

The SAVE Act's Threat to Community-Based Voter Registration Drives

The SAVE Act would gut third-party voter registration, a method more often used by Black and brown voters and other groups that have historically faced greater hurdles in voting.

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Congress is currently considering the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, an ill-conceived and dangerous voter suppression bill. Its supporters are falsely promoting it as a bill about immigration and election integrity. In fact, the SAVE Act would make it harder for millions of eligible American citizens to vote in multiple ways. The SAVE Act's threat to third-party voter registration efforts is one of its many dangers that has received less attention. Yet the harms of ending third-party registration – particularly for Black and brown voters, younger voters, voters with less formal education, low-income voters, and voters who are naturalized citizens – cannot be overstated.

The SAVE Act would require all eligible voters to provide documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC), like a passport or birth certificate, *in person* to register and re-register to vote. The Brennan Center for Justice estimates based on survey data that over 20 million American citizens do not have these documents readily on hand¹ and could thus easily be disenfranchised under the bill. In addition, the SAVE Act would upend popular methods of voter registration like online voter registration, registration by mail, automatic voter registration, and third-party voter registration drives, because **the bill requires DPOC to be provided *in person to an election or other approved government official*.**²

Critically, the SAVE Act's DPOC requirements will seriously undercut the ability of non-governmental organizations to assist people in registering to vote. Currently, in many states these organizations hold large-scale, nonpartisan community drives where voters can fill out voter registration forms. Staff members then drop off the completed forms at the proper election office, ensuring that those voters are registered for the upcoming election cycle. If the SAVE Act passes, third-party registration organizations

will no longer be able to offer these services – instead, each registrant will have to arrive in person at their local election office with DPOC in hand to register.

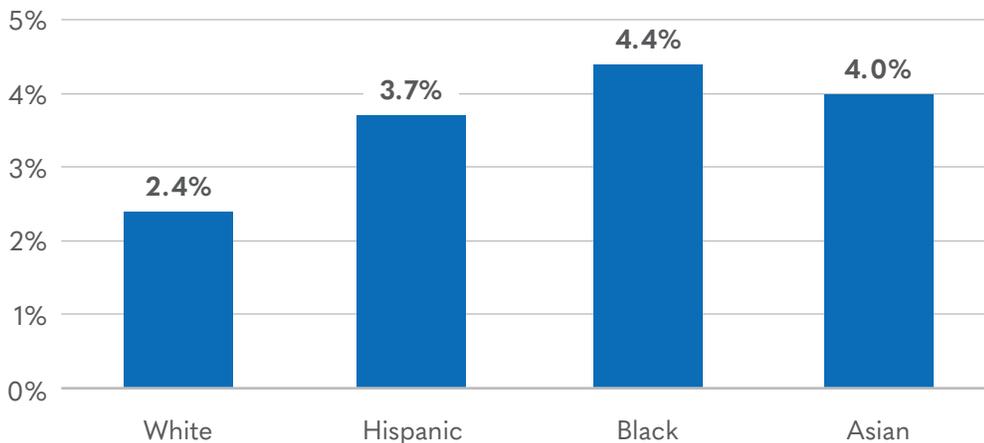
Third-party voter registration efforts are especially important for voters of color, who are historically nearly twice as likely to register to vote through a drive as compared to white voters.³ Third-party registration drives are particularly successful because they are community-initiated and involve direct personal contact and encouragement.⁴ They are simple, convenient, and accessible. For these same reasons, those who use this method are also more likely to actually make it to the polls, compared to those who register another way.⁵

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Community voter registration drives have historically helped millions of eligible people, and particularly Black and brown people, register to vote.⁶ **Notably, Census Bureau survey data tells us that in the 2022 election cycle, nearly 10.5 million people nationwide registered to vote via a “registration drive” or via third-party efforts at “school[s], hospital[s], or campus[es].”⁷** These registrations accounted for 6.5 percent of all voter registrations across the country.

A closer look at Census Bureau survey data reveals that in 2022, “registration drive” registrations were higher among Black and brown voters, voters with less formal education, low-income voters, and voters who are naturalized citizens. Notably, Black, Hispanic (Latino), and Asian voters all used registration drives at higher rates than white people (note that the Census Bureau did not provide these data for Native American voters). Black voters registered to vote at voter registration drives at nearly twice the rate of white voters.

Percent Eligible Voters Registered by Registration Drive, Nationwide November 2022

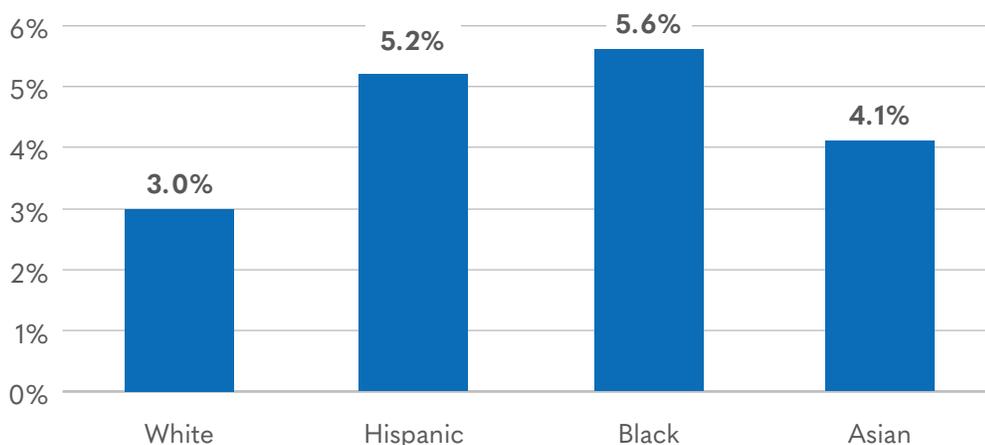


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey - Voting and Registration Supplement, November 2022.

Along that vein, voters with less than a high school diploma registered via voter registration drives at nearly twice the rate of those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Registration drive registrations were also, for the most part, higher among households with an income of \$39,999 or less, as compared to those with incomes of \$40,000 or more. And 4 percent of voters who were naturalized citizens registered via voter registration drives, compared to 2.8 percent of native-born citizen voters.

Similarly, “school, hospital, or campus” registrations were higher among Black and brown voters, young voters, voters with less formal education, and voters who are naturalized citizens. As with registration drives, Black, Hispanic (Latino), and Asian voters registered to vote at a school, hospital, or campus at higher rates than white people (and again, data was not provided for Native American voters). Black people registered to vote via registration drives at nearly twice the rate of white people.

Percent Eligible Voters Registered at School, Hospital, or Campus, Nationwide November 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey - Voting and Registration Supplement, November 2022.

Strikingly, voters aged 18-24 registered at a school, hospital, or campus at a rate of at least 2.5 times the rates of voters in groups aged 25 and up. And 4.2 percent of voters with less than a high school diploma registered at a school, hospital, or campus, compared to 3 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Finally, 4.1 percent of naturalized citizen voters registered at a school, hospital, or campus, compared to 3.6 percent of native-born citizen voters.

The SAVE Act adds nothing to the integrity of our elections and only makes it harder for millions of eligible voters to access the ballot. The bill's in-person DPOC requirements will disproportionately affect Black and brown voters, younger voters, voters with less formal education, low-income voters, and voters who are naturalized citizens, all of whom rely on third-party registration efforts at higher rates. This voter suppression bill must not pass.

Appendix

The data for this analysis were drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau’s most recent Current Population Survey - Voting and Registration Supplement for November 2022. A data summary (Table 12) for Method of Registration is available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>. The data are based on Census survey data, not actual voter registration records from state or local voter files.

Nationwide Registration, Overview

TOTAL Registration	161,422,000
Registration Drive and School, Hospital, or Campus Registration, Combined	10,492,430

Note: *Registration Drive & School, Hospital, or Campus Tables continue on the following pages.*

Registration Drive

	Percentage of Subgroup's Total Registrations - Via Registration Drive	N = Number Registered Via Registration Drive
Overall	2.9% of all registrations via registration drive	4,681,238 registrations via registration drive
By Race		
White Non-Hispanic	2.4%	2,722,248
Hispanic (all races)	3.7%	666,925
Black (alone or in comb.)	4.4%	922,548
Asian (alone or in comb.)	4.0%	335,280
By Nativity		
Native-born citizen	2.8%	4,114,600
Naturalized citizen	4.0%	578,920
By Educational Attainment		
Less than high school grad.	4.2%	306,474
High school graduate	3.4%	1,352,180
Some college	2.9%	1,367,611
Bachelor's degree or more	2.4%	1,612,704
By Family Income		
Under \$10,000	4.2%	58,758
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.0%	69,850
\$15,000 to \$19,999	2.7%	33,777
\$20,000 to \$29,999	4.3%	187,437
\$30,000 to \$39,999	5.0%	319,850
\$40,000 to \$49,999	2.6%	154,336
\$50,000 to \$74,999	3.2%	554,656
\$75,000 to \$99,999	2.6%	390,234
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2.6%	556,400
\$150,000 and over	2.3%	665,781
Income not reported	2.2%	327,448

School, Hospital, or Campus

	Percentage of Subgroup's Total Registrations - Via School, Hospital, or Campus	N = Number Registered at School, Hospital, or Campus
Overall	3.6% of all registrations via school, hospital, campus	5,811,192 registrations at school, hospital, or campus
By Age		
18 to 24 years	8.6%	1,129,180
25 to 44 years	3.4%	1,712,240
45 to 64 years	3.0%	1,650,420
65 years and over	3.1%	1,330,489
By Race		
White Non-Hispanic	3.0%	3,402,810
Hispanic (all races)	5.2%	937,300
Black (alone or in comb.)	5.6%	1,174,152
Asian (alone or in comb.)	4.1%	593,393
By Nativity		
Native-born citizen	3.6%	5,290,200
Naturalized citizen	4.1%	578,920
By Educational Attainment		
Less than high school grad.	4.2%	306,474
High school graduate	3.9%	1,551,030
Some college	4.1%	1,933,519
Bachelor's degree or more	3.0%	2,015,880

Endnotes

1. Kevin Morris and Cora Henry. (June 11, 2024). *Millions of Americans Don't Have Documents Proving Their Citizenship Readily Available*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/millions-americans-dont-have-documents-proving-their-citizenship-readily>.
2. 118th Congress. (2024). H.R.8281 – SAVE Act. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/8281>.
3. Diana Kasdan. (November 30, 2012). *State Restrictions on Voter Registration Drives*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-restrictions-voter-registration-drives>.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. All data for this analysis are provided in the Appendix and were drawn from U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022, Table 12 (Method of Registration, By Selected Characteristics)* (April 2023), available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>. Retrieved on 2/20/2025.

Our Work to Build Power

For decades, Dēmos has been committed to advancing racial justice by working at the intersection of economic justice and democracy reform. Our recent publication, the [Dēmos Power Agenda: A Framework for Building People Power](#), outlines our vision for creating a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy and economy. The [Power Scorecard](#) offers a data framework and tool to establish a baseline of the current economic, civic, and political conditions we face as we fight for that multiracial democracy and economy.

About Dēmos

Dēmos is a non-profit public policy organization working to build a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy and economy. We work hand in hand to build power with and for Black and brown communities, forging strategic alliances with grassroots and state-based organizations.

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