



ISSUE BRIEF

MORE THAN 1 IN 4 ELIGIBLE DETROIT VOTERS CANNOT READILY PRODUCE A CURRENT, NAME-MATCHED PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP. WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

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BY MARA CECILIA OSTFELD AND YUCHENG FAN

M | **DMACS** DETROIT METRO AREA
COMMUNITIES STUDY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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OVERVIEW

This brief highlights findings from a recent survey by the [Detroit Metro Area Communities Study](#) (DMACS) at the University of Michigan, commissioned by and conducted in partnership with [Outlier Media](#), examining Detroit residents' access to the citizenship documents that proposed federal and state legislation would require, or encourage states to require, in order to register to vote. The survey was fielded between June 22 and August 31, 2026, and it captures the views of a representative sample of 1,832 Detroit residents who are eligible voters.¹ Results have been weighted to reflect the population of Detroit. See [full results from DMACS surveys here](#). [Findings from the survey can be found here](#).

For guidance on what documents to bring to your polling place, see [Outlier Media's Voter ID Guide here](#).

INTRODUCTION

Congress has spent much of the past two years debating whether to require documentary proof of U.S. citizenship — such as a birth certificate, passport, or naturalization certificate — to register to vote in federal elections. The House passed an initial version, the SAVE Act, in April 2025, and an expanded version, the SAVE America Act, in

February 2026; both have stalled in the Senate. Proponents of these rules are now pursuing these requirements through Congress' budget process.² Rather than requiring states to adopt a documentary proof-of-citizenship requirement, this approach would offer up to \$10 billion in federal funding to states that choose to adopt one. It remains unclear whether this incentive program will survive the Senate's rules governing what can be included in a reconciliation bill.

Michigan is weighing its own requirement, which would apply specifically to voter registration and is more directly relevant to Detroit voters. House Bill 4765 would require the Secretary of State to verify a registrant's citizenship, either through existing state and federal databases or through a document such as a birth certificate or passport (a name change would additionally require documentation such as a marriage license).³ Applicants the state cannot verify would be registered as "federal-only voters," able to vote in federal but not state or local races. The bill passed the Michigan House along party lines in April 2026 and has since stalled in the Senate. A separate effort to place a similar requirement in the state constitution failed to qualify for the November ballot after both the Michigan and U.S. Supreme Courts declined to intervene; its backers are reportedly aiming for 2028.⁴

Supporters of these measures frame them as safeguards against noncitizen voting. Opponents note that federal law already requires voters to be citizens, and people who lie about that can be charged with a crime. Additionally, cases of non-citizens registering to vote are very rare, and these rules may keep many more eligible citizens from voting than non-citizens.⁵ When Kansas adopted a similar documentary proof-of-citizenship law, it blocked an estimated 31,000 eligible citizens — about 12% of applicants — from registering, even though almost no noncitizens had been found on the state's voter rolls beforehand.⁶ National estimates suggest that more than 21 million voting-age citizens may not have easy access to the documentation that these laws require, with the burden falling hardest on residents who have changed their name (commonly through marriage), whose documents have expired, or who cannot locate the underlying paperwork on short notice.⁷

This brief uses DMACS survey data to ask how many eligible voters in Detroit could currently produce a citizenship document that is readily accessible, current, and shows their current legal name, which is the kind of documentation these proposals would generally require. By extension, it estimates how many eligible Detroit voters would be at risk of losing access to voter registration if such a requirement were adopted.



MOST DETROITERS HAVE A CITIZENSHIP DOCUMENT, BUT MORE THAN 1 IN 4 DETROIT ADULTS LIKELY FACE AT LEAST ONE BARRIER

- Ninety-one percent (91%) of Detroiters say they could quickly find a citizenship document, such as a birth certificate, passport, or naturalization papers, if asked to show one tomorrow.^{8,9} The remaining 9% either do not have one they could quickly find (5%) or are not sure or did not answer (4%).
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of Detroiters say they could quickly find a citizenship document that is current. Another 10% can find a document but say it is expired or not current, and 4% are unsure whether it is current or did not answer.¹⁰
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of Detroiters say they could quickly find a citizenship document that is both current and shows their current legal name. Another 4% have a current document they could quickly find but say it does not reflect their current legal name (3%) or are unsure whether it does or did not answer (1%).¹¹
- Taken together, about 27% of Detroiters could not produce a current, name-matched citizenship document tomorrow, are unsure whether they could, or did not answer.

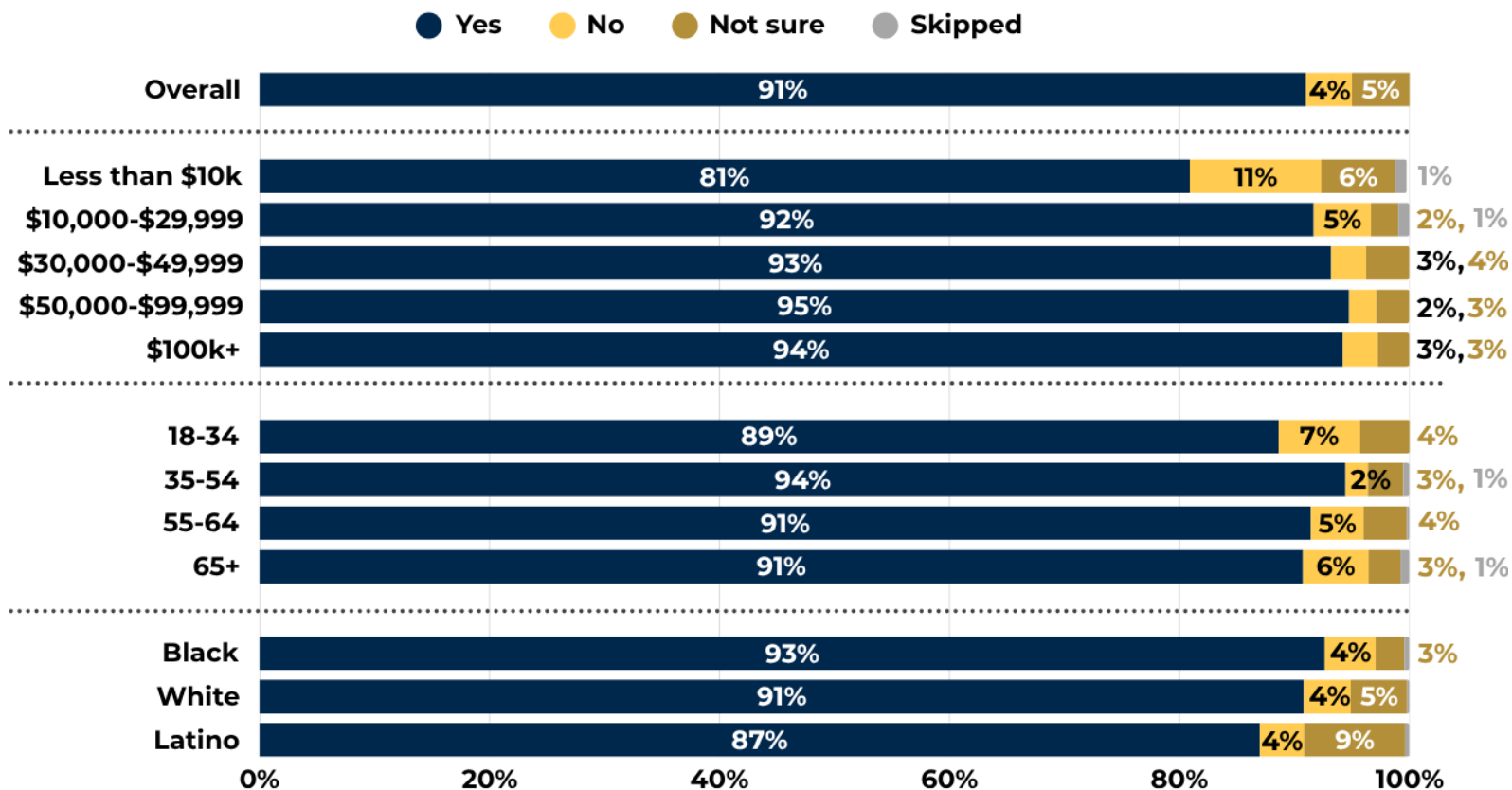
Figure 1: Detroit residents' readiness to quickly produce a current, name-matched citizenship document



DETROITERS IN THE LOWEST-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO FIND A CITIZENSHIP DOCUMENT

- Having a document somewhere is not the same as being able to put a hand on it. About 9% of Detroiters say they could not find proof of citizenship if they had to show it tomorrow (5%) or are not sure that they could (4%).
- The lack of easy access to citizenship documents is concentrated among the lowest-income households. Among residents in households earning under \$10,000, 18% say they could not find a document or are unsure they could, more than twice the rate of any other income group.
- Younger adults also stand out. Over one in ten (11%) of Detroiters ages 18–34 say they could not or are not sure they could readily find a document, versus 5% of those ages 35–54, and 9% of those ages 55–64 and 65 and over.

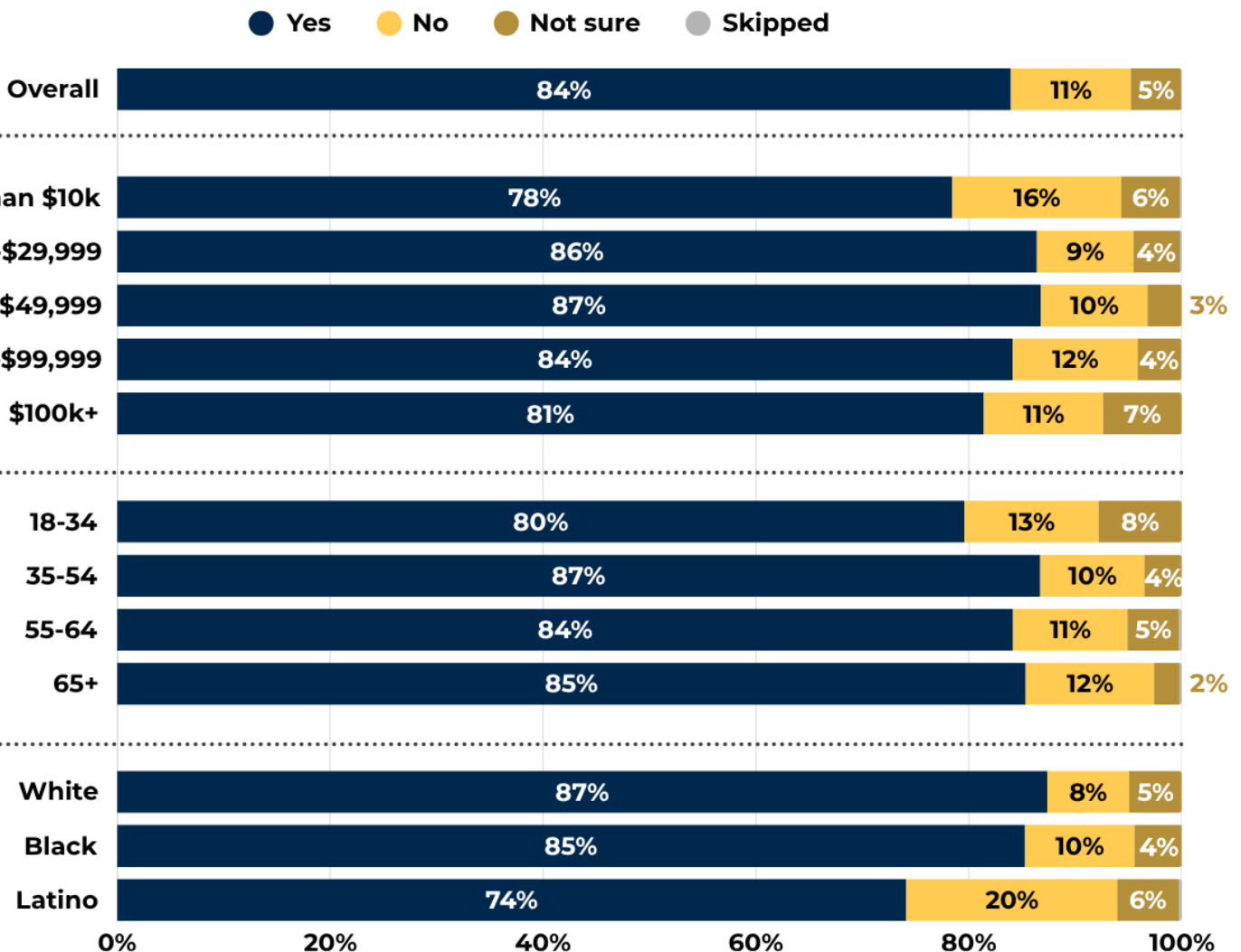
Figure 2: Detroit residents with citizenship documents within easy reach, by income, age, and racial groups



EXPIRED DOCUMENTS ARE A BARRIER ACROSS DETROIT BUT ARE MORE COMMON AMONG LATINO RESIDENTS

- Among the 91% of Detroiters who can find a citizenship document, 11% say none of the documents they can find is current/not expired,¹² and another 5% are unsure.
- Unlike being able to find one's citizenship documents, expired documents are not concentrated among younger or lower-income Detroiters.
- Expired documents are most common among Latino Detroiters. About a quarter (26%) of Latino residents with a findable document report that at least some of their citizenship documents are (20%) or may be (6%) expired. By comparison, about 15% of Black Detroiters, and 13% of White Detroiters report that their citizenship documents are or may be expired.
- The pattern does not appear to be driven by foreign-born Latino residents. About 24% of U.S.-born Latino residents with a findable document say none is current or are unsure, similar to the 23% of foreign-born Latino residents, though that estimate is imprecise.^{13,14}

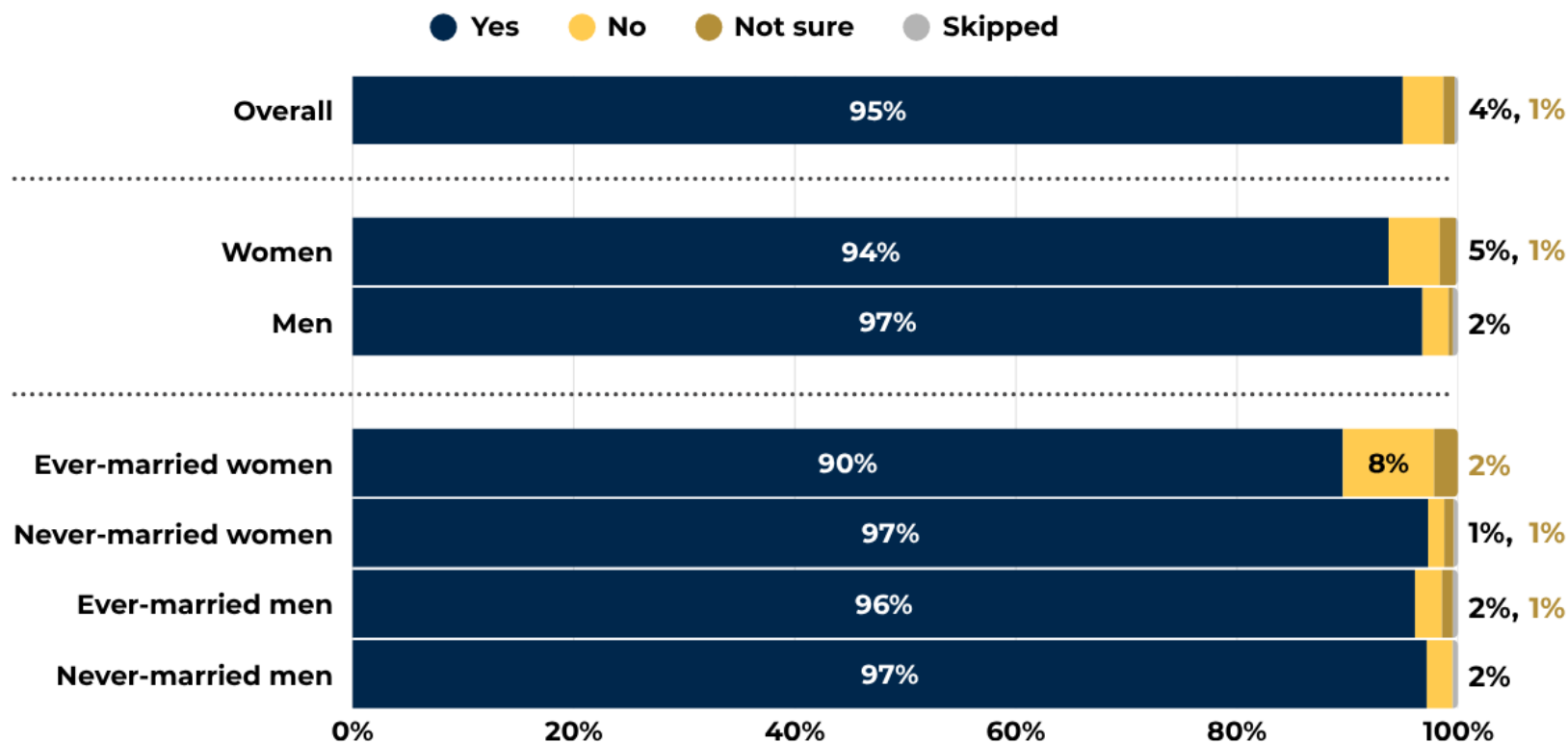
Figure 3: Detroit residents with unexpired citizenship documents within easy reach, by income, age and racial groups



ABOUT 1 IN 10 WOMEN WHO HAVE EVER MARRIED MAY HAVE A CITIZENSHIP DOCUMENT THAT DOESN'T MATCH THEIR CURRENT LEGAL NAME

- Among residents with a findable, current document, 4% say their documents do not show their current legal name, and another 1% are unsure if their documents show their current legal name.
- Women (6%) are about twice as likely as men (3%) to report that there is or may be a name mismatch on their citizenship documents.
- The gap is concentrated among women who have ever been married. Among ever-married women, 10% report a mismatch or are unsure, compared with 2% of never-married women, 3% of ever-married men, and 2% of never-married men. Among never-married residents, women and men are equally likely to report a mismatch.

Figure 4: Detroit residents with unexpired, name-matched citizenship documents within easy reach, by gender and marital status



AUTHORS

Mara Cecilia Ostfeld is a faculty co-lead of the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study and a Research Associate Professor at the Center for Political Studies and the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan.

Yucheng Fan is the Data Manager at the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Because these proposals concern voter registration, all analyses in this brief are restricted to respondents who are eligible to vote. For the purposes of brevity, references to 'Detroiters' or 'Detroit residents' refer to eligible Detroit voters in this brief.
- 2 Congress' budget process (the budget reconciliation process) lets the Senate pass bills about spending and taxes with just 51 votes instead of the usual 60 that are required to stop a legislative filibuster.
- 3 H.B. 4765, 103rd Leg., Reg. Sess. (Mich. 2025), <https://legislature.mi.gov/Bills/Bill?ObjectName=2025-HB-4765>
- 4 Hayley Harding, "[Citizenship Voting Proposal Kept Off Ballot by US, Michigan Supreme Courts](#)," *Bridge Michigan*, September 4, 2026 (originally published by Votebeat).
- 5 Elaine Kamarck, "[Why Do So Few Noncitizens Try to Vote?](#)" Brookings Institution, July 23, 2026.
- 6 Bipartisan Policy Center, "[Six Things to Know About the SAVE America Act](#)," updated July 17, 2026.
- 7 Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, University of Maryland, "[Citizen Voter ID Survey: Key Results](#)," June 2024.
- 8 Throughout this brief, percentages are rounded and may not sum to 100%.
- 9 Respondents were asked, "Do you have any citizenship documents (U.S. birth certificate, U.S. passport, or U.S. naturalization papers) in a place where you can quickly find it if you had to show it tomorrow?" Response options were "Yes," "No," and "Not sure."
- 10 Respondents who said they could quickly find a citizenship document were asked, "Are any of these documents that you can find quickly current/not expired?" Response options were "Yes," "No," and "Not sure." Percentages are reported as a share of all respondents who are eligible Detroit voters.
- 11 Respondents who said they could quickly find a citizenship document and that at least one of those documents was current were asked, "Do any of these documents that you can find quickly and are not expired have your current name on it (as opposed to a maiden name)?" Response options were "Yes," "No," and "Not sure." Percentages are reported as a share of all respondents who are eligible Detroit voters.
- 12 Birth certificates and naturalization certificates do not expire, but other documents that can denote citizenship status such as passports, military IDs (when shown with military service records), and REAL ID-compliant licenses do expire.
- 13 This estimate only includes 23 foreign born Latinos and is therefore imprecise.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on DMACS, please contact
Sharon Sand, DMACS project manager, at
slsand@umich.edu.

Learn more at www.detroitsurvey.umich.edu
