ARTICLE
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The SAVE Act Would Disenfranchise Millions of Citizens

The SAVE Act would force citizens to prove their citizenship with documentation unavailable to millions and upend the very voter registration process.

CARTER LEWIS
Senior Fellow

MEDIA CONTACT
Sean Dawson
Senior Director, Media Relations
sdawson@americanprogress.org

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
Peter Gruber
Senior Director, Government Affairs
pgruber@americanprogress.org

Alexandra Chaver
Senior Manager, Government Affairs
achaver@americanprogress.org

This article contains an update.

The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act has been reintroduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation would require all Americans to prove their citizenship status by presenting documentation—in person—to state or local officials when they register to vote in federal elections. Specifically, the legislation would require the vast majority of Americans to rely on a passport or birth certificate to prove their citizenship. While this may seem innocuous, it would in fact upend the process by which most Americans register to vote and would disenfranchise tens of millions of Americans who don't have ready access to a passport or a birth certificate matching their legal name.

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Because documentation would need to be presented in person, the legislation would also force many voters to travel to government offices during a pandemic and voter suppression drives nationwide, and otherwise utilize voter registration strengths—a service so many rely on. Americans would need to appear in person, with original documents, to voter registration offices or other organizational information or to change of address or change in name. Although the SAVE Act has been introduced in previous sessions of Congress and technology back decades and would be unworkable for millions of Americans, it would disenfranchise tens of millions people who live in rural areas, traditionally disadvantaged communities, and people who have changed their name, and would be sufficient forms of documentation to prove citizenship under the legislation.

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In short, the SAVE Act is discriminatory legislation that would drastically alter the process by which most Americans register to vote. It would disenfranchise alongside the resources available to most Americans as well as the reality of American women's lives. Despite these overwhelming facts and the real consequences of the legislation, Congress continues to pursue the SAVE Act independently—and the Republican-controlled Senate and the Trump administration in the House of Representatives has declared that passing the legislation is one of their top priorities for the 116th Congress.

Existing election integrity measures

Federal law already sets forth voter qualifications and requirements for voters to register to vote. As required by federal law, Americans must provide their name, date of birth, residence, and the last four digits of their social security number on a voter registration application in order to provide election officials with the necessary information to verify their identity and voting eligibility. The federal voter registration form also requires that the applicant be asked by election officials an ordered with the oath of verification—and, instead, make every single American citizen put in the work, time, and resources to exercise their constitutional right to vote and convince the government that they're eligible.

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Half of American citizens do not have a valid passport

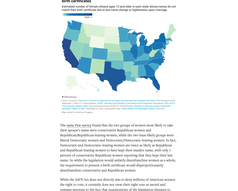
In addition to setting voter registration back on the government era, the SAVE Act would disenfranchise millions of Americans who don't have ready access to proof of citizenship do not possess the documentation required under the bill.

According to statistics and data released by the U.S. Department of State, approximately only half of American citizens possess a passport. This means that half of all American citizens would not be able to provide one of the documents required under the legislation to prove that they would be required to register to vote under the SAVE Act.

Nationwide, approximately 46 million American citizens do not possess a passport. Over the past twenty-two generations, 55 million Americans—or a ballot in the 2024 presidential general election.

Figure 1

Only half of American citizens have a passport
Percentage of each state's citizen population that possesses a valid passport



Note: Data is presented for general population and not citizen population.

Source: U.S. Department of State, "Passport Statistics," Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2020, https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/passports/statistics/passport-books-cards/passport-books-cards-2020.xlsx;

the SAVE Act would be the first.

This series examines the impacts the SAVE Act and similar bills would have on the right to vote of American citizens.

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