Message Guide: Documentary Proof of Citizenship & The SAVE Act

About This Guide

This message guidance is based on learnings from dozens of quantitative state and national voter surveys, online qualitative interviews, and creative ad tests Voting Rights Lab and Secure Democracy USA have commissioned over the last five years, with input from numerous state and national partner organizations.

Voting Rights Lab and Secure Democracy USA's most relevant research on this topic includes significant audience research, as well as two recent projects focused on persuadable voters:

- A national survey identifying the voters most persuadable about confidence in elections;
- An online qualitative board conducted in December 2024 to examples voters' attitudes and views on noncitizen voting. The panel included a mix of progressive Democrats, Independents and moderate Democrats, and Republicans – the findings of which are available here.
- RCT-tested digital content launched in January 2025, the findings of which are available here.

All research shared here is for 501(c)(3)-compliant purposes only; it is not to be used for any partisan, political, or electioneering activities by any organization.

Topline Recommendations

1. Underscore that **existing checks & balances ensure only citizens vote**.

2. **Keep focus on harm to citizens** and frame it as an **excessive mandate.**

3. Highlight the potential **chaos for states,** as well as local election officials.

4. Focus criticism on **policy to divide us, restrict our freedom to vote,** and **increase partisan control** of our elections.

Key Messages

- **Every state has a strong set of checks and balances to ensure only eligible citizens vote.**

  - When registering or when someone votes for the first time, Americans must provide either a Social Security number or an official state ID like a driver's license, which election officials can use to confirm their citizenship status.

- [The SAVE Act](#) **and similar bills we're tracking in state legislatures across the country would mandate American citizens provide documents that many can't access – like a passport or certified birth certificate – to register to vote or update their registration, such as after a move.**

  - The last [federal court](#) to consider this issue (law out of Kansas) found it an impermissible violation of the Constitution.

- **The impact would be astounding. These bills would inject chaos in our elections *and* block millions of eligible Americans from voting.**

  - CHAOS OF STATE DPOC LAWS: States would need to create a costly separate system for state elections and federal elections: separate ballots and separate voter registration lists – all so states can impose this mandate on its citizens voting in state elections, while separately carrying out its constitutional duty to hold federal elections in accordance with federal law.

  - CHAOS OF SAVE ACT: Busy election offices would be tasked with obtaining information from applicants that may be difficult or impossible to access. Election officials could face months of intensive effort to update registration records with newly-required information, interfering with other essential tasks to prepare for upcoming elections.

  - BLOCKING AMERICANS FROM VOTING: State Department data shows [43-49%](#) of Americans — or [104-118M](#) voting-age citizens — do not have current passports and research from the Center for American Progress finds approximately [69 million women](#) do not have a birth certificate with their legal married name on it.

    - A recent survey from [YouGov/the Economist](#) found the citizens less likely to hold valid passports are low and middle income voters in the South and Midwest.

    - When Kansas attempted similar proof of citizenship requirements in 2013, [one in eight](#) new and eligible registrants were denied registration since they couldn't access the necessary documents.

- **These bills are meant to divide Americans at a time when we are united in what we want from our government leaders: solutions to fix our broken economy.**

  - Recent polls from [YouGov](#) and [Ipsos](#) show inflation, prices, and the economy as the most important issues to voters by far.

- **In the United States, American citizens decide our elections, not politicians.**

  - Instead of tearing down our system of checks and balances to win at all costs, our leaders should be focused on something Americans are united on: solutions to fix our broken economy.

Sample Tough Q&A

Isn't this just the new Photo ID?

No, this is an excessive, bureaucratic mandate that simply goes way, way too far. It is *far worse* than laws requiring photo IDs to vote when you consider that [91% of American adults](#)have a driver's license and only about 57% of Americans have a passport to prove their citizenship.

Why are some lawmakers pushing for this law then?

This is about dividing Americans at a time when we are united in what we want from our government leaders: solutions to fix our broken economy. Instead of tearing down our system of checks and balances to win at all costs, our leaders should be focused on what unites us. .

Can noncitizens vote in our elections?

Every state has a strong set of checks and balances to ensure only eligible citizens vote. When voting for the first time, Americans must provide either a Social Security number or an official state ID like a driver's license, which election officials can use to confirm their citizenship status.

…oh, but you know that no system is perfect. We should do better to ensure everyone who votes is a U.S. citizen.

Look, not only is it practically infeasible for an undocumented immigrant to have the documents required to register to vote in the first place, it's also difficult to imagine an undocumented immigrant would risk government scrutiny, arrest, and deportation — all to cast just one vote. But here's what is not hard to imagine because it's true: if this passes, millions of citizens would no longer have a voice in our elections. It's government overreach run amok.

Fast Facts

Roughly half of voting-age Americans don't have a current passport

- Voting Rights Lab's analysis of State Department data shows about half ([43%](#)) of Americans — or [132M](#) voting-age citizens — don't have access to a passport.

- Citizens in states won by President Trump in 2024 are less likely to have a valid passport — 21 of the 25 states with the lowest passport ownership were carried by President Trump. For example, 62% of voting-age citizens in Tennessee — one of the states with a documentary proof of citizenship bill — don't have a passport.
  - Obtaining a passport is expensive. Current rates are a $130 application fee plus a $35 execution fee. The fees are the same for passport renewal.
  - In recent years, it's taken 10-13 weeks to process a passport application.

- Consumer research shows that citizens in rural, working class, farming, and evangelical communities are least likely to hold passports. The data show:
  - [76% of citizens who have not attended college](#) **do NOT** have a valid passport
  - [70% of citizens with family income less than $50K](#) **do NOT** have a valid passport
  - [62% of "evangelical hub" citizens](#) **do NOT** have a valid passport
  - [58% of citizens in working-class communities](#) **do NOT** have a valid passport
  - [53% of rural and farmland](#) citizens **do NOT** have a valid passport

Noncitizen voting is exceedingly rare

- In October 2024, Georgia's Republican Secretary of State reviewed millions of registered voters and [found](#) just 20 noncitizens on the rolls, only nine of whom had ever been able to cast a ballot.

- Last October, an RNC election integrity specialist told Pennsylvania poll watchers that noncitizen voting is "[close to impossible](#)" due to the robust safeguards already in place.

Research & Resources

- Voting Rights Lab and Secure Democracy USA: [Countering Noncitizen Voting Disinformation.](#) (February 2025)
- Voting Rights Lab: [There Are Ways to Modernize Our Elections. The SAVE Act Isn't One of Them.](#) (January 2025)
- Voting Rights Lab: [State and Federal Law Ensures Only Citizens Can Vote in U.S. Elections](#) (October 2024)
- Voting Rights Lab: [State Voting Rights Tracker: Proof of Citizenship](#) (updated daily)