

# DEMOCRACY 101: UNDERSTANDING PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS FOR VOTER REGISTRATION

MARCH 2025



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## What is Democracy 101?

With new legislative sessions kicking off in states across the country, MAP's Democracy program is releasing a series of policy briefs focused on educating communities about emerging trends in election and voting-related legislation.

The policies detailed in this series are among the 50+ laws we track in real time with our Democracy Maps, which can be viewed [here](#).

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## Introduction

Voter registration is the first step in the process for eligible voters to exercise their fundamental right. However, state laws governing voter registration differ significantly, with some states automatically registering eligible voters and allowing same-day registration, while others impose restrictions on registration drives and conduct unfair and often flawed voter purges. Recently, policy proposals requiring proof of citizenship for voter registration have emerged, threatening to disenfranchise millions of otherwise eligible voters.

Proof of citizenship requirements for voter

registration would upend our election systems and create significant barriers to participation in the democratic process for otherwise eligible voters. These laws require all eligible voters to provide documentary proof of citizenship, such as a passport or original birth certificate, in order to register to vote. Recent analysis shows that as many as 1 in 10 eligible voters lack access to these documents. These laws would disproportionately impact marginalized communities, create immense administrative and cost burdens on election officials, and disrupt current registration systems. This brief details the history of these policies and the current legislative proposals, while also explaining the harm of these requirements and why proof of citizenship policies are simply solutions in search of a problem.



# Understanding Proof of Citizenship Requirements and Their History

Proof of citizenship laws require individuals to provide documents such as a passport or original birth certificate to be registered to vote. This is despite federal law already making it a crime for noncitizens to vote and requiring registrants to swear they are eligible under penalty of perjury.

Proponents of these requirements claim these additional measures are necessary to prevent noncitizens from voting, even though [repeated evidence](#) shows the rate of noncitizens voting is extremely rare, and most often due to honest mistakes. In addition, existing [safeguards](#) already prevent ineligible individuals from voting. Proof of citizenship requirements are not intended to actually improve election security but are instead the newest version of discriminatory policies intended to disenfranchise already marginalized groups.

While recent proposals and false claims of noncitizen voting have renewed the push for proof of citizenship requirements, these restrictive policies are not new.

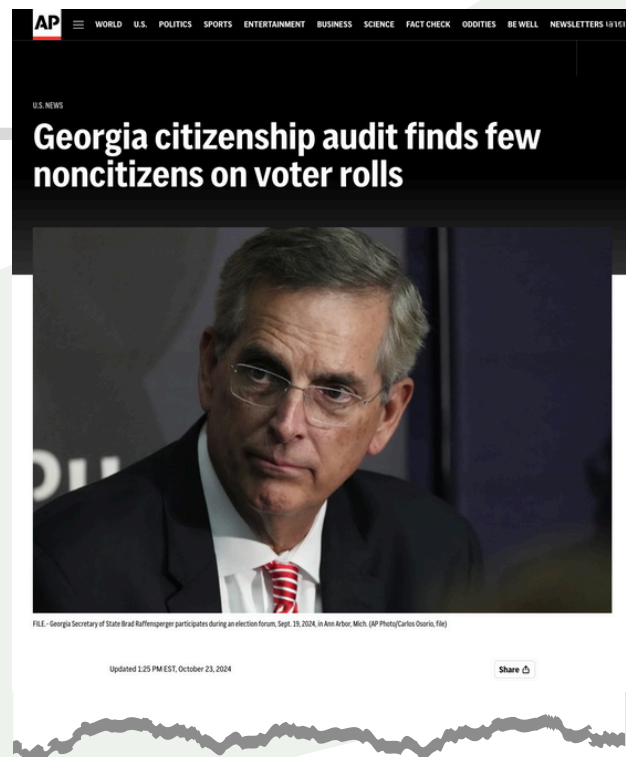
**Arizona** was the first state to adopt a proof of citizenship requirement in 2004. The law created a two-tier registration system where

voters who do not present proof of citizenship are prohibited from voting in state and local elections. [Over 250,000](#) Arizonans are currently blocked from voting in state elections due to these requirements.

**Kansas** also illustrates the harmful impacts on these impractical requirements on voters.

Kansas enacted a proof of citizenship law in 2013, and tens of thousands of residents were blocked from registering. The law was eventually struck down by a federal appeals court.

Most recently, **Louisiana** and **New Hampshire** enacted proof of citizenship laws in 2024, both of which are going into effect this year.



*In 2022, Georgia conducted a comprehensive audit of their voter rolls and found that 20 noncitizens registered out of 8.2 million total. Additionally, none of those 20 identified had voted in the 2020 election.*

# Why Proof of Citizenship Requirements are Harmful

The harms resulting from proof of citizenship requirements are significant and far-reaching. The fact that many otherwise eligible voters lack access to the necessary documents, combined with the requirement to present these documents in person, increases the likelihood that these policies may disenfranchise many Americans.

## #1. Lack of Access to Documents to Prove Citizenship

The SAVE Act and similar state legislation require documents such as a passport or original birth certificate to satisfy their requirements. Driver's licenses or other government-issued documents are not sufficient under these laws. [Recent analysis](#) shows that as many as 1 in 10 eligible voters lack access to these documents. Approximately [146 million Americans](#) do not possess a valid passport, and millions more lack access to their birth certificate. As a result, proof of citizenship requirements would likely disenfranchise millions of Americans.

## ***What is the SAVE Act?***

In addition to state proposals for proof of citizenship requirements, the new Congress and Trump administration are also prioritizing the federal [SAVE Act](#) this year. The SAVE Act would require proof of citizenship for all voter registration transactions nationwide. These requirements would not only apply to new registrants, but to all re-registrations, such as when someone moves. This would impact tens of millions of Americans each election cycle.

By requiring registrants to present proof of citizenship in person, the law would effectively eliminate online and mail registration, as well as disrupting automatic voter registration and third-party registration drives. The law would also require states to conduct voter purges of suspected noncitizens using unreliable data and would not require officials to notify voters before their removal. [Recent voter purges](#) in Alabama, Texas, and Virginia, that resulted in the removal of thousands of eligible U.S. citizens, provide a preview of the impact that would result from these overbroad and discriminatory efforts.

In addition, the experiences of Arizona and Kansas, [as discussed on page 3](#), demonstrate the substantial burdens that would be placed on election officials nationwide if the SAVE Act were to pass. The law would burden these officials with an unworkable and unfunded mandate requiring the broad overhaul of all aspects of election administration. And to make matters worse, the law allows election officials to be held criminally liable for registering someone who does not provide proof of citizenship, even in cases of unintentional mistakes, and even if the registrant turns out to in fact be a citizen. Imposing the SAVE Act and its ineffective proof of citizenship requirement nationwide would threaten the right to vote for millions of Americans.



## #2. Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Communities

Many marginalized communities would face outsized impacts from proof of citizenship requirements. [Two-thirds of Black Americans](#) lack a valid passport, and lower-income voters are also less likely to have a passport or be able to afford the significant cost to obtain one. [Almost 70 million married](#) American women do not possess a birth certificate with their legal name on it, often due to marriage-related name changes. And both young and elderly voters are [disproportionately impacted](#); 14% of elderly registrants reported lacking access to documents to prove citizenship, while almost 25% of young voters also reported the same. Additionally, there are as many as [3.3 million transgender voters nationwide](#), but [nearly 70% of them lack a government ID](#) that matches both their name and gender identity. As you can see, many communities that already face significant barriers to participating in the democratic process would face outright disenfranchisement under these requirements.

## #3. Criminalizing and Disrupting Election Administration

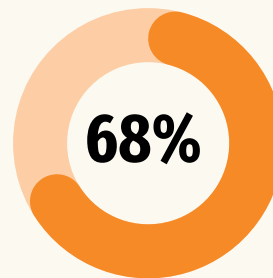
In addition to direct impacts on voters, proof of citizenship laws would also upend many current election administration systems and impose a complex unfunded mandate on election officials. Election infrastructure is already chronically underfunded, and these new policies would increase costs for state and



**Two-thirds of Black Americans lack a valid passport.**

**Almost 70 million**

**married American women do not have a birth certificate with their legal name on it.**



**of the 3.3 million transgender voters nationwide lack a government ID that matches both their name and gender identity.**

local governments. In addition, the SAVE Act also threatens election officials with criminal penalties for honest mistakes.

## Current Legislative Proposals

In addition to the federal SAVE Act, more states are considering proof of citizenship requirements during the 2025 legislative session. As of March 10, at least 21 states (as shown in [Figure 1](#)) are considering at least 40 bills to implement proof of citizenship laws. MAP tracks these laws and their developments in real time on our [Democracy Map](#). Notable proposals include:



### Indiana HB 1680

This bill requires proof of citizenship for any new or renewing registrants and requires officials to obtain the same documentation for certain current registrants such as lawful permanent residents.



### Michigan HJR 2

This proposed constitutional amendment would require all new and current registrants to verify their citizenship, as well as authorizing broad voter purges of suspected noncitizens.



### South Carolina SB 128

This proposed constitutional amendment would require all new and renewing registrants to provide proof of citizenship.



### Texas HJR 49

This proposed constitutional amendment would require all new and renewing registrants to provide proof of citizenship.



### Wyoming HB 157

This bill requires proof of citizenship for any new or renewing registrants.

# The Consequences of Proof of Citizenship Requirements

Proof of citizenship requirements for voter registration are harmful and unnecessary.

***These requirements create significant barriers to voting, disproportionately impact marginalized communities, and threaten to upend election administration systems across the country.***

Instead of addressing real threats to election security, these policies perpetuate inequality, encourage discrimination, and erode trust in democracy. Policymakers should focus on proposals that expand voter access and improve election security, rather than enacting restrictive laws based on false claims of voter fraud.

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## This report was authored by:

### Movement Advancement Project

MAP's mission is to provide independent and rigorous research, insight, and communications that help speed equality and opportunity for all people. MAP works to ensure that all people have a fair chance to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, take care of the ones they love, be safe in their communities, and participate in civic life.

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