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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

# **Who Lacks ID in America Today? An Exploration of Voter ID Access, Barriers, and Knowledge**

Analyses Led by the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement  
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This report presents results from the first public survey in nearly 20 years focused on who does and does not have various types of government-issued photo identification.<sup>1</sup> This report also sheds new light on the barriers faced by voting-age citizens in obtaining such identification. Lastly, it explores the public's knowledge of voter ID laws in their states for in-person and mail-in voting against a backdrop of states rapidly adding new or stricter voter ID requirements between 2021 and 2023.

VoteRiders, Public Wise, the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement (CDCE) at the University of Maryland, and the Brennan Center for Justice contracted with SSRS, a highly regarded survey firm, to obtain a nationally representative sample of the U.S. adult citizen population. The sample of 2,386 respondents was 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. All of the results below are weighted. Population count estimates are based on data from the US Census.<sup>2</sup> A summary of the main results follows.

**Nearly 21 million voting-age U.S. citizens do not have a current (non-expired) driver's license.** Just under 9%, or 20.76 million people, who are U.S. citizens aged 18 or older do not have a non-expired driver's license. **Another 12% (28.6 million) have a non-expired license, but it does not have both their current address and current name.** For these individuals, a mismatched address is the largest issue. Ninety-six percent of those with some discrepancy have a license that does not have their current address, 1.5% have their current address but not their current name, and just over 2% do not have their current address or current name on their license. Additionally, just over 1% of adult U.S. citizens do not have any form of government-issued photo identification, which amounts to nearly 2.6 million people.

**Millions of Americans across political parties do not have a license.** Twenty-three percent of Democrats (23 million people), 16% of Republicans (15.7 million people), and 31% of independents/others (10.5 million people) indicate they do not have a license with their current name and/or address. Nearly 15 million people indicate they do not have a license at all, including 9% of Democrats (8.6 million people), 6% of Republicans (6.2 million people), and 18% of independents/others (5.9 million people).

**Black Americans and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately less likely to have a current driver's license.** Over a quarter of Black adult citizens and Hispanic adult citizens do not have a driver's license with their current name and/or address (28% and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/citizens-without-proof> last accessed 1/24/24.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html> Table 1. Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex and Single Years of Age: November 2022.



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27% respectively), compared to about one out of five adult citizens who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander (21%) or White (18%). Eighteen percent of Black adult citizens, 15% of Hispanic adult citizens, and 13% of Asian/Pacific Islander adult citizens do not have a license at all, compared to just 5% of White adult citizens.

**Young Americans are least likely to have a driver's license with their current name and/or address.** Younger Americans overall are far less likely to have a driver's license with their current name and/or address, with 41% of those between the ages of 18-24 and 38% between the ages of 25-29 indicating this, compared to 24% between the ages of 30-49, 13% between the ages of 50-64, and 11% of adult citizens over the age of 65.

**Almost half of Black Americans ages 18-29 do not have a driver's license with their current name and/or address (47%), and 30% do not have a license at all.** While 42% of White Americans ages 18-29 do not have a driver's license with their current name and/or address, only 5% do not have a license.

**One in five Americans living in states with voter ID requirements do not have a current driver's license.** Twenty-one percent of adult Americans in states with strict photo ID requirements do not have a driver's license with their current name and/or address, including 7% who do not have a license at all. For states with strict non-photo ID requirements, 26% do not have a current license with their current name and/or address, including 5% who do not have a license at all.

**People with less education and lower annual incomes are more likely to lack a current driver's license.** Forty-one percent of people without a high school degree do not have a driver's license with their current name and/or address, and 35% do not have a license at all. Twenty-four percent of high school graduates and 20% of those with some post-high school education do not have a license with their current name and/or address, compared to 17% of college graduates and 15% of those with some post-college education. Thirty-nine percent of those with annual incomes under \$30,000 do not have a license with their current name and/or address, including 23% who do not have a license at all. Twenty-one percent of those making between \$30,000 and \$50,000 annually do not have a license with their current name and/or address, compared to 15% making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and 9% of those making over \$100,000.

**People with a disability are far more likely to lack a current driver's license.** Twenty percent of people who self-identified as having a disability do not have a license, and an additional 9% have a license but without their current name and/or address, compared to 6% of non-disabled people who do not have a license and an additional 13% who have a license but without their current name and/or address.



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### Knowledge of ID Laws

**Over half of Americans living in states requiring photo ID to vote in-person do not know their state's laws, and do not realize that they will need this type of identification to successfully cast a ballot.** Fifty-five percent of people living in states with photo ID requirements indicated they do *not* think photo ID is required for voting in person in their state or don't know if it is. In these states, nearly two-thirds of people ages 18-29 (66%) are not sure that photo ID is required, compared to 52% of people over the age of 29. This confusion and misperception affects all partisan groups, including 50% of Republicans, 58% of Democrats, and 61% of independents/others.

People in lower income groups are more likely to think photo IDs are not required for voting in person or to be unsure, including 61% of adult citizens with annual salaries less than \$30,000, 61% making between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 51% making between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 48% making over \$100,000 annually. Black Americans are less likely to be mistaken or unsure about photo ID requirements, with 46% of Black Americans who live in a state requiring photo ID thinking that photo ID is not required in their state or being unsure, compared to 56% of White Americans and 56% of Hispanic Americans who do not realize that they need photo ID to successfully vote in-person.

**Many Americans living in states that do *not* require photo ID to vote in-person are also mistaken about their voter ID laws.** Overall, a majority of adult citizens in states that do not have strict photo ID laws are aware that photo ID is not required to vote in-person in their state. Sixty-five percent of Americans living in these states know that photo ID is not required for them to vote, while 35% think photo ID is required or are not sure what the law is.

Forty percent of Black Americans and 44% of Hispanic Americans in these states incorrectly think photo ID is required to vote in-person, compared to only a third of White Americans (33%). This misperception is similar across partisan groups, with 33% of Democrats, 38% of Republicans, and 35% of independents/others in these states indicating photo ID is required.

**More than half of voting eligible Americans are unsure about the ID laws for voting by mail in their state.** Whereas 25% of adult Americans are not sure whether their state requires voters to show identification for in-person voting, more than double that percentage (56%) are unsure whether their state requires identification for voting by mail.



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**There are many reasons why people do not have a driver's license.** Some people do not have a license because they “don't like driving/don't drive” (31%), they are “not interested” (8%), or they have anxiety about driving (3%). **Nineteen percent of**

**individuals without a driver's license cite bureaucratic or economic factors as the reasons for which they do not have a license,** including the cost of getting a license (8%), financial/legal difficulties including unpaid tickets/fines (4%), lack of time (4%), or lack of underlying documents (3%).

**There is strong bipartisan support for requiring high schools to provide state IDs for those without a license.** Overall, 81% support this initiative, including 84% of Democrats, 78% of Republicans, and 81% of independents/others.

### Potential ID Difficulties

**Fifteen percent of adult citizens (over 34.5 million people) either do not have a driver's license or state ID or have one that may cause difficulties voting in states with strict photo ID laws.** These difficulties include having a license but without a current address/name and no state ID card (10%), not having a license or official state ID card (1.6%), not having a license and having a state ID card without a current address/name (1.7%), and having a license and state ID card but with neither reflecting the current address/name (1.5%).

**Younger adults and adults in lower income groups are more likely to lack ID or have a form of ID that may cause potential voting difficulties.** Thirty-one percent of adult citizens aged 18-29 face potential voting difficulties due to their lack of ID or a form of ID not having their current address and/or name on it, compared to just 11% of adult citizens over the age of 30. Adult citizens with annual incomes less than \$30,000 are more likely to face such potential difficulties (21%) than those making between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (17%), between \$50,000 and \$100,000 (12%), or over \$100,000 (9%).

**Hispanic adult citizens are the most likely group to have potential voting difficulties due to a lack of ID or a mismatch between their current address/name and what appears on their ID.** While 12% of Asian or Pacific Islander adult citizens and 14% of both Black and White adult citizens have a form of ID that may cause voting difficulties, 18% of Hispanics do. **Over one third of younger (18-29-year-olds) White adult citizens (35%) face potential voting difficulties due to having an ID without their current address or name on it,** compared with 28% of younger Black adult citizens, 30% of younger Hispanic adult citizens, and 20% of younger Asian or Pacific Islander adult citizens.



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**Democrats and independents/others are more likely to face these potential voting difficulties than Republicans.** Eighteen percent of Democrats and 17% of those who are independent or not affiliated with one of the two major parties either lack an ID or have a form of ID that may cause voting difficulties, while only 11% of Republicans do.

### **Documentary Proof of Citizenship**

Beyond ID to vote, this survey also measured if voting-age American citizens have documentary proof of citizenship documents, including a US Birth Certificate, US Passport/US Passport Card, US Naturalization Certificate, and US Certificate of Citizenship.

**Over 9% of voting-age citizens, or 21.3 million people, cannot readily access documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC),** either because they do not have it at all or because they could not access it easily if needed.

**Just under 2% of voting-age American citizens, or over 3.8 million people, lack ANY form of DPOC.** This means 3.8 million voting-age American citizens do not have a birth certificate, passport, naturalization certificate, or a certificate of citizenship. This disproportionately affects marginalized racial and ethnic groups, as 3% of People of Color lack any form of DPOC, compared to 1% of White Americans. Eight percent of White Americans (or over 12.9 million people) and 11% of People of Color (or over 8.4 million people) cannot readily access DPOC. Independents are also more likely to lack DPOC (4%) compared to Democrats (2%) and Republicans (1%). Independents are also more likely to be unable to readily access DPOC (13%, or almost 4.5 million) than Democrats (10%, or just under 9.7 million) and Republicans (7%, or over 7.1 million).