

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS & BLACK COMMUNITIES

Identity documents (IDs) are vital keys necessary to open the doors to so many parts of everyday life. However, there are key system-level failures that create significant obstacles to IDs for many people, causing severe, yet avoidable harm. This infographic highlights some of the unique impacts on Black communities. See MAP's [new report](#) to learn more about the obstacles to ID, the harms caused from a lack of ID, and recommendations for improving ID access for everyone.

SYSTEM FAILURES CREATE OBSTACLES TO ACCURATE ID



Burdensome documentation requirements often mean a person needs one form of ID (such as a birth certificate) to get another ID (such as a driver's license). But legal segregation meant many Black people were routinely denied equal access to hospitals, even for childbirth, and as a result many older Black Americans still alive today were never issued birth certificates. The Brennan Center estimates that 6-7% of all U.S. adults, or 15-18 million people, have no access to the documents needed to prove their birth or citizenship.



IDs are needlessly expensive, with a new driver's license costing an average of 4.1 hours of work at minimum wage—not including the costs of time waiting at or traveling to an ID office. Costs are even higher in the South, home to the largest share of the Black population. And, due to centuries of discrimination, Black communities face higher rates of poverty and are more likely to work low-wage jobs. This is especially true for Black LGBTQ people, Black people with disabilities, and others who face even higher rates of poverty.



Discrimination has been and remains a central experience for Black communities in the United States, including discriminatory policies and practices about IDs. As noted above, many Black Americans were denied access to hospitals and therefore birth certificates. Today, discriminatory treatment by law enforcement leads to Black Americans being disproportionately pulled over, searched, and fined, which in turn contributes to higher rates of suspended driver's licenses among people of color, often due to the inability to pay these fines and fees.

LACK OF ID CAUSES CONCRETE, YET AVOIDABLE HARM



Overall, **21%** of Black adults lack a valid driver's license, compared to 12% of all adults.



A lack of ID **blocks access to basic needs**, such as housing, health care, or employment. People of color, and especially Black people, face higher rates of suspended driver's licenses, and research shows that suspended licenses often lead to job losses or significant pay cuts—and this loss of income in turn makes it harder to pay the fines needed to reinstate their license.

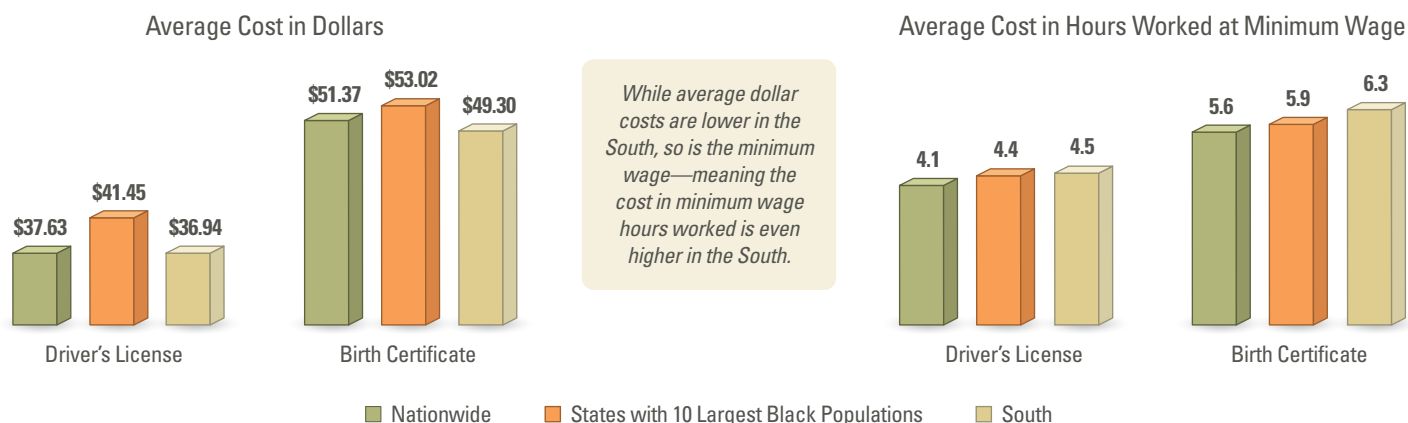


A lack of ID **limits access to essential services**, such as banking, which requires an ID. Having a bank account is critical for economic security and stability, but in 2019, the FDIC reported that 13.8% of Black households were “unbanked”—meaning no one in the house had a checking or savings account. This is significantly higher than the nationwide rate of unbanked households (5.4%), and even more so than the rate of unbanked White households (2.5%).



A lack of ID **restricts participation in civic life**. Research shows strict voter ID laws disproportionately harm Black voters and other voters of color, including through rejected registrations and ballots, decreased voter turnout, and much more. For example, in 2018, a Georgia law about IDs and voter registration led to more than 51,000 voter registrations being flagged—and over 80% of those were Black, Latino, or Asian voters. The law was overturned in 2019 following a lawsuit.

AVERAGE COST OF DRIVER'S LICENSE AND BIRTH CERTIFICATES ARE HIGHER IN STATES WITH LARGEST BLACK POPULATIONS



Note: Each state's ID costs are matched to that state's minimum wage. For more detail on these graphs, visit this infographic's citations [here](#).

VOTER ID LAWS TARGETING BLACK VOTERS WITH "ALMOST SURGICAL PRECISION"

The United States has a long history of creating obstacles to voting, and particularly so for Black people. After the abolition of slavery, access to the ballot box for Black people was routinely prevented by literacy tests, poll taxes, voter intimidation tactics, and violence. The 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) was vital to dismantling these and other barriers to the ballot box for millions of voters, including in the South, which is home to the majority of Black Americans and home to some of the harshest efforts to restrict the right to vote.

However, in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down key pieces of the VRA in a case called *Shelby County v. Holder*, drastically changing the landscape across the country, but especially in the South. Immediately after the Court's ruling, and continuing today, states that had previously been required to seek federal permission to make changes to their voting rules instead pushed forward sweeping changes—emboldening other states to do so as well.

For example, just weeks after the 2013 *Shelby* decision, North Carolina passed a strict voter ID law. In 2016, that law was struck down by a federal court for targeting Black voters with, in the judges' words, "almost surgical precision." The state passed yet another photo ID law in 2018, and that too was struck down a few years later, with the judges ruling that the law "was motivated at least in part by an unconstitutional intent to target African American voters." Researchers at the time found that Black voters in recent elections in the state were about twice as likely as white voters to lack qualifying forms of ID.

Currently, five Southern states (and 10 states nationwide) require photo ID to vote, with many more considering similar legislation. Another six Southern states request photo ID, and research shows that people of color are more likely to be asked for ID even when ID is not legally required. These laws create obstacles for many voters, including older people, people of color, rural residents, people with low incomes, and transgender people—all populations which are either less likely to have a government ID, less able to travel to or access a state ID-issuing office, or both. Combined with the financial cost associated with obtaining a form of ID that meets these states' strict requirements, these strict photo ID laws and other system failures about IDs create significant obstacles to vote for millions of people, and particularly for Black residents.

Adapted from: North Carolina Public Radio's "[Plaintiffs Say North Carolina's Photo ID Law Suppresses Black Voters](#)" (Apr 9, 2021) and "[North Carolina Judges Strike Down State's Voter ID Law](#)" (Sept 17, 2021).

Learn more about identity documents in MAP's new report:

THE ID DIVIDE: HOW BARRIERS TO ID IMPACT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND AFFECT US ALL

<http://www.mapresearch.org/id-documents-report>

