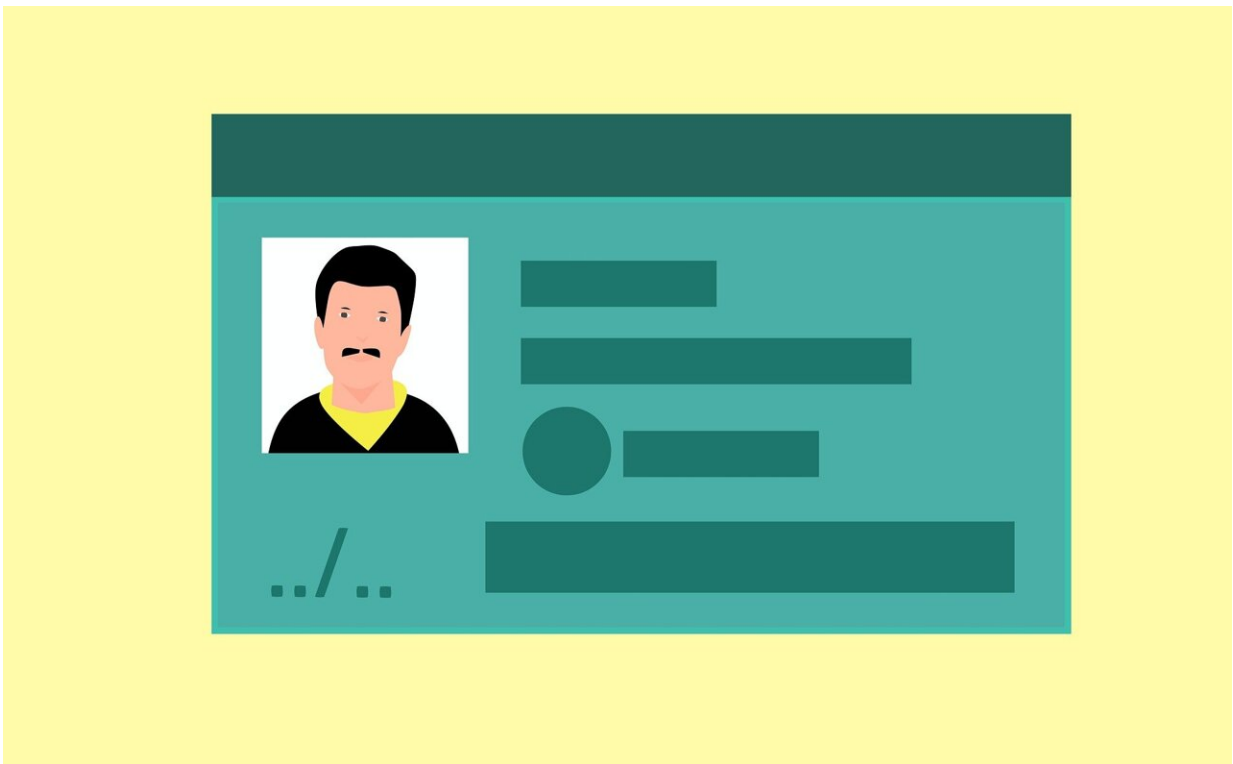


Level of support for gender-neutral option on state IDs found to be affected by political orientation, social context

May 31 2023, by Elizabeth Kivowitz



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

As of June, 22 states and the District of Columbia will allow residents to select a gender-neutral "X" marker, rather than "male" or "female," on their driver's licenses, birth certificates, and other government-issued

identification documents.

The policies reflect the increasing acknowledgements that people's biological sex does not always align with their gender identity and that more people today identify as neither male nor female. Indeed, some have advocated for the removal of gender identification altogether on government IDs, arguing that categorizing by sex or gender is harmful and the government should not have the authority to do so.

In a new research paper, Abigail Saguy, a UCLA professor of sociology and [gender studies](#), found that LGBTQ+ and feminist activists—many of whom also identified as nonbinary, transgender or queer—support the addition of an "X" as a third gender option on IDs; they also overwhelmingly support the removal of gender from IDs.

The study was published in the journal *Social Problems*.

Saguy also found that conservative gender activists in the study—mostly cisgender white women—are unlikely to support the addition of an "X" option or the removal of gender markers. Those activists often cited medical and safety concerns as reasons to continue classifying everyone as either male or female on ID cards.

"These findings show how both [political orientation](#) and social context shape preferences for emphasizing versus de-emphasizing sex and gender," Saguy said.

For the study, Saguy interviewed 85 gender activists: 69 progressive activists, 13 conservative activists and three whose views are not easily categorized as progressive or conservative. The latter group comprised radical feminists who belong to organizations that collaborate with conservatives to oppose [transgender rights](#), sometimes called trans exclusionary radical feminists, or TERFS.

In the research, 90% of the progressive activists were open to adding an "X" option to IDs, in comparison to 15% of the conservative activists. Saguy found that for some progressive activists, the "X" recognizes or affirms a nonbinary [gender identity](#), while for others, it offers a way to resist gender classification.

Meanwhile, 85% of the progressive activists supported the removal of sex or gender markers from ID cards; some said the markers force nonbinary or intersex people to choose between authenticity to their true selves and safety—given the fear that identifying as non-normative could expose people to discrimination. Others said sex and gender markers should be removed because they no longer reliably indicate biological sex.

But many of the progressive respondents said they viewed the "X" marker as an important middle step toward the eventual removal of gender identifiers from IDs.

Among the conservative respondents, 11 of the 13 oppose adding additional sex or gender markers, and the same number oppose removing sex and gender markers altogether.

Some of them reported that they consider gender a biological, binary fact—male or female—and that they believe the government has a right to the information because of national security and medical risks. Some of the conservative activists also said that the financial cost of implementing such changes would also be a reason not to alter IDs, especially given that they see the issue as a concern to only a small minority of people.

Some of the progressive respondents expressed concerns that removing sex and gender markers from IDs could erode the state's ability to track various forms of gender inequality or negatively affect transgender

people's access to medical care. But in the paper, Saguy writes that sex, [gender](#) and related medical information could be made accessible to people for whom it is relevant in specific contexts without it being included on state-issued IDs.

More information: Abigail C Saguy, Too "Full of Gender" How Activists Conceptualize the Promises and Pitfalls of Gender-Neutral Identity Documents, *Social Problems* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/socpro/spad008](#)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

Citation: Level of support for gender-neutral option on state IDs found to be affected by political orientation, social context (2023, May 31) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-gender-neutral-option-state-ids-affected.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.