

The Costs of Implementing Documentary Proof of Citizenship Bills

Lessons from Arizona, Kansas, and Other States

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Introduction

Documentary Proof of Citizenship (DPOC) bills have captured the imagination of federal and state lawmakers across the country since the reintroduction of the federal Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act in early 2025. In the months that followed, a deluge of states introduced their own versions of the bill.¹

These bills vary in specifics but generally require all voters to present documented proof of their citizenship whenever they register or re-register to vote — often in person, and with strict limitations on what counts as proof of citizenship. Recently, advocates and lawmakers have devoted much attention to the ways that DPOC bills will disenfranchise many eligible voters and disproportionately harm voters of color, low-income voters, disabled voters, military and overseas voters, and married women voters. Less attention has been paid to the financial and administrative burdens these proposals impose on states and local governments, however. While both are important considerations, we focus on the latter in this white paper.

Our research shows that a DPOC system can cost a state millions of dollars to implement, maintain, and defend. Requiring applicants to present proof of citizenship significantly slows down and complicates the voter registration process. For each jurisdiction that passes such a bill, election officials need to develop and implement procedures for evaluating every applicant's citizenship documents and recording the results. This involves changing voter registration forms, contacting voters about registration deficiencies, overhauling online databases, implementing data privacy protections for digital copies of documents, retraining all election officials to recognize and handle DPOC, accounting for staff time to review copies of DPOC, and, if a state's law mandates it, devoting additional staff time to ongoing voter roll purges.² Moreover, every jurisdiction that passes such a bill should significantly invest in voter education to make sure that voters know what documents they need and how to get them by registration deadlines.³ Yet, as our findings demonstrate, DPOC bills' fiscal notes and similar analyses tend to grossly underestimate or completely ignore such costs.

Nor is there a singular, reliable database with citizenship information that could assist election officials in verifying citizenship. Federal systems like SAVE are not definitive,⁴ and state motor vehicle databases are not sufficiently up to date regarding citizenship information to be reliable.⁵ As a result, the costs compound once errors concerning voter eligibility are factored in. Thus, DPOC systems come with what we term “system error remediation costs” — high costs associated with correcting administrative mistakes, fixing wrongful voter purges, and related litigation.

In this white paper, we look closely at the costs that two states, Arizona and Kansas, have incurred due to DPOC legislation. First, we lay out our findings concerning the high costs that Arizona and Kansas have each faced to implement and maintain DPOC systems. Next, we describe how each state has incurred more in system error remediation costs. As we explain below, our findings represent a floor, rather than a ceiling, concerning the magnitude of expenses a state contemplating a new DPOC bill can expect. We then draw examples from a handful of additional states to demonstrate how existing state DPOC bills tend to grossly underestimate, or flat-out ignore, state and local costs of implementation and maintenance. We conclude that no matter how a state may choose to structure a DPOC bill, the costs and administrative burdens will be substantial.

Methodology

We focused our research on Arizona and Kansas because those two states have had DPOC laws on the books the longest – since 2004 and 2013, respectively.

The information in this white paper comprises everything we were able to gather from publicly available resources, such as fiscal notes, state budgets, and deposition transcripts, as well as interviews with willing state and local election administration officials. We also included information obtained from the Arizona secretary of state in response to our public records requests.

We used Arizona and Kansas as case studies because the majority of DPOC bills have not yet been implemented, which means the financial impacts of these newly enacted bills are not being felt and cannot be assessed yet. For example, Louisiana, which passed its DPOC bill, S.B. 436, in June of 2024, does not yet have a task force devoted to the bill's implementation, and to date, its Voter Registration Application,⁶ Parrish Board of Elections Supervisors' manual,⁷ and third-party voter registration instructions⁸ have not changed to reflect the new law. Moreover, as discussed below, states' financial projections attached to DPOC bills were not helpful, because states generally did not set realistic expectations concerning the cost of implementing the legislation.

Obtaining information about the money spent to implement laws in Arizona and Kansas was not without difficulty, however. Budget and appropriations records from both states have provided a great deal of insight – with the caveat that without budget line items that tie spending to specific DPOC provisions, it is difficult to decisively link certain expenditures with new DPOC requirements. This is further complicated by the fact that the costs of conducting elections are largely borne by counties. With 15 counties in Arizona and 105 counties in Kansas, and no uniform budget reporting requirements in either state, cost allocations are not always listed clearly according to their purpose (e.g., voter registration or staff training to accommodate changes to the system).

As a result, the information presented below is not exhaustive of every cost that may be associated with a DPOC bill. Rather, it represents a baseline that illustrates the magnitude and variety of expenses that states can expect to incur when implementing a DPOC law. Any gaps in available data, however, suggest that the costs of implementation could be even more substantial than what is outlined below. These figures are also not adjusted for inflation, indicating that the costs would be even higher today.

For ease of reference, findings concerning actual costs have been bolded throughout this paper.

Implementation Costs

Arizona

While Arizona has required DPOC for voter registration longer than any other state, its system has gone through a variety of changes over the years. Below, we describe the evolution of Arizona's DPOC laws and the information we found concerning costs incurred by the state at each stage of that evolution.

Initial DPOC Requirements (2004) and Related Voter Registration Database Upgrades

Arizona's Proposition 200 went into effect in December of 2004, requiring election officials to reject any voter registration form that did not include DPOC. Proposition 200 relied heavily on the fact that Arizona began requiring proof of citizenship or authorized presence for driver's licenses in 1996, so driver's licenses issued after October 1, 1996, could potentially satisfy DPOC requirements for voter registration.⁹ As a result, Arizona applicants do not have to provide physical documents when registering to vote if they provide their Arizona driver's license number on their application, as election officials work with the Arizona Motor Vehicle Division ("MVD") to check whether the applicant provided DPOC when they obtained their driver's license.¹⁰ Registrants who do not have Arizona driver's licenses or do not provide proof of citizenship in their original transaction with the MVD can avoid submitting physical proof only if they provide a federally issued number establishing citizenship, such as an alien registration number, naturalization certificate number, or Bureau of Indian Affairs number. Proposition 200 applied only prospectively, meaning people who registered to vote prior to 2004 did not have to resubmit proof of citizenship.¹¹

There are few records documenting the initial costs of implementing Proposition 200. The potential fiscal impact statement the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) prepared for Proposition 200 stated, "The proposition's verification requirements may affect the workload of state and local government agencies. The JLBC Staff is unable to quantify the fiscal impact of these provisions."¹²

One likely fiscal impact of Proposition 200, however, is the technological upgrade that Arizona made to its voter registration database in the aftermath of its passage. In 2003—before Arizona implemented its DPOC requirement—Arizona had already invested significantly to develop and implement a system called Voter Registration Arizona (VRAZ), later known as VRAZ-I, in order to comply with the Help America Vote Act.¹³ VRAZ cost \$1 million.¹⁴ But soon after Proposition 200 was implemented, the Arizona secretary of state solicited bids from contractors to develop a new voter registration system that could serve as “a true statewide, real time system.”¹⁵ She explained: “The current checks for felons, MVD, and death records are done in batch, once a night. The new system will check the external data (Court, Death, MVD) as the voter registration record is being added or modified.”¹⁶ This system, dubbed VRAZ-II, was sourced through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process in 2005.¹⁷ **Arizona ultimately awarded IBM a \$9.4 million contract to develop VRAZ-II.**¹⁸ Proposition 200 likely factored significantly into the decision to further upgrade the voter registration system so soon after the rollout of VRAZ. Specifically, VRAZ-II helped implement Proposition 200 by enabling the voter registration and MVD systems to quickly share information about citizenship. The press release announcing the contract said that “[t]he new system will be designed with the goal of helping to reduce voter registration fraud,”¹⁹ which seemingly alludes to the fact that Proposition 200’s supporters promoted it as a purported anti-fraud measure.

Bifurcated DPOC System (2013)

When it was enacted, Proposition 200’s DPOC requirement applied to both state and federal voter registration forms. But in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court found that Arizona could not demand DPOC from an applicant using the federal form (which requires only a sworn statement that the applicant is a citizen).²⁰ Therefore, Arizona could not reject federal forms that did not include DPOC. As a result, Arizona adopted a bifurcated system to soften its DPOC law and comply with the Court’s orders. Under this two-part system, applicants who submit federal forms without DPOC are registered as “federal only” voters and are eligible to vote only in federal elections. Applicants who submit state forms with DPOC are registered as “full ballot” voters and are eligible to vote in federal, state, and local elections. Those who submit federal forms with a driver’s license or other number that

indicates they already have DPOC on file with the state are also registered as “full ballot” voters.

The bifurcated system opened the door to a host of additional burdens and costs. Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes described some of the burdens this way:

[It] makes things a lot more difficult for election administrators, particularly in some of our larger counties, for example Maricopa County. ... Regardless of what the rules say, are the folks who are administering these elections, the folks who are actually doing the day-in-and-day-out work—the data entry, the voter contact, the follow up, all of these sorts of things—go[ing] that extra step to make sure that the voters get what they need? And [what they need] is, [that] their fundamental rights are preserved.²¹

State and local officials did not respond to our public record requests concerning these costs. **Nevertheless, the bifurcated system meant that the state thereafter had to process voter registrations on two different tracks, which must have entailed additional staff time, multiple versions of forms, additional upgrades to recording systems, and similar expenses.**

Expanded DPOC requirements (2022)

In 2022, Arizona enacted two laws (H.B. 2492 and H.B. 2243) to expand and harden Arizona’s DPOC requirements by:

- Requiring county recorders to reject state forms not accompanied by DPOC and creating a felony offense for election officials who fail to reject them;
- Requiring county recorders to cross-check a multitude of databases and “use all available resources” to investigate the citizenship status of applicants who submit a federal form without DPOC, and creating a felony offense for election officials who fail to conduct this investigation and register someone who turns out to be a noncitizen;²²
- Requiring election officials to give the Arizona attorney general a list of currently registered voters who lack DPOC for investigation and possible prosecution;

- Prohibiting currently registered federal-only voters from voting in presidential elections and from voting by mail in all federal races (*this provision was struck down by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2025*);²³ and
- Requiring applicants to include their place of birth on their registration form (*this provision was struck down by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2025*).²⁴

In some ways, these bills were an attempt to restore Arizona's DPOC requirements to their original strength (i.e., completely rejecting state forms without DPOC²⁵ and disenfranchising those who submit federal forms without DPOC). But in other ways, these bills expanded Arizona's DPOC system to include features that it had never had before, such as mandatory investigations of applicants' citizenship using databases known to contain faulty or outdated records, ongoing purges of currently registered voters, and severe penalties for election officials. These features exist in the proposed federal SAVE Act, as well as many other proposed state-level DPOC bills. Although many of these provisions have now been overturned or stayed by courts, information concerning the money spent on their implementation provides valuable insights into the costs and administrative burdens of DPOC laws.

Records from Arizona's Joint Legislative Budget Committee indicate that in June 2023, it approved a one-time transfer of \$500,000 to upgrade the Arizona Voter Information Database ("AVID," the successor to VRAZ-II) to "address legislative changes enacted in the 2021 and 2022 Legislative sessions," including, "[c]ollection of data related to certain voter registration information (including residency, citizenship status, and death notifications)" and "[c]hanges related to federal-only voter registrations (including citizenship requirements and reporting provisions)."²⁶ Information disclosed by the Arizona secretary of state in response to our public records request indicates that most of the necessary updates to AVID were related to Arizona's new DPOC requirements. In particular, an estimated costs memo from the company hired to complete the upgrade indicates that \$325,093 of the estimated \$437,628 total cost were related to changes that needed to be made to AVID in order to comply with H.B. 2492 and H.B. 2243.

In addition to this one-time expenditure, predicted annual expenses for the maintenance and operation of AVID have increased sharply, at least in part due to the new DPOC requirements. **While from fiscal years (FY) 2023–2025 the state budgeted \$1.3 million annually for maintenance and operation of AVID,**

the secretary's FY 2026 budget narrative called this "an incomplete assessment of the cost,"²⁷ in part because "changes to AVID mandated by litigation and legislation have expanded its functionality," specifically citing H.B. 2492.²⁸

"Additionally, counties have made it abundantly clear that more training, support, and testing are necessary to ensure they are able to process voter registration accurately. Based on these legal mandates and county requests, [the Arizona Secretary of State] has revised the estimated AVID [maintenance and operation] to \$2.34 million in FY 2026 and beyond."²⁹

Additionally, in FY 2024, \$6 million was appropriated from the General Fund and distributed to county recorders of Arizona's six most populous counties to "review the accuracy of their voter rolls, including whether any registrations should be cancelled according to statute."³⁰

Several election officials noted the difficulties created by the new DPOC requirements, especially those inherent in cross-referencing multiple databases to investigate citizenship status. During litigation proceedings challenging the new requirements, Matt Jackson Webber, program manager for voter registration and early voting at the Yavapai County Recorder's Office, said his office had not been provided with any guidance on how they should resolve conflicting information on a registrant's citizenship from different databases and observed, "I think we would need monetary resources and a lot of clarification and cooperation from a lot of other governmental agencies in state, local, federal to be able to implement this [bill]."³¹ Charlotte Asrarynezami, clerk of the Gila County Board of Supervisors, noted that the downsides of being required to compare the voter rolls to various databases every month were "time" and "having enough staff to do that."³² And Hilary Hiser, chief deputy recorder at the Pima County Recorder's Office, mentioned difficulties in accessing some of the databases the new law required them to cross-reference, stating that, "here in the state of Arizona health records and vital statistics are not accessible to anybody other than the Health Department."³³ These statements underscore how the expanded DPOC requirements imposed significant logistical, financial, and operational burdens on local election officials that lawmakers may not have anticipated.

To summarize, since 2023, Arizona's DPOC laws have led to substantial new costs and administrative burdens, including a \$500,000 database upgrade, \$6 million in county funding for voter-roll reviews, and rising database maintenance costs estimated at \$1.3 million annually from FY 2023–2025 and \$2.34 million annually beginning FY 2026, as well as reports from election officials of confusion, staffing shortages, and logistical barriers in complying with the expanded DPOC mandates.

Kansas

Kansas maintained its DPOC system for a much shorter duration than Arizona did, but there remain valuable insights to glean from its implementation of DPOC requirements. In 2011, the state of Kansas enacted H.B. 2067, known as the Kansas Secure and Fair Elections (SAFE) Act.³⁴ The new law required every person registering to vote for the first time in Kansas after January 1, 2013, to provide DPOC.³⁵ Kansas's DPOC requirements were in effect until May 2016, when the federal district court in Kansas issued a preliminary injunction blocking enforcement of the SAFE Act's DPOC provision.³⁶ The district court permanently enjoined enforcement in 2018 in a decision later affirmed by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals.³⁷ Kansas election administrators had approximately one and a half years after the law was enacted to prepare for implementation of the DPOC requirement. The requirement was then in effect for nearly three and a half years, before the court permanently blocked its enforcement.

The Elections Division of the secretary of state's office is responsible for election administration in Kansas. The agency's budget and expenditures are covered in annual Governor's Budget Reports. **The report states that expenditures of \$161,000 in FY 2012 and \$150,000 in FY 2013 were specifically approved for implementation of the SAFE Act.³⁸ A later report clarifies that final expenditures for implementation of the SAFE Act were \$192,367 in FY 2013;³⁹ unfortunately, final expenditures for FY 2012 are not reported. Given that final expenditures in FY 2013 outpaced projections, we can assume that the \$161,000 approved for FY 2012 represents a floor, not a ceiling, of what was ultimately spent.**

Thus, available information demonstrates that the secretary of state's office spent at least \$353,367 in funds specifically earmarked for SAFE Act implementation.⁴⁰ The expenditures "include[ed] voter education and outreach programs and materials."⁴¹ **Importantly, this sum does not account for any staff hours and resources expended by the agency to enforce Kansas's DPOC during the normal course of business or after 2013. This figure also does not account for any of the costs borne by counties—only costs borne by the state.** As outlined above, obtaining comprehensive data on county-level costs was impossible. However, a few examples illustrate the types of costs counties faced on a yearly basis in order to comply with the SAFE Act's documentation requirements.

First, each county needed to evaluate and process additional documentation. For most voter registration applications, other non-DPOC identification requirements—such as driver's license numbers and Social Security numbers—are authenticated through automatic systems that local election officials can query. But local election officials do not have access to external systems that can check passport numbers or countrywide birth certificate records (which both serve as common forms of DPOC). Secretary of State Kris Kobach commented that there is no "magical computer database" where "you plug a person's name into it and it says if they're a citizen or not a citizen."⁴²

In 2013, the Election Office in Johnson County—the most populous county in the state—requested funding in the FY 2014 budget for two additional full-time staff members, which would "allow the Election Office to carry out the new registration documentation processes created in 2012 and 2013, as well as handle issues driven by increases in registrations."⁴³ The request was denied for FY 2014, but the following year, an additional full-time election manager was added to the staff for FY 2015 for the same purposes.⁴⁴ **This was a yearly additional cost of \$65,000 and represented an 8% increase in the county office's personnel expenditures.⁴⁵**

Additionally, counties shoulder the cost of communicating any changes or new registration requirements to voters, with little help from the state. In the aftermath of the passage of the SAFE Act, they were required to contact at least one-third of new registrants (those who did not provide DPOC at the time of their application) to inform them of the DPOC requirement, and to send three written notices and

make one phone call to applicants on the incomplete list.⁴⁶ Election officials, who aim to move applications out of pending status in their system and ensure voters successfully register, expended significant resources to conduct this required outreach and obtain applicants' DPOC.

Douglas County, the state's fifth most populous county, incurred \$33,000 in added costs during 2014 for hiring additional temporary employees and mailing registrants to notify them and follow up about new DPOC requirements. These costs represent a 10% increase from 2010, the last midterm election before the requirement went into effect.⁴⁷ And again in 2016, the county had to hire a temporary full-time employee from May to December for follow-up contact regarding DPOC requirements, representing a 71% increase in temporary staffing costs as compared to 2012 (the last presidential election before implementation).⁴⁸ The county's postage costs were five times higher in 2016 than in 2012, as well, at least some of which was attributed to SAFE Act outreach.⁴⁹

These are examples from just two counties; Kansas has 105 counties total. With costs increasing anywhere from 10% to 500% across all the counties in the state, the DPOC requirement imposed substantial financial and employment burdens on local election offices.

System Error Remediation Costs

When evaluating the cost of a legislative policy, it is important to consider not only the actual costs of implementation but also the downstream costs – such as the expenses associated with correcting administrative mistakes, litigating the constitutionality of such provisions, and addressing any unintended burdens on voters the policy creates.

DPOC processes are highly error prone. Election officials must verify original citizenship documents, which can be difficult to process consistently. The available processes also often rely on cross-referencing databases, such as Department of Motor Vehicle records, that were not designed in the first instance to verify citizenship and thus do not keep up-to-date information concerning citizenship. Errors in data entry, mismatched records, and stale data can all wrongly block eligible voters from registering or purge them from the rolls. Fixing those errors—through staff time, voter outreach, eligibility hearings, and re-processing—drives up administrative costs substantially.

Because DPOC requirements can lead to eligible voters being denied the right to vote, they are frequently challenged on constitutional grounds and under federal statutes like the National Voter Registration Act. DPOC requirements also disproportionately affect groups such as voters of color and Native American voters, who are more likely to lack ready access to citizenship documentation, which makes these laws especially vulnerable to claims of discrimination under the 14th Amendment and the federal Voting Rights Act. States can incur significant expenses defending such laws, often unsuccessfully. Even when upheld in part, litigation requires significant legal resources and diverts funding from other election needs. Below, we detail information we found concerning the system error remediation costs that Arizona and Kansas incurred.

Arizona

Arizona has incurred substantial costs through litigation and database errors. The state attempted to sidestep constitutionality challenges while maintaining a DPOC law by bifurcating its voter registration system, but that bifurcation has not reduced its system error remediation costs.

System Errors

Since the MVD only started collecting citizenship documents from people applying for driver's licenses in 1996, the agency adopted a policy of marking anyone who got their license before 1996 as a citizen, even if they'd never provided DPOC. As the Arizona Mirror reported, "County officials rely heavily on driver's licenses for citizenship status, but when they checked the system for those voters, they were told they were citizens, when they hadn't ever been asked to provide documents proving it. As a result, over 20 years, 218,000 longtime residents who hadn't provided citizenship proof were still registered to vote a full ballot, when they should have been allowed to vote only in federal elections."⁵⁰

In September 2024, this problem was uncovered by Arizona's secretary of state, and these 218,000 voters were asked to provide DPOC, even if they'd voted in many previous elections without issue. Given that this discovery was made so close to the November 2024 election, the Arizona Supreme Court allowed affected voters to participate in the 2024 federal and state elections without providing DPOC. But the issue remains and has yet to be resolved.

As Secretary Fontes noted, "We're in the process of going back and redoing a lot of this contact with these voters out there. ... It's a bumpy road when you get into depending on data systems that were not designed to handle this type of data and the variety of data that is required to fulfill the needs of these regulations. If you don't have the full package, it's a very, very rough road."⁵¹

To remedy this problem, the secretary of state has:⁵²

1. Collected all available data from the MVD and, when able to do so, notified all election officials and the public of the situation;
2. Contacted several federal agencies to try to obtain expedited access to federal databases for the purpose of verifying the citizenship of potentially impacted voters;
3. Sent every county recorder in Arizona voter records from the initial MVD group with information that would enable SAVE database verification so the county recorders can begin conducting citizenship verification;
4. Engaged the Arizona Department of Health Services to provide copies of birth certificates for all possibly affected voters who were born in Arizona so their records reflect proper DPOC;
5. Identified, and has begun engaging with, various Arizona agencies that may be of assistance in connection with verifying the citizenship of possibly impacted voters;
6. Begun conducting a review of the original Arizona Voter Information Database (AVID) development requirements to make sure the data received from MVD can be used by the voter registration system to effectively verify DPOC for registrants; and
7. Commissioned a comprehensive internal investigation into the situation, including a search of the secretary of state's office records to ascertain the extent to which the issue was known and for how long, what steps were or were not taken to correct the problem, and how the office, moving forward, can work to assure that an error of this magnitude won't happen again.

While we could not obtain all information regarding the costs related to all of these measures, a letter from Governor Hobbs to Secretary of State Fontes indicates that Secretary Fontes spent \$500,000 to hire counsel to do an internal review and obtained \$200,000 in funds to support county recorders in their efforts to contact affected voters.⁵³ Additionally, information disclosed by the Arizona secretary of state in response to our public records request shows that the office spent \$195,000, divided across all fifteen counties in Arizona, to "help defray the costs of verifying Documented Proof of Citizenship (DPOC) related to the MVD data issue" and to "cover direct and indirect

costs of sending notice letters to voters and associated staffing.” The amount of funding a county received was dependent on its number of impacted voters. Maricopa County, with its 100,359 impacted voters, received the most funding (\$56,552.44).

Litigation

For as long as Arizona has had DPOC laws, it has been tied up in costly litigation over those laws. Arizona’s first DPOC law, enacted in 2004, was challenged in 2006 by a group of Arizona residents, as well as the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona. After seven years of litigation, the Supreme Court found in 2013 that Arizona’s application of DPOC requirements to federal voter registration forms was unlawful because it was preempted by federal law (specifically, the National Voting Rights Act). **The state of Arizona was ordered to pay the plaintiffs’ attorney’s fees and litigation expenses, which totaled \$1.94 million.⁵⁴ Notably, this amount does not include the money that Arizona spent on its own attorneys defending the case.**

The Supreme Court’s ruling in 2013 meant that Arizona could not reject federal forms that did not include DPOC. This led Arizona to create the bifurcated system described above. The result was that election administrators continued to reject all state registration forms without DPOC. So in 2017, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Arizona Students’ Association challenged this practice, which they alleged arbitrarily treated federal form and state form applicants differently, as an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote. The case settled in 2018, with the Arizona secretary of state agreeing to register applicants who submitted state forms without DPOC as “federal only” voters. **As part of the final settlement, the state of Arizona agreed to reimburse the plaintiffs for \$70,000 of attorney’s fees and costs.⁵⁵ Once again, this does not include the costs incurred by Arizona to pay for its own attorneys.**

Litigation concerning Arizona’s latest attempt to expand its DPOC laws in 2022 is still ongoing. While we could not obtain information concerning the costs incurred to date in that litigation, there is no question that they will be sizable.

Human Error

Records from Arizona have also shed light on the additional costs that can be reasonably expected when factoring in human error on the part of applicants. These errors are an expected part of any process that relies on human input, even when applicants are diligent. As Graham County Recorder Polly Merriman explained, her office opposed an expanded DPOC law because they “felt that it was going to be more difficult for the voter and more difficult for us to process a voter.” When asked what would specifically make the process more difficult, she answered that, “... if [some voters] have to check the citizenship checkbox in along with providing the DPOC, they may fail to checkmark the box; or answering where their place of birth, if they failed to do that, then we would have to seek out the voter. It just would create more potential problems and more times that we would have to reach out to the voter for that information if that became mandatory fields.”⁵⁶ The more complicated voter registration becomes, the more likely it is that applicants will make honest mistakes, and election staff will need to expend resources to reach out to those applicants and address those errors.

Kansas

From the time Kansas’s DPOC law went into effect in 2013 until it was enjoined in 2016, its administration was anything but smooth. The state faced a multitude of technological, organizational, and legal challenges that were a direct result of the flawed system designed by the SAFE Act and its implementing regulations and directives. In short, the DPOC regime Kansas created did not work, resulting in the disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of Kansans and the loss of millions of taxpayer dollars.

System Errors

Starting January 1, 2013, Kansas required first-time voter registrants to submit DPOC: a majority (62%) of new registrant applications were submitted at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for the 2014 election cycle (November 2012 to November 2014).⁵⁷ Problems with administering the DPOC requirement arose immediately. By June 2013, approximately one-third of new voter registrations had not been finalized,⁵⁸ the vast majority of which were deemed to lack the required citizenship documentation.

Some of those applicants had submitted a form of documentary proof of citizenship as part of their interaction with the DMV. However, a \$40 million modernization project begun in 2009 that was supposed to enable the DMV's computer system to store and automatically transfer to election officials electronic copies of documents—including birth certificates and passports—was not working.⁵⁹ According to a county election official, these documents were not successfully transmitted to election offices, despite claims from the secretary of state that they were emailed.⁶⁰

The larger problem, however, was the way DMV policy and staff handled voter registration applicants. Most driver's license *renewals* or updates do not involve showing documents that prove citizenship, as opposed to first-time licenses, which require proof of lawful presence, the documentation for which is often used to prove citizenship. The DMV set a policy for their clerks statewide to neither request DPOC from new voter registrants who were renewing or updating their license nor even inform them that they were required to submit such documentation to complete their voter application.⁶¹

The lack of voter education was a continued problem beyond the DMV office and ultimately led to the disenfranchisement of thousands of Kansans. The work of a nonprofit and additional journalistic investigation showed that many applicants were unaware that their voter registration was not completed and had been suspended.⁶² Court records show a number of representative examples of applicants who were never informed that their voter registration was incomplete or who were informed months or years later.⁶³

There was a yearslong breakdown in communication and coordination between the DMV, the secretary of state, county election offices, and voters. Before the DPOC requirement was enjoined in March 2016, these and other system errors resulted in “31,089 total applicants who were denied registration for failure to provide DPOC[,] ... represent[ing] approximately 12% of the total voter registration applications submitted since the law was implemented in 2013.”⁶⁴ The U.S. District Court found, and the 10th Circuit affirmed, that “the estimated number of suspended applications that belonged to noncitizens was ‘statistically indistinguishable from zero,’ while ‘more than 99% of the individuals’ whose voter-registration applications were suspended were citizens who would have been able to vote but for the DPOC requirement.”⁶⁵

The staff time and additional administrative expenditures that went into identifying and attempting to ameliorate these implementation errors, after the state had already invested \$40 million to update the DMV’s database, are not documented. Nevertheless, we can safely assume these costs were considerable given the gravity of the situation and the number of Kansans affected.

Litigation

Because Kansas’s DPOC system incorrectly disenfranchised tens of thousands of eligible voters, federal courts found it unconstitutional—an illegal abridgment of Kansans’ 14th Amendment rights—as well as in violation of the National Voter Registration Act. As a result, **Kansas was required to pay \$1.9 million in attorney’s fees to the prevailing parties of two civil rights lawsuits.**⁶⁶ **And this sum does not account for the cost of the thousands of hours spent by staff in the attorney general’s office and secretary of state’s office on a sprawling array of litigation related to the DPOC provision.**⁶⁷ Much of the litigation was initiated by the state as it scrambled to fix the legal and administrative problems it created with the SAFE Act.⁶⁸

Underestimated Costs

Having demonstrated through the Arizona and Kansas examples that actual costs of implementing and maintaining DPOC systems are staggering, we now turn to the failure of states to provide accurate fiscal assessments of proposed DPOC legislation.

States have introduced a considerable number of DPOC bills that have not reliably predicted the costs of implementing such requirements. Other states have completely neglected to provide fiscal notes or similar analyses. Our findings show that any fiscal analyses states have provided on this issue are, at best, underestimations.

States That Provided No Fiscal Analysis of Any Kind

Several states have not provided any fiscal impact analysis for their DPOC bills. Alabama passed its DPOC law, H.B. 56, in June 2011. The corresponding fiscal note does not account for any expenses related to implementation of this law. As the American Immigration Council notes, that fiscal note is “astonishing in its incompleteness.”⁶⁹ In 2024, Louisiana enacted S.B. 436, requiring that individuals attach documentary proof of citizenship to their voter registration form. No fiscal note is provided on the legislative website for this legislation.⁷⁰ In 2025, Wyoming enacted H.B. 0156, which added a 30-day residency requirement as well as a DPOC requirement to register to vote.⁷¹ The fiscal note for the legislation states, incredibly, that there will be “[n]o significant fiscal or personnel impact.”⁷²

States That Ignored Fiscal Impacts on Local Government

Some states provided fiscal analyses that acknowledged some state-level costs but grossly underestimated the costs to local governments. The Missouri Senate, when advancing the state’s DPOC proposal in both its original form and the later amended version, provided a fiscal summary with an estimated net effect of \$0 on local funds.⁷³ But a later fiscal analysis of the same bill reveals some assumptions that demonstrate how unrealistic that estimate was. The narrative analysis of the

amended bill explains that this new responsibility would have to be funded by the state according to the state constitution, but “[t]he exact cost of materials and postage that the state must cover is unknown.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, the narrative analysis notes that the St. Louis County Board of Elections estimated that it would spend approximately \$1.66 for each incomplete registration that fails to include documentary proof of citizenship, as the board would be required to send a letter requesting the missing documentation.⁷⁵ The analysis then goes on to assume that “incomplete registrations would be a small proportion of the newly registered voters. Therefore, [the Committee on Legislative Research] does not anticipate the cost would exceed \$250,000.”⁷⁶ The analysis is problematic because it does not contemplate any costs beyond postage to notify voters of incomplete registrations—ignoring, among other things, the significant staff time that would be required to identify and remedy such deficiencies.

In 2025, the Texas Senate passed S.B. 16, which was then considered by a House committee.⁷⁷ This legislation would have required DPOC and limited voters to a federal-only ballot if they could not provide proof, meaning that it would have created a bifurcated voter registration system similar to that of Arizona. The bill would also have created a felony for election officials who failed to reject an application lacking the required documentation. All fiscal notes throughout the bill’s lifespan fail to list any costs to local governments related to implementing the DPOC requirement.⁷⁸ Instead, the fiscal notes list only that there may be “increased demands upon local correctional resources” if individuals were to be convicted under the proposed felony penalty.⁷⁹ None of them considered the increased costs of election administration by local governments.

The recent DPOC legislation enacted in New Hampshire particularly illustrates the tendency to severely underestimate costs, as the fiscal analyses actually predicted that local election administration costs would *decrease* shortly after implementation. In 2024, New Hampshire enacted H.B. 1569, which removed any exceptions for proving voter identification, including voter affidavits,⁸⁰ and added a requirement that the voter identification include proof of citizenship.⁸¹ When the legislation was enacted, the fiscal note included an estimate of political subdivision impact.⁸² It listed county expenditures as \$0 for the next three fiscal years. For local expenditures,

the fiscal note simply listed “indeterminable” for FY 2025 and “indeterminable decrease” for FY 2026 and FY 2027.⁸³ In its narrative explanation for this fiscal note, the methodology section of the note reads:

The New Hampshire Municipal Association states in the initial year, there will likely be added expenses for training election officials on new election worksheets, including mileage, salaries, and other associated reimbursements. The exact costs will depend on the chosen options (online or in-person) and individual municipal reimbursement policies.⁸⁴

Cutting certain voter registration choices means officials won’t need to train or assist with alternative identification or affidavits, decreasing time spent with voters. This reduction in interaction is expected to lower overall salary and overtime costs for election officials resulting in a decrease to local expenditures starting in FY 2026.⁸⁵

These assumptions proved woefully incorrect during the 2025 local town elections, as the financial analyses had not accounted for the number of applicants who would need assistance to register with additional documentation. Even in a low-turnout local election, several voters were turned away for not having the necessary documentation. Observers at 22 polling locations found that at least 96 people had been turned away, an average of nearly four per polling place.⁸⁶ That number does not reflect additional applicants who were likely turned away at other polling locations. New Hampshire had 308 polling locations in 2024.⁸⁷ Assuming a similar number of applicants would be turned away at every polling location, over 1,300 would-be voters would have been turned away for lacking DPOC. New Hampshire Secretary of State David Scanlan acknowledged the problem afterward, noting that, “[W]e have to go way above and beyond in the ... voter education process, so they understand the requirements of the new law.”⁸⁸ He added that he had “taken steps like hiring a communications director, which we never had before.”⁸⁹

States that Otherwise Provided Incomplete Fiscal Analyses

Finally, some state DPOC bills do have fiscal notes with details about local government expenditures, but they are nevertheless incomplete or fail to consider likely costs. For example, H.B. 0202, pending before the Tennessee General Assembly, would require an applicant to provide DPOC if the state coordinator of elections is not able to confirm citizenship of the applicant when comparing the statewide voter registration database with other state databases and the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program.⁹⁰ The fiscal note also says that the state constitution requires that the state share in these costs. The fiscal note lists for local governments \$165,000 in mandatory expenditures in FY 25-26 and \$100,000 in mandatory expenditures in subsequent years.⁹¹ The narrative assumptions describe that all counties would need to update their voter registration records systems and “pay for increased secure storage to permanently maintain an individual’s registration, voting history, and proof of citizenship documents.”⁹² The fiscal note does not, however, describe any training or staffing costs that may be associated with those activities.

Utah also considered DPOC legislation during its 2025 general session. H.B. 332 was a comprehensive bill that addressed several provisions concerning voter registration and ballot surveillance.⁹³ The fiscal note does describe likely costs to local governments, stating, “[e]nactment of this legislation could cost local governments \$453,000 one-time and \$220,000 ongoing for storing video footage, staff support to perform citizenship verification.”⁹⁴ The analysis does not, however, account for other likely costs, such as database updates and notices to voters.

Michigan also considered a proposal for a constitutional amendment to implement DPOC, House Joint Resolution B, in 2025.⁹⁵ The fiscal note analysis notes that the amendment would likely result in additional costs to municipal clerks' offices. It goes on to specify:

The resolution's requirement to verify documentation may also entail increases in personnel hours, paid wages, or FTE counts in city and township clerk's offices. The state's election systems and processes have changed dramatically in recent years, adding considerable responsibilities for clerk's offices and their existing staff. Many offices are working at capacity and may be unable to absorb additional responsibilities with existing staff. The resolution may, therefore, result in some local offices incurring the expense of hiring additional staff or adding staff hours.⁹⁶

Despite providing this narrative, the fiscal analysis does not provide any estimate for these costs. The lack of an estimated dollar amount makes the analysis incomplete and, ultimately, unhelpful to both legislators and residents in understanding the actual costs to local governments in Michigan.

The implementation of Kansas's SAFE Act is a final, illustrative example of gross underestimation of the costs of DPOC laws to state government, as well as burdens placed on local election officials. The SAFE Act's fiscal note estimated an increase in expenditures by the secretary of state of merely \$12,500 in FY 2011 and \$1,000 in FY 2012.⁹⁷ This \$13,500 stands in stark contrast with the minimum \$353,367 the secretary of state actually spent in FY 2011 and FY 2012 to implement the SAFE Act. Additionally, according to the governor's budget reports, implementation of the SAFE Act was projected to be 60% complete at the end of FY 2012 and 100% complete at the end of FY 2013.⁹⁸ And indeed, "actual" implementation was reported complete at the end of FY 2013, which is when the specifically earmarked SAFE Act implementation expenditures stopped.⁹⁹ However, we know that implementation of the SAFE Act, and the expenses associated with it, were far from over at the end of 2013 due to the numerous system error remediation costs described above—especially to local election offices. The expenditures almost certainly would have continued had the law not been enjoined.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

States have not been effectively estimating the costs and administrative burdens that DPOC requirements will place on their state and local governments, not to mention those placed on voter registration applicants. Secretary Fontes estimated that proper implementation of a DPOC system would require an investment at the state and federal level “in the tens of billions of dollars to make sure that we are covering every eligible citizen, because at the end of the day, that’s what we have a responsibility towards.”¹⁰¹ Our findings show that the two states with the most robust records of DPOC costs each incurred millions of dollars in implementation costs and system error remediation costs, and likely incurred additional, undocumented costs. For Arizona, which persists in its efforts to maintain a DPOC system, our research strongly suggests that those costs will continue to compound. As states seek to balance their budgets and engage in thoughtful fiscal planning, those contemplating DPOC bills must be aware of the financial and administrative costs of implementing such requirements, including the costs and burdens that will be passed on to local election officials.

Endnotes

1. Voting Rights Lab, “Proof of Citizenship,” <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/issues/proof-of-citizenship>.
2. In a 2025 virtual policy conversation hosted by Votebeat, Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes noted some of these costs, stating, “you’re going to have to process a whole new set of paperwork, and you’re going to have to train folks to process that whole new set of paperwork. And reprogram your computer systems to be able to accept that new column of data ... there’s an enormous amount of backroom technical work that has to go into these sorts of things, before you even get to reaching out to voters. And there’s a lot of costs that can be involved in those sorts of things.” Votebeat, “Checking Citizenship: A conversation with two secretaries of state,” moderated by Jen Fifield, streamed live May 19, 2025, YouTube, 52:01, <https://youtu.be/g5kDJwT3oNk?si=P4LlvxIXMd2sN3Pz&t=3121>.
3. As New Hampshire Secretary of State David Scanlan explained, “We’re going to have to prepare by educating as best we can the population of individuals that need to be registered that they now have to bring these documents with them to be able to do that. ... We also know that there is no single federal database that contains citizenship information, and as other states, you know, get on the bandwagon and pursue a strict requirement of citizenship documentation that we are going to need resources to be able to help voters make that qualification. And I think that the states that are going in this direction, are going to have to be prepared to be a resource for voters to help them obtain that documentation if they don’t have it.” Votebeat, “Checking Citizenship: A conversation with two secretaries of state,” moderated by Jen Fifield, streamed live May 19, 2025, YouTube, 13:41, <https://youtu.be/g5kDJwT3oNk?si=i-Lv1LSGvSoAKtSs&t=821>.
4. When asked if it was practicable to compare all of his county’s voters against the SAVE system, Matt Jackson Webber, Program Manager for Voter Registration and Early Voting at the Yavapai County Recorder’s Office, answered, “Not without a lot more employees and, well, alien registration numbers. So practicably, no.” Transcript of Deposition of Yavapai County Recorder, represented by Matt Jackson Webber, at 91:9 - 92:7, *Mi Familia Vota v. Fontes*, 719 F.Supp.3d 929 (D. Ariz. 2024). See also Jasleen Singh and Spencer Reynolds, “Homeland Security’s ‘SAVE’ Program Exacerbates Risks to Voters,” Brennan Center for Justice, July 21, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/homeland-securitys-save-program-exacerbates-risks-voters>.
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7. Louisiana Secretary of State, “Parish Board of Elections Supervisors Handbook,” revised August 2025, <https://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/PublishedDocuments/ParishBoardOfElectionSupervisor-Handbook.pdf>.
8. Louisiana Secretary of State, “Voter Registration Drive Information Sheet,” revised August 2024, <https://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/PublishedDocuments/07.31.24ThirdPartyRegistrationBest-Practices.pdf>.
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10. Institute for Responsive Government, "How Arizona's Proof of Citizenship Law Works," accessed September 12, 2025, <https://responsivegov.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/How-Arizonas-Proof-of-Citizenship-Law-Works.pdf>.
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12. Arizona Secretary of State, "2004 Ballot Propositions: Proposition 200," September 2004, https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2004/Info/PubPamphlet/Sun_Sounds/english/prop200.htm.
13. United States Government Accountability Office, "Election Reform: Nine States' Experiences Implementing Federal Requirements for Computerized Statewide Voter Registration Lists," GAO-06-247, January 2006, p. 35, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-06-247.pdf>.
14. Ibid.
15. Arizona Department of Transportation, "Report on Audit of MVD's Authorized Presence Policy and Data for Voter Registration Purposes," January 31, 2025, p. 111, <https://www.democracymarket.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/hobbs-mvd-audit.pdf>.
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19. Ibid.
20. *Arizona v. Inter Tribal Council of Ariz., Inc.*, 570 U.S. 1 (2013).
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24. Ibid.
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37. *Fish v. Kobach*, 309 F. Supp. 3d 1048 (D. Kan. 2018); *Fish v. Schwab*, 957 F.3d 1105 (10th Cir. 2020).
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39. Kansas Division of the Budget, “Comparison Report: The FY 2014 Governor’s Budget Report with Legislative Authorizations,” p. 57, <https://budget.kansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/fy2014-comp-rpt.pdf>.
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41. Kansas Division of the Budget, “Comparison Report: The FY 2014 Governor’s Budget Report with Legislative Authorizations,” p. 57, <https://budget.kansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/fy2014-comp-rpt.pdf>.
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66. *Fish v. Kobach*, Order on Joint Motion and Stipulation Regarding Plaintiffs’ Motions for Attorneys’ Fees and Costs, Case No. 16-2105-JAR-JPO (D. Kan. Sept. 15, 2021); *Bednasek v. Kobach*, Order on Joint Motion and Stipulation Regarding Plaintiffs’ Motions for Attorneys’ Fees and Costs, Case No. 15-9300-JAR-JPO (D. Kan. Sept. 15, 2021).
67. The *Fish v. Kobach* (later *Fish v. Schwab*) case alone involved expansive briefing, numerous hearings, a bench trial at the District Court, two appeals and oral arguments at the 10th Circuit, contempt proceedings, and a certiorari petition to the U.S. Supreme Court. There was an additional stream of at least four cases, in venues ranging from the trial court in Shawnee County to the D.C. Circuit, concerning the federal Election Assistance Commission’s (dis)approval of incorporating Kansas’s DPOC requirement into the federal form, and Secretary Kobach’s subsequent attempt to create a bifurcated election system in Kansas similar to Arizona’s. See *Kobach v. United States Election Assistance Commission*, 772 F.3d 1183 (10th Cir. 2014); *Belenky v. Kobach*, No. 2013-CV-1331 (Shawnee Cnty. Dist. Ct. Kan.); *Brown v. Kobach*, No. 2012-CV-1316 (Shawnee Cnty. Dist. Ct. Kan.); *League of Women Voters of the United States v. Newby*, 838 F.3d 1 (D.C. Cir. 2016).
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