State Index Score Card

Index 1: Voter Registration - Confidence level - LOW
Tennessee closes voter registration 30 days before Election Day. The state provides online voter registration, but not same-day nor automated. Although the state does not purge voting lists no matter how many years of nonvoting, there was a high number of total purges conducted in 2020. Those convicted of felonies may petition for voter restoration upon completion of the sentence or be pardoned by the governor. A moderate number of 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. 2022 law expands voter list maintenance processes and purge voters related to non-citizenship, conviction history, residence, or death.

Index 2: Voter Identification - Confidence level - LOW
Tennessee has a strict photo ID law. The state is NOT a member of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) which helps states improve accuracy of voter rolls. A moderate number of voters contacted the 1-866-OUR-VOTE legal hotline in 2020 with concerns about voter ID or not being on the voting list/database. No laws were enacted in 2021 or 2022 to impose restrictions.

Index 3: Early Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Tennessee offers early in-person voting beginning 20 days before Election Day, ending 5 days prior or 7 days before a presidential preference primary. Weekend voting is Saturday only. Excuse-required absentee ballot voting is available.

Index 4: Safe Voting - Confidence level - LOW
Tennessee provides excuse-only absentee ballot options. There is no proactive mailing of ballots applications to voters without request nor prepaid postage. Ballot drop-off options are restrictive. The state does offer accessible electronic vote-by-mail ballots to voters with disabilities. There are no restrictions on who can return the ballot on behalf of a voter in need.

Learn more about how to vote and voting rights in Tennessee: VOTE411
Learn about voting laws recently passed or enacted in Tennessee: 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 Tennessee: DemocracyMovement.us
Index 5: Ballot Acceptance - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Tennessee 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 not allow election administrators to preprocess returned ballots. It does not have a codified process for voters to correct for ballot discrepancies. Tennessee does have a signature verification program. Absentee ballots must be received by the close of polls on Election Day.

Index 6: Logistical Barriers in Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Tennessee allows employees to take up to 3 hours paid leave to vote. There was a high ratio of poll workers per polling sites in 2020 and a low number of voters reporting concerns with access or safety issues at the polls. Tennessee ranked 46th among all states in 2020 to improve election processes while being cost effective. The state has few to no measures to assist disabled and/or elderly voters, including prohibiting curbside voting, nor provides quality accessible voting machine options.

Index 7: Equipment, Security, and Auditing - Confidence level - LOW
Tennessee has a voter-verified paper audit trail for some counties. The state uses a combination of hand marked paper ballots and electronic voting machines, offering Ballot Marking Devices for voters with accessibility needs. Tennessee does not test the equipment according to federal standards. The state's election security systems received very low overall ratings in 2018. It uses some audit methods to double-check for machine recording errors during the statutorily required post-election period. Overall, Tennessee ranked last among all states in this index. 2022 laws create new and additional procedures regarding post-election audit procedures and methods in the counties; processes for absentee ballots, including requests, transmittal, and returns; use of optical scan tabulators, and the threshold triggering a hand count.
Index 8: Independent Election Administration - Confidence level - LOW

Although Tennessee has established the constitutional right to a secret ballot, it does not prohibit election interference by the legislature. Bills in 2022 sought to usurp the roles of state election officials, shift election authority, conduct an audit of the 2020 election results, create the power to review other elections, and prohibit private funding of election administration. 2022 law enacted mandates consent by house and senate speakers to enter into consent decrees to change state election laws or rules.

Index 9: External Interference in Voting - Confidence Level - MEDIUM

Public opinion surveys showed that Tennessee voters had not much trust in the 2020 election news coverage, while political scientists gave the state low media integrity ratings. Tennessee had a moderate number of demonstrations during the last week of the general elections. There was a low number of reports from voters about political intimidation online and disinformation, as well as concerns about election certification. State law requires training for all poll workers and authorizes law enforcement to be present only by request or on official business. There are no state laws which criminalize voter intimidation and false election speech, prohibit obstructing or hindering voters, nor ban weapons at polling sites.

Index 10: The Role of Government and Politics – No rating given, informational only

Tennessee is one of 19 states that has a Republican trifecta, as well as a triplex - the governor, attorney general, and secretary of state are from the same political party. Based on the last two presidential elections, Tennessee is one of the 10 most Republican-leaning states, with an average GOP voting margin of 24.6% compared to the national average Democratic voting margin of 3%. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the state’s population grew by 8.9% compared to the national average of 7.4%. Tennessee is less racially diverse than the rest of the country. During the past decade, the white population dropped from 84% to 79%. With the U.S. Census results, the state will neither gain nor lose any representatives in Congress.