

Expert: Small villages politically vulnerable

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By **Paul Brooks**

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NEW PALTZ - Small villages are as vulnerable as they are attractive, New York state political and government expert Gerald Benjamin said Thursday.

Villages are attractive because they come with the legal authority to do things like control land use and annex property, said Benjamin, who heads the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz.

Villages are supposed to have a population of at least 500, but at least 70 or 80 villages in the state have fewer than that. Bloomingburg, according to the indictment from U.S. Attorney Preet Brahara, held 420 residents in 2014.

Such small populations make villages like Bloomingburg vulnerable politically through elections, Benjamin said, "and this is not the only example of alleged voter fraud. It's bad."

The voting power and patterns of Hasidic communities has become an issue in other Hudson Valley communities such as Kiryas Joel and Monroe in Orange County and Ramapo and the East Ramapo school district in nearby Rockland County.

The number of lawsuits around these communities "has gone wild," Benjamin said. "When you are relying on litigation to make decisions, it is not healthy."

He is not hostile to Hasidics, Benjamin said, "but I am hostile to breaking the

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