights Act this year, setting off a string of redistricting battles across the South, with Republican-led statehouses moving quickly, in some cases within days, to redraw congressional maps in time for midterm elections in November.

"We know in this fight we're fighting powerful forces, but this is why we rally today," said Marc Morial, president and CEO of the civil rights organization National Urban League. "This is why we seek to bring Americans together of goodwill from all races, from all sections of the country to push back as forcefully as we can."

The gathering was organized by the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network and Martin Luther King III and Arndrea Waters King's Drum Major Institute, alongside more than 90 community partner organizations, including the NAACP and National Urban League.

"Defending the vote means defending the foundation of our democracy," King III said in a statement. "Sixty-three years after my father stood at the Lincoln Memorial, we are called to march again, not only in remembrance, but in action."

According to the organizers, the march aimed to "confront the systemic rollback of civil rights at this critical moment," referring to President Donald Trump's efforts to curb mail-in voting, weaken anti-discrimination protections across the federal government and fundamentally shift what civil rights are.

"We stand on the same ground because the work is not finished," Sharpton wrote in a letter to supporters. "The right to vote, the very foundation of our power, is being chipped away in statehouse after statehouse. When the vote is weakened, every other right grows fragile with it."

The program hosted speakers including Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vermont, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-New York.

"Black unemployment is up, Black homeownership is down and Black political representation is under

assault with Jim Crow-like tactics all throughout the South – challenging times," Jeffries said, referring to the system of state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the American South until the 1960s.



Demonstrators bow their heads during the "March on Washington 2026: Defend the Vote" rally on Aug. 28. ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

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