



# The SAVE Act: Overview and Facts

By Greta Bedekovics and Sydney Bryant January 31, 2025

## Quick summary

- The [Safeguard American Voter Eligibility \(SAVE\) Act](#) would require all American citizens registering to vote or updating their registration information to present **documentary proof of citizenship in person**. For the vast majority of Americans, this would be a **passport or birth certificate**.
- Government-issued driver's licenses—including REAL IDs—as well as military or tribal IDs do not satisfy the bill's requirements.
- The legislation would invert the responsibility to verify a person's eligibility and citizenship status from election officials and the government onto every single American citizen, making citizens convince the government that they're eligible to exercise their right to vote.
- The SAVE Act would **change the way all citizens register to vote** upon enactment. It would upend online voter registration, make it impossible to mail in a registration application, and eliminate voter registration drives.

Read the full column:

[“The SAVE Act Would Disenfranchise Millions of Citizens”](#)

## Statistics

- Approximately **146 million Americans citizens do not possess a valid passport**—for context, [153 million Americans voted](#) in the 2024 presidential general election:
  - High rates of passport ownership are overwhelmingly concentrated in blue states, while low rates are concentrated in red states.
  - In seven states, less than one-third of citizens have a valid passport: West Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.
  - Only in four states do more than two-thirds of citizens have a valid passport: New York, Massachusetts, California, and New Jersey.
- **84 percent of women who marry change their surname**, meaning as many as **69 million American women** do not have a birth certificate with their legal name on it and thereby could not use their birth certificate to prove citizenship. The SAVE Act makes no mention of being able to show a marriage certificate or change-of-name documentation.
- The SAVE Act poses a serious socioeconomic issue that would disproportionately impact working-class and lower-income Americans:
  - **Only 1 in 4** Americans with a **high school degree or less** have a valid passport.
  - **Only 1 in 5** Americans with **income below \$50,000** have a valid passport.

- Young Americans (those ages 18 to 29), those with college and postgraduate levels of education, wealthy Americans, and those who identify as liberal or Democrat are the most likely groups to possess the required forms of documentation. **“Coastal elites”** are the least likely group to be adversely affected by the bill.
- Republicans are [less likely](#) to possess a passport, and conservative and Republican-leaning women are twice as likely to have [changed their surname](#).

## Impacts

Even small changes such as moving into an apartment building, moving down the block, or changing party affiliation are considered voter registration updates. Under the SAVE Act, Americans would have to go **in person** to their election office and present original or certified documentation to make any voter registration change.

This would make civic participation much more difficult for tens of millions of citizens every election cycle and would outright disenfranchise millions more. The policies of the SAVE Act would also be in addition to state voter ID laws that require voters to show identification at the polls:

- **Online voter registration – a service 42 states rely on – would be upended or even eliminated.** Notably, [10.8 million Americans used online registration in the 2022 cycle](#).
- **Voters could no longer mail in a voter registration application;** they would still have to show up in person with documentation to complete registration. Notably, [7.3 million Americans registered to vote by mail, email, or fax in the 2022 cycle](#). Rural Americans would be particularly affected.
- **Automatic voter registration (AVR)** administered through motor vehicle agencies and other state agencies would **be severely gutted**. Millions of online and mail motor vehicle agency transactions could no longer be used to update voter registration databases. Systems of AVR like the one through [Alaska’s Permanent Fund Dividend](#) could no longer function.
- For the 2022 cycle, [of the 80.1 million Americans who registered to vote or updated their voter registration, only 5.9 percent did so in person](#) at an election office. Under the SAVE Act, tens of millions of Americans would likely be waiting in lines in election offices to update their voter registration information every election cycle. This would pose a significant barrier to voting and overwhelm election offices.
- Voter registration drives would be eliminated, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts would be upended.

## Correcting the record

- **REAL IDs would NOT work.** The legislation states that “a form of identification issued consistent with the requirements of the REAL ID Act of 2005 that indicates the applicant is a citizen of the United States” can be used. However, no state’s REAL ID indicates citizenship status, and legally residing noncitizens can obtain a REAL ID.