



GEORGIA:  
DEMOCRACY &  
ELECTIONS

# REPORT 2023

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ASSESSING ELECTION SAFETY, SECURITY,  
ACCESSIBILITY, AND FAIRNESS IN THE PEACH STATE

ISSUED: JULY 13, 2023



# DISCLAIMER:

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The following democracy and elections research and custom scoring rubric, developed by Georgia First, are intended to serve as a guiding framework for assessing state-level democracy and elections, based on our organization's beliefs (see *Section 2*, page 5) and perceived best practices. It is important to note that the rubric is not an authoritative or exhaustive measure of democracy and elections, nor does it claim to represent the views of all individuals and organizations. The report and rubric do not explore or provide assessment criteria for the type of voting system utilized by a state and/or jurisdiction (e.g., hand-marked paper ballots; direct recording electronic [DRE] systems; ballot-marking devices and systems [BMDs]). Additionally, it does not include criteria for more local-level administrative considerations or conditions, such as community specific voter intimidation activities; availability of college campus polling locations; and/or other unique community needs such as on-site polling assistance for alternate languages. It is designed to provide general guidance and foster constructive discussion.

By using this rubric, users acknowledge and accept the aforementioned disclaimer. The rubric is provided in good faith and should be employed as a tool for analysis, discussion, and improvement, rather than as a definitive measure of democracy and elections.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Georgia First** is a 501(c)4 political advocacy group founded by a former North Georgia county commissioner. The organization **focuses its efforts on three main areas:** sound fiscal policy, expanded access to health care, and election integrity and democracy issues. By design, the Georgia First board of directors is comprised of equal Democrats and Republicans and a staunch Independent—all of which **hold the organization accountable to the middle.**

The **right to vote** is the very bedrock of our republic and the right by which we protect all others. Like so many, we have been concerned about the numerous national and state events that have transpired since 2020. Georgia First believes there are **serious threats to our democracy.**

One of the **most significant challenges is the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories** with social media platforms making it easy to quickly spread this false information. These circumstances, combined with the **prioritization of political party ideologies over good policy**, hinder constructive debate, polarize the political landscape, and even drive individuals to threats of, or actual violence. According to Vanderbilt University's Unity Index, **Americans' general sense of faith and trust in their political institutions reached a 40-year low in 2021.**

“  
*No right is more precious in a free country than that of having a voice in the election of those who make the laws under which, as good citizens, we must live. Other rights, even the most basic, are illusory if the right to vote is undermined.*  
—Chief Justice Earl Warren  
”

Considering Georgia's own significant challenges, dating back to the 2018 gubernatorial election and significantly escalating after the 2020 presidential election, **Georgia First set out to evaluate the state of democracy and elections in the Peach State.** While many organizations routinely assess the individual performance of state legislators and members of Congress, using legislative scorecards, there are fewer nonpartisan organizations examining state-level democracy and elections performance.

The foundation for our state-level assessment is based on three core beliefs.

**We believe** the state of Georgia:

- Should adopt **common sense policies** that build trust in our elections;
- Should refrain from enacting **partisanly charged election policies**; and
- Has a responsibility to ensure newly enacted elections requirements are **adequately funded.**

A **custom rubric** (see *Appendix I*) was developed, using a **five-tier rating system** and focusing on multiple criteria organized **across four categories:**

1. Elections Integrity & Security
2. Elections Administration
3. Elections Funding
4. Voter Access & Participation

As part of the **comprehensive analysis**, our team examined the current Georgia landscape; inventoried the state's democracy and elections legislation passed since 2020; assessed regulatory requirements; and researched third-party, state-level scoring for democracy and elections. The detailed rubric is available in *Appendix I*, and the full report outlines in detail the research and analysis performed as well as high-level results from five (5) recent third-party, state-level reports.

Out of a total of 99 points, **Georgia scored 88, earning it an "Above Average" rating.** Three of the four categories had similar performance ratings, while lower scores were primarily earned in the Elections Funding category. It is important to note that if some of the 2023 proposed election legislation had been enacted, it would have significantly *decreased* Georgia's final 2023 rating.

Additionally, this report is intended to **assess the conditions of democracy and elections** at the **macro level** as opposed to a more micro level. As such, Georgia First did not include assessment criteria for more local-level administrative considerations.

Moving forward, Georgia must focus its efforts on **improving voter access** and embracing the idea that we all **benefit from a more engaged citizenry**, regardless of political party affiliation or ideologies. We have allowed outside influences and conspiracy theorists to **sow distrust** among our citizens, and **pressure Georgia legislators** to ignore the facts provided by state and local election officials, along with other credible nonpartisan entities and dedicated public servants.

What Georgia needs most is not more omnibus election bills; SB202 while imperfect as it relates to increased voter access and participation, it did include a number of positives and adequately addressed legitimate elections security concerns in several ways.

The **next best steps for Georgia** to improve include but are not limited to:

- Pass 2024 legislation to protect voter-roll-management from unchecked, frivolous third-party challenges
- Clean-up guidance for how provisional ballots are treated on Election Day
- Adequate funding for any new state-mandated election requirements & need-based aid for previously unfunded mandates
- Independently developed Georgia electoral maps
- Respect for Constitutional authority of Georgia's Secretary of State

*\*The complete Next Steps list can be found in Section 9 of the full report.*

Georgia cannot further these priorities without **healthy and respectful debate** over real Georgia issues and **not hyperpartisan accusations and manufactured problems.** By working together and exchanging our suspicions for critical thinking, Georgia **can become a national example for safe, fair, accessible, and secure elections.**

For report or other questions, contact Director of Communications, Shannon Ferguson at [Shannon.Ferguson@Georgia1st.org](mailto:Shannon.Ferguson@Georgia1st.org).



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## Section 1

# INTRODUCTION TO GEORGIA FIRST

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Georgia First is a 501c4 organization committed to preserving and growing the strength and welfare of our state, her people, and our collective future. The organization is committed to advancing the lives of all Georgians by:

- Advocating for strong fiscal policies that create a robust middle class,
- Expanding healthcare access and improving affordability, and
- Standing as a voice above the fray for democracy and elections.

Founded in early-2022 by Natalie Crawford, a native Georgian, lifelong Republican and unapologetic moderate, Georgia First works to preserve and grow Georgia's ever-shrinking middle class by building strong faith-based and community coalitions, limiting government overreach, promoting fiscal responsibility, and advancing individual liberty.

Crawford is a former two-term North Georgia county commissioner who founded Georgia First following some of our nation's most turbulent election cycles. Georgia First aims to tamp down the ongoing hyperpartisan rhetoric that only divides us; serves to delay progress;

stymies innovation; and fails to deliver real-world solutions for hard-working Georgians.

While many nonprofit organizations describe themselves as "nonpartisan," Georgia First takes the opposite approach—we are cross-partisan, serving as a bridge between the two prominent parties to help overcome dominating political ideologies and achieve compromise. By design, the Georgia First board of directors is comprised of equal Democrats and Republicans and an Independent—all of which help hold the organization accountable to the middle.

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*"It's time we start putting people over politics and put the people of Georgia first. We're working to preserve a strong economy that emphasizes opportunity, innovation, and fiscal responsibility; access to affordable healthcare in both cities and rural areas; and the right to vote securely for all eligible citizens."*

~Natalie Crawford, Executive Director



## Section 2

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

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The right to vote has long been at the heart of this grand experiment and the struggle for enfranchisement—an ongoing pursuit in creating a more perfect union. The right to vote is the very bedrock of our republic and the right by which we protect all others. Understanding that the administration of elections is an arduous task for Georgia’s counties, we believe the State of Georgia:

*Should adopt common sense policies that build trust in our elections*  
*Should refrain from enacting partisanly charged election policies*  
*Has a responsibility to ensure newly enacted elections requirements are adequately funded*

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Further, recognizing the importance of the franchise and that all eligible voters have the right and responsibility to participate in the process:

- *We believe* in secure elections and that the administration of elections, at all levels, should be insulated from partisanship.
- *We believe* political districts should be an accurate representation of communities and the populations who live there, drawn to reflect equal representation, not for political expediency.
- *We believe* every eligible vote should count, regardless of party affiliations or policy preferences.
- *We believe* it is a reasonable expectation that voters confirm their eligibility and that they are who they say they are.
- *We believe* voting access is critical in a 21st century world and that citizens should have options for casting a ballot—among them early voting, transparent absentee ballot process, and secure and adequate drop boxes.
- *We believe* that the more eligible voters who participate in our democratic process yields a stronger and more representative government and that eligible voters across all demographics should be encouraged to participate.



## Section 3

# THREATS TO OVERALL DEMOCRACY

Over the last several years, the United States has faced numerous threats to its overall democracy, which have persisted through 2023, earning the designation of “moderately backsliding” on a global assessment in 2022 but showing improvement following the 2022 mid-terms.<sup>1</sup> One of the most significant challenges is the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories.<sup>2</sup>

Social media makes it easy to quickly spread false information, leading to a distorted public discourse, eroding trust in traditional institutions, and undermining the democratic process. Misinformation campaigns have targeted elections and individual candidates, amplifying divisions and sowing doubt among citizens, thereby posing a significant threat to the foundations of democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Another threat to democracy is the prioritization of political party ideologies over good policy.<sup>4</sup> The increasingly polarized political landscape hinders constructive debate and compromises the ability to enact effective legislation. The focus on winning ideological battles, rather than finding common ground and pursuing evidence-based policies, results in legislative gridlock, and weakens the democratic system's ability to respond to some of our most pressing societal issues. This erosion of compromise

and the abandonment of evidence-based decision-making undermines the democratic principle of governance—*by the people, for the people*.

Furthermore, a concerning trend of reducing voter access and diminishing voter protections, often positioned as election security, ultimately serves to undermine the principle of equal representation. Some states have implemented more restrictive voting laws, such as but not limited to reduced early voting opportunities and excessive voter roll edits. These measures often disproportionately affect underserved communities. Additionally, the weakening of voter protections, such as the 2013 Supreme Court ruling regarding the Voting Rights Act, risks the democratic ideal of inclusive and equal representation.<sup>5</sup>

Compounding these challenges, threats of violence and actual violence pose a grave risk to U.S. democracy. Political polarization and the rise of extremist ideologies fueled tensions, leading to incidents of violence and intimidation. Attacks on elected officials, voter suppression efforts targeting specific communities, and the breach of the U.S. Capitol in 2021, underscored the fragility of democratic institutions and highlighted the urgent need for safeguarding the democratic process.



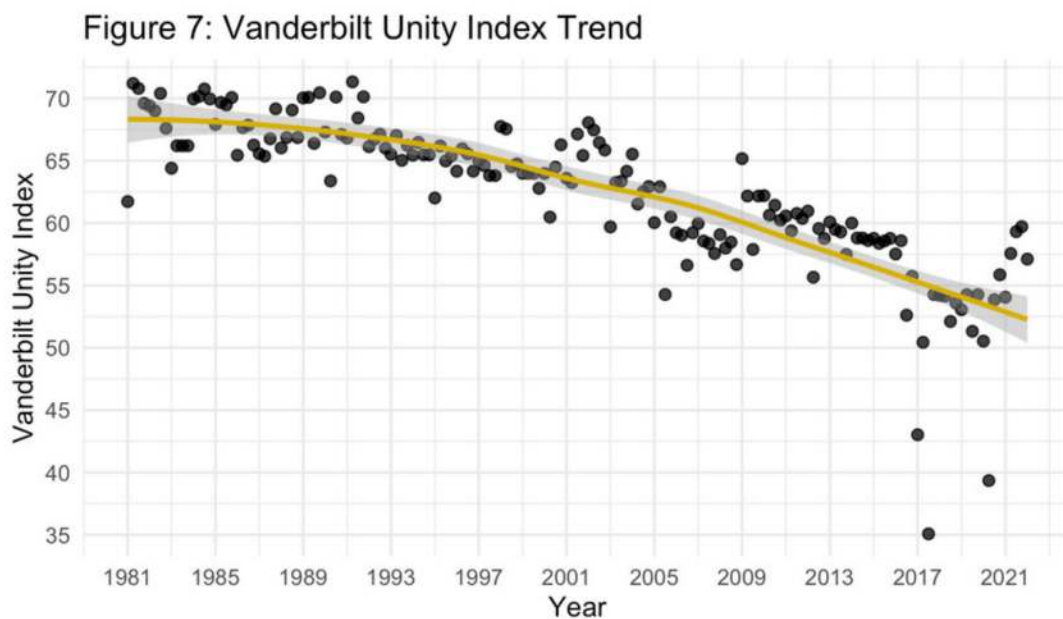
Vanderbilt University created the Vanderbilt Unity Index, an analytical representation of “unity,” tracked quarterly since 1981. On a scale of 0–100 with 100 representing the most unified state, the U.S. has seen a steady 40-year decline in the country’s faith in our shared political life with 2021, notably among the lowest scores.<sup>6</sup>

Misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories are fueling division among U.S. citizens and undermining the public’s long-held trust in democratic institutions. Putting political ideologies over good policy hinders effective governance and compromises the democratic process. Political theater and hyperpartisan rhetoric have flooded social media channels, infiltrated U.S. committee hearings, and devolved legislative chamber debates.

Additionally, reducing voter access, diminishing voter protections, and threats of violence erodes the principle of equal representation and creates an environment of fear and intimidation. Addressing these threats requires a concerted effort to promote accurate information; challenge conspiracy theorists; protect the integrity of elections; foster compromise; and ensure the safety and participation of all citizens in the democratic process.

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*“The Vanderbilt Unity Index seeks to measure fluctuations in Americans’ general sense of faith and trust in their political institutions, not the reactions of the public to particular policies. As an aggregate of several different inputs, we believe the VUI can serve as an estimate of the country’s faith in our shared political life.”<sup>7</sup>*



*Section 4*

# CURRENT GEORGIA DEMOCRACY & ELECTIONS LANDSCAPE

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The state of democracy in Georgia has been under intense scrutiny, and subject to significant concerns by both conservative and progressive voters since the 2018 gubernatorial election. These concerns significantly escalated following the 2020 election cycle. With Georgia at the forefront of baseless claims and conspiracy theories about widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election, the state is facing significant challenges regarding democracy and elections. These baseless fraud claims, regarding destruction of absentee ballots, ballot-filled suitcases, and irregular election worker behaviors to name a few, resulted in threats against county elections staff and volunteers, and even necessitated some poll workers to go into hiding and/or relocate for their family's safety.<sup>8</sup> Alleged fraud and heightened divisive partisan rhetoric ultimately led to the passage of an omnibus elections integrity bill (Senate Bill 202), during the 2021 legislative session. One of the most significant negative impacts, resulting from SB202, was the final bill language and provision allowing any resident to challenge the qualifications of an unlimited number of voters within their county.<sup>9</sup>

The passage of SB202 resulted in broad condemnation from a number of Georgia-based companies, such as Delta and Coca-Cola whose CEO James Quincey described it as "wrong" and a "step backward."<sup>10</sup> Voting rights activists dubbed the bill "Jim Crow 2.0."<sup>11</sup> While the catalyst for the bill was non-credible election fraud claims, and in some ways a knee-jerk reaction to those claims, it is worth noting some of the bill's positive elements.

- Addressed voter wait times by requiring large polling places to take action if wait times surpass an hour at certain times during the day (hire more staff, split up the precinct)
- Codified ballot drop boxes requiring each county to have at least one
- Expanded early voting access for most counties: adds an additional mandatory Saturday and formally codifies optional Sunday voting hours
- Permitted counties to have early voting open as long as 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. but required 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at minimum
- Required training for poll watchers before allowing them to work and gave local officials authority over where watchers can observe
- Eliminated the "jungle primary" (i.e., all candidates for elected office run in the same primary regardless of political party)



- Maintained process for elderly (over 65), disabled, and military to apply once for absentee ballot and automatically receive one for the rest of that election cycle
- Allowed for applications to be submitted online using online request portal
- Instituted rank choice instant runoff ballots for active military and their family members as well as overseas voters
- Required better notification process for polling place closure(s)
- Permitted counties to begin processing (but not tabulating) absentee ballots two weeks before election
- Allowed local elections officials discretion over elections equipment use for smaller, lower-turnout races (i.e., One (1) BMD to every 250 active voter ratio not required in those smaller races; can be at local officials discretion, based on expected turnout.)

Since redistricting in 2020, multiple state lawsuits are underway with challenges to Georgia's most recent redistricting (electoral) maps for both the House and the Senate as well as legal challenges to the state's use of ballot marking devices (BMD). State officials and alternate electors from the Georgia Republican Party have been deposed as part of the Fulton County District Attorney's ongoing election probe, regarding former President Donald Trump's outreach to Secretary of State (SOS) Brad Raffensperger and other elected officials, concerning Georgia's 2020 election returns. Georgia has also seen several elections officials for larger counties resign, over the last several years and following the tumultuous 2020 election cycle. And for the first time ever, the Carter Center monitored U.S. elections, during the 2022 midterms, in response to rising threats to democracy and diminished voter confidence. Georgia was included among those five states monitored by the Carter Center along with Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Michigan.<sup>12</sup>

The above is a high-level summary of the current conditions in Georgia. These notable considerations, combined with Georgia's ongoing legislative elections tinkering, all contribute to an environment that Georgia First believes has the potential to threaten the core tenets of democracy. Partisan rhetoric from both parties continues to contribute to a climate of division and suspicion, further eroding public confidence in the integrity of Georgia's democratic institutions.

More recently, a significant breach of the Coffee County elections office was uncovered, and the state subsequently learned that a full copy of the Dominion Voting Systems software, obtained during that breach, was uploaded to a ShareFile account.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, 19 voter check-in tablets ("poll pads") were recently reported stolen from a DeKalb County warehouse. Although, the SOS reports that no voter information is at risk because the new devices had not been loaded, and the poll pads do not generate ballots or count votes.<sup>14</sup>

*Section 5*

## GEORGIA ANALYSIS PERFORMED

For this inaugural *Georgia: Democracy & Elections Report 2023*, Georgia First chose to focus on an overall state assessment and scoring as opposed to the more typical individual legislative scorecards. The five-tier rating criteria and scoring rubric detailed in *Appendix I* seeks to establish what Georgia First believes to be best practices for democracy and elections.

This Georgia report and scoring is based on a comprehensive evaluation strategy.

Our team:

- Performed extensive evaluation of available third-party research and recent state-level rankings
- Used third-party research to assess the perceived state of democracy for the United States as well as individual states
- Reviewed the respective methodologies and rankings assigned by those third-party organizations to identify any commonalities and differences (see *Section 7* for state reporting)
- Consulted democracy and elections experts in and outside Georgia
- Analyzed local and national media elections coverage for the state of Georgia between 2020 and 2023, noting public comments offered by both experts, legislators, and other officials
- Inventoried and evaluated all Georgia elections-related legislation adopted by the Georgia General Assembly for legislative sessions 2021–2023 (see *Section 6* of the report)
- Reviewed multiple nonpartisan redistricting sources
- Inspected all public comment submitted to the Joint Reapportionment Committee in 2021
- Attended 2022 and 2023 Georgia legislative committee meetings in-person or viewed on-line, evaluating public testimony offered by individual citizens, NGOs, and others, noting legislator questions posed and public comments offered
- Continued monitoring of pending/ongoing state court proceedings related to Georgia elections



## Section 6

# GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE & REGULATORY ASSESSMENT



As part of our overall analysis, Georgia First assessed current regulatory conditions and examined democracy- and elections-related legislation adopted between 2021 and 2023, scoring each as overall positive (+) or negative (-) for the state. Regulatory and legislative actions were then categorized across seven (7) unique categories as follows:

## 1 ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Required Secretary of State (SOS) and State Elections Board (SEB) to give legislative Judiciary committees at least five (5) business days advance notice before entering into any election-related consent agreements.
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Required the SEB to notify the General Assembly at least 20 days prior to the effective date of any emergency rule, and gave authority to either House or Senate Judiciary committees to suspend the SEB's emergency rule by a majority vote.
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Removed the SOS as chair of the SEB, made the SOS a non-voting member, and replaced the SOS with a nonpartisan chair appointed by the legislature.
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Limited local elections officials ability to pre-process absentee ballots to a specific time period (i.e., may begin on the third Monday before Election Day but not earlier) as opposed to self-determination based on unique local needs
- ⊖ SB222 (2023): Imposed excessive criminal and financial penalties for elections officials who “solicit, take, or otherwise accept” donations, services or contributions to aid in county elections administration
- ⊖ SB222 (2023): Initial legislation language removed the SOS from the SEB
- ⊕ SB222 (2023): Offered bipartisan amendment to reinstall SOS as ex-officio member of the SEB



## 2 LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

- ⊖ Georgia's electoral maps are drawn by the state legislature as opposed to an entity that is independent, nonpartisan, or comprised of equal party appointees. This only serves to benefit whichever political party is in power at that moment in time. It is worth noting that both Georgia Democrats and Republicans have been accused of gerrymandering over the years.

## 3 ELECTIONS SUPPORT

- ⊕ SB222 (2023): Passed amendment that increased the nominal value of services and goods from \$250 to \$500
- ⊖ SB222 (2023): Prohibited counties from seeking third-party grants and funding to assist with local election costs
- ⊕ SB222 (2023): Permitted the SOS to seek third-party grants and funding to assist Georgia counties with election costs
- ⊖ SB222 (2023): Shifted third-party funding efforts to the Secretary of State (SOS) without full consideration for the staffing needs required to support this new mandate

## 4 VOTER PROTECTION

- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Established election crime hotline administered by a partisan, elected position (i.e., Attorney General) as opposed to a nonpartisan state law enforcement entity
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Required the SOS to participate in a multi-state voter registration cross-check system
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Allowed unlimited voter challenges a voter could make on another person's qualifications
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Made it a misdemeanor to photograph or record an electronic voting machine or voted ballot
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Allowed out of precinct provisional ballots to count if cast in the wrong polling place after 5:00 p.m.
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Created potential inequity by not allowing for exceptions in extenuating circumstances for provisional ballots cast in the wrong precinct before 5:00 p.m.
- ⊕ SB441 (2022): Expanded GBI duties to expressly include identifying and investigating potential election law violations

## 5 VOTER RESPONSIBILITY

- ⊕ State law requires photo identification when voting and provides Georgia voters with access to free voter identification cards to assist with voting (*Ongoing*)
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Required voter identification on Absentee Ballot requests and allows eligible voters three options for identification : 1) Georgia Driver's License number, 2) State identification number, or 3) a variety of alternate photo ID options such as United States Passport, other valid identification card issued by a branch, department, agency, or entity of the state of Georgia, any other state, or the United States, military identification card, or Tribal identification card combined with proof of address (current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck, Government check, or other government document)

## 6 VOTING ACCESS

- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Required counties with long wait times in 2020 to either open another voting station or add more staff, equipment, or both to the existing station (Applied to precincts with more than 2,000 voters that had waited longer than one hour to vote in 2020.)
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Permitted counties to adjust the size of precincts based on wait times for the previous election
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Allowed Georgia residents to serve as poll officers in adjoining counties where they were not employed by the county
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Limited counties' authority to self-determine extended polling hours, explicitly requiring a court judgment to do so
- ⊖ Reduced available drop box days
- ⊕ Reduced drop box hours and locations, shifting from 24/7 in variety of locations in 2020
- ⊕ Required drop boxes to be located indoors
- ⊖ Required closure of drop boxes four (4) days prior to Election Day
- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Shortened runoff elections from nine (9) weeks after the first round to four (4) weeks which reduced early voting and absentee ballot return times

## 6 VOTING ACCESS CONTINUED

- ⊖ SB202 (2021): Prohibited new voters from being registered before the runoff election
- ⊕ SB202 (2021): Expanded early-voting opportunities
- ⊕ SB129 (2023): Expanded employee access for early voting not just on Election Day

## 7 VOTER PARTICIPATION

- ⊕ Continued compliance with Motor Voter Act 1993 and maintaining voter registration access via public assistance office interactions (*Ongoing*)
- ⊕ Adoption of automatic voter registration (2016) as part of the driver's license application and renewal processes (*Ongoing*)
- ⊖ Modifications to the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS) website in (XXXX) resulted in an erroneous "opt-in" voter registration process as opposed to the 2016 automatic voter registration process implemented, leading to 15 months of missed opportunities for Georgia voters (2021)
- ⊕ Resolution of the Georgia DDS website issue to fix the website error, returning to an automatic registration and opt-out approach (2022)





*Section 7*

# GEORGIA RANKING & SCORING

## A. How Others Score Georgia's Democracy & Elections

While many nonpartisan and political action committees offer specific legislative scoring for individual U.S. elected officials, Georgia First found that there are fewer groups assessing overall democracy and elections at a state level. It is worth noting that the majority of groups scoring democracy and elections are seemingly considered as left-leaning or center-left, according to groups like Influence Watch, a project of the conservative think tank Capital Research Center. The notable exception is The Heritage Foundation (THF), a Washington, D.C. based research and educational institution, established 30 years ago. The Foundation's mission is to build and promote conservative public policies, promoting free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

*Appendix III* provides a detailed list of six (6) recent state-level democracy and election assessments identified by Georgia First. The summarized list of the studies and their respective Georgia scores are listed below.

In addition to the six state performance studies below, Georgia First also identified a GOP score card developed by the Republican Accountability Project (RAP), a group of Republicans and conservatives defending democracy and promoting pro-democracy, Republican candidates. However, the score card exclusively assesses the performance of current Republican members of Congress as opposed to state performance. It is worth noting that the RAP Democracy Grade is determined by evaluating Republicans based on six different criteria, centered around the 2020 election and specific events that followed.

**The Heritage Foundation** - Examined election integrity across 12 unique areas, believed to be essential to secure elections, with final score based on compilation of scores.

***Overall Georgia Score = 83/100; rank #2***

**Leadership Now Project** - Examined three core areas: Voting (C), Electoral Systems (C), and Campaign Finance (B).

***Overall Georgia Score = C, Low Risk Election Interference***

**Movement Advancement Project** - Tracks 44 election laws, policies, and data points, examining Who Votes, How to Vote, and Protecting the Vote. Utilizes five-tier Scoring Rubric: High, Medium, Fair, Low, and Negative.

**Overall Georgia Score = Assigned a "Fair Overall Policy Tally;" listed among 18 other states assigned this ranking**

**States United Democracy Center and Project Democracy** - Asserts the risk is highest in states where the executive leaders (governors, secretaries of state, and attorneys general) are more likely to engage in election subversion and where the legislature is likely to pass laws increasing the risk of election subversion.

**Overall Georgia Score = Assigned "Medium Risk" on a three-tier rating system: Highest Risk, Medium Risk, and States to Watch**

**End Citizens United & Let America Vote** - Designed a 300-point scoring rubric for each of the three categories with multiple 10-point questions under each: Voting Rights Laws (34/D), Campaign Finance & Anti-Corruption Laws (47/F), and Democracy Subversion Protections (47/F).

**Overall Georgia Score = Ranked 47/50 with Grade "F" assigned**

**The Gerrymandering Project** - Assessed overall partisan fairness using a four-tier letter-grade, based on two categories: Competitiveness & Geographic Features. [Grading - A: Good for the category; B: Better than average, but bias still exists; C: Average for the category, could be better but could also be worse; F: Poor for the category, could be much better].

**Overall Georgia Scores = Congressional (Score C), State House (Score B), and State Senate (Score F)**

## Section 7

# GEORGIA RANKING & SCORING

## B. Georgia First Scoring

**ABOVE  
AVERAGE**

The Georgia First *State Democracy & Elections Rubric (Appendix I)*, and its corresponding *Glossary (Appendix II)*, carefully outline our scoring criteria; the levels of performance and best practice descriptions as defined by Georgia First; and the points available for each. The criteria are organized across the four categories below. Based on Georgia First's custom-developed scoring rubric, **Georgia scored an 88 out of an overall 99 points**, earning it an "Above Average" rating. The total points possible and earned points are summarized by the four categories below. The detailed Georgia scoring per criteria are available on the following page. It is important to note that if some of the 2023 proposed election legislation had been enacted, it would have significantly *decreased* Georgia's final 2023 rating.

**27**  
TOTAL

### Elections Integrity & Security

Upholding election integrity reinforces public trust in the democratic process, and safeguards the legitimacy and credibility of election outcomes and preserves the cornerstone of democratic governance.

**26**  
EARNED

**27**  
TOTAL

### Elections Administration

Effective elections administration is essential for upholding democratic principles, promoting civic participation, and preserving the legitimacy of the democratic system in the United States.

**24**  
EARNED

**18**  
TOTAL

### Elections Funding

By adhering to these best practices, states can foster public trust, maintain the impartiality of election administration, and ensure that all citizens have equal access to a well-funded and well-conducted electoral process. Transparent and equitable funding of elections is essential for upholding the democratic principles of fairness, integrity, and the public's confidence in the electoral system.

**14**  
EARNED

**27**  
TOTAL

### Voter Access & Participation

By prioritizing voter access, states can foster broad and diverse participation, empowering citizens to exercise their democratic right and strengthening the representative nature of the electoral outcomes. Upholding voter access reinforces the principles of equality, fairness, and inclusivity, reinforcing the foundations of democratic governance and fostering an engaged and participatory citizenry.

**24**  
EARNED



Georgia First's *State Democracy & Elections Rubric* is intended to assess the state of democracy and elections for a state at the macro level as opposed to a more micro level. Thus, Georgia First did not include assessment criteria for more local-level administrative or unique community considerations.

### Georgia - Elections Integrity & Security

- 9** Photo identification (ID) is required to vote, but the state provides access to free ID and permits alternative ID options for requesting and/or casting a ballot.
- 8** The state utilizes ERIC to verify accuracy of voter information and consistently performs scheduled reviews and maintenance to ensure timely updates and removal of outdated or ineligible voter records. Clear and transparent criteria for the removal of inactive or ineligible voters which is easily accessible to the public. Robust notification process used to inform voters of a pending removal and provides a process to verify and address discrepancies prior to list removal. Maintains comprehensive audit trails of the list maintenance process.
- 9** The state requires and consistently conducts traditional and/or risk-limiting audits as appropriate to their system and ensures all ballots are subject to further audit to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

### Georgia - Elections Administration

- 7** The state legislature does not favor local control of elections and has used the legislative and/or regulatory process to or in an attempt to reduce or minimize the authority of its state and/or local elections officials.
- 9** Election administration is transparent and accountable, and local elections administration provides for an efficient and positive voter experience—voter lines and wait times are reasonable, polling location equipment is sufficient and properly maintained and operating correctly, and there are not any other known or significant issues that directly impact voter access.
- 8** Local and/or state election officials are not consulted prior to enacting state elections legislation. Legislative action and policy, and regulatory changes are based on some facts and limited data.

### Georgia - Elections Funding

- 7** Any state election requirements enacted are minimally funded by the state and local budgetary impacts are not considered.
- 7** Only state-level elections officials are permitted to directly apply for grants to help offset overall taxpayer costs associated with election administration.

### Georgia - Voter Access & Participation

- 8** The state offers fewer options for voting prior to Election Day, including limited automatic ballot mailing; 20–30 days of early-voting; some eligibility for no-excuse absentee voting; and/or limited drop box locations.
- 8** The state permits third-party voter registration drives, but imposes limited third-party requirements. Allows completed voter applications obtained during a drive to be submitted within a somewhat reasonable time frame (no more than 13 days but not less than 7 days from completion).
- 8** The state operates a front-end point-of-service (POS) registration process, including motor-voter registration and other public assistance POS options, following a back-end opt-out mailer procedure for the voter [i.e. voter registration defaults at POS].

## Section 8

# FINAL THOUGHTS

**SCORING** – Democracy and elections in Georgia have experienced a number of challenges since 2020, forcing both the Governor and Secretary of State to publicly and repeatedly defend the state against allegations of voter fraud, election mismanagement, and stolen elections. When comparing Georgia First’s “Above Average” score to that of other third-party, state-level assessments, there is moderate consensus and disagreement (see *Section 7, A & Appendix III*). It is important to note that each organization used a unique methodology, but generally examined state-level democracy and elections performance. For that reason (i.e., state-level assessment), Georgia First believes it is beneficial to share those recent state-level rankings and offer a general comparison of those results. Most of those overall Georgia rankings equated to a “C” or “fair” performance with the exception of The Heritage Foundation, which scored Georgia an 83 out of 100, earning the Peach State a Top 10 ranking (ranked second behind number one Tennessee). The Foundation’s assessment criteria most closely aligned with Georgia First’s approach to state-level assessment. However, THF focused solely on election integrity and security, while Georgia First focused on that as well as voter accessibility.

**OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT** – Following this review, we are left with an unanswered question: *Why are so many of the organizations examining democracy and elections seemingly labeled as left- or left-center-leaning, regardless of their nonpartisan status and/or bipartisan funding and organizational leadership?* Regardless of party affiliation, the January 6, 2021 events at our nation’s Capitol and the Carter Center’s first-ever involvement in U.S. elections in 2022, alone warrant self-reflection by all at a minimum. A willingness to objectively examine policy and advocate for positions in support of our democracy does not make an organization left- or right-leaning, and inaccurately assigning these labels only further amplifies partisan rhetoric and emboldens zero-sum antics.

**LEGISLATIVE TINKERING** – Considering that voting is the very bedrock of our democracy and the right by which we protect all others, we should always be striving for continuous improvement, working to ensure our elections are safe, accessible, secure, and easy for every eligible voter. However, striving for continuous improvement does not require continued legislative tinkering, nor do we believe it is best practice. In fact, ongoing legislative tinkering year-over-year only serves to further erode voter confidence. When laws and regulations surrounding elections change frequently, it can create confusion and uncertainty among voters, and at best, this uncertainty can erode trust in the electoral process, and at worst can discourage eligible voters from participating.

**VOTER CONFIDENCE** – According to a 2022 series, The Strengthening American Democracy Initiative, by The Brookings Institution, “one of the drivers of decreased confidence in the political system has been the explosion of misinformation deliberately aimed at disrupting the democratic process” which “confuses and overwhelms voters.”<sup>15</sup> Various polling and surveys, noted in the Brookings’ series, were aligned—voter confidence is at an all-time low and there is a shared pessimism among participants that their vote does not make a difference. Decreased voter confidence in the system results in decreases in civic engagement, and reduced voter participation is never good for democracy. With the ease of quickly spreading misinformation and reduced opportunities for adequate voter education, it is increasingly difficult to build public trust in election processes and final results. This strained environment, combined with a continuous roll-out of new elections legislation and local mandates that must be explained to the voting public, creates further confusion and provides new opportunities for disinformation.

**DEMOCRACY & ELECTIONS PRIORITIES** – This is not to suggest that securing our elections should not be a top priority. That being said, when numerous investigations at the local, state, and/or federal levels conclude that the 2020 election was not stolen, it is important that states begin focusing on ways to:

- dispel myths,
- properly educate the voting public,
- adequately fund elections,
- support hardworking state and local elections staff and community volunteers,
- increase voter participation regardless of party or ideologies, and
- rebuild overall voter confidence.





*Section 9*

## NEXT STEPS

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Georgia cannot further these priorities by ignoring investigative conclusions, accepting false conspiracy theories, and continually reopening Georgia Code.

While SB202 was imperfect as it relates to increased voter access and participation, it did include a number of positives and adequately addressed legitimate elections security concerns in several ways (see *Section 6, Georgia Legislative & Regulatory Assessment*).

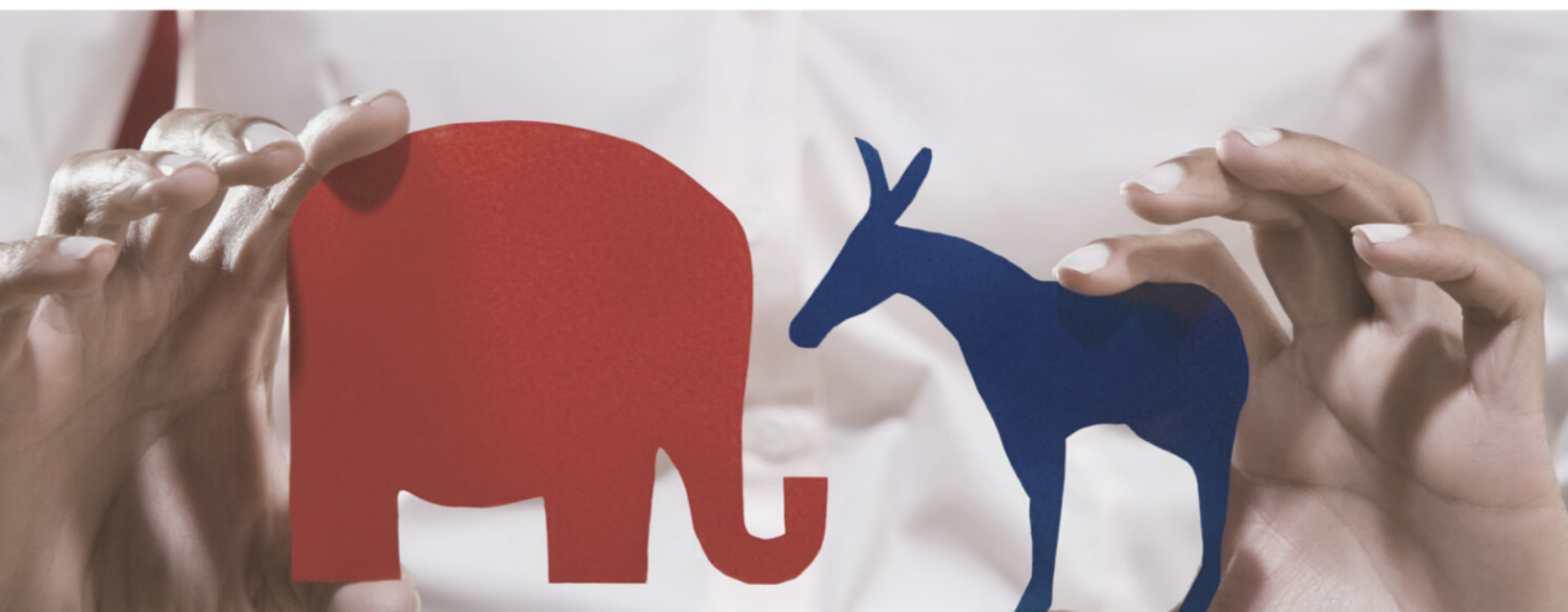
Moving forward, Georgia must focus its efforts on improving voter access and embracing the idea that we all benefit from a more engaged citizenry, regardless of political party affiliation or ideologies. We have allowed outside influences and conspiracy theorists to sow distrust among our citizens, and pressure Georgia legislators to ignore the facts provided by state and local election officials, along with other credible nonpartisan entities and dedicated public servants.

### *What Georgia needs most is....*

- To pass legislation in 2024, protecting our voter-roll-management from unchecked third-party challenges and ensuring voter challenges are not frivolous, but based in fact and supported by credible evidence.
- Clean-up of guidance for how provisional ballots are treated on Election Day, ensuring equitable and consistent treatment of all provisional ballots cast by eligible voters in the wrong precinct at any time on Election Day.
- The General Assembly, in partnership with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office, to thoroughly evaluate recent unfunded state election mandates, calculating total financial impacts and developing an application process for need-based aid by local election boards.
- All legislators to fully consider the administrative and fiscal impacts on counties before drafting and adopting new state election mandates.
- The independent development of its electoral maps. One party should not benefit over another nor should one elected official's self-interests drive boundaries.

- Conservatives to follow the pervading elections evidence, embrace the existing legislative improvements made since 2020, and reject further legislative action based on election denials or misinformation.
- Progressives to carefully evaluate allegations of voter suppression and value the need for secure drop boxes.
- Its General Assembly to support the Constitutional authority of the Georgia Secretary of State and respect the will of Georgia voters in their selection of the SOS, allowing Georgia voters to evaluate the SOS' performance at the polls.
- And lastly, healthy and respectful debate over real Georgia issues and not hyperpartisan accusations and manufactured problems.

*Georgia First believes that if we all work together and exchange our suspicions for critical thinking, our state can become a national example for safe, fair, accessible, and secure elections.*



# APPENDIX I

## DEMOCRACY & ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

**EXCELLENT** (99 points max) - The state has **taken significant steps to protect** its **democratic principles** and ensure the integrity and fairness of its **election processes**.

**ABOVE AVERAGE** (88 points max) - The state has **some measures in place to protect** the integrity of its democratic principles and election processes with **some areas that need improvement**.

**AVERAGE** (77 points max) - The state has **some significant unresolved challenges** to its democratic principles and election processes.

**BELOW AVERAGE** (55 points max) - The state has **serious flaws** in its democratic principles and election processes.

**POOR** (44 max points) - The state's democratic principles and election processes are **severely compromised**.

Elections Integrity & Security: Photo Identification				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
Photo identification (ID) is <b>required</b> to vote, but the state provides access to <b>free ID and permits alternative ID options</b> for requesting and/or casting a ballot.	Photo identification (ID) is <b>required</b> to vote and the state provides access to a <b>free ID</b> , but <b>does not permit alternative IDs</b> for requesting and/or casting a ballot.	Photo identification (ID) is <b>requested but not required</b> to vote. The state <b>does not provide</b> a program or access to obtain a <b>free photo ID</b> , but <b>does permit the use of alternative ID options</b> for requesting and/or casting a ballot.	Some type of voter identification is <b>requested</b> for voting but a <b>photo ID is not required</b> for requesting and/or casting a ballot.	Voter <b>identification is not required</b> for requesting and/or casting a ballot.

## DEMOCRACY &amp; ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

Elections Integrity & Security: Voter Roll Management				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
<p>The state <b>utilizes ERIC</b> to verify accuracy of voter information and <b>consistently performs scheduled reviews and maintenance</b> to ensure timely updates and removal of outdated or ineligible voter records. <b>Clear and transparent criteria</b> for the removal of inactive or ineligible voters which is <b>easily accessible to the public</b>. <b>Robust notification process</b> used to inform voters of a pending removal and provides a process to verify status and address discrepancies <b>prior to list removal</b>. Maintains <b>comprehensive audit trails</b> of the list maintenance process.</p>	<p>The state <b>utilizes ERIC</b> to verify accuracy of voter information and <b>regularly performs scheduled reviews and maintenance</b> to ensure timely updates and removal of outdated or ineligible voter records. <b>Clear and transparent criteria</b> for the removal of inactive or ineligible voters which is <b>easily accessible to the public</b>. <b>Active notification process</b> used to inform voters of a pending removal and provides a process to verify status and address discrepancies <b>prior to list removal</b>. Maintains <b>complete audit trails</b> of the list maintenance process.</p>	<p>The state <b>utilizes multiple reliable sources to verify accuracy of voter information</b>, such as but not limited to death data from the Social Security Administration and motor vehicle department data. Infrequent reviews and maintenance. <b>Lack of clear criteria</b> for list removal with criteria <b>not easily accessible to the public</b>. <b>Limited notification</b> process with limited verification options <b>prior to list removal</b>. <b>Incomplete audit trails</b> for the list maintenance process.</p>	<p>The state <b>performs limited data verification</b>. <b>Inconsistent reviews and maintenance</b> schedule. <b>Lack of transparent and publicly available criteria</b> for list removal. <b>Limited notification</b> process with limited verification opportunities <b>prior to list removal</b>. <b>Incomplete audit trails</b> for any list maintenance activities.</p>	<p>The state's <b>data verification process is inadequate</b>. Inconsistent reviews and maintenance schedule. <b>Lack of transparent and publicly available criteria</b> for list removal. <b>Insufficient notification</b> process with inadequate verification opportunities, <b>prior to list removal</b>. <b>Inaccurate or incomplete audit trails</b> for any list maintenance activities.</p>



## DEMOCRACY &amp; ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

Elections Integrity & Security: Audits				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
*The state <b>requires and consistently conducts traditional and/or risk-limiting audits</b> as appropriate to their system and ensures <b>all ballots are subject to further audit</b> to ensure the integrity of the voting process.	*The state requires and conducts <b>some routine audits</b> to help ensure the integrity of the voting process and <b>many ballots are subject to audit but not all.</b>	*The state <b>requires audits but does not provide any statutory guidance</b> on which ballots are subject to audit.	*The state <b>only conducts procedural audits.</b>	*The state <b>does not conduct any routine audits.</b>

*\*This criteria does not consider or examine election recounts—auto, mandatory, and/or legal challenges—for the purposes of this evaluation and scoring.*

Election Administration: Administrative & Regulatory Oversight				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
The <b>state legislature favors</b> local control of elections and properly defers to its state and/or local elections officials for administrative considerations, execution, and self-governing.	The <b>state legislature does not favor</b> local control of elections and does not properly defer to its state and/or local elections officials for administrative considerations, execution, and self-governing.	The <b>state legislature does not favor</b> local control of elections and has <b>used the legislative and/or regulatory process to or in an attempt to reduce or minimize the authority</b> of its state and/or local elections officials.	The <b>state legislature has enacted legislation that reduces the authority</b> of state and/or local elections officials in order to assume <b>more direct involvement and authority</b> over local elections administration.	The <b>state legislature has assumed greater control</b> over state and/or local elections administration through the <b>implementation of legislation or other state-level political appointments.</b>

DEMOCRACY & ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

Election Administration: Transparency & Accountability				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
<p>*Election administration is <b>transparent and accountable</b>, and local elections administration provides for an <b>efficient and positive voter experience</b>—voter lines and wait times are reasonable, polling location equipment is sufficient and properly maintained and operating correctly, and there are not any other known or significant issues that directly impact voter access.</p>	<p>*Election administration is <b>transparent but</b> there is a <b>lack of accountability</b> at the state and/or local levels in <b>adequately addressing voter access and/or experience issues</b>, such as but not limited to long voter wait times, insufficient or inoperable equipment, and/or other known or significant issues that directly impact voter access.</p>	<p>*Election administration <b>lacks transparency and accountability</b> at the state and/or local levels with officials only <b>partially addressing any voter access and/or experience issues</b>, such as but not limited to long voter wait times, insufficient or inoperable equipment, and/or other known or significant issues that directly impact voter access.</p>	<p>*Election administration is <b>not transparent</b> at the <b>state and/or local</b> levels. Election officials <b>lack accountability</b> at the <b>state and local</b> levels by <b>refusing to timely address any voter access and/or experience issues</b>, such as but not limited to long voter wait times, insufficient or inoperable equipment, and/or other known or significant issues that directly impact voter access.</p>	<p>*Election administration is <b>not transparent or lacks accountability</b> at the <b>state and local</b> levels. There are <b>significant ongoing and unresolved voter issues</b>, such as but not limited to long voter wait times, insufficient or inoperable equipment, and/or other known or significant issues that directly impact voter access.</p>
<p><i>*This criteria examines the overall statewide performance, 159 counties collectively as opposed to individual counties and/or percentage of overall voters.</i></p>				
<p><b>Local and/or state elections officials are consulted prior to</b> state elections legislation being enacted. Legislative action and policy, and regulatory <b>changes are based on facts and reliable data.</b></p>	<p><b>Local and/or state</b> election officials are <b>not consulted prior to</b> enacting state elections legislation. Legislative action and policy, and regulatory <b>changes are based on some facts and limited data.</b></p>	<p><b>Local and/or state</b> election officials are <b>not consulted prior to</b> enacting state elections legislation. Legislative action and policy, and regulatory <b>changes are not based on facts or reliable data.</b></p>	<p><b>Local and/or state</b> election officials are <b>not consulted prior to</b> enacting state elections legislation. Legislative action and policy, and regulatory <b>changes are frequent</b> and are based on <b>unproven or misinformation.</b></p>	<p><b>Local and/or state</b> election officials are <b>not consulted prior to</b> enacting state elections legislation. Legislative action and policy, and regulatory <b>changes are frequent</b> and are <b>based on conspiracy theories and/or political motives.</b></p>

## DEMOCRACY &amp; ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

Election Funding: Mandates & Additional Resources				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
<p><b>Any state</b> election requirements enacted are <b>fully funded</b> by the state or appropriate <b>local</b> budgetary impacts are <b>considered prior to and in partnership with</b> local election boards.</p>	<p><b>Any state</b> election requirements enacted are <b>only partially funded</b> by the state and <b>local</b> budgetary impacts are <b>not fully considered</b>.</p>	<p><b>Any state</b> election requirements enacted are <b>minimally funded</b> by the state and <b>local</b> budgetary impacts are <b>not considered</b>.</p>	<p><b>Some state</b> election requirements enacted are <b>minimally funded</b>, creating <b>unfunded mandates</b> for local governments.</p>	<p>The <b>state does not fund its election mandates</b>, creating <b>significant unfunded mandates</b> for local governments.</p>
<p><b>Local election boards</b> are <b>permitted to directly apply</b> for grants to help offset county taxpayers costs associated with election administration.</p>	<p><b>Only county administrators</b> are <b>permitted to directly apply</b> for grants to help offset county taxpayer costs associated with election administration.</p>	<p><b>Only state-level elections officials</b> are <b>permitted to directly apply</b> for grants to help offset overall taxpayer costs associated with election administration.</p>	<p><b>State and local</b> elections officials are <b>legally prohibited from seeking</b> grant opportunities to directly offset overall taxpayer costs associated with election administration.</p>	<p><b>State and local</b> elections officials are <b>legally prohibited from and face significant criminal penalties and fines</b> for seeking grant opportunities to directly offset overall taxpayer costs associated with election administration.</p>

## DEMOCRACY &amp; ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

Voter Access & Participation: Ballot Options & Registration				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
The state offers a <b>variety of options</b> for voting <b>prior to Election Day</b> , including but not limited to automatic ballot mailing for the entire election cycle; no-excuse absentee voting; 30+ days early-voting; and secure and adequate drop boxes.	The state offers <b>fewer options</b> for voting <b>prior to Election Day</b> , including limited automatic ballot mailing; 20–30 days of early-voting; some eligibility for no-excuse absentee voting; and/or limited drop box locations.	The state has <b>some access restrictions</b> for voting <b>prior to Election Day</b> , including automatic ballot mailing is prohibited; 10–20 days of early-voting; excuse-required absentee voting; and/or drop box hours and/or locations are significantly limited.	The state has <b>limited options</b> for voting <b>prior to Election Day</b> , including automatic ballot mailing is prohibited; early-voting fewer than 10 days; absentee ballot requests are restricted to military personnel and eligible dependents and U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S. only; and/or drop boxes are not available.	The state <b>does not offer</b> early-voting; absentee ballot requests are restricted to military personnel and eligible dependents and U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S. only; and drop boxes are banned.
*The state <b>encourages third-party voter registration</b> efforts and <b>does not impose overly restrictive third-party requirements</b> and/or allows completed applications to be submitted within a reasonable time frame (no more than 30 days but not less than 14 days from completion).	*The state <b>permits third-party voter registration</b> drives, <b>but imposes limited third-party requirements</b> . Allows completed voter applications obtained during a drive to be submitted within a somewhat reasonable time frame (no more than 13 days but not less than 7 days from completion).	*The state <b>restricts third-party voter registration</b> drives, and <b>imposes unreasonable third-party requirements</b> . Imposes more restrictive time frames for submitting completed applications (within six (6) days but not less than three (3) days from completion).	*The state <b>significantly restricts third-party voter registration</b> drives to certain types of groups. Imposes unreasonable time frames for returning completed applications (within 48 hours but not less than 24 hours from completion).	*The state <b>prohibits third-party voter registration</b> drives.

***\*For the purposes of this evaluation and scoring, we do not account for any additional application deadlines that may be necessary and/or required by the state and local election officials immediately preceding an election cycle.***



## DEMOCRACY &amp; ELECTIONS RUBRIC - SCORING

Voter Access & Participation: Automatic Registration				
EXCELLENT 9 Points	ABOVE AVERAGE 8 Points	AVERAGE 7 Points	BELOW AVERAGE 5 Points	POOR 4 Points
The state <b>operates a robust front-end point-of-service (POS) registration process</b> , including motor-voter registration, other public assistance POS options, and <b>additional state agency registration opportunities</b> , following a <b>back-end opt-out mailer procedure</b> for the voter [i.e. voter registration defaults at POS].	The state <b>operates a front-end point-of-service (POS) registration process</b> , including motor-voter registration and other public assistance POS options, following a <b>back-end opt-out mailer procedure</b> for the voter [i.e. voter registration defaults at POS].	The state <b>operates a front-end point-of-service (POS) registration process</b> , including motor-voter registration, other public assistance POS options, and <b>additional state agency registration opportunities</b> , following a <b>front-end opt-out procedure</b> for the [i.e. voter must decline registration at POS].	The state <b>operates a front-end point-of-service (POS) registration process</b> , including motor-voter registration and other public assistance POS options, following a <b>front-end opt-out procedure</b> for the voter [i.e. voter must decline registration at POS].	The state <b>operates a front-end point-of-service (POS) registration process</b> , including motor-voter registration and other public assistance POS options, following a <b>front-end opt-in procedure</b> [i.e. voter must elect to be registered at the POS].

**NOTE:** Georgia First's State Democracy & Elections Rubric is intended to assess the state of democracy and elections for a state at the macro level as opposed to a more micro level. Thus, Georgia First did not include assessment criteria for more local-level administrative considerations such as localized voter intimidation activities, college campus polling locations, and any other unique community needs or considerations such as on-site polling assistance needed for alternate languages.

# APPENDIX II

## DEMOCRACY & ELECTIONS SCORING RUBRIC - GLOSSARY

### **Elections Integrity & Security:**

Election integrity and security is the paramount commitment to uphold the highest standards of fairness, transparency, and accuracy in the electoral process. It encompasses a range of measures and safeguards implemented to ensure that every eligible citizen can exercise their right to vote freely and that the results are tabulated transparently and reported with precision. This includes secure and accessible voting methods, reliable, auditable, and tamper-resistant voting machines/technology, impartial administration and adherence to strict protocols in counting and certifying votes, with comprehensive audit trails. Requiring voter ID is a valuable means of verifying the identity and eligibility of voters. However, it is essential to ensure that any requirements related to voter ID are implemented in a manner that does not unduly restrict access to voting or disproportionately impact certain segments of the population, maintain fairness and inclusivity in the electoral process.

### **Elections Administration:**

State and local governments which bear the responsibility of administering elections embrace the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and transparency in the planning and execution of elections. Best practices encompass a series of key elements including robust and accurate voter registration systems, comprehensive and up-to-date voter rolls, comprehensive voter education and outreach initiatives, well-trained and impartial poll workers, adequate resources for poll workers, accessible and inclusive polling locations, efficient management of absentee, and early voting processes.

### **Elections Funding:**

States and local governments bearing the responsibility of administering elections adequately fund elections to ensure impartiality and integrity in the administration of the electoral process. Best practices for achieving impartiality in election funding include transparent and accountable mechanisms for resource allocation, clear guidelines for budgeting and spending, nonpartisan or cross-partisan oversight. Equitable distribution of resources, based on factors such as population size, demographic considerations. Robust disclosure and reporting requirements for third-party contributions and expenditures to ensure transparency and help prevent undue influence or conflicts of interest.

### **Voter Access & Participation:**

Voter access is upheld as a fundamental tenet of democracy and drives the adoption of practices/policies that guarantee equal and convenient opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate in the electoral process. This includes active implementation of measures that remove barriers to voting, such as enacting automatic voter registration, establishing accessible and secure polling locations, expanding early voting periods, providing alternatives like mail-in and absentee voting, and offering language assistance and accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Voter participation is respected as the cornerstone of a thriving democracy reflecting the collective voice and will of the people. Broad voter participation among all eligible voters is prioritized and actively encouraged and valued for its ability to strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of electoral outcomes and enhance civic engagement.

# APPENDIX III

## THIRD-PARTY RESEARCH & SCORING

The table below offers summary insights into some of the recent state-level assessments identified by Georgia First.

ORGANIZATION	GA SCORE/RANKING	HIGH-LEVEL METHODOLOGY
<p><b>The Heritage Foundation</b></p> <p>Research and educational institution whose mission is to build and promote conservative public policies, promoting free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense</p>	<p>Election Integrity Scorecard Score = 83/100; Ranking = Top 10 (#2)</p> <hr/> <p><i>Notes</i></p> <p>2022 report. Highest score (B) for Campaign Finance; noted independent spending reporting required, contribution limits in place, and campaign finance records available online.</p>	<p>Examined 12 core areas: voter ID; voter registration lists; absentee ballots; vote harvesting/trafficking; election observers; citizenship; voter assistance; vote counting; election litigation; same-day registration; automatic registration; and private funding</p> <hr/>
<p><b>Leadership Now Project</b></p> <p>National membership organization of business and thought leaders taking action to protect and renew American democracy</p>	<p>Democracy Report Card Score = C, Low Risk Election Interference</p> <hr/> <p><i>Notes</i></p> <p>2022 report. Highest score (B) for Campaign Finance; noted independent spending reporting required, contribution limits in place, and campaign finance records available online.</p>	<p>Examined three core areas: Voting (C), Electoral Systems (C), and Campaign Finance (B)</p> <hr/>
<p><b>MAP, Movement Advancement Project</b></p> <p>Independent, nonprofit think tank dedicated to advancing conversation, policy change, and collaboration to improve equality and opportunity for all</p>	<p>Assigned a “Fair Overall Policy Tally;” listed among 18 other states assigned this ranking</p> <hr/> <p><i>Notes</i></p> <p>2023 report. Highest score (B) for Campaign Finance; noted independent spending reporting required, contribution limits in place, and campaign finance records available online.</p>	<p>Tracks 44 election laws, policies, and data points, examining Who Votes, How to Vote, and Protecting the Vote. Utilizes five-tier Scoring Rubric: High, Medium, Fair, Low, and Negative</p> <hr/>

**ORGANIZATION****States United Democracy Center (SUDC) and Protect Democracy (PD)**

**SUDC:** Nonpartisan organization connecting state & local officials, law enforcement leaders, & pro-democracy partners to advance free, fair, & secure elections

**PD:** Cross-ideological nonprofit group dedicated to defeating authoritarian threat, building more resilient democratic institutions, & protecting freedom & liberal democracy

**GA SCORE/RANKING**

Assigned "Medium Risk" on a three-tier rating system: Highest Risk, Medium Risk, and States to Watch

*Notes*

2022 report. Noted only one of four high risk bills passed in 2021, highlighted three constitutional officers rejected election denialism, cited lieutenant governor as vocal 2020 election denier, and the passage of SB202 as potential risk for legislature-led election subversion.

**HIGH-LEVEL METHODOLOGY**

The risk is highest in states where the executive leaders (governors, secretaries of state, and attorneys general) are more likely to engage in election subversion and where the legislature is likely to pass laws increasing the risk of election subversion.

**End Citizens United (ECU) & Let America Vote (LAV)**

**ECU:** Democratic-aligned political action committee.

**LAV:** Organization committed to overturning Citizens United, ending unlimited and undisclosed money in politics, and protecting and expanding the right to vote

Ranked 47/50 with a Grade F assigned

*Notes*

2022 report. Given Democratic-aligned position of the organization, poor scoring is not surprising. Only positive highlights ("thumbs-up") noted was that Georgia offers automatic voter registration, online registration, no-excuse absentee voting, and early in-person voting.

Designed a 300-point scoring rubric for each of the three categories with multiple 10-point questions under each: Voting Rights Laws (34/D), Campaign Finance & Anti-Corruption Laws (47/F), and Democracy Subversion Protections (47/F)

**The Gerrymandering Project**

A project of Princeton University to conduct nonpartisan analysis to understand and eliminate partisan gerrymandering at a state-by-state level

Congressional (Score C), State House (Score B), & State Senate (Score F)

*Notes*

2021 report. Congressional scored Cs in both categories. The State House received an "F" for Competitiveness, but a "C" for Geographic Features. The State Senate scored "F" for Competitiveness, and "C" for Geographic Features.

Assessed overall partisan fairness using a four-tier letter-grade, based on two categories: Competitiveness & Geographic Features. [ Grading - A: Good for the category; B: Better than average, but bias still exists; C: Average for the category, could be better but could also be worse; F: Poor for the category, could be much better]



# ENDNOTES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Natalie Crawford, Founder & Executive Director**



Crawford brings more than two decades of business experience, public service, and issues advocacy to Georgia First. Graduating from Piedmont University with her MBA, she spent more than a decade working in higher education before transitioning into community banking and financial technology. In her current role with Georgia First, Crawford helps advance economic opportunity and health outcomes for all Georgians while adhering to “old-school” Republican principles.

An unapologetic moderate, a native Georgian, and lifelong Republican, Crawford served two terms on the Habersham County Commission, filling roles as vice-chair and chair. She held top leadership roles in the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, serving on the Board of Managers. During her eight years on the commission, Crawford is credited with helping save the local hospital, increasing county reserves, and leading economic growth efforts with the creation of the Habersham Partnership for Growth as well as expansion projects for both the airport and a large industrial park.

In addition to her public service and private sector work in community banking, she is president and founder of the Evie Peters Foundation. Crawford’s advocacy record also includes advancing efforts on health care, jobs and the economy, and good government. She was selected for the 2020 Georgia Trend Top 40 Under 40 class and most recently was competitively selected to participate in Georgia Forward’s 2022 Young Gamechangers. Crawford currently resides in Hall County with her family.

### **Shannon Ferguson, Director of Strategy & Communications**



Ferguson earned her Master of Public Administration and has more than 20 years of public sector marketing, communications, and stakeholder engagement experience in Georgia. Additionally, she spent more than a decade performing legislative and policy analysis on behalf of Georgia state agencies. Ferguson began her career in state government working for the State Health Benefit Plan under the Georgia Merit System and then the Department of Community Health, where she served in a variety of benefits management and constituent services roles.

Recruited by the state treasurer in 2001 to help start Georgia’s new 529 college savings plan, here Ferguson served as the plan’s assistant director for 10 years, providing contract management and oversight, leading the plan’s marketing and communications strategy, and growing assets under management to more than \$1 billion in just under 10 years.

Transitioning into higher education, Ferguson went on to serve as the communications director for the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, followed by several years working in local government administration and economic development. Immediately prior to joining Georgia First in mid-2022, Ferguson served as a senior public involvement specialist with a Fortune 100 company, assisting with the execution of Georgia Power’s multi-year, multi-billion-dollar grid infrastructure improvement program. Ferguson currently resides in Forsyth County with her family.