

Explainer: SAVE, SAVE America and MEGA Acts

What These Three Election Bills Could Mean for Voters, States, and Election Officials

This explainer compares the [Safeguard American Voter Eligibility](#) (SAVE) Act, the [SAVE America Act](#), and the [Make Elections Great Again](#) (MEGA) Act to outline how each proposal would change voter registration, identification requirements, election administration, and federal enforcement. Together, these bills represent a [significant shift](#) in how federal law would shape the rules for federal elections and how states would be required to run them.

A summary table annex providing a side-by-side breakdown of the three bills can be found [here](#).

Under the Constitution, states are given the [primary authority](#) to administer elections, while Congress is given a limited role in shaping rules on federal contests. These three proposals, backed by the President and most members of the Republican Party, would move well beyond those traditional guardrails. They would impose new nationwide mandates on voter registration documentation, mandate ongoing federal voter-eligibility checks and purges, dictate confusing mail-in voting procedures, and condition federal funding on compliance. This would [centralize key voter-screening decisions](#) within federal agencies and databases controlled by the executive branch—raising significant constitutional concerns and the risk that partisan officials could influence who is able to register and remain on the rolls.

The bills are being advanced amid an unprecedented level of federal pressure on state election systems, including [Department of Justice demands](#) for sensitive voter data, calls to “nationalize” election rules, and federal law-enforcement raids involving local election offices. In that context, the unprecedented shift of authority from state and local administrators to Washington would mark a significant departure from the Constitution and long-standing practice, and would intensify concerns about political interference in election processes.

These bills are being justified by false claims of widespread noncitizen voting and election fraud – narratives that have been disproven time and time again. By focusing on problems that do not exist, these measures would divert precious time, funding, and attention away from the real and well-documented election security needs [identified by state and local officials](#), such as modernized equipment, physical security, and the recruitment and retention of election workers.

In practical terms, the bills would create new barriers for eligible voters while placing sweeping, [unfunded mandates](#) on state and local election offices. Due to documentation hurdles, stricter ballot deadlines or limited access to common voting methods, tens of millions of voters would be at risk of being excluded from the process entirely.

At the same time, these bills would force officials to rapidly overhaul existing systems, implement new training and complex verification procedures, and absorb new administrative and legal burdens without providing additional resources. Taken together, these changes would strain election infrastructure, exacerbate the [high turnover rate](#) among election officials, and put eligible voters at risk of being excluded.

By outlining the key provisions and real-world administrative and legal consequences of each bill, this explainer shows how their impacts differ in scope and what those changes could mean for voters, election officials, and our nation's election system more broadly. A summary table annex providing a side-by-side breakdown of the three bills can be found [here](#).

SAVE Act

The SAVE Act is the most narrowly focused of the three bills. It primarily targets voter registration requirements and the documentation voters must provide. While its scope is more limited, its provisions would make widesweeping changes to the front-end of the voting process where eligible voters are determined.

Documentary Proof of Citizenship (DPOC) Requirement

- Under the SAVE Act, voters would be required to present documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) in order to register to vote. These documents are also required to be shown in person each time a voter changes or updates their registration, including when voters move even within the same state, or when they change their last name.
- Over [21 million U.S. citizens](#) lack easy access to the documentary proof of citizenship. Access to these documents is closely tied to socioeconomic status, ultimately disenfranchising those of lower income or those with less education.
- In Kansas, where documentary proof of citizenship is already required, the law blocked over [30,000 potential registrants](#) – around 12% of all voter registrations – in just two years despite 99% of these potential registrants being U.S. citizens.
- DPOC is more likely to affect married women who changed their last names, as well as young and elderly voters who are less likely to have access to documents proving citizenship. DPOC does not affect just one segment of the population. It would disenfranchise voters across the country.

Mail and Online Voter Registration Effectively Eliminated

- The SAVE Act would eliminate the ability to register to vote online or by mail by requiring that voters submit DPOC in person.
- Roughly [9% of Americans](#) – more than 7 million voters – registered to vote by mail in 2022, and [43 states](#) allow online voter registration.
- This change would create new barriers for voters who rely on the convenience of remote or mail registration options. Rural voters, seniors, people with disabilities, students, military families, and workers with inflexible schedules would be most affected.
- This would significantly increase in-person traffic and paperwork for already understaffed election offices, slowing registration processing and raising the risk of errors and backlogs.

Private Right of Action to Sue Election Officials, and Criminal Penalties for Election Officials

- Expanding the legal avenue for individuals to challenge the election process could lead to an influx of baseless claims of alleged voter fraud.
- Additionally, increasing the liability of election officials could deter qualified individuals from serving as election workers, leading to worse staffing shortages and decreasing the years of expertise in an election office. It could encourage [harassment, threats and intimidation](#) and lead to politically motivated litigation that targets specific election administrators. This could exacerbate already high election official [turnover rates](#), which could lead to delays in registration and voting processes.

Voter List Verification Using Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) System

- The bill would push states to rely on the Department of Homeland Security's SAVE database for voter eligibility checks, even though it was built for public benefits verification, not for determining who can vote.
- This would centralize sensitive voter screening in a federal system run by the executive branch, raising constitutional and partisan-control concerns while duplicating verification steps states already perform more accurately.
- It would also [aggregate highly sensitive personal data](#) in a federal database without clear transparency about security, auditing, or limits on use—creating major privacy and cybersecurity risks.
- Federal verification databases have historically produced errors in which U.S. citizens are [incorrectly flagged as noncitizens](#), raising the risk of eligible voters being wrongfully removed from voter rolls.



- Relying on imperfect databases and sources would increase the administrative burden on election officials as they chase large numbers of false matches instead of focusing on proven election-security work. It would also create additional obstacles for voters attempting to correct their removal in time to participate in elections.

SAVE America Act

The SAVE America Act builds on the framework established in the SAVE Act, requiring documentary proof of citizenship to register, direct state and local election officials to rely on federal data sources such as the SAVE system, and creating a private right of action for individuals to bring lawsuits against election officials. The SAVE America Act goes even further by expanding federal control into the act of voting itself, including strict voter identification mandates and citizenship re-verification at the polls in order to cast a ballot.

All of the provisions in the SAVE Act, plus:

Nationwide, Strict Photo Voter ID Requirements for In-Person and Mail-in Voting

- The bill would require voters in every state to present one of only a narrow set of qualifying photo IDs to cast a ballot in federal elections.
- It excludes several commonly-used forms of identification, including [student IDs](#) and public assistance IDs such as Medicare and Medicaid.
- This would disproportionately impact young voters, low-income voters, and voters who may not be able to readily obtain a driver's license or Real ID. The bill permits Tribal IDs only if they include both a photo and expiration date, of which many do not, potentially disenfranchising indigenous voters.
- As of 2024, [34.5 million Americans](#) reported not having a driver's license or state ID card, or having one with the incorrect address or name. As voter ID laws become more restrictive under the SAVE America Act, the risk of disenfranchising a significant portion of the population grows.
- Currently only [23 states ask voters](#) to provide photo IDs to vote, and 13 accept non-photo identification. Imposing a nationwide photo ID mandate would not only create barriers for millions of voters, it would force states to rapidly overhaul their systems without additional funding or a phase-in period, increasing administrative strain, voter confusion, and the risk of rejected ballots.
- The bill would require those voting by mail-in ballot to include a copy of their eligible photo ID both with the absentee ballot request and when returning the ballot. This creates additional hurdles for voters, adding additional hurdles to mail-in voting.

Reaffirming Citizenship Status at the Polls

- If eligible voters are able to overcome the hurdles to registering with documentation of citizenship, they would have another hurdle to clear. They would be required to once again affirm their citizenship status at the polls, unless their jurisdiction has provided sensitive voter data to the Department of Homeland Security. This requirement adds yet another unfunded administrative burden on election officials, potentially increasing wait times at the polls.
- This provision pressures jurisdictions to share sensitive voter information with DHS, raising the same data security, data accuracy, privacy, potential for misuse, and federal control concerns outlined in the SAVE Act section above.

The SAVE America Act does not allocate additional federal funding to implement nationwide DPOC and photo ID mandates, and does not include a phase in period for jurisdictions to adjust to new systems and requirements. Without adequate time, resources and training, election officials would face heightened legal and personal scrutiny, while shouldering the administrative and financial burden of enforcing these policies. The lack of support and flexibility increases the risk of delays, inconsistent implementation, and avoidable errors, while placing election officials under heightened legal and political scrutiny.

MEGA Act

The MEGA Act is the most far reaching of the three bills, incorporating all the provisions of the SAVE Act and SAVE America Act and concentrating federal control of elections even more. In addition to including the SAVE and SAVE America Act's strict voter ID and DPOC requirements, centralized voter list screening using the error-prone SAVE system, and private rights of action against election officials, the MEGA Act would impose new mandates on voter roll purges, mail-in voting, and federal funding compliance. By dramatically expanding federal authority, the bill represents the most aggressive attempt to override traditional state and local control of elections.

All of the provisions in the SAVE and SAVE America Acts, plus:

Ballots Must Be Received By Election Day

- The bill would require ballots to be received by election officials on or before Election Day to be counted in federal races, even if they are postmarked by Election Day.
- Currently 15 jurisdictions, representing [43% of voters](#) in the 2024 election, allow mail ballots to arrive after Election Day, so long as they are postmarked by

Election Day. Eliminating this flexibility could lead to a bifurcated system like [Arizona's](#), which has faced intense scrutiny over the years.

- Removing this option could lead to confusion, unequal access to the ballot across states, and greater scrutiny of election results. It could disadvantage voters who rely on mail voting, since delivery delays caused by weather, mail volume, or logistical issues could prevent ballots from being received on time.

Eliminates Universal Vote By Mail

- In some states, all registered voters automatically receive a mail-in ballot regardless of whether or not they requested to vote by mail. At least [eight states as well as Washington D.C.](#), and certain jurisdictions in Nebraska and North Dakota, participate in universal vote by mail systems.
- Under the MEGA Act, voters would instead have to request a mail-in ballot for every election, adding steps that could lower participation particularly among older adults, rural voters, and people with disabilities.

Eliminates Permanent Mail-in Voter Lists

- Permanent mail voters lists allow voters to automatically receive a ballot for every election without submitting repeated requests, helping to streamline participation and reduce administrative errors. [Nine states and Washington D.C.](#) currently allow all voters to join a permanent absentee voting list.
- Eliminating these lists would require voters to actively request a ballot for every election, adding extra steps that could lead to missed deadlines, lower turnout and processing delays. It could also increase workloads for election officials who would need to handle more requests and verify eligibility repeatedly.

Restricts Voter Assistance for Ballot Return

- The MEGA Act would limit who can return someone else's ballot and cap how many ballots one person may submit, affecting family members and caregivers who commonly assist voters. Individuals returning ballots on behalf of someone else must present election officials with photo ID and an affidavit signed by the voter.
- These restrictions would disproportionately impact older adults, voters with disabilities, and those in areas with limited drop off options, increasing the risk that eligible voters cannot return their ballots on time. They could increase administrative burdens as well. Election administrators would need to monitor compliance and could face legal challenges if errors occur.

Federal Voter Roll Maintenance Requirements

Purging Voter Rolls Every 30 Days

- States would be required to purge and update voter registration lists once every 30 days, using the error-prone SAVE system and Social Security records to identify and flag potential “ineligible voters.”
- Frequent large scale purges increase the risk that eligible voters will be mistakenly removed from registration lists, creating confusion and forcing voters to go through the tedious and time consuming process of re-registering that is created under MEGA. Past errors in [Virginia](#) and [New York](#) indicate that purges can disenfranchise voters.

Flagged Voters on Publicly Available Lists

- Voters flagged as ineligible during list purges would be placed on a publicly accessible list while they are given time to prove their eligibility and avoid being removed from the lists
- Making flagged voter information public could expose them to harassment or voter intimidation. Posting personal information could raise concerns about privacy and security, placing vulnerable populations at risk and undermining confidence in election systems.

Eliminating the 90-Day “Quiet Period”

- The MEGA Act would eliminate the current 90-day “quiet period” created under the National Voter Registration Act, during which election officials are prohibited from cancelling voter registrations or purging voters in the lead up to an election.
- Shortening or eliminating this period increases the risk of eligible voters being removed without sufficient notice, preventing them from having the opportunity to correct the error before registration deadlines.

Centralized Statewide Voter Registration List

- Under MEGA, states would be required to create “a single, centralized, [statewide voter registration list](#)” that contains the name, registration information, and a unique identifier, consolidating local, state and federal data.
- Building and maintaining such a [system](#) could take years and significant resources, yet the bill provides no additional funding to support the undertaking of this project.

- Merging multiple data sources increases the risk of errors or accidental removal of eligible voters, while the scale of the system could heighten scrutiny of [election officials](#), increase workloads and lead to potential disenfranchisement.

Federal Enforcement Authority

- The bill would mandate that federal funds used to administer federal elections cannot be used without Attorney General certification. The Attorney General would also have the authority to enforce compliance including taking [legal action](#) against states that fail to meet the law's requirements.
- Giving funding authority to a partisan, presidentially-appointed federal official would make election administration vulnerable to politicization.
- This makes election administration vulnerable to politicization and pressures states to align policies with the administration in power.

Requires Paper Ballots for All Federal Races

- The bill would require voter-verifiable paper ballots for all federal elections, either manually marked by the voter or via a ballot-marking device.
- Requiring a voter-verifiable paper audit trail for all federal races would be a positive step for transparency. However, the MEGA Act would take this a step too far by every in-person location to provide voters the option of a hand-marked paper ballot.
- This would be a major operational shift (and unfunded mandate) for states and jurisdictions that currently do not offer hand-marked paper ballots as an option.

Bans Ranked Choice Voting for Federal Races

- The bill would ban ranked choice voting in federal races, having an immediate impact on [Alaska, Maine and Washington D.C.](#)
- More broadly, this would limit the flexibility of states to adopt voting systems tailored to their infrastructure and voter preferences. In Maine, for example, [57% of voters](#) support ranking candidates.

The MEGA Act would centralize voter screening and election administration in the federal executive branch, impose massive administrative and legal burdens on election officials, create significant new barriers for voters, and raise serious privacy, cybersecurity, and constitutional concerns. Millions of eligible voters could face new hurdles to participation, while states would lose autonomy over how elections are conducted.

Appendix: Summary of Provisions in the SAVE, SAVE America, and MEGA Acts

Measure	SAVE Act	SAVE America Act	MEGA Act
Documentary proof of citizenship for voter registration and registration updates	X	X	X
Eliminates online and mail in voter registration	X	X	X
Verification of voter eligibility using with SAVE system, SSN Verification Service, and state agencies	X	X	X
Private right of action for individuals to sue election officials	X	X	X
Criminal penalties for election officials	X	X	X
ID required for absentee ballot request		X	X
Strict photo ID required to vote		X	X
Ends universal mail-in voting			X
Eliminates permanent absentee voter lists			X
Mail-in ballots must be received by Election night			X
States required to conduct monthly voter list purges			X
Ineligible voters from purges placed on publicly available list			X
Use of voter verifiable paper ballots for all federal elections			X
States create a statewide voter registration list			X
Bans ranked choice voting for federal elections			X
Federal funding tied to compliance, and certified by Attorney General			X