State Index Score Card

Kentucky

State Rank: 22
Overall Score: MEDIUM

Index 1: Voter Registration - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Kentucky closes voter registration 9 days before Election Day. The state offers online voter registration, but not same-day nor automatic. Kentucky disqualifies those convicted of felonies from voting permanently unless that disqualification is removed by pardon. The state does not purge voting lists no matter how many years of nonvoting. There were zero total purges conducted in 2020. A low number of Kentucky 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.

Index 2: Voter Identification - Confidence level - HIGH
Kentucky has a non-strict non-photo 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 or not being on the voting list/database. Restrictive state legislation was pending in early 2022, but did not pass.

Index 3: Early Voting - Confidence level - LOW
Kentucky offers early in-person voting beginning the Thursday before Election Day, ending the Saturday before. Excuse-required absentee ballot voting is available. Legislation enacted in 2021 placed restrictions on voter access. 2022 law requires more specific timing and accessibility requirements for no-excuse in-person absentee voting and excuse-required absentee voting in-person during early voting.

Learn more about how to vote and voting rights in Kentucky: VOTE411
Learn about voting laws recently passed or enacted in Kentucky: 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 Kentucky: DemocracyMovement.us
Index 4: Safe Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Kentucky reverted back to excuse-only absentee ballot options after making no-excuse temporary in 2020 in response to the pandemic. State laws passed in 2021 made availability of drop boxes permanent, but also shortened the window to apply for a mail ballot and placed anti-voter restrictions assisting the return of an absentee ballot for a voter in need. The state offers an online portal for absentee ballot applications and provides accessible electronic absentee to voters with disabilities, but no prepaid postage. 2022 law expands the list of qualifying excuses to vote by absentee ballot and allows disabled voters to receive a mail-in ballot through the state’s online portal, in addition to requesting a ballot.

Index 5: Ballot Acceptance - Confidence level - MEDIUM
Kentucky had a high percentage of mail-in ballots returned in 2020, with a low rejection rate. There is a statewide statutorily ballot tracking program, but it is not strong. The state allows election administrators to preprocess returned ballots, has a signature verification program, and has codified process for voters to correct for ballot discrepancies. All ballots must be received by close of polls on Election Day.
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Index 6: Logistical Barriers in Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM

Election Day in Kentucky is a state holiday, and state law allows employees to take up to 4 hours unpaid leave to vote. The state provides limited quality accessible voting machine options and has few other laws if any above federal mandates to assist disabled voters. State law in 2021 created barriers with disability or mobility issues and criminalization of volunteers assisting voters. However, a new law allows voting centers where residents of any precinct can come vote. 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, inadequate signage, and COVID-19 protocols. The state has passed measures to address the residency challenges of voters experiencing housing instability. Kentucky had a moderate ratio of poll workers to polling sites in 2020. It was ranked among the bottom ten states that invested in the 2020 election to improve processes while being cost effective.

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

Kentucky has a voter-verified paper audit trail for some counties. Most counties use a Ballot Marking Device to meet voter accessibility needs, while others use hand marked paper ballots or electronic voting machines. The state tests the equipment according to federal standards. Kentucky uses E Poll Book technology statewide, which helps reduce discrepancies. The state uses traditional and risk limiting audit methods to double-check for machine recording errors before certification and during the statutorily required post-election period. 2022 law requires audit protocols by which ballots are checked, compared, and verified with the results produced by vote tallying equipment to ensure accuracy. 2022 law also requires that voting equipment and ballot boxes be kept under video surveillance for 30 days following any election, and modifies requirements for election equipment, including a prohibition on equipment used in tabulation or aggregation of votes from connecting to the internet.

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Index 9: External Interference in Voting - Confidence Level - MEDIUM
Public opinion surveys showed that Kentucky voters had no trust in the 2020 election news coverage, while political scientists gave the state medium media integrity ratings. There was a low number of reports from voters about political intimidation, concerns with election certification, electioneering, poll worker misconduct, and police presence. State law mandates 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, prohibit obstructing or hindering voters, nor ban weapons at polling sites.

Index 10: The Role of Government and Politics – No rating given, informational only
Kentucky is one of six states that has a truly split government. It has neither a trifecta – the governor and the legislature are from different parties - nor a triplex – the governor, attorney general, and secretary of state are not from the same political party. Based on the last two presidential elections, Kentucky is one of the 10 most Republican states, with an average GOP voting margin of 27.9% compared to the national average Democratic voting margin of 3%. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the state’s population grew by 3.8% compared to the national average of 7.4%. Kentucky is among the least racially diverse states in the country. During the past decade, the white population dropped from 88% to 82%. With the U.S. Census results, the state will neither gain nor lose any representatives in Congress.

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