

## **Rural and Small Town Texas Citizens More Likely To Be Impacted By Documentary Proof of Citizenship to Vote Mandates**

Legislation before Texas lawmakers would create additional burdens for eligible Texas to prove their citizenship before being allowed to vote. Proof of citizenship mandates, like those in S.B. 16/H.B. 5337, would add unnecessary, untested steps to Texas's strong existing election safeguards, burdening millions of Texas citizens and election administrators.

The Texas constitution and Texas statutes – as well as federal law – are clear that one must be a U.S. citizen to vote in Texas elections. Texas has strong safeguards already in place to make sure that only citizens can vote – including requirements to use a Texas driver license, ID card, or Social Security number to register, and strict voter ID laws at the polls and for vote-by-mail.

### **Rural, small-town voters less likely to have citizenship documents**

Many eligible Texas citizens would have to present a U.S. passport, birth certificate, or naturalization papers to register to vote or stay on the voter rolls if S.B. 16/H.B. 5337 became law. **This mandate is likely to be especially burdensome for voters in Texas's rural counties.**

A Secure Democracy USA analysis of U.S. State Department, U.S. Census Bureau and Texas Department of State data, as well as responses to consumer and academic surveys, shows that **Texas voters in rural counties or counties with the smallest metro areas are generally less likely to have access to the proof-of-citizenship documentation** mandated by S.B. 16/H.B. 5337. These counties tend to have a higher share of voters with disabilities, more families whose income is below the state average, and larger vote margins for President Trump.

### **Many citizens living in rural counties, small towns do not have passports**

**Voters in smaller, rural counties are less likely to have a U.S. passport:** In 114 of the 185 non-urban, small town, or rural counties in Texas, the estimated percentage of U.S. adults that do not have valid a U.S. passport is 38% or higher.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the estimated

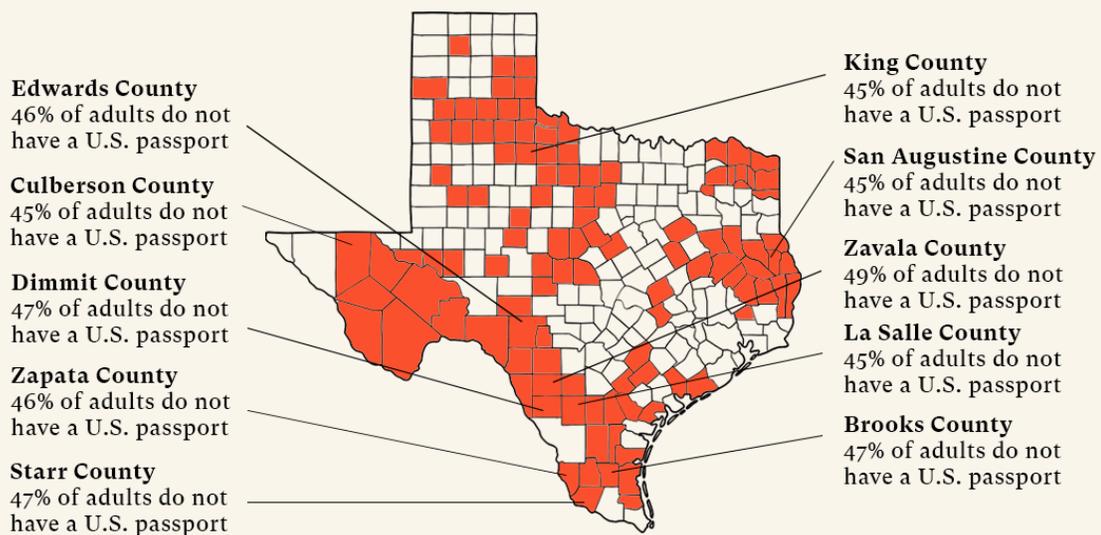
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<sup>1</sup> Passport holding rates are estimated based on varied county income tiers, using income categories from 2023 [YouGov/Economist survey](#).

percentage of adults without U.S. passports is generally lower—but not insignificant—in more populous counties, including in Harris (37%), Dallas (36%), Tarrant (34%), Bexar (36%), Travis (31%), Collin (29%), Denton (29%), and Fort Bend (30%).

## Voters in Smaller, Rural Counties Are Less Likely to Have a U.S. Passport

In 62% of non-urban, small town, or rural Texas counties, it's estimated that 38% or more of adults lack a valid U.S. passport.



Source: YouGov/Economist Survey 2023

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## Many urban and rural Texans do not have current birth certificates

Many voting-age adults do not have birth certificates matching their current name – because they got married and took their spouse’s name, for example. Nationally, there are nearly 69 million married women who have changed their last names and lack an original birth certificate with their current last name.<sup>2</sup>

In 14 Texas counties, upwards of **half of the voting-age population is estimated to have changed their name due to marriage** and may not be able to present an updated birth certificate.<sup>3</sup> Most of these counties are rural, but several are more urban, Trump-leaning

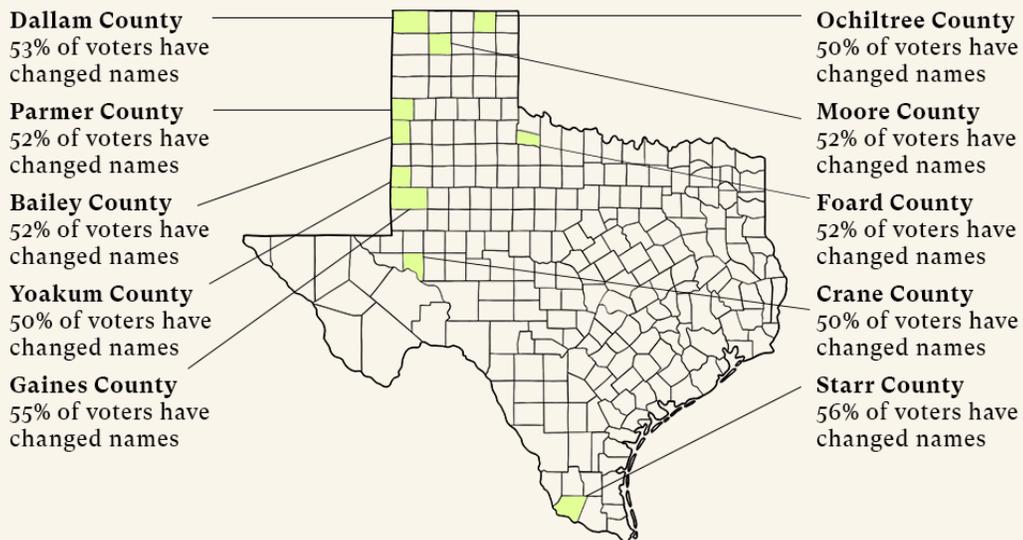
<sup>2</sup> Newsweek, “[Married Women Could Be Stopped From Voting Under SAVE Act.](#)” February 11, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Name change rates are estimates based on U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, [Table S0501](#), 2023, accessed on February 10, 2025; and Pew Research Center, “[About 8 in 10 women in opposite-sex marriages say they took their husband’s last name.](#)” September 7, 2023.

counties, such as Hidalgo (55%), Webb (53%), and Maverick (51%).

## Many Voters Do Not Have Birth Certificates That Match Their Current Name

In 10 rural Texas counties, upwards of half of voting-age adults are estimated to have changed their name due to marriage.



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Pew Research Center

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### President Trump performed best in rural counties – where passport access is lower

According to national consumer data and surveys, **supporters of President Trump and key GOP voting blocs are less likely to have access to a valid passport** than others. Nine of the 10 Texas counties where President Trump performed best in 2024 were rural counties and those with the smallest metro areas.

Nationally, a 2023 YouGov survey found that 55% of Republican voters and 52% of Trump 2020 voters reported they lacked a valid U.S. passport.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, large majorities of key

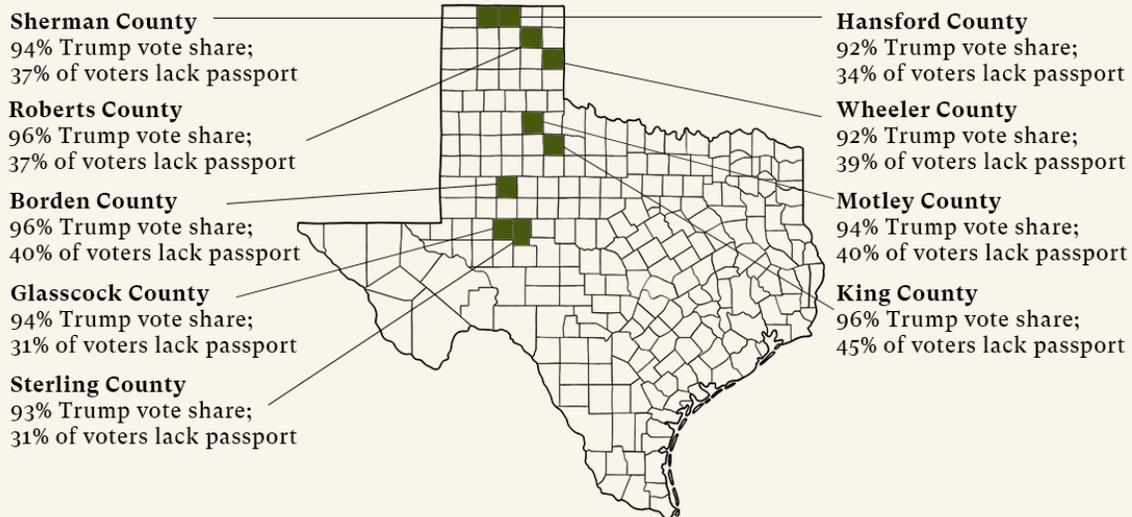
<sup>4</sup> YouGov/Economist, "[Survey: Passports](#)." August 2023.

Republican voting groups lack a valid passport, according to the American Communities Project.<sup>5</sup> This includes:

- 62% U.S. adults who live in Evangelical hubs
- 58% of working class U.S. adults
- 53% of U.S. adults in rural middle America (compared to 38% of adults in big cities)
- 53% of U.S. adults in aging farmlands
- 52% of U.S. adults near military posts

## President Trump Performed Best in Rural Counties – Where Passport Access is Lower

In the 9 Texas counties with strongest support for President Trump in 2024, at least 30% of voters lack a U.S. passport.



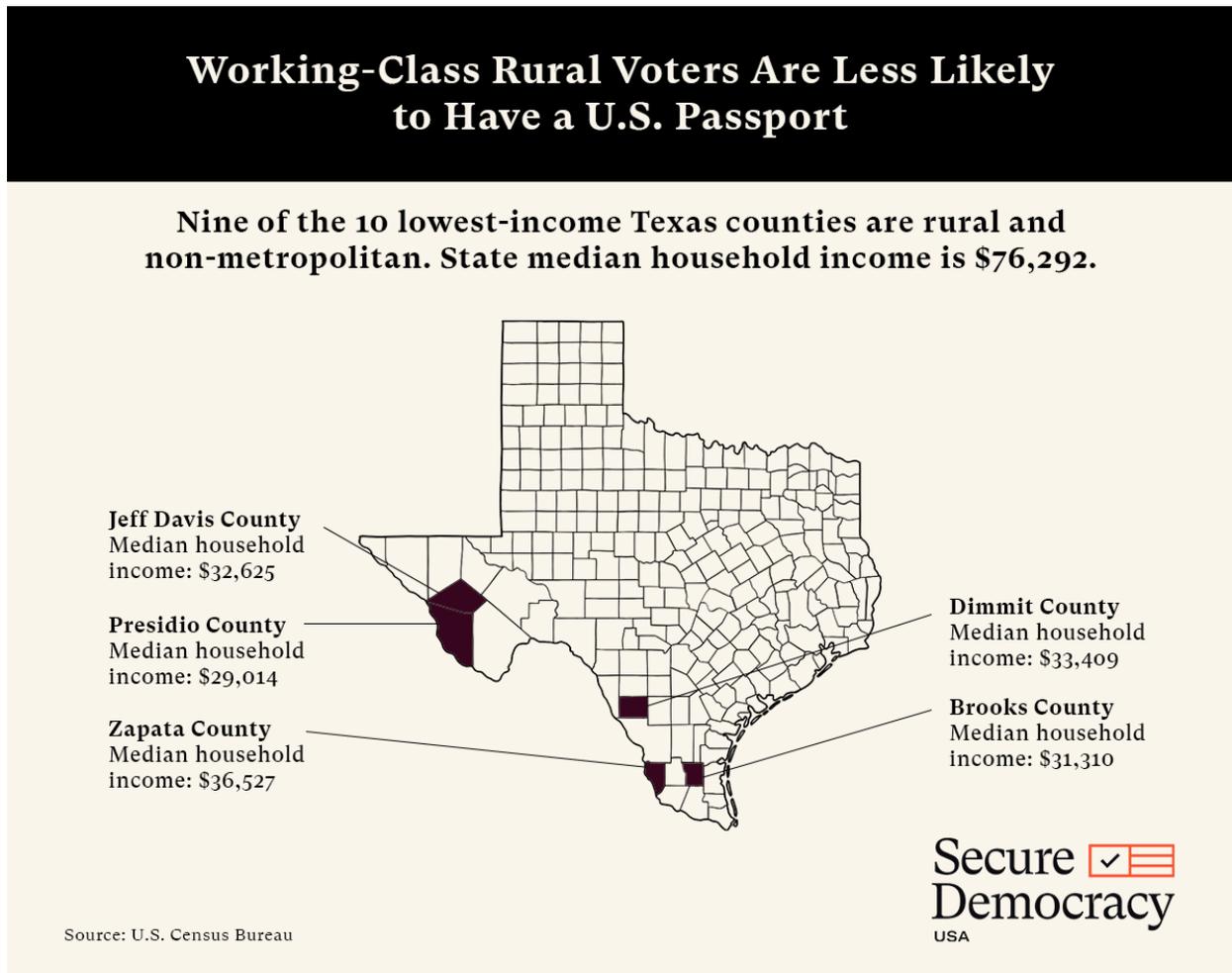
Sources: Texas Secretary of State and YouGov/Economist survey



<sup>5</sup> American Communities Project, "[Who Owns a Passport in America?](#)" March 19, 2023.

## Working-class rural voters more likely to lack document access

Numerous studies have found that lower-income voters are less likely to have a U.S. passport. In Texas, **lower-income families tend to be concentrated in rural and small-town counties**: household income in all but 14 of Texas's 185 non-urban, small town, or rural counties are below the state average, and nine of the state's 10 lowest-income counties are rural and non-metropolitan counties.<sup>6</sup>



Obtaining proof-of-citizenship documentation can be particularly burdensome for lower-income households. It currently costs \$165 to obtain or renew a passport.<sup>7</sup> Fees for obtaining a birth certificate from Texas's state and county health departments are at least \$22.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, [Table B19013](#), 2023. Accessed on April 6, 2025.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State, "[Passport Fees](#)." Accessed on February 5, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Texas Secretary of State, "[Costs and Fees: Birth Records](#)." Accessed April 14, 2025.

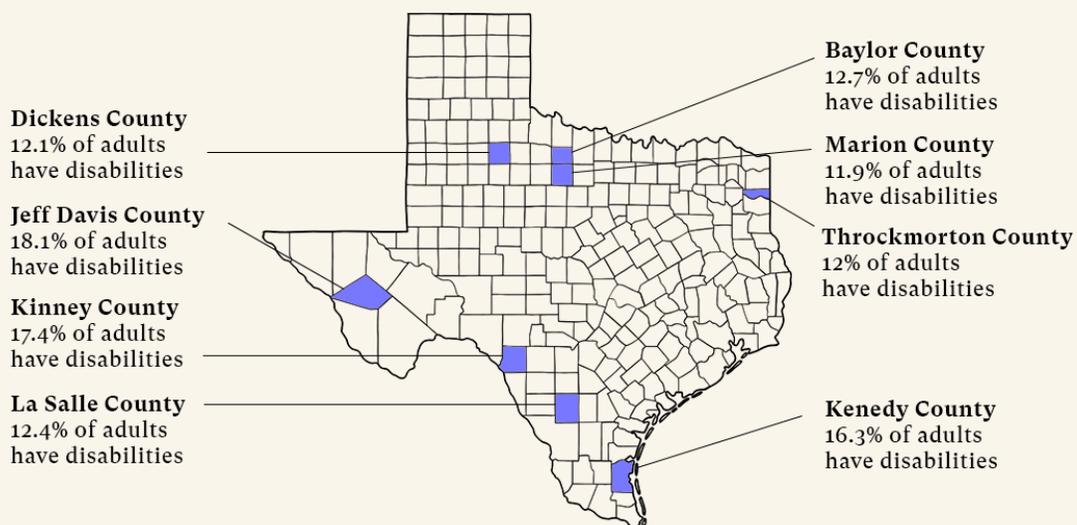
## Rural voters with disabilities face particular challenges

Eight of the 10 counties with the highest share of adults with disabilities are rural and small-town counties.<sup>9</sup> National surveys of voting-age adults indicate that **Americans with disabilities are less likely to possess or have ready access to citizenship documentation** such as a passport, birth certificate, or naturalization papers.<sup>10</sup>

Without reliable access to a car, and with limited or irregular office hours, disabled adults who live in rural regions and small towns might also struggle to reach federal or state agencies, DPS branches, or elections offices to obtain and provide the documentation they need to vote.

### Americans With Disabilities Are Less Likely to Have Access to Citizenship Documentation

Eight of the 10 Texas counties with the highest share of adults with disabilities are rural and small-town counties.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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**Secure Democracy USA** is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization building stronger elections, state by state. We advocate for practical election policy solutions guided by research and supported across the ideological spectrum.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, [Table B18101](#), 2023. Accessed on April 6, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> University of Maryland Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, "[Which U.S. citizens lack easy access to documentary proof of citizenship?](#)" April 10, 2025.