

**NINA MOINI:** Congress is back from spring break today, and the US Senate is expected to debate the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, or SAVE. The legislation, which already passed the US House, would set new federal standards for voting, including a new requirement that voters have documentary proof of citizenship in order to vote. The bill also requires states to hand over voter data to the Department of Homeland Security. Democrats are firmly opposed.

This bill is just the latest effort by the president to assert more control over elections, as he continuously claims, falsely, that the 2020 election was stolen from him. In fact, multiple court cases in various states have found that he lost the election. Joining me now to explain the bill and where it stands is University of Minnesota Political Scientist Larry Jacobs. Larry, thanks for joining us.

**LARRY JACOBS:** Great to be with you.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. So let's just start by telling us a little bit about the SAVE Act. Where does it fit in this greater push for the federal government to be involved in elections?

**LARRY JACOBS:** Well, the main plank of it is to require a proof of citizenship to register to vote. And that's the main part of it. There's also a requirement to require those who do mail-in ballots to also have a citizenship requirement as part of that. So, in sum, it's about the federal government stepping in and setting standards for voter registration. This has typically been left to the states.

**NINA MOINI:** That's exactly what I was just going to say. This is usually a state sort of a thing. So this is new because it's the federal government trying to set some standards for the entire country about what voting regulations would look like, right?

**LARRY JACOBS:** Yeah. That's the big word here-- "new." And, to a lot of folks in the world of elections and the administration of elections, it's unheard of. In the Constitution, there's very explicit language that Congress sets the times, the place, the manner of elections. There's power in the Constitution for states with regards to electors for the presidential election. The idea of the president stepping in and trying to create a national set of standards and also a national list of voters is unheard of.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah. I mean, I know that Trump has said, without evidence, that Democrats can only win the midterms if they cheat. And he's explicitly said that Republicans need the SAVE Act to win in November, these midterm elections. So he's creating doubt around elections already. So I'm wondering if you could address what impact that would have on voters come Election Day. Will there be a loss of trust?

**LARRY JACOBS:** Well, I think that's probably the most concrete result of what's going to happen, because this is almost certainly not going to pass Congress. But this issue about trust and confidence in the elections is a real issue. And if the Republicans lose, you can expect there'll be some folks saying, hey, the election was rigged, even though we've never found evidence of the kind of fraud that would change an outcome.

**NINA MOINI:** Minnesota's Secretary of State Steve Simon has said that his office is preparing for the possibility of federal interference in elections. So what do you think that means? What steps do you think his office is likely taking?

**LARRY JACOBS:** Well, I think, for sure, there's the standard approach of election offices all over the country, whether it's Democrat, or Republican, or nonpartisan, to have preparation so that it's a well-run election. The standard here is you need to have safety first.

It's like an air flight. You cannot have an error. And that is the mindset of election officials. So all over the country for months, they've been getting the ballots ready. They've been preparing for registration, even down to the possibility of recounts. All that's going on. So I think that's step one is just be ready.

But I think, given what the president's been saying, there are other steps that have been taken. And Secretary Simon has talked about being prepared immediately to go to court if the president were to try to interfere, perhaps by committing some kind of military or police presence to voting areas, or to try to get involved in seizing ballots. All that has been gamed out by Secretary Simon and, frankly, in other states.

**NINA MOINI:** Right. Here in Minnesota, something like that's already happening, because the Trump administration did make a series of moves to demand that Minnesota turn over its voter rolls. And that is now in a legal battle between Minnesota and the federal government. What do you think the president's end goal is when it comes to that sort of a thing, when he wants to look at the voter data?

**LARRY JACOBS:** Well, I'm not expecting he would find anything. Again, this has been looked at by courts during the 2020 election. There were recounts, hand recounts, ballot machine recounts in some of the closest states, like Georgia, which is generally a Republican controlled state. And there's been no evidence of anything but very marginal problems, and it had no effect on the outcome.

So I don't think this is a real problem. But I do think it creates this perception, again, that the president seems to be intent on creating. It's also important to note here that the president does not speak for the Republican Party on this. There's quite a bit of division in the Republican Party about some of the things the president is talking about. And one of the reasons why I think the SAVE Act is not going to pass in Congress, in all likelihood, is because of this opposition among Republicans in the Senate, partly because what the president is proposing could well hurt turnout among Republican voters.

**NINA MOINI:** All really good points, Larry. We always appreciate your expertise. Thanks for sharing your information with us.

**LARRY JACOBS:** OK. Good to be with you.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah, that was Larry Jacobs, Founder and Director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota.