Index 1: Voter Registration - Confidence level - LOW
South Carolina closes voter registration 30 days before Election Day. The state allows online voter registration, but not automatic nor same-day. South Carolina does not purge voters from lists for not voting and there was a very low number of purges conducted in 2020. Felony disenfranchisement continues until terms of parole or probation are complete. A very high 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. State law passed in 2022 places new standards for voter list maintenance as part of an annual general list maintenance program, such as removing voters who have been declared mentally incapacitated, while mandating reports on non-U.S. citizens who are issued a driver's license or non-driver ID, and tracking voters' deaths outside the state instead of just within the state. New legislation requires that individuals be removed from the list of eligible voters within 7 days of receipt of information that they are not qualified.

Index 2: Voter Identification - Confidence level - LOW
South Carolina has a non-strict photo ID law. It is a member of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) which helps states improve accuracy of voter rolls. However, a high number of voters reported concerns about voter ID or not being on the voting list/database.

Index 3: Early Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM
South Carolina enacted a new 2022 law offering early in-person voting 14 days before Election Day except for elections other than statewide general elections. County election officials determine whether to provide Saturday hours other than during general elections, while Sunday early voting is prohibited. Excuse-required absentee ballot voting is available.
Index 5: Ballot Acceptance - Confidence level - LOW
South Carolina had a high percentage of mail-in ballots returned in 2020, with a low rejection rate. There is a statutorily required statewide ballot tracking program, but it is not strong. The state has no codified process for voters to correct for ballot discrepancies and does not have a signature verification program. Each absentee ballot envelope must be signed by the voter and a witness. Military and overseas voters are exempt from the witness requirement. Absentee ballots must be received by the close of polls on Election Day. 2022 law now permits preprocessing of absentee ballots on the 2nd day before Election Day.

Index 6: Logistical Barriers in Voting - Confidence level - LOW
South Carolina has no law allowing employees to take any type of paid or unpaid leave to vote. Although the state allows curbside voting, it has very few measures to assist voters with disability or mobility issues, including some accessible voting machines options. There was a high number of reports from voters in 2020 about the lack of accessibility for the disabled. Although there was a moderate ratio of poll workers to polling sites, there was a high number of reports in 2020 about long lines, inadequate signage, delayed opening or early closing of polling sites, mishandling of polling site ballots, and concerns about voting equipment. South Carolina ranked at the bottom of all states in this index. 2022 law reduces the number of polling sites according to the number of registered voters per precinct.
Index 8: Independent Election Administration - Confidence level - LOW

South Carolina has established the constitutional right to a secret ballot and its election administration is designed to be nonpartisan by nature. No laws were passed in 2021, but bills in 2022 sought to penalize, usurp, or interfere with state or local election officials; shift election authority which could allow for more partisan interference with election administration in the state; conduct an audit of the 2020 election results; and increase the reporting, investigation, and prosecution of election crimes.

2022 laws that were enacted ban private funding of election-related processes not provided through ordinary state or county appropriations, elevate several election-related crimes from misdemeanors to felonies, create mechanisms for the state legislature to seek the removal of any member of the state election commission or the commission’s executive director, prohibit the state election commission from issuing emergency regulations, and allow state legislative leaders to intervene in state and federal court actions related to elections.

South Carolina

State Rank: 45
Overall Score: LOW

Learn more about how to vote and voting rights in South Carolina: VOTE411
Learn about voting laws recently passed or enacted in South Carolina: 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 South Carolina: DemocracyMovement.us

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

South Carolina has a statewide voter-verified paper audit trail, uses Ballot Marking Devices for voters with all accessibility needs, and tests the equipment according to federal standards and accreditation. The state uses E Poll Book technology statewide, which helps reduce discrepancies. The state’s election security systems received very high overall ratings in 2018. The state uses some audit methods to double-check machine recording errors before election certification and during the statutorily required post-election period. 2022 state law approved the addition of optical voting systems and expanded the type of auditing methods.
Index 9: External Interference in Voting - Confidence Level - LOW
Public opinion surveys showed that South Carolina voters had no trust in the 2020 election news coverage, while political scientists gave the state low media integrity ratings. There was a high number of reports from voters about political intimidation and disinformation in-person and online, electioneering, poll worker misconduct, and concerns with police presence at the polls. Although state law prohibits weapons at polling sites and authorizes law enforcement to be present only by request or on official business, none require all poll workers to be trained, criminalize voter intimidation and false election speech, or prohibit obstructing or hindering voters at polling sites. New 2022 state law expands the scope of electioneering crimes to cover early voting locations.

Index 10: The Role of Government and Politics – No rating given, informational only
South Carolina 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, South Carolina is a solidly Republican-leaning state, with an average GOP voting margin of 13.0% compared to the national average Democratic voting margin of 3%. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the state's population grew by 10.7% (11th fastest) compared to the national average of 7.4%. South Carolina 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.