



# CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## **WHO LACKED PHOTO ID IN 2020?: An Exploration of the American National Election Studies**

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March 13, 2023

## INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's School of Law commissioned a survey to estimate the number of people who did not have proof of citizenship, as well as those that lacked non-expired, government issued photo identification.<sup>1</sup> This research demonstrated that 11% of adult American citizens, or an estimated 25 million when adjusted for 2020 Census figures, were lacking identification that might be necessary for them to vote, and that members of underrepresented groups were much more likely to lack this documentation.

A great deal has changed in American politics since 2006, including demographic changes and an expansion in the number of states that require photo identification in order to vote. Unfortunately, existing and more current surveys do not contain the detailed and specific questions that the Brennan Center included in its 2006 survey. New survey research that included these questions would more definitively speak to the implications of voter ID laws on Americans' ability to cast an acceptable ballot in the current context.

To help inform new survey research, the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement collaborated with VoteRiders<sup>2</sup> to analyze data from the 2020 American National Election Studies (ANES), which includes several questions on the various types of documentation one has. The ANES has a large and nationally representative sample and is widely viewed as the premier survey of voting-age Americans' political attitudes and behaviors.

While the ANES data have many strengths, they also have significant limitations in the context of voter ID laws in 2023 and beyond. That is, the data do not provide information on whether the identification has one's current name (particularly last name) and/or current address, whether proof of citizenship (connected by legal documentation to one's current name) is readily available, and do not reveal the exact type of identification one has for those lacking a driver's license and passport. As a result, the estimates provided below are best viewed as lower bounds on the percentage and number of individuals who lack the identification needed to vote in a growing number of states.

## MEASUREMENT

To measure whether U.S. citizens of voting age have non-expired government issued photo identification, the ANES asked three questions on its pre-election questionnaire. The first question asked whether the individual had a non-expired driver's license. The second question asked whether the respondent had a non-expired U.S. passport. The third question, which was administered only to those who said they had neither a non-expired driver's license nor a non-expired U.S. passport, asked whether the individual had some other form of non-expired,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/citizens-without-proof> last accessed 2/27/23.

<sup>2</sup> VoteRiders is the country's leading nonpartisan voting rights organization focused on the issue of voter ID. Founded in 2012, the organization has provided free voter ID education and assistance to millions of voters. See: [VoteRiders.Org](http://VoteRiders.Org) for more information.

government issued photo identification.<sup>3</sup> Of note, only two types of IDs are common to all 36 states with voter ID laws as of 2023: a current driver's license or state ID in your state.

## RESULTS<sup>4</sup>

**Nearly 29 million voting-age U.S. Citizens did not have a non-expired driver's license and over 7 million did not have any other form of non-expired government issued photo identification.** By applying results from the 2020 ANES to the U.S. Census Current Population Survey's estimates of the citizen voting-age population,<sup>5</sup> we estimate that tens of millions of Americans did not have the most common forms of identification used for voting in 2020 (nearly 29 million, or 12%, did not have a current driver's license; and over 13.5 million, or 6%, did not have a non-expired driver's license or a U.S. passport). The ANES data combined with Census estimates also reveal that nearly 7.6 million Americans of voting-age did not have any non-expired government issued photo identification (3% lacked photo ID).

**Over 11 million young people did not have a current driver's license and more than 3 million did not have any non-expired government issued photo ID.** Results from the ANES when translated to U.S. Census estimates suggest that nearly 11.5 million adult Americans aged 18-29 did not have a driver's license in 2020, with most of them (7.5 million) falling in the 18-24-year-old category. Those who were 18-19-years-old were the least likely to have a driver's license (39% lacked a license), followed by those aged 20-24 (23% lacked a license), and those aged 25-29 (19% lacked a license). The likelihood of not having a license among each of these groups of young people was considerably higher than the rate among those 30 and older (9.7% lacked a license, 8% among those aged 65 and older). Overall, the 24% of young people aged 18-29 who lacked a license was more than twice the rate of those aged 30 and up (9.7% lacked a license).

We also estimate that nearly 3.1 million 18–29-year-olds did not have any non-expired government issued photo ID in 2020. Those who were 18- or 19-years old were especially unlikely to have any photo ID, as 15%, amounting to 1.1 million 18-19-year-olds, did not have any non-expired government issued photo ID. By comparison, 4% of 20-24-year-olds, 5% of 25-29-year-olds, and about 2.5% of those age 30 and older did not have any photo ID (about 1.7% among those 65 or older). That is, 18–19-year-olds were more than 3.75 times more likely than 20-24-year-olds, just under 3 times more likely than 25-29-year-olds, and over 6 times more likely than those 30 or older to lack photo ID. As young people continue to delay getting a driver's license, these differences across age groups might well increase.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The exact question wording follows: “Do you have a non-expired Driver’s License, or do you not have one?; Do you now have a non-expired U.S. passport, or do you not have one” and if the individual didn’t have either they were asked “Do you have any form of non-expired, government issued photo ID, such as a state ID card or military ID?” Any references in the text to “photo ID” reflect information about non-expired, government issued photo identification.

<sup>4</sup> Data are from the American National Election Studies. 2021. ANES 2020 Time Series Study Full Release [dataset and documentation]. February 10, 2022 version. [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org) . All data are weighted using the post-election sample weight, V200010b.

<sup>5</sup> Data from the U.S. Census were obtained from: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-585.html>, last visited 2/27/23. Estimates of subpopulations do not always add up to the total given item non-response in the Census data.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/parenting/2023/02/21/teens-not-driving/> last accessed 2/27/23.

**Members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups were least likely to have a driver's license or any government issued photo ID.** People who identified as Black non-Hispanic (6.2% lack photo ID), Hispanic (6.1% lack photo ID), or Native American, Native Alaskan, or another race (4.5%) were about twice as likely as those who identified as White non-Hispanic (2.3% lack photo ID) or Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (1.6% lack photo ID) to lack any non-expired government issued photo ID. This translates into over 1.86 million Black, over 1.86 million Hispanic, about 180,000 Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and almost 3.6 million White voting-age citizens who lacked ID.<sup>7</sup>

**Differences across race were even larger with respect to the percentage of people who did not have a current driver's license.** 24% of Hispanic, 21% of Black, 12% of Native American, Native Alaskan, or another race, 9% of Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islanders, and 8% of White voting-age citizens did not have a driver's license. That is, adult Hispanic Americans were about 3 times more likely to lack a driver's license, and adult Black Americans were about 2.5 times more likely to lack a driver's license than adult White Americans. When converting to raw numbers, we estimate that nearly 7.5 million Hispanic, 6.4 million Black, over 1 million Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islanders, and nearly 12.9 million White voting-age citizens lacked a driver's license.

**Young Black and Hispanic Americans were the least likely to have a current driver's license or any photo ID.** Thirty-nine percent of Hispanic 18-29-year-olds, 37% of Black 18-29-year-olds, and just under 17% of White 18-29-year-olds lacked a driver's license in 2020. The patterns were similar with regard to lacking any photo ID. Young people age 18-29, who identified as Hispanic were the least likely to have photo ID (12% lacked photo ID), relative to those who identified as Black non-Hispanic (10% lacked photo ID), and those who identified as White non-Hispanic (4% lacked photo ID). Young people who are Hispanic or Black are among the fastest growing populations, suggesting that the total number of people who lack ID could grow considerably in the coming years, and the extent to which voter ID laws prevent eligible voters from casting a ballot could grow considerably as a result as well.

**Individuals whose highest level of education was a high school degree or less were the least likely to have a current driver's license or any photo ID.** Over 18.5 million people who did not complete high school or whose highest level of education is a high school degree did not have a driver's license. The rate at which individuals did not possess a driver's license dropped precipitously as education level increased, 34% of adult Americans with less than a high school degree, 19% of high school graduates, 10% of those with some college experience, 5% of college graduates, and 4% of those with a graduate degree did not have a driver's license. In other words, those without a high school degree were more than 7 times more likely to lack a license than those with a college degree or more, more than 3 times more likely than those with some college experience, and almost 2 times more likely than those with a high school degree.

Nearly 5.3 million voting age citizens with a high school degree or less did not have any non-expired government issued photo ID. The rate at which individuals did not have photo ID

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<sup>7</sup> We cannot provide an estimated number of voting-age citizens who identify as Native American, Native Alaskan, or another race because the Census voting and registration tables do not provide corresponding voting-age population estimates.

also drops as education level increases, from 10% among those without a high school degree to 5% among those with a high school degree, 2% among those with some college experience, 1% among those with a college degree, and to just under 1% among those with a graduate degree. In relative terms, those without a high school degree were about 2 times more likely to lack photo ID than those with a high school degree, 4 times more likely than those with some college experience, 9 times more likely than those with a college degree, and over 10 times more likely than those with a graduate degree.

**In states with strict photo identification laws over 3 million voting-age U.S. citizens did not have a current driver's license and over 1 million did not have any non-expired government issued photo identification.** In 2020, the states of Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Wisconsin had strict photo identification laws. Applying the ANES results to population estimates from the Census reveals that almost 3.1 million adult Americans in these six states did not have a driver's license. Over 1.3 million voting-age citizens in those states likely did not have the identification needed to vote in 2020 and an additional 1.3 million had some form of non-expired government issued photo ID but did not have a driver's license or U.S. passport.

The rate at which adult Americans lacked a license or any photo ID varied across state ID law classifications. Those in states with no voter ID law were the least likely to have a driver's license (16% lacked a license), followed by those in states with non-strict photo ID (12% lacked a license), strict non-photo ID (12% lacked a license), non-strict non-photo ID (9% lacked a license), and strict photo ID (6% lacked a license). But with regard to lacking any photo ID the pattern differed; 5% of those in strict photo ID states lacked any photo ID, followed by 4% of those in no ID law states, 3% in non-strict photo ID states, 2% in non-strict non-photo ID states, and 1% in strict non-photo ID states.

Looking toward the laws in place in 2023 and beyond, Arkansas and Ohio (as of April 4, 2023) will also have strict photo ID laws. If these laws had been implemented in 2020 we estimate that nearly 1.5 million voting-age citizens would not have had any photo ID in the states with strict photo ID laws, an increase of 145,000 individuals over the estimates from the 2020 strict photo ID states. The difference with regard to lack of a driver's license is considerably larger; over 4 million people in the now 8 strict photo ID states did not have a license, an increase of over 940,000 adult Americans over the number from the 2020 strict photo ID states.

**Millions of Democrats and millions of Republicans did not have a current driver's license or any photo ID.** With respect to lacking a driver's license, Republicans were the least likely to lack a license (9% or 8.2 million lacked a license), followed by Democrats (nearly 15% or over 15 million lacked a license), and then those who did not identify with either major party (17% or over 5 million lacked a license). However, about 3% of Republicans and Democrats alike did not have any non-expired government issued photo ID. According to the ANES data, 3.4% of Democrats lacked photo ID while 2.9% of Republicans lacked photo ID. Those rates are both lower than the 4.1% of those who did not identify with either of the major parties who did not have photo ID. When translating these results across the population we estimate that just under 3.5 million Democrats, over 2.7 million Republicans, and over 1.3 million who did not identify with either party lacked photo ID.

**Those who were not registered and those who did not vote in 2020 were more likely to lack a current driver's license and lack any photo ID.** The rate at which adult Americans who were not registered to vote lacked a driver's license (30% lacked a license) was nearly 3 times higher than the rate among those who were registered (11% lacked a license). The results were similar when comparing 2020 non-voters to 2020 voters. Roughly 26% of non-voters did not have a driver's license compared to 9% of voters; that is, non-voters were about 3 times more likely to lack a driver's license than voters. While the rates among non-registrants and non-voters were higher than registrants and voters, respectively, the total number of registrants without a license (over 18 million) exceeded the number of non-registrants without a license (7.5 million), by a large margin, and the number of voters without a license (over 13 million) exceeded the number of non-voters without a license (over 10 million).

Over 10% of non-registrants did not have any photo ID. That rate is nearly four times the rate for those who were registered (2.6% lacked photo ID). But given the larger proportion of the population made up by registrants, the estimated 4.3 million registrants who did not have any photo ID is considerably larger than the nearly 2.7 million non-registrants who did not have any photo ID. Non-voters in 2020 were also much more likely to lack photo ID (8% lacked photo ID) than 2020 voters (nearly 2%, or over 4 times less likely), with an estimated 3.4 million non-voters and 2.7 million voters lacking photo ID.

**Voting-age citizens who self-identified as permanently disabled were far more likely to lack photo ID than those who were not permanently disabled.** Over 30% of those who were permanently disabled did not have a driver's license compared to 11% of those who were not permanently disabled. With regard to any photo ID, 7% of permanently disabled adult Americans did not have any photo ID compared to 3% of others. For both licenses and any photo ID, adult Americans who were permanently disabled were more than twice as likely to lack photo ID.

## **ADDITIONAL FINDINGS**

- **The percentage of voting-age students who did not have a current driver's license (22% lacked a license) was nearly twice as large as the percentage of non-students (just under 12% lacked a license).** The percentage of students who did not have any photo ID (9% lacked photo ID) was more than three times larger than the percentage of non-students who did not have any photo ID (2.9% lacked photo ID).
- There was a **strong relationship between income and lack of a driver's license.** Thirty percent (or about 4.8 million) of adult Americans earning less than \$30,000 per year did not have a driver's license compared to 18% of those earning more than \$30,000 but less than \$50,000, nearly 11% of those earning over \$50,000 but less than \$100,000, and about 6% of those earning \$100,000 or more per year. That is, the rate among the lowest income category (less than \$30,000) is about 5 times greater than the highest income category (\$100,000 or more). Nine percent (or nearly 1.5 million people) of voting-age citizens earning less than \$30,000 per year did not have any photo ID compared to 4% of those earning between \$30k and \$50k, and about 2% among those earning more than \$50k.<sup>8</sup> Again, those with the lowest income levels were about 5 times more likely than those in the top income categories to lack any photo ID.

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<sup>8</sup> The base population estimate provided by the U.S. Census is lower due to non-response on the income questions.

- The **percentage of females who lack a current driver's license (just under 14% lack a license) was higher than the percentage of males** (just under 11% lack a license). But the percentage of females and males who did not have any photo ID was nearly identical, at about 3%. However, more specific inquiry related to whether or not a respondent's license has their current name on it could potentially shed light on gender differences regarding possession of current photo ID, given that women are far more likely than men to change their names upon marriage or divorce.
- **Adult Americans who were not married were nearly three times more likely to lack a current driver's license (19% lacked a license) than married people** (just under 7% lacked a license). Those who were not married were four times more likely to lack photo ID (5.4% lacked photo ID) than those who were married (1.3% lacked photo ID).
- **Twenty-two percent of voting-age adults who did not own a home lack a current driver's license** compared to 7.5% (or nearly 3 times fewer) of homeowners. Those who did not own a home were nearly four times more likely to not have a photo ID (6.4% lacked photo ID) than those who owned a home (1.7% lacked photo ID).
- **Adult Americans who lived in a city were the most likely to lack a driver's license (17% lack a license)**, followed by those who live in a rural area or small town (11% lack a license), and 8% who live in a suburban area. The percentage of those who lived in a rural area or small town who did not have photo ID (4% lacked photo ID) was slightly larger than the percentage among those who lived in a city (3.6% lacked photo ID), and almost double the percentage among those who lived in a suburb (2.1% lacked photo ID).
- **Adult Americans born in Puerto Rico or another U.S. territory are almost three times more likely than those born in a U.S. state or Washington, DC to lack a current driver's license**, and nearly two times more likely than those born in another country to lack a driver's license (33% Puerto Rico or another U.S. territory, 18% U.S. state or DC, and 12% another country, lack a license). Just over 17% of voting-age citizens born in Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories did not have any photo ID compared to 3% of those born in a state or DC, and 3.8% born in another country. That is, adult Americans born in Puerto Rico or another U.S. territory are about 6 times more likely to lack any photo ID than adult Americans born in a state or DC, and nearly 5 times more likely than adult Americans born in another country.
- **Differences in the rate at which American adults lack a license a current driver's license or any photo ID based on mobility were relatively small.** Those who have lived at their address for less than 1 year, were only slightly less likely to lack a driver's license than those who had lived at their address for 5 or more years (12% vs. 11% lacked a license). It is possible that larger differences would result if we had data on whether current name and address were included on the license. A larger share of those who lived at their address for 1-2 years (16% lacked a license) or for 3-4 years (14% lacked a license) did not have a driver's license. Roughly 4.5% of both those who lived at the same address for a year or less and those who did so for 1-2 years did not have any photo ID, while 3% of those who lived at the same address for 3-4 years, and 2.7% of those who lived at the same address for 5 years or more did not have any photo ID.

The results from the ANES shed a great deal of light on who did not have ID in 2020. Overall, the results show that groups that have the least access to resources and political representation are the most likely to lack ID.

Among the most important findings are those related to age and race, where there were large disparities in the likelihood that individuals would have a driver's license or any photo ID.

**With growth in the overall population of young people, people of color, and young people of color—and these groups' relatively high probability of lacking ID—the potential of voter ID laws to directly or indirectly keep eligible citizens from casting a ballot is likely to rise. This will be the case even if states do not continue to rapidly pass new or stricter voter ID laws, as they have been doing steadily since 2020.** The need for efforts to make obtaining ID easy and accessible will increase. The need will be even greater if states continue to pursue stricter photo identification laws.

As informative as these results are, important gaps in knowledge remain. Future research should use the information from the ANES to guide the development of new surveys to investigate access to proof of citizenship, the extent to which one's current name and address appear on their ID, and what other types of ID individuals have. Additionally, new surveys should examine the barriers that exist for those who do not have ID.