Index 1: Voter Registration - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Iowa offers online and mail in voter registration due 15 days before, allows same-day in-person registration on Election Day, but not automatic. Youth can pre-register to vote beginning at 17 years of age. Voting rights are automatically restored to those incarcerated for felonies upon release, except for those convicted of homicide. The state purges voters from lists after eight years of nonvoting and no response to state notice of pending removal. There were zero total purges conducted in 2020. A low number of Iowa voters contacted the 1-866-OUR-VOTE legal hotline in 2020 during the last week of the election with concerns about voter registration and the handling of provisional ballots. 2021 law requires updating the voting registration files annually.

Index 2: Voter Identification - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Iowa has a non-strict non-photo voter ID law. The state is a member of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) which helps states improve accuracy of voter rolls. A low number of voters in 2020 reported concerns about voter ID. No laws were enacted in 2021 or 2022 to impose restrictions.

Index 3: Early Voting - Confidence level - LOW
Iowa offers early in-person voting beginning 20 days before Election Day, ending the day before. No-excuse required absentee voting is available. Legislation enacted in 2021 placed restrictions on voter access by removing the ability of a county election commissioner to establish satellite absentee voting locations at their discretion.

Index 4: Safe Voting - Confidence level - LOW
Iowa offers no-excuse absentee ballot voting. State law in 2021 banned proactive mailing of applications and ballots to voters without their request. Iowa shortened the window to apply for a mail ballot, placed anti-voter limits on who can return an absentee ballot for a voter in need, and restricted the availability of drop boxes. There is prepaid postage to return the ballot.

Learn more about how to vote and voting rights in Iowa: VOTE411
Learn about voting laws recently passed or enacted in Iowa: State Voting Rights Tracker by Voting Rights Lab
If you or anyone you know encounters problems while voting, call the Election Protection Hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE or 866-687-8683
Learn how to take action to protect voting rights in Iowa: DemocracyMovement.us
Iowa had a high percentage of mail-in ballots returned in 2020, with a low rejection rate. There is a statewide ballot tracking program, but it is not strong nor statutorily required. The state does allow convening special election boards to preprocess returned ballots. It does have a signature verification program. Iowa has a codified process for voters to correct for ballot discrepancies in which a voter may submit a replacement ballot until the day before the election or vote at the voter's precinct polling place. Absentee ballots must be received by close of polls on Election Day.

Index 6: Logistical Barriers in Voting - Confidence level - HIGH

Iowa allows employees to take up to 3 hours paid leave to vote. The state provides high quality accessible voting machine options and allows curbside voting. State laws in 2021 increased barriers for votes with disabilities and limited the rights of college students. There were very few reports from voters in 2020 with concerns about access and safety issues at polling sites, with the highest number about mishandling of polling site ballots. The state has passed measures to address the residency challenges of voters experiencing housing instability. Iowa had a moderate ratio of poll workers to polling sites in 2020. It was ranked among the top half of states that invested in the 2020 election to improve processes while being cost effective.

Index 7: Equipment, Security, and Auditing - Confidence level - HIGH

Iowa has a statewide verified paper audit trail. All voting centers use hand marked paper ballots and offer Ballot Marking Devices for voters with accessibility needs. The state tests the equipment according to federal standards and accreditation. Iowa uses E Poll Book technology statewide, which helps reduce discrepancies. Its election security systems received fair overall ratings in 2018. The state uses traditional audit methods to double-check for machine recording errors before certification and during the statutorily required post-election period.
Index 8: Independent Election Administration - Confidence level - LOW
Although Iowa has established the constitutional right to a secret ballot, it does not prohibit election interference by the legislature. State laws passed in 2021 shift election authority, criminalize elected official for their decisions, and allow interference with local elections. Legislation pending in early 2022 could shift emergency power; usurp, penalize, and interfere with state and election local officials; and increase reporting, investigation, and prosecution of election crimes.

Index 9: External Interference in Voting - Confidence Level - MEDIUM
Public opinion surveys showed that Iowa voters had no trust in the 2020 election news coverage, while political scientists gave the state low media integrity ratings. Iowa voters were targeted with robocalls to stay home and not vote. There were a few reports from voters with concerns about political intimidation, election certification, and poll worker misconduct. State law prohibits obstructing or hindering voters at polling sites, criminalizes voter intimidation and false election speech, and authorizes law enforcement to be present only by request or on official business. The state does not require all poll workers to be trained.

Index 10: The Role of Government and Politics – No rating given, informational only
Iowa is one of 3 states that has a Republican trifecta, but not a triplex - the governor, attorney general, and secretary of state are not from the same political party (Arizona and North Dakota are the others). Based on the last two presidential elections, Iowa, which was a swing state, now tilts Republican, with an average GOP voting margin of 8.8% compared to the national average Democratic voting margin of 3%. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the state’s population grew by 4.7% compared to the national average of 7.4%. Iowa is among the least racially diverse states in the country. During the past decade, the white population dropped from 87% to 84%. With the U.S. Census results, the state will neither gain nor lose any representatives in Congress.