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**DEMOCRACY AND
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Who Lacks Documentary Proof of Citizenship?

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Background

Policy makers and the public are increasingly interested in who lacks documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC). As proposals to require documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote have proliferated in the U.S. Congress and state legislatures, policy makers and the public are asking who would be impacted by this legislation. But key questions remain. To what extent are voting-eligible American citizens going to be burdened or even disenfranchised by these requirements? And are these burdens borne equally by the American public or are the burdens disproportionately borne by some constituencies?

Three surveys we conducted provide some of the best estimates of who lacks documentary proof of citizenship. We are able to begin to answer these questions by drawing on the results from three unique surveys that we conducted in 2023 and 2024. One survey had a nationally representative sample of the adult U.S. citizen population,¹ the second had a representative sample of adult U.S. citizens in Georgia,² and the third had a representative sample of adult U.S. citizens in Texas.³ Each survey asked whether respondents had the types of identification and documents needed to prove citizenship, with the state surveys tailored to the specific voter ID laws in those states.⁴ With regard to DPOC, the surveys asked whether adult U.S. citizens owned documentary proof of citizenship documents (U.S. Birth Certificate, U.S. Passport/U.S. Passport Card, U.S. Naturalization Certificate, and U.S. Certificate of Citizenship), and if so, whether the respondent could access the document(s) the next day if they had to do so, which we treat as a measure of ready access. All of the results below are weighted and population count estimates are based on data from the U.S. Census.⁵

¹ The national survey was conducted using a sample of 2,386 adult US citizens drawn from SSRS's probability panel and a random sample of known pre-paid cellular phone numbers. Included in the sample are oversamples of 18-24-year-olds, Black respondents, Hispanic respondents, Black and Hispanic 18-24-year olds, and individuals with income less than \$30,000 per year. The survey was fielded 9/12/23 - 10/4/23 with funding from UMD's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement (CDCE), VoteRiders, Public Wise, and The Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law. For more details see: <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/pubs/Voter%20ID%20survey%20Key%20Results%20June%202024.pdf>

² The Georgia survey was conducted using a sample of 1,258 adult US citizens who reside in Georgia from SSRS's probability panel with a supplement from the Verasight probability panel. Included in the sample are oversamples of 18-24-year-olds, Hispanic respondents, and individuals with income of less than \$30,000 per year. The survey was fielded July 18, 2024 through August 11, 2024 with funding from VoteRiders. For more details see: https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/Voter%20ID%20Report_Georgia.pdf

³ The Texas survey was conducted using a sample of 1,210 adult US citizens who reside in Texas from SSRS's probability panel with a supplement from the Verasight probability panel. Included in the sample are oversamples of 18-24-year-olds, Black respondents, and individuals with income of less than \$30,000 per year. The survey was fielded July 18, 2024 through August 11, 2024 with funding from VoteRiders. For more details see: <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/Voter%20ID%20Report%20Texas.pdf>

⁴ The topline for the Georgia and Texas surveys can be found at: <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/State%20Surveys%20F24%20Toplines%20Final.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>



Key Takeaways

Many Americans of all political identities lack DPOC: More research is needed to understand how, if at all, the SAVE Act⁶ would impact electoral outcomes. More Democrats reported lacking access to DPOC in our national survey; however, our state level results suggest that the political impact may vary state by state. In our Texas survey, we found more Republicans than Democrats reported not currently having DPOC at all or not being able to easily access DPOC. In our Georgia study, we found roughly even numbers of Democrats and Republicans were impacted.

Laws requiring documentary proof of citizenship to vote could inaccurately remove eligible citizens from the rolls. DPOC laws, such as the proposed federal SAVE Act or the numerous proof of citizenship bills pending in state legislatures, apply not only to new registrants but also to those already registered to vote if their citizenship status is questioned. Voters who move or wish to update their party preference would also need to re-register and be subject to the DPOC requirement.

Over 21.3 million *eligible* voters (9%) across the country do not have, or do not have easy access to, DPOC. These eligible citizens would be blocked from, or challenged by, needing to provide DPOC to register to vote or stay registered and exercise their fundamental right to have a voice in our democracy.

In Georgia, a recent audit by the Secretary of State found a mere [nine instances of non-citizen voting](#) while our survey suggests that nearly 46,000 U.S. citizens of voting age in Georgia (1%) do not currently have any access to documentary proof of citizenship, and over 718,000 U.S. citizens of voting age in Georgia (9%) could not easily access the documents they do have. This means that **legislation like the SAVE Act that requires documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote could burden or disenfranchise nearly 85,000 Georgia citizens for every instance of non-citizen voting observed by the Secretary of State.** This extraordinarily low rate of accuracy suggests that policy makers and the public may want to explore more accurate policy approaches that prevent these extremely rare cases of non-citizen voting rather than pursuing blanket policies that inaccurately burden or disenfranchise tens of thousands of eligible voters for every instance of non-citizen voting.

Over 10 million registered Americans (6%) have DPOC but do not have easy access to it, and over 2.1 million adult American citizens who are already registered to vote (1%) do not currently have any access to DPOC. It is essential to understand the options for these individuals who have already registered to vote and might (depending on state law) have already had their citizenship verified electronically by their state.

⁶ This is the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act (SAVE). More information can be found at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/8281>



Additional Highlights

National Survey

Just under 2% of voting-age American citizens, or over 3.8 million people, currently lack ANY form of DPOC. This means 3.8 million voting-age American citizens do not currently have a U.S. birth certificate, U.S. Passport/Passport Card, U.S. Naturalization Certificate, or a U.S. Certificate of Citizenship.

- One of the more surprising results is that almost 3 times as many males (over 2.8 million, 2.5%) as females (over 1 million, 0.9%) do not currently have any DPOC at all.

Millions of American citizens across race and ethnicity, gender, and party affiliation do not have or cannot easily access DPOC.

- People of Color (11%) are more likely than White People (8%) to lack DPOC. Given variation in population sizes, more White people (over 12.9 million) than People of Color (8.5 million) either do not have or cannot easily access DPOC.
- More males (over 12 million, 11%) than females (over 9 million, 8%) do not have or cannot easily access DPOC. Importantly, the estimate for females should be viewed as a lower bound, as we do not have an estimate for the number of males or females whose current legal name does not match the name on their DPOC, and we know that women are more likely to change their names upon marriage or divorce. We did not ask about access to marriage certificates or divorce certificates, which married people typically use to show proof of a name change.⁷
- Nearly 9.7 million Democrats (10%), over 7.1 million Republicans (7%), and about 4.6 million people unaffiliated with either major party (14%) do not have or cannot easily access DPOC.

Georgia Survey

About 760,000 voting-age Georgians who are U.S. citizens (10%) would have difficulty showing documentation proving their citizenship. One percent of all Georgians do not have any DPOC at all (nearly 46,000), while 9% cannot readily access their DPOC (over 718,000).

⁷ It is also important to note that other individuals change their names for different reasons, including but not limited to marriage or divorce, and that men may also change their names upon marriage or divorce. These individuals would also be harmed by legislation that would require documentary proof of citizenship that matches a current legal name.



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- Lack of accessible DPOC affects White and Black Georgians at the same rate (about 10% do not have it or can not easily access it). Due to Georgia's population, this affects nearly 413,000 White Georgians and 268,000 Black Georgians. 16% of Hispanic Georgians (68,000) do not have accessible DPOC.
- More Georgian women (456,000 or 11%) face difficulty proving their citizenship status than Georgian men (310,000 or 9%). Again, as noted above, the estimate for women is best treated as a lower bound, as many who do have DPOC may have a document without their current name on it.
- Democrats and Republicans are equally likely to not have accessible DPOC (8%), which translates to almost 270,000 Democrats and nearly 243,000 Republicans. Eighteen percent (over 251,000) of independents in Georgia lack accessible DPOC.
- Georgians aged 18-34 are substantially more likely to lack accessible DPOC than those 35 or older (14% vs 9%). But given differences in population sizes, more Georgians aged 35 or older (463,000) than Georgians aged 18-34 (308,000) do not have ready access to DPOC.

Texas Survey

About 1.3 million Texans who are U.S. citizens and of voting age (7%) would have difficulty showing documentation proving their citizenship. One percent of adult Texans who are U.S. citizens and of voting age do not have any DPOC at all (166,294), and 6% cannot easily access their DPOC (nearly 1.1 million).

- For White Texans, 131,400 (1%) do not have any DPOC, and 405,800 (4%) cannot easily access their DPOC. Nearly all Black and Hispanic Texans have DPOC, but 138,000 Black Texans (5%) and 447,000 Hispanic Texans (8%) cannot easily access it.
- More men in Texas than women do not have or do not have easy access to DPOC. While 699,00 Texan men would have difficulty proving their citizenship, 542,000 Texan women can say the same. One percent of men (137,000) do not have any DPOC and 6% (562,000) can not easily access it. Nearly all women have DPOC, while 5% cannot easily access it. As noted above, the estimate for women is a lower bound, as the survey did not ask if the respondent's current name appears on their DPOC.
- Showing DPOC is harder for Texas Republicans than Texas Democrats. More than twice as many Republicans than Democrats either do not currently have DPOC or do not have easy access to it (nearly 676,000 Republicans compared to nearly 305,000 Democrats). One percent of Texas Republicans do not have DPOC (114,000), and 7% cannot easily access their DPOC (562,000). Nearly all Texas



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Democrats have DPOC but 4% of Texas Democrats cannot easily access their DPOC (301,000).

- Younger Texans are more likely to have trouble accessing their DPOC than older Texans, but a larger number of older Texans either currently do not have or cannot easily access DPOC. Eleven percent of Texans aged 18-34 either do not currently have or do not have easy access to DPOC, translating to just under 630,000 Texans. More Texans aged 35 or older, nearly 650,000 (5%), do not currently have or do not have ready access to their DPOC.
- Higher-income Texans are more likely to not have DPOC than lower-income Texans. For Texans making more than \$100,000 annually, 2% do not have DPOC, and an additional 2% cannot easily access their DPOC. For Texans making under \$30,000 annually, nearly all have DPOC but 5% cannot easily access their DPOC.