

Examining the Ease of Voting in Arizona

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June 2022

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ellen O'Brien and Madison Frazee for their research assistance. Thoughtful feedback by Alison Cook-Davis, David Berman, and Michael Slaven contributed to this report.

Executive Summary

Inflamed debates over voting rights (voter suppression and fraud) have dominated recent news cycles. They often overlook trade-offs “between safeguarding the integrity of the vote and ensuring broad participation.”¹ Furthermore, beyond more extreme forms of disenfranchisement (property restrictions, male-only voting, Jim Crow laws), it is largely structural forces – economic development, history, culture – that seem to determine the level of election turnout and fraud.² To cut through these debates, this report investigates how the ease of voting has changed in Arizona over the last 30 years. It then asks: Do new restrictions, like voter ID laws, make elections measurably safer? Have they really made voting harder? Do laws that make voting easier substantively increase voter turnout and change the composition of the electorate?

Overall, voting is easier and more accessible to more people than it has been for most of history.³ Over the last three decades, Arizona legislators have worked to make voting more accessible. Since 1989, Arizona passed 271 laws affecting A.R.S. Title 16, which regulates the conduct of elections. Of those, 78 affect the ease of voting. Forty-seven clearly made voting easier, while 15 clearly made voting harder. Sixteen were classified as having no clear effect. The laws contained 127 provisions total, 87 making voting easier and 33 making voting harder, with seven remaining with no clear effect.

Most of these laws examined were uncontroversial and passed in a bipartisan manner. These laws balanced what’s normatively desirable with what’s administratively feasible. Three of the most significant changes were: (1) the creation of a de-facto vote-by-mail and early voting system, through no-excuse absentee voting (1991), early voting (1993), and the Permanent Early Voting List (2007); (2) the creation of more ways for people to register to vote as well as keep their registration up-to-date, through automatically updating voter registration with postal data (1994), online voter registration (2002), a state-wide uniform voter registration database (2003), and automatic voter registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) (2005); (3) and making voting rights restoration easier for individuals convicted of felonies (2019).

There are a few exceptions to the trend of expanding ways voters can register and cast ballots, with the potential that 2021 is a turning point where access to the ballot box becomes harder. The most significant is a ballot measure passed by voters in 2004, requiring birth certificates for voter registration and ID for voting at the polls. Other laws increasing the burden on voters are Republican-only initiatives, including bans on ballot collection (2011, 2013, 2017), restrictions on voter assistance (2011 [not in effect]), changes to the permanent voting list (2013 [repealed], 2021), and the expansion of ID requirements to early voting, voting centers, and emergency ballots (2019). More minor changes making voting harder, supported by both parties, were passed to deal with primarily administrative issues, including creating an inactive voter list (1994) and stopping the publishing of polling places 80 days in advance of elections (2000).

We cannot know with certainty whether making voting easier has led to broader voter participation in Arizona because there is too much statistical noise surrounding any specific law or specific election. However, research shows that some changes, especially motor voter provisions and vote-by-mail, are generally associated with small single-digit percentage point increases in voter turnout.⁴ Most other changes are not associated with any significant increases in turnout.⁵ There has been no evidence that increasing turnout substantively changes the partisan balance of the electorate or the outcomes of elections.⁶

Researchers have used various methods to study voter fraud: analysis of fraud allegations, convictions, and news reports; statistical searches for anomalies in election results; linking various government databases; and surveys. The best available evidence suggests that voter fraud is a relatively rare phenomenon unlikely to affect election outcomes.⁷ It is likely but not certain that large schemes to unduly influence electoral outcomes would be discovered. Election rules are extremely complex and often administered by volunteer poll workers.⁸ If irregularities are found, they are often more likely to be attributable to honest mistakes by voters and poll workers and other clerical errors.⁹ There is no evidence that easing access to the ballot box has increased voter fraud, nor is there any evidence that procedural obstacles to voting have reduced the occurrence of voter fraud.¹⁰ In this sense, much of the discourse surrounding election laws is divorced from reality.

What stands out to the outside analyst is that the rules for registering to vote and casting ballots are extremely complex, further complicated by the fact that they are often implemented by local volunteer workers. Even legislators in committee hearings are at times confused by various eligibility rules and electoral processes. It is no wonder that some voters are confused about how to vote, that others give up on voting altogether, and that poll workers and administrators make mistakes. However, simplifying the rules and procedures for voting has rarely been considered in the debates.

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Introduction

Over the last 30 years, Arizona's voting laws have undergone many changes transforming the ease of voting. Theoretically, the ease or difficulty of registering to vote and casting a ballot (the ease of voting) affects election turnout and the demographic composition of the electorate. Having a large election turnout that reflects a country's citizenry is generally considered a hallmark of a healthy democracy.¹¹ At the same time, changing turnout and demographics can affect the partisan balance of the vote, making election rules of strategic interest to political parties. However, as this report discusses, absent severe disenfranchisement, research does not find large effects of electoral rules on the outcome of elections. Even large effects on turnout are rare (without systematic effects on the partisan balance), with the exceptions of motor-voter laws, same-day registration, and potentially vote-by-mail.

Since the early 1990s, legislators in Arizona have made it easier to access absentee ballots, creating a de-facto vote-by-mail system for at least 80% of voters. However, in the 2000s, concerns about fraud or maybe anti-immigrant sentiment changed the tide somewhat.¹² Proposition 200, approved by voters in 2004, required birth certificates for voter registration (since restricted to state/local elections by the US Supreme Court). Other bills have followed this trend. In the name of reducing fraud and increasing confidence in the electoral process, the state legislature has added procedural hurdles to access the ballot box. In 2022 alone, over 140 bills affecting the conduct of elections were introduced in the state legislature.¹³ Roughly 100 Republican-sponsored bills promise to safeguard elections from fraud and propose to roll back many changes that have made voting easier and more convenient over the last 30 years.

Political opinion on these legal changes is quite polarized. Several Republican lawmakers in Arizona are convinced that election fraud is widespread, suggesting that the 2020 presidential election was rigged in favor of Joe Biden.¹⁴ Others do not go to these extremes but still argue that vote-by-mail is vulnerable to fraud and should be restricted.¹⁵ Some Democrats allege that these changes have little to do with preventing voter fraud but all with suppressing the vote of minorities more likely to vote for the Democratic Party.¹⁶ In these debates, even small changes are discussed polemically.

Consider this example: According to a 2021 Arizona law, registered early voters that have not voted in four years are sent a notice. If they do not reply, they are removed from the list of early voters, who are sent a ballot automatically, but remain registered voters. Gov. Doug Ducey claims that this law will "strengthen trust, efficiency, security, and integrity of our elections," albeit without providing any evidence.¹⁷ Democrats call the law "voter suppression," alleging that it will disenfranchise poor and minority voter, again providing little evidence.¹⁸ In reality, the research I discuss below suggests that the law may have very little effect in either direction.

This is not a new debate. The impetus for the first voter registration laws in the 19th century were election irregularities. Even then, motives mixed concerns about democracy with partisan considerations.

"In 1836, Pennsylvania ratified its first registration law, but applied it only to the city of Philadelphia. It required city assessors to compile a list of qualified voters and prohibited anyone whose name did not appear from voting. Supporters claimed the law was needed to

prevent the 'gross election frauds' that prevailed in the city. But at the constitutional convention the following year, the law was assailed as a partisan move aimed at cutting down the Democratic vote in Philadelphia and cutting out the poor and the laboring classes."¹⁹

This report illuminates and seeks to understand these developments, based on research and data. I ask, how has the ease of voting changed over the last 30 years in Arizona? Do new restrictions, like voter ID laws, make elections measurably safer? Have they really made voting harder? Do laws that make voting easier substantively increase voter turnout?

It is not often addressed that conceptually there are trade-offs between the ease of voting and the security of elections: "In a big, complex, modern, and highly mobile society such as our own, the procedures for preventing fraudulent votes will encumber the process of voting because we do not know one another. The identity of voters cannot be stored in the heads of election workers. So, we need other means of keeping track of voters and their votes."²⁰ At the extreme, rules to safeguard the integrity of the vote might be so burdensome (think bringing witnesses, notarizing ballots) that they keep many eligible voters away, thereby weakening democracy. On the other extreme, achieving widespread participation (think anonymous online poll) might make fraud rampant, weakening democracy.

The matter is complicated by the fact that political parties face dual incentives. On the one hand, they are invested in continuing democratic government, which allows them to continue to exist, even when they lose elections. On the other hand, they have incentives to change electoral rules to widen their base, making it easier to win. This second motivation becomes particularly salient when politicians stop seeing their opponents as legitimate players in the democratic arena. It might be less the legal landscape but cultural norms and civil society vigilance that determine which incentives outweigh. When analyzing legislative proposals, it is important to keep these dual motivations in mind.

The ease of voting is also affected by administrative considerations. Administering a large, diverse population distributed across a large territory is complicated. This makes running elections hard, especially when resources and staff are limited. Most elections are conducted on the ground by volunteers with limited training and knowledge of the law. This suggests that irregularities may be due to mistakes or incompetence instead of fraud. It also means that burdens on voters can result from (unfortunate) bureaucratic necessities instead of calculated voter suppression. At the same time, resources allocated to election administration might become part of policymakers' principled or strategic considerations.

The legitimacy of the electoral process is a related question. In general, we know that both robust possibilities for participation and strong safeguards against fraud are required for legitimacy. At the same time, international comparison shows that a wide range of institutional arrangements is compatible with legitimate democratic regimes. While procedural assessments have some influence, principled support for democracy tends to be shaped by a wide range of historical, economic, and cultural variables.²¹ Importantly, legitimacy is a question of perception. Between 2004 and 2020, the number of Americans saying that they have little or no confidence in votes being accurately cast and counted increased from 24% to 41%.²² This shift is not caused by new facts about the integrity of US elections but changes in public discourse and elite cues. This further complicates ideas that specific laws, like requiring voter ID, might increase the legitimacy of elections. Depending on the framing, such as voter suppression, they

might actually decrease trust in elections. This means claims that a specific law will increase or decrease the legitimacy of the electoral process are suspect and need to be empirically investigated.

Similar questions arise when asking questions about voter turnout or fraud. Some laws might make voting harder by adding additional steps for the voter to go through. However, that does not necessitate lower turnout because other contextual factors might counteract the incentives. As discussed later, this might be the case with voter ID laws.²³ Similarly, laws that make voting easier do not necessarily increase voter turnout. As discussed later, this might be the case when voting rights are automatically restored to felons, especially when they are unaware of it.²⁴ Furthermore, there is little evidence that variations in turnout systematically advantage one party over the other.²⁵ The reason is that occasional voters are more easily influenced by the characteristics of the electoral contest at hand.

Debating these issues is also complicated by the very real history of voter suppression and disenfranchisement in the United States. The right to vote and other fundamental human rights have long been embattled between white property-owning elites and the rest, between men and women, as well as between the white majority and minorities. For instance, Jim Crow laws very clearly disenfranchised African Americans. Similarly, into the 20th century, Native Americans often could not vote, meaning they had no democratic means to fight their marginalization. This context matters. Even if we find that voter ID laws or rules for absentee ballots have little effect on voter turnout, African Americans or Native Americans might be reasonably concerned that future laws could have more extreme effects and history could repeat itself.

This report aims to provide empirical grounds for public discourse over election laws that affect the ease of voting and fraud. It is important to keep in mind that framing, agenda-setting, and public discourse can drive policy independently of their correspondence with reality. The next section addresses why we should care about the ease of voting. It defines the terms and sets out our methodology for assessing how the ease of voting has changed in Arizona since 1989. This time-period was selected because searchable text of Arizona bills is available starting in 1989. The third section lays out some of the main types of rules that affect how easy or hard it is for citizens to vote. For each of them, I describe Arizona's current rules and compare them to states with more restrictive and less restrictive rules. The fourth section presents the results of analyzing Arizona legislation between 1989 and 2021. Despite recent examples to the contrary, Arizona has made the process of registering to vote and casting a ballot easier overall. The fifth section addresses how the major legal changes have affected turnout, the composition of the electorate, and the partisan balance. According to the best available evidence, most policy interventions have modest impacts on voter turnout and negligible effects on the partisan balance. The subsequent section analyzes what is known about the legal changes and their effects on voter fraud. I find little evidence for a relationship. The level of fraud is mostly influenced by larger structural forces and has been a negligible force in modern electoral politics. Section seven analyzes the public discourse surrounding vote-by-mail in Arizona, based on arguments surrounding the laws that have made it easier and harder. The conclusion presents, based on this analysis, an argument for more evidence-based policy making and suggests some ideas moving forward.

Defining the Ease of Voting

Modern democracy is often considered to stand on several pillars:²⁶

- Free and fair elections to choose and replace governments;
- Citizens that actively participate in civic life, including voting;
- Protection of the basic (human) rights of all people;
- Bureaucratic administration that applies laws and rules equally; and
- The rule of law protected by courts.

If we hold democracy as an important value to be pursued, we must care about a system of elections that allows wide participation and does not systematically exclude any groups. In the history of the United States, equal participation has not been the norm. Political scientists therefore usually don't consider the United States a modern democracy until 1920, when women gained the right to vote, or plausibly not until the 1960s, when major civil rights legislation was passed, allowing a broader franchise and election fraud had become less prevalent.²⁷

The State of Arizona and its counties have a long history of attempting to disenfranchise Native Americans, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans.²⁸ Before the Civil War, the franchise was reserved for white males. Property restrictions on the franchise, like a minimum acreage of landholding or property taxes paid by the voter, were mostly ended by 1860, but some persisted for local elections into the beginning of the 20th century, including in Arizona.²⁹ Since then, disenfranchisement has taken the form of burdensome rules that by law or in implementation prevented certain groups from voting (among others, so-called Jim Crow laws). For instance: even though Native Americans officially gained the right to vote in Arizona in 1948, "Using poll taxes, literacy tests, English language tests, and refusing to place polling places in or near Indian communities, Western states were successful in their efforts to prevent Indians from voting."³⁰ Having a large population of non-English speakers, Arizona relied on literacy tests to disenfranchise minorities. As a result, Apache, Coconino, and Navajo county were covered by the pre-clearance provisions of the US Voting Rights Act of 1965, requiring among other things US Department of Justice (DOJ) approval for election procedure changes. However, it was not until 1970, that literacy tests were discontinued. The whole state of Arizona became covered by the preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act in 1970. A main reason was its large single language minority and the provision of election materials in English only.³¹

In the 1980s and 1990s, the state of Arizona entered several consent decrees with federal courts for impeding Native American voters.³² Twenty-two election procedure changes between 1973 and 2003 were rejected by the DOJ under preclearance procedures, including the redistricting plans following the 1980, 1990, and 2000 census.³³

It is easy to agree on some procedural minimums, but just how equal and broad participation has to become to be considered truly democratic is quite controversial.³⁴ While conventionally people argue that more participation is always better, some scholars think that a population that is too politically mobilized leads to gridlock and bad policy outcomes.³⁵ At the same time, representative government can only work when the voters choosing representatives are themselves somewhat representative of the population.³⁶

Undeniably, voting today is more convenient and accessible to more people than during the Jim Crow era of mass disenfranchisement.³⁷ There are more ways to register to vote, to get

informed, and to submit a ballot than in any other time in history. At the same time, turnout has not dramatically changed since the 1920s.³⁸ The motivations for current legislation that make voting more burdensome are murky – preventing fraud, the motivation presented by advocates, appears disingenuous given no known relationship between those laws and the prevention of fraud (see section 6). This is suggestive of partisan and racial motivations, aimed at shaping the electorate in favor of Republicans.³⁹ At the same time, there is little evidence that these laws actually have that effect (see section 5).

Given the history of the United States in directly and indirectly withholding the right to vote from large parts of the population along ethnic and racial lines, the ease of voting is surrounded by fears and symbolism. Even if voter ID laws have little effect on turnout, might African Americans reasonably worry that this is the first step in a new movement to disenfranchisement? While “the slippery slope” is generally considered a fallacy, should lawmakers take seriously the fears of the electorate shaped by history? Even if making voter registration easier does not increase voter turnout, is it an important symbolic act that tells voters, “we want you to turn out,” and builds trust with previously disenfranchised populations? Symbolism and perception are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note that facilitating the vote of the hardest-to-reach individual might have important effects on building trust in the democratic process and government. But just how much effort should the state undertake to enable its citizens to utilize their rights? To which degree do citizens need to take initiative and expend their own resources to participate in the political process? These questions have been the subject of long philosophical debate and cannot be answered in this report.

I examine how the ease of voting has changed in Arizona since 1989 by analyzing all laws that affect the conduct of state and federal elections. I consider laws to make voting harder when they add steps to voter registration or casting ballots as well as when they remove options to do so (see Appendix). I consider individual provisions, meaning some laws were categorized as undecided. This procedure allows us to say something more definitively about how access to voting has changed. While no measure is perfect, this is better than discussions based solely on intuition and ideology. An important caveat to the analysis is that I only examine statutory language. It is possible that counties and local election workers implement those statutes in ways that counteract or exaggerate the theoretical effects of state law.

The Ease of Voting in Comparison

In the following, I look at the main factors determining the ease of voting – eligibility rules, registration rules, rules for registration drives, early voting rules, and rules for casting ballots. For each issue, I explain Arizona’s process and compare it to states that make it more and less easy to vote.

Voting Eligibility

Residency Requirements: In Arizona, residency for the purposes of voting requires an “actual physical presence” in the state, as well as an “intent to remain,” and a person must be a resident of the state for at least 29 days before the election.⁴⁰ Temporary absences are permitted as long as the resident has an “intent to return.” Arizona has among the longest length of residency requirements, which range from 10-30 days in 25 other states.⁴¹

Mental Competency Requirements: Arizona law bars from voting anyone who has been declared “incapacitated” by a court, defined as a person who is impaired mentally, physically, or by intoxication “to the extent that he lacks sufficient understanding or capacity to make or communicate responsible decisions concerning his person.”⁴² A person under limited guardianship can file a petition to retain their right to vote.⁴³ It is one of 13 states with such a system. States such as Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, and Vermont have no disability- or mental competency-related restrictions on voting, while four states (Nebraska, Hawaii, Rhode Island and Mississippi) bar people from voting if they are “non compos mentis,” a phrase that is largely undefined and often open to interpretation.⁴⁴

Felon Disenfranchisement and Reinstatement: Convicted felons are barred from voting in Arizona. Civil rights, including voting, are restored automatically on final discharge for the first offense, while a person convicted of more than one felony can file for restoration of civil rights two years after final discharge; restoration is at the discretion of the court.⁴⁵ In the least restrictive states (Maine and Vermont as well as Washington, D.C.), felons remain eligible to vote, including while incarcerated. The most restrictive states permanently disenfranchise people convicted of certain crimes, with only a pardon from the governor able to restore them; in Iowa, for example, any person convicted of an “infamous crime,” including any felony, is permanently disenfranchised unless pardoned.⁴⁶

Voter Registration Rules

Registration Deadline: Arizona’s deadline to register to vote is 29 days before the next election. This is common since the maximum deadline allowable under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 is 30 days.⁴⁷ A more permissive system, same-day registration and voting, has been implemented in 18 states and Washington, D.C., including Vermont, Wisconsin, Utah, and California.⁴⁸ North Dakota is the only state that does not require voter registration.

Online Voter Registration: Arizona was the first state to implement online voter registration in 2002, and is now one of 42 states plus Washington, D.C. that offers it. Eight states still require that a voter registration form be filled out on paper either in person or by mail, and the most restrictive version of this system is in Wyoming, where the form must be notarized if not filled out in a county office or at the polls on Election Day.⁴⁹

Automatic Voter Registration: Arizona, like most states, is required by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 to allow voter registration when residents interact with the state’s motor vehicle agency.⁵⁰ Since Oregon pioneered automatic voter registration in 2016, 22 states and Washington, D.C. have made registration at their motor vehicle agencies automatic; people interacting with these states’ motor vehicle agencies are either registered automatically, with the option to opt out after the fact, or must actively choose whether or not to be registered.⁵¹

Pre-Registration Rules: In Arizona, a person can register to vote if they will be 18 years old on or before the next regular general election.⁵² This is the practice in a total of 25 states. More permissive states, including California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Utah, permit pre-registration for all 16-year-olds.⁵³ Five of the most restrictive states limit registration to 2-6

months before a person turns 18 (e.g., Texas requires an individual to be 17 years and 10 months old before they can register).

Registration Drive Rules

Training Requirements: Arizona does not require training for registration drives and is among the least restrictive states.⁵⁴ Certain states such as California, Georgia, and Washington offer optional training; other states require training for all voter registration drive participants.⁵⁵ Colorado, for example, requires training and testing of drive organizers every calendar year.

Notification and Registration Requirements: Arizona does not require notification or registration of a registration drive and is among the least restrictive states.⁵⁶ Nebraska requires deputy registrars (i.e. people who are trained to assist voters in filling out registration forms) to notify the county of the location and time of the drive and the names and party affiliations of the deputy registrars, who must work in teams of at least two and include at least one member of a different political party. New Hampshire and Wyoming do not allow any third-party registration or voter registration drives.

Compensation Rules: Registration drive participants may not be compensated based on how many registration forms they collect in Arizona; every state that permits voter registration drives bans this practice.⁵⁷ Texas and Tennessee additionally ban establishing quotas for the number of completed forms to be collected by individuals conducting a voter registration drive.

Early Voting Rules

Vote-by-mail/Absentee Ballots: Arizona is among 34 states and DC that permit “no-excuse” absentee/mail ballots.⁵⁸ Eight of these states, including California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Utah, allow all elections to be conducted entirely by mail.⁵⁹ Oregon conducts all elections exclusively by mail. The remaining states require a specific excuse to vote by absentee ballot. For instance, in Arkansas a voter is required to certify that they are disabled, ill, or out of the county on election day to receive and absentee ballot. All states are required to provide absentee voting for certain voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA).⁶⁰

Deadline for Delivery of Ballot: Early ballots in Arizona must be received by 7 p.m. on Election Day, whether delivered by mail or in person.⁶¹ This is in keeping with the majority of states, 31 of which require absentee or mail ballots to be received on or before Election Day. More lenient states, such as Alaska, Maryland, and Illinois, will accept any mailed ballot that is postmarked on or before Election Day and received within 1 to 14 days after the election.⁶²

Return Methods: Arizona is among the 13 most lenient states in terms of returning mail-in ballots, permitting ballots to be dropped off at “any polling place in the county”; most other states only allow them to be returned in person at the county election official’s office, in combination with mail or drop box returns.⁶³ While drop boxes are not explicitly addressed in Arizona state law, the Election Procedures Manual permits any county recorder to establish one or more ballot drop-off locations or drop-boxes in accordance with the Secretary of State’s guidelines.⁶⁴ Twenty-two states have laws directly permitting or mandating drop boxes as a method of ballot return.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, a few states have recently limited or banned drop boxes altogether. In

2020, governors in Ohio and Texas limited the number of drop boxes to one per county, and the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld a ban on drop boxes across the state in February 2022.⁶⁶

Absentee/Mail Ballot Verification: Twenty-seven states, including Arizona, conduct signature verification on mail ballots.⁶⁷ More lenient states, such as Connecticut, Nebraska, and New Mexico, verify that the envelope has been signed but do not compare signatures against other government records. More stringent states may require the signature of a witness or require that the ballot envelope be notarized. Four states (Arkansas, Georgia, Minnesota, and Ohio) require a copy of the voter's ID or a state ID number to be included with the ballot.

Early In-person Voting: Early in-person voting in Arizona begins 26 days before the election and ends the Friday before the election.⁶⁸ This is around the average length of early voting periods. States with the longest early voting periods begin the process as early as 50 days before the election in Pennsylvania or 45 days before in Vermont, Virginia, and South Dakota. The shortest period of early in-person voting is in Kentucky, which begins on Thursday and ends on the Saturday before the election. Six states, including Mississippi, South Carolina, and New Hampshire, do not offer any early in-person voting options.

Time off from Work Rules: Arizona law gives any person up to three hours of paid time off in order to vote if polls are not open at least 3h outside of work time.⁶⁹ Other states, for examples Arkansas and Minnesota, allow some time off independently of scheduled work time that day.⁷⁰ 21 states do not have any voting leave laws in statute.

Emergency Ballots for People Indisposed: Arizona is one of 38 states to permit emergency absentee voting.⁷¹ Voters in Arizona who are confined due to illness or physical disability may request an early ballot any time before 5 p.m. on election and, depending on the timing and feasibility of their request, have a ballot delivered to their location.⁷² Certain states, including Missouri and Nebraska, have no emergency exception to their absentee ballot deadline. Other states, such as New Jersey and Vermont, allow any voter to request a mail-in ballot until Election Day or the day before.⁷³

Ballot Collection: Only a family member, household member, or caregiver may return a ballot on behalf of a voter in Arizona. The least restrictive states, such as Hawaii and Wyoming, do not have any restrictions on who may return a ballot. In contrast, the most restrictive states, such as Alabama, prohibit anyone but the voter themselves from returning the ballot.⁷⁴ Some states further limit how many ballots can be returned by one person and how long they can have the ballot in their possession. In Maine, for example, a person delivering someone else's ballot must do so within two business days of receiving it.

Casting Ballots Rules

Polling Locations: Arizona requires that polling places be publicly announced at least 20 days before a general or primary election.⁷⁵ The number of polling places needs to be "reasonable and adequate."⁷⁶ Beyond this, Arizona does not regulate the location of polling places. Most states do not have any clear rules on the number of polling places that are considered sufficient.⁷⁷ California offers an example of a more heavily regulated state, where public buildings, school buildings, and tax-exempt property must be made available for polling while candidates' residences, sex offenders' residences, and businesses that offer alcohol are

prohibited from being used. The least restrictive states, such as Maine and Kansas, do not specifically regulate polling locations.

Vote Centers: Vote centers allow any voter in a given jurisdiction, usually a county, to receive and cast their ballot.⁷⁸ In Arizona, a county board of supervisors may authorize the use of vote centers either in place of or in addition to other precinct-based polling places.⁷⁹ Arizona is one of 12 states that allow counties to use vote centers, while four states – Hawaii, Kansas, Utah, and Washington – require the use of vote centers in all counties.⁸⁰

Voting Hours: Arizona polling place hours are 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. While most states have polls open from around 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., some states, including Vermont, Tennessee, New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts, have flexible opening times set by municipalities or counties.⁸¹

ID Requirements at the Polls: Arizona voters need to identify themselves before casting a ballot. Options include (1) a photo ID with an address, (2) two forms of non-photo ID, such as a utility bill or an Arizona vehicle insurance card, or (3) a photo ID without an address and a non-photo ID with an address, for instance, a passport and a bank statement. If an individual shows up to the polls without the required ID, they are allowed to vote on a provisional ballot and the voter can provide ID up until 5pm on the fifth (third for state elections) business day after the election. With these rules, Arizona is situated among the more restrictive states regarding ID requirements.⁸² However, some states are more stringent. For instance, seven states, including Arkansas and Georgia, only accept photo IDs. More lenient states require voters to sign the poll book, provide an affidavit, or confirm some biographical information. The lowest burden on voters is found in D.C., Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, and Oregon, where voters simply have to sign next to their name.

Electioneering: In Arizona, influencing, intimidating, or hindering voters is illegal, and no electioneering can occur within 75 feet of a polling place. Other states may prohibit campaign apparel, signs and banners, exit polls, petitions, or loitering in addition to influencing or intimidating voters or obstructing entrances.⁸³ Iowa is one of the most restrictive states both in terms of the number of specific electioneering activities prohibited (campaign materials, petitioning, loitering, influencing voters, intimidating voters, obstructing entrances) and distance from the polls (300 feet). Less restrictive states include Washington, which only bans electioneering activities within the polling place itself.

Voting Assistance: The Election Procedures Manual for Arizona elections notes that voters may be accompanied and assisted by a person of their choice – other than their employer, their union representative, or any candidate on the ballot – during any part of the voting process.⁸⁴ Under federal election laws, voters with disabilities or difficulty reading or writing English are entitled to reasonable accommodations, including assistance from election officials.⁸⁵ However, some states have recently introduced additional barriers to assisting voters. For example, Texas passed SB 1 in 2021, which restricts who may accompany a voter during drive-through voting and requires anyone who assists a voter to complete a form with their name, address, relationship to the voter, and an oath that they were not compensated for their assistance.⁸⁶

Guns: In Arizona, private citizens are prohibited from bringing weapons within the 75-foot perimeter around a polling place.⁸⁷ It is one of 10 states, including Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, that explicitly prohibit guns and other weapons in polling places.⁸⁸

Provisional Ballots and Resolution ('Curing'): A provisional ballot is issued in Arizona when a voter received an early ballot but wishes to vote in person, has moved, changed their name, or does not appear on the precinct register.⁸⁹ County officials must verify provisional ballots within 10 calendar days of a federal election and five business days of any other election which may involve contacting the voter. A provisional ballot issued for a voter who does not provide ID must be 'cured' by providing identification by 5 p.m. on the fifth business day after a federal election or the third business day after any other election.⁹⁰ While many states reject provisional ballots cast in the wrong precinct, jurisdictions such as California and Washington, D.C. accept these ballots. Some states have a shorter window in which voter registration and identification must be verified; Illinois, for example, has a deadline of 7 days after the election.⁹¹

Timeline of Ease of Voting in Arizona

Since 1989, Arizona passed 271 laws affecting A.R.S. Title 16, which regulates the conduct of elections. Of those, I classified 78 as affecting the ease of voting. Forty-seven clearly made voting easier, while 15 clearly made voting harder. Sixteen were classified as undecided; either because they included provisions in both directions, or because the directionality was contingent on unknown factors. I did not distinguish between "large" and "small" changes. For better resolution, I counted individual provisions within laws, largely following committee summaries of what individual elements of laws are. There were 127 provisions total, 87 making voting easier and 33 making voting harder, with seven remaining undecided. A complete list, as well as an explanation of the methodology, can be found in the appendix.

If we look at these changes over time (see Figures 1 and 2), we can see that laws that make voting easier have been regularly passed through the past three decades, peaking in the early 2000s. More laws increasing the burden on voting have been passed in the last decade peaking in 2011/2019/2021.

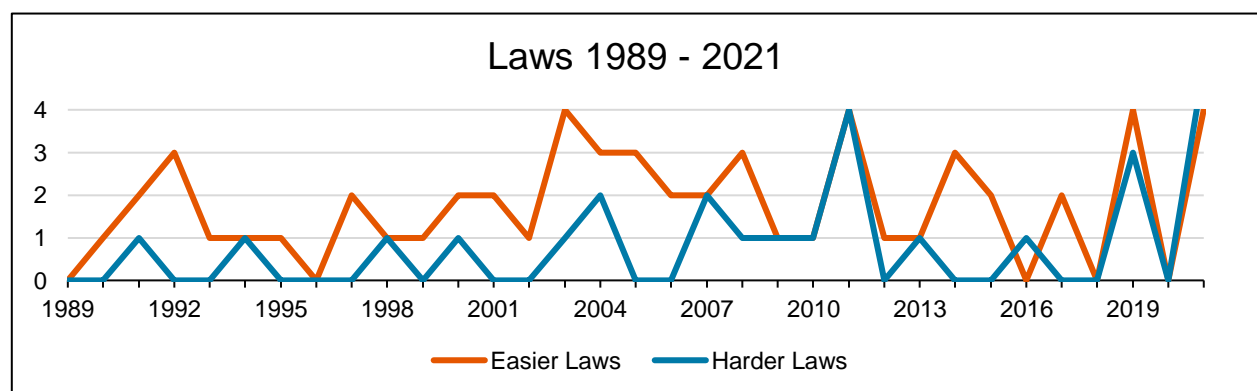


Figure 1: The ease of voting in Arizona according to laws modifying A.R.S. 16. See appendix for methodology.

Throughout the 1990s, Arizona legislators worked on making voting more accessible and more convenient. Most of the changes were negotiated and passed on a bipartisan basis. Two of the most significant changes were allowing absentee voting without an excuse (1991), and allowing

counties to establish in-person early voting locations (1993). This set Arizona on a path where early voting, as well as mail-in voting, would dominate the election process. Many more minor procedural changes were made that lowered the burden on registering and turning out to vote.

The voter registration system was streamlined by making voter registration forms available in many different public places, like government offices and libraries (1991, 1991, 1992, 1994). Based on the National Voter Registration Act of 1994, registering to vote at the DMV was simplified. Guidance was added to direct county recorders to automatically update voter registration with postal data (1994, 2000) and allowed voters to update addresses when voting in some instances (2000). A law in 1991 lowered from 50 to 29 days the period an individual has to reside in the state/a district to be able to register to vote. Another 1991 law replaced a system of cancelling voter registrations with an inactive voter list. This allows electors to re-activate their voter registration by voting within 4 years. Since then, electors, whose election mail is undeliverable, or who do not respond to a new address verification, are placed on the inactive voting list. A 1993 law clarified that a postal residence for registration is not required, allowing unhoused people to vote.

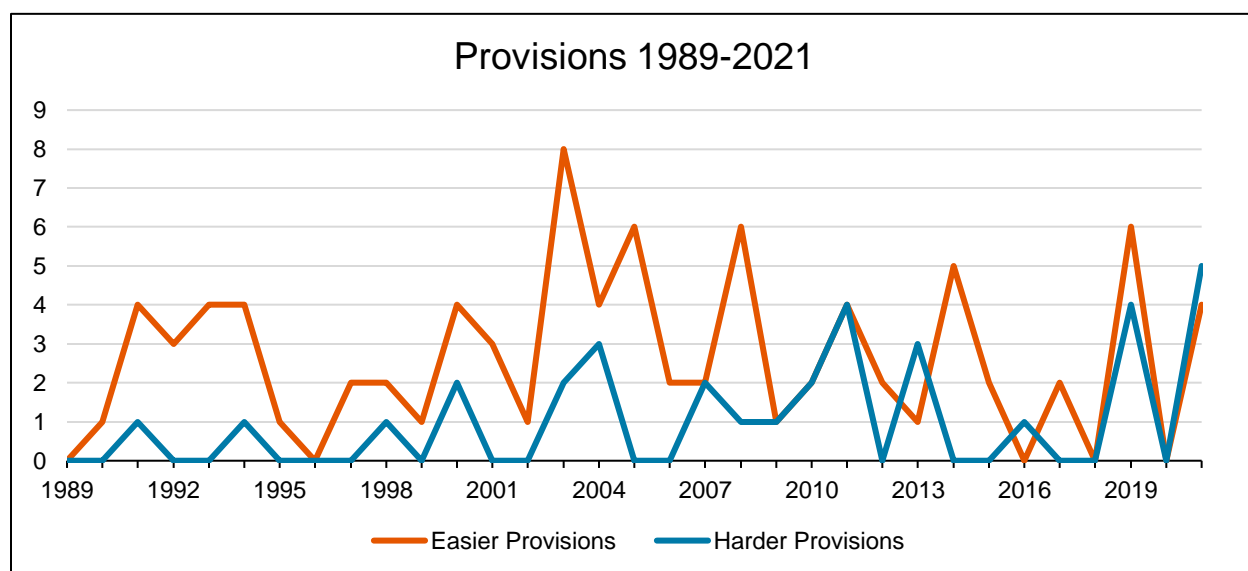


Figure 2: The ease of voting in Arizona according to provisions modifying A.R.S. 16. See appendix for methodology.

In most states, including Arizona, voter registration information is a public record that is often easily accessible to private individuals. This makes registering to vote a safety concern for people that do not want to be found, for instance, victims of domestic violence or judges. Over time, Arizona has allowed more and more individuals to keep some of their information, including their address, private: various judges (1995), victims of domestic violence (1997), prosecutors (2001), and public defenders (2003).

It is not always easy for counties to identify appropriate polling places. A 1992 law, passed despite some Republican opposition, declared that public schools must make space available for the conduct of elections, with a few exceptions. In 1993, legislators decided that polling place locations must be published 80 days before an election (in effect until 2000).

Changes were also made to the actual voting process. In 1992, voters were allowed to deposit their ballot into the box themselves if they so prefer. Since 1993, electors, who are not found on the precinct register, can vote a provisional ballot to be verified. So-called new resident ballots can be utilized by a voter that moved within a county. This updates their address automatically, removing the need to change one's voter registration (1994). Rules were also enacted for people who, for health reasons, are unable to leave the house. Ballots are hand-delivered in emergencies, even on election day (1998, 1999). A 2000 law allows minors to accompany voters at polling places.

Between 1989 and 2000, there were only a few laws that made voting more burdensome. Most changes were small and had relatively obvious bureaucratic reasons, hence not causing any significant opposition. A 1991 law specified that residency for voter registration includes physical presence in the state. The 1994 reforms specified that a voter registration form without a birthdate is incomplete. In 1998, a law clarified that one cannot use the power of attorney to cast a vote. However, this had already been the case since U. S. courts generally held that voting is a personal act that cannot be delegated.⁹² In 2000, county recorders were directed to remove individuals from the voter roll that indicated on a jury questionnaire that they are convicted felons without restored civil rights. This was passed with some Republican opposition. The same law removed the requirement that polling locations must be published 80 days before the election (now 20 days) for logistical reasons.

Not all changes started in the Arizona legislature. The 1994 reforms, which passed against some significant Republican opposition, made changes in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. This federal law required uniform federal registration forms, voter registration at the DMV and public assistance agencies, mail voter registration, and prohibited removal from the voter rolls for non-voting. Concerns over low turnout created impetus among both parties to make voter registration easier, but the federal bill was passed against Republican opposition.⁹³ Jackie Winchester, the Supervisor of Elections for West Palm Beach, Florida testified in Congress at the time, "Many of our members feel that this legislation would open the door to voter fraud, thus undermining the confidence of the electorate."⁹⁴ The main argument at the time, besides federalism and cost concerns, was that the bill would make registering to vote too easy.⁹⁵

The controversy surrounding the 2000 presidential election in Florida spurred further reforms nationwide. Among others, the Ford-Carter Commission and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission found several irregularities in the election administration by the state of Florida, including the disenfranchisement of African American voters, missing leadership, erroneous voter registration purge of former felons, as well as lacking accessibility for people with disabilities, and those lacking English proficiency.⁹⁶ However, most of the irregularities were not attributable to suspect motives but human error: Insufficiently trained poll workers administering an overly complex set of election rules under fragmented guidance by counties were bound to make mistakes. Expert sentiment suggested that similar scrutiny would reveal similar problems in other states.⁹⁷ Commissions made wide-ranging recommendations that went beyond problems specific to the 2000 election. Issues of fraud were discussed, especially as result of inaccurate voter rolls and mail-in voting. Some commissioners suggested "to require those who are registering to vote and those who are casting their ballot to provide some form of official identification, such as a photo ID issued by a government agency. [...] They believe this burden is reasonable, that voters will understand it, and that most democratic nations recognize this act as a valid means of protecting the sanctity of the franchise."⁹⁸ The often-forgotten corollary to this was that the

commission suggested government-issued ID should be available free of charge from offices in all neighborhoods.⁹⁹

Many of the reform proposals were enacted through the Help America Vote Act of 2002, which passed with minimal Democratic and Republican opposition. This federal legislation prescribed some uniform standards for election administration, including stricter ID requirements for voter registration, appropriated funds to update voting equipment (e.g., replace punched-card systems), and established the Election Assistance Commission.

The Arizona state legislature implemented the federal reforms in 2003 and 2004. Several provisions lowered the burden on voters. Overseas and uniformed voters were allowed to request ballots for two election cycles at a time, they can now transmit those ballots via fax, and the Secretary of State was tasked with providing uniform information to this group of voters (2003). While Arizona, unlike other states, already had provisional ballots, a system to notify voters when their provisional ballot is counted was added; provisional ballots need to be verified within 10 days for federal elections and within 5 days all other elections (2003). The largest reform was the establishment of a uniform state-wide voter registration database, leading to more accurate voter rolls (2003). If a voter's early ballot request is incomplete, the county needs to notify them (2003). Voters, whose information is protected, were allowed to request an absentee ballot more than 90 days advance of the election (2004). The practice of schools refusing to be polling places by citing disruption of school affairs was prohibited (2004). The deadline to respond to an address change verification notice was extended from 25 to 29 days (2004).

With the state-wide uniform registration database also came stricter registration rules that made registration more difficult. Voter registration now needs to include a voter's drivers' license number and social security number, if they have been assigned those. If a statewide database had not been established in time, voting would have required the provision of a photo ID, bank statement, or similar document (2003). While previously a registration form was considered complete even if the citizenship question was not answered, since 2004 it has to be answered with yes. Some Democrats voted against this bill.

These reforms started a period where more requirements were added to the process of registering and voting. Proposition 200, passed by 55.6% of voters in 2004, established that voters need to present photo ID or two different forms of alternative ID at the polls and prove their citizenship to register to vote. The underlying argument, that this was necessary to prevent fraud, was controversial.¹⁰⁰ Several court cases were filed. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that the proof of citizenship requirement for federal elections was unconstitutional.¹⁰¹ Since then, Arizona maintains two types of voter registration – one for federal offices only (without the citizenship requirement) and one for all other elections.

Despite this dramatic change, the Arizona state legislature moved further in the direction of making voting easier in other aspects. In 2005, changes were made to the way uniformed and overseas voters can vote, allowing applications for ballots until 7pm on election day, votes to be cast from locations in the US, voters that have never lived in the US but whose parents are registered in AZ, and electronic transmittal of ballots. Another law, passed against some Democratic opposition, simplified registration at the DMV by making the license form sufficient for voter registration (2005). Since 2005, counties, cities and towns are required to obtain voting systems for blind or visually impaired individuals.

A 2006 law allows voters to correct missing or illegible information on a voter registration form until 7pm on election day. The Secretary of State was directed to establish maximum wait times at polling places and publish methods for reducing wait times (2006).

The current election system, where most ballots are cast via mail, was established in 2007. A permanent early voting list was established removing the need to apply for an early ballot every election. While voters can be removed from the list, as they can from the general rolls, not voting was not grounds for removal until 2021. Additionally, more officials were added to the list of people that can seal their voter registration: Judge commissioner, code enforcement officer, correction officer and support staff, probation officer, clemency board member, law enforcement support staff, national guard member, and some firefighters (2007). Some bureaucratic changes that year made voting slightly harder. The deadline for any elector to request an early ballot was changed from the Friday preceding the election to the 11th day preceding the election. Another law, passed against some Democratic opposition, specified that someone convicted of forging election returns cannot automatically have their right to vote restored after release.

Small changes made voting less burdensome in 2008. Since then, voters with sealed records need to be notified 6 months before their protection expires. Early in-person voting must open at least same day as early ballots are sent out and early ballots need to be sent out within 5 days of receipt by the county. The period in which early ballots can be requested was extended to 93 days before the election. Clarification of rules also led to slightly more stringency. Voters now have only 35 days to respond to a change of address verification message before being placed on the inactive list – previously the deadline was dependent on the election date.

A 2009 law mandates speedy delivery of early ballots, declaring that requests received before the 30th day before the election must be answered by the 26th day before the election. At the same time, it was specified that early ballots cannot be sent out earlier than that date by counties, which was not common practice, but in some cases might lead to ballots being delivered slightly later.

After having legalized various methods of transmitting ballots for service members and overseas voters, a 2010 law specified that they can designate the means by which they wish to receive voting materials. A huge gain in transparency was made by requiring counties to provide a method by which voters can verify that their ballot has been received. Another change, probably of marginal importance for federal elections, stated that if an election is not called 120 days before the election, counties do not have to send election notices to early voters. Additionally, the County Board of Supervisors was allowed to consolidate polling stations for precincts if it determines that there are a lot of early voters, potentially leading to longer lines or driving times.

Since 2011, the Arizona legislature has tried to restrict who can collect early ballots, because, according to proponents, there is some danger for manipulation. A 2011 law, passed against significant Democratic opposition, required a person who delivers more than 10 early ballots to an election official to provide a copy of their photo ID and specified additional felonies related to the (fraudulent) collection of ballots. As with most changes to electoral rules, this was submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for pre-clearance under the Voting Rights Act. When the DOJ asked for further information, Arizona withdrew the ID provision, so that part of the law never went into effect. In 2012, the legislature repealed the ineffective provision. Another 2011 law made finding assistance for voting at the polls harder by prohibiting employees or volunteers for a candidate, campaign, political organization, or political party in that election from helping. No preclearance was given for this provision either and it was repealed by a 2012

law. Another 2011 law specified that the default ballot request for overseas and uniformed voters is reduced to one election cycle. Other provisions eased the burden on voting. Since 2011, a permanent early voter address needs to be only in the State of Arizona, instead of the county of registration. Border patrol agents were added to the list of people who can have their voter registration sealed.

In 2012, one election law was passed against unanimous Democratic opposition. It allows all organizations to distribute early voter registration forms, making them more widely available but also adds additional paperwork to said requests, requiring a signed statement that the voter is eligible to vote in the county.

In 2013, spouses of deceased peace officers and former public officials were added to the list of people eligible for sealing their voter registration. 2013 was also the year in which the state legislature tried to reverse the permanency of the early voting list. According to that bill, counties can send a notice to an early voter, who has not voted in the two last primary and general elections. If the voter does not respond, they are deleted from the early voting list but remain registered voters. A statement (“won’t be able to vote at regular polling place”) was added to the early voting registration paperwork. If it is not attached, the voter will only be issued a one-time early ballot. The legislature also revived its 2011 attempt to restrict who can collect ballots. According to that provision, ballots cannot be returned on behalf of an individual by paid workers or volunteers of any group or organization, including political action committees. These legal changes were passed against the unanimous opposition of the Democratic minority and two Republicans in the House.

The 2013 election law revisions were simplified by a U.S. Supreme Court decision in the same year. In *Shelby County v. Holder*, the court held that the pre-clearance provision of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional in its current form.¹⁰² This ruling removed the need for Arizona to seek approval from the DOJ for changes in its election law.

The 2013 changes, which included changes to the initiative process, provoked huge public opposition. A referendum proposal gathered over 146,000 signatures.¹⁰³ In response, Republicans repealed the changes in 2014 against Democratic votes. However, lawmakers also stated that they wanted to reintroduce the legislation in less visible ways.¹⁰⁴ This proved to be true. In 2016, against the votes of House and Senate Democrats, a law stipulated that early ballots can only be collected by family members, caregivers, or household members, making it a class 6 felony for an ineligible person to knowingly collect early ballots from another person. A Circuit court held this provision as well as the practice of discarding votes cast in the wrong precinct unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed this ruling in July 2021.¹⁰⁵ In 2021, the permanent early voting list was renamed the early active voting list, with inactive voters (4 years) being removed after a notification procedure. A lawsuit against this provision is pending in federal district court.¹⁰⁶

Despite these developments, small changes continued to ease the burden of voting in other ways. In 2014, the list of people who may request certain personal information to be confidential was expanded to Address Confidentiality Program participants, which newly includes victims of sexual offenses as well as the spouses of peace officers. In 2015, former judges and U.S. immigration court judges were added to the list, against the unanimous Democratic minority in the House but not the Senate. Employees of the Department of Child Safety who have direct contact with families were added without significant opposition (2015). A 2017 law added to voter privacy by requiring that early ballot return envelopes are of a type that does not reveal the

voter's selections. Another law clarified that voter registration needs to be accepted on the next immediate business day if the filing deadline falls on a weekend or legal holiday (2017).

A 2019 reform effort made the restoration of civil rights, including voting, easier. Former felons do not have to pay any filing fees and first-time offenders do not have to pay fines to regain the right to vote (2019). While Arizona had already established automatic civil rights restoration for first-time offenders, in practice they still had to file an application.¹⁰⁷ This law clarified that no application or petition is needed for automatic restoration. Additionally, procedural safeguards were added for the discretionary restoration process for repeat offenders. Another 2019 change allows counties to include an internet address for revising voter registration information in specified notices. Employees of adult protective services were added to the list of people that can keep voter registration information confidential (2019). Finally, it was statutorily required that counties reach out to voters of early ballots where signatures are inconsistent and allow 5 days past election day to confirm their identity (2019).

Other 2019 laws, all passed along party lines, increased the burden on voters. Since then, polling place voter ID requirements are applied to on-site early voting locations and voting centers. ID also needs to be verified to receive an emergency early ballot; misrepresenting an emergency becomes a felony (2019). Counties now need a vote from the whole Board of Supervisors to establish Emergency Voting Centers (2019). They are also required to post the number of federal-office only electors (whose citizenship has not been confirmed) on their website (2019).

Since 2021, the Secretary of State is required rather than allowed to compare records of deaths with the statewide voter registration database. Hearing officers and members of the commission on appellate court appointments were added to the list of persons, whose voter registration can be kept confidential (2021). Voters must be offered a ballot privacy folder at polling locations (2021). Against the opposition of the majority of Democrats, early ballot envelopes must be designed to not show a voter's political party affiliation (2021). A provision directing the Department of Game and Fish to offer voter registration to all applicants of licenses was declared unconstitutional due to errors in legislative procedure relating to the budget (2021).¹⁰⁸

Beyond the abolition of the permanent early voting list, four additional provisions passed in partisan votes in 2021 that increased the burden on voters. Public bodies that administer elections are barred from receiving or expending private monies for election purposes. Missing signature on early ballots need to be added no later than 7pm on election day. This legislation clarifies a disagreement between the Attorney General and the Secretary of State. The latter had proposed treating missing signatures like mismatched ones, giving voters 5 days past election day for correction. A lawsuit against this provision is pending in federal district court.¹⁰⁹ Another law specifies that a county recorder or other election officer may not deliver or mail an early ballot to a person who has not requested it. Lastly, the legislature was empowered to appoint a (possibly private) "entity" to investigate the federal-only voter registration roll (people who did not show a birth certificate) and purge them if deemed ineligible. This provision was also part of the budget bill that was declared unconstitutional.

Reviewing these changes over the last three decades shows that Arizona's legislators have mostly worked to make voting more accessible. Most laws were passed in a bi-partisan manner. There are a few exceptions to this trend, with the potential that 2021 is a turning point from thereon out access to the ballot box becomes harder. The first is the 2004 ballot measure requiring birth certificates for registration and ID for voting. The others are Republican-only initiatives, including

bans on ballot collection, restrictions on voter assistance, changes to the permanent voting list, as well as smaller administrative changes.

Effects of Changing the Ease of Voting on Turnout

In the following, I consider the impacts of laws affecting the ease of voting on voter turnout, the composition of the electorate, and potential election outcomes. I focus on the major changes in Arizona's election law since 1989. Review of academic sources, journalistic sources, and logical analysis lead to the following conclusions:

- Voter registration: Changes in registration requirements and procedures, most importantly motor voter provisions and online registration, have moderately improved turnout, maybe up to 7 percentage points. It is unclear whether these changes have affected the composition of the electorate. There is no evidence for advantages to either party. The effects of requiring birth certificates for registration are unknown, but surveys show that a small percentage of citizens do not have easy access to these documents. Currently, at least 26,600 Arizona electors are disenfranchised from state elections for not providing a birth certificate.
- Vote-by-mail and recent restriction: The evidence suggests that Arizona's moves to create a de-facto vote-by-mail system might have moderately increased voter turnout (maybe up to 4 percentage points) without any effects on the partisan balance. Recent legal changes, like making the early voter list impermanent, move Arizona closer in line with other no-excuse absentee voting systems, potentially decreasing turnout. Bans on ballot collection disproportionately affect Native American communities, but numbers are too small to show up in turnout.
- Felony disenfranchisement: Currently, Arizona disenfranchises up to 233,816 felons, disproportionately African Americans, only a small fraction of which are likely voters. While the automatic restoration of voting rights does lead to more voters, the numbers are too small to show up meaningfully in turnout.
- Voter ID: Arizona's voter ID law disenfranchises some voters that are more likely to be African American or Latino but also less likely to vote in the first place. The numbers are so small that significant effects on turnout are hard to measure, ranging in studies from 0% to 3%. There is no evidence that voter ID laws change the partisan balance systematically or substantially.
- Early in-person voting: While early voting is convenient, evidence suggests that it might have only a small positive or no effect on turnout.
- Residency requirements: Lowering residency requirements has stopped the disenfranchisement of recent movers. Given the already low starting point, turnout effects are probably minimal.
- Voting centers and wait times: Establishing voting centers and reducing wait times have the potential to improve turnout. We don't know enough about Arizona's implementation to estimate its effect.
- Keeping voting rolls up-to-date and the treatment of inactive voters: Overall, the evidence suggests that keeping accurate voting rolls is important and that purges need to be done carefully. There is insufficient evidence to assess the impacts of Arizona's changes to voting roll administration on turnout.

The finding of small or no effects is not surprising in the light of the literature on voter turnout. Generally, voter turnout is relatively stable over time, varying with the cultural and institutional characteristics of countries.¹¹⁰ For most voters, voting is a habitual act relatively indifferent to circumstances.¹¹¹ More peripheral (occasional) voters are motivated by the characteristics of the election (e.g. closeness).¹¹² This means, that higher turnout is often associated with more volatility and less predictability of election results, at times disadvantaging incumbents.¹¹³ While there is some evidence that peripheral voters generally lean Democratic, their vote choice is also more easily influenced by short-term factors, leading to the finding that turnout does not affect the partisan balance systematically.¹¹⁴ However, this does not mean laws creating more unsurmountable barriers to voting would have no effect on the electorate. For example, Jim Crow Laws clearly kept White Democrats in power.¹¹⁵

Voter Registration Rules

During the 2020 election, 66.2% of eligible U.S. citizens turned out to vote.¹¹⁶ This is the highest since the 1900s; post-World War II presidential election turnout averaged around 58% with 42% for midterm elections.¹¹⁷ This is low in international comparison, where voters in other developed democracies turn out at much higher rates for their national legislative elections. For instance, Australia, Belgium, South Korea, and Belgium all have voter turnout in the high 70s or 80s. Voter registration rules have long been considered as an important factor explaining this divergence.¹¹⁸ In many other countries, the government takes the lead in maintaining lists of all eligible voters. In the U.S., it is the responsibility of the individual to be registered to vote. To do so, they must meet various procedural steps as discussed earlier.

The figure below shows the turnout of the voting eligible population (VEP) in presidential and mid-term elections. We can see that, in general, Arizona trends are not substantively different for US trends.

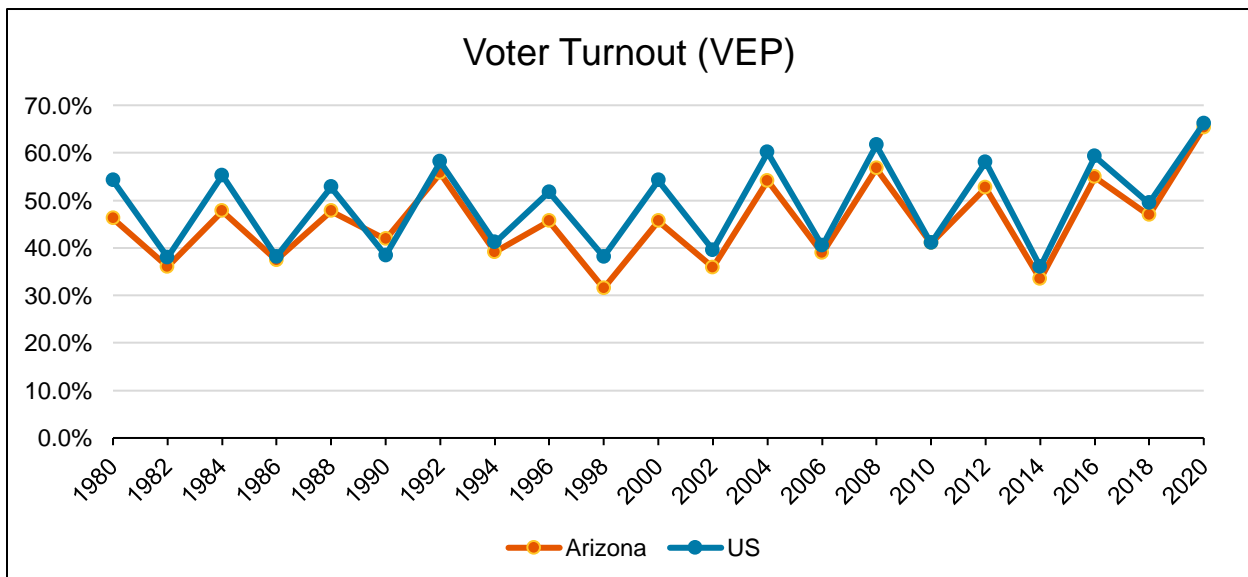


Figure 3: Voter turnout as a percentage of voting eligible population.¹¹⁹

It has become much easier to register to vote in Arizona based on actions by the state legislature and decisions by the Secretary of State. This has included:

- Making voter registration available at many points of contact between the government and its citizens, most importantly using the driver's license forms as means of voter registration;
- Establishing a state-wide uniform registration database;
- Updating registration information automatically based on postal and other government data;
- Forgoing registration purges solely based on not voting;
- Allowing online voter registration; and
- Allowing voters to correct certain information at the polls;

In some instances, steps necessary to register to vote in Arizona have become more burdensome. The most dramatic one has been to require proof of citizenship (except for federal elections).

It is very hard to determine how much these changes impact voting. It is not disputed that they have decreased and increased the costs of voting, and that in general there is a relationship between the cost of voting and actual turnout. However, in practice it is hard to measure the impact of one specific law, even if it is the only election code modification. Turnout at elections varies according to many factors, for instance the changing demographic composition of the population, the state of the economy, the political climate, and mobilization efforts by political parties. Some elections are just much more salient than others. Furthermore, changes are rarely observed in the absence of other changes. Additionally, more complex statistical questions arise because, for instance, we observe that states with already high turnout make registration easier, confounding the causal impact of the legal change. Due to these changes, it is impossible to say anything about the specific impact of one law in Arizona. However, we can consider general categories of modifications to voter registration and what that implies for Arizona.

The literature has identified two voter registration changes with substantial impact on the number of registered voters and turnout. One is either moving registration deadlines closer to election day, allowing election day registration, or not requiring voter registration at all. The other one is registering people to vote at the DMV, especially when those programs directly ask people if they want to register to vote or register them automatically if they do not opt-out (so-called Motor Voter Programs).

Studies show that states were able to increase voter turnout by between 2 and 10 percentage points by offering same day registration (see Appendix).¹²⁰ Motor Voter programs have increased turnout by between 0.3 and 4.7 percentage points (see Appendix).¹²¹ Simple studies from the 1990s generally find larger effects than new studies that employ more advanced statistical models, suggesting that the former are to be treated with caution.¹²² One important finding is that these rules matter much more in high salience presidential elections compared to all other elections.¹²³ Overall, review papers conclude that the timeline of registration matters, but registration alone is not the main variable explaining low turnout in the US.¹²⁴

The effects of changing registration rules on different subgroups are somewhat disputed. Most pronounced is the impact of motor voter programs and same day registration on young people.¹²⁵ This makes sense: the longer people are in the habit of voting or not voting the less

likely they are to be affected by interventions.¹²⁶ Even just allowing online voter registration, which Arizona introduced in 2002¹²⁷, increased turnout among 18-22-year-olds by 10 percentage points while having modest impacts on a population level.¹²⁸

Some studies have found that motor voter programs and same day registration have slightly stronger effects on turnout among poorer, less educated populations.¹²⁹ Others find either “relatively minor” effects or even suggest stronger effects on voters with high socio-economic status.¹³⁰ A more recent conclusion is that the effects might be most pronounced among middle income people with high school but no college degree.¹³¹ There are no studies that show any significant differences in effects by race or ethnicity.¹³²

While common wisdom among journalists and pundits seems to suggest that higher turnout is always better for Democrats, it is questionable whether higher turnout affects outcomes in a systematic way.¹³³ Both Democrats and Republicans have won election by increasing turnout among their registered voters.¹³⁴ The partisan effects of registration laws depend on how many people are affected and whether they are politically distinct. There is no evidence that motor voter laws have benefitted Democrats.¹³⁵ One study, only applicable to some counties in Wisconsin, shows that election day registration increased Republican voter share measurably, albeit by very little. Overall, partisan differences in effects are probably negligible: “Today's registration laws appear to have much smaller partisan effects [compared to Jim Crow laws]. Scholars have investigated the partisan implications of changing registration laws and consistently found little if any, noticeable effects.”¹³⁶

There are a variety of other registration laws passed by states that have been the subject of research, including hours of registration offices, re-registration requirements, purges for non-voting, as well as mail-in registration. One review article concludes about these types of laws, “none, however, exhibits clear and consistent effects across the wide range of empirical analyses of the turnout effects of registration laws. The minimal effects, if any are discernable at all, suggest that the costs associated with these laws are too small to influence turnout very much.”¹³⁷

There are no studies measuring the impact of the proof of citizenship requirement for registration that was passed in 2004. Only one other state has implemented a similar provision, but the Kansas law and never-in-effect provisions in other states were all held unconstitutional.¹³⁸ While the law was in effect in Kansas between October 1, 2015 and March 23, 2016, the state canceled 16,319 voter registration applications due to missing proof of citizenship.¹³⁹ One way of estimating the effect in Arizona is to look at the number of federal-only voters. Since a 2013 US Supreme Court decision, Arizona allows voters to register for just federal elections, if they do not submit proof of citizenship. There are currently around 26,600 voters registered, who did not submit proof of citizenship.¹⁴⁰ That is 0.6% of all registered voters and 0.5% of the voting-eligible population in Arizona.¹⁴¹ Additionally, 20-30% of these registered electors will be non-voters.¹⁴² The number of voters that are deterred by proof of citizenship requirements and never apply is unknown.

Another way of approaching this question is to look at potentially disenfranchised voters, those citizens who cannot produce proof of citizenship. Unfortunately, this is difficult to assess. A poll in 2006 found that 5.7% of Americans did not have easy access to a passport or birth certificate.¹⁴³ Poor, low-income, and rural populations as well as those who did not graduate high school, were nearly twice as likely as others to not have easy access to a passport or birth certificate.¹⁴⁴ However, this is also the population least likely to vote in general.

At least some of the immediate effects of asking for proof of citizenship might have actually increased turnout. While much of the voting literature focuses on the costs of voting, psychological reactions are important too. The literature on voter ID laws tells us that groups that perceive their right to vote threatened might actually turn out at higher rates than previously (see below). Academic analysis of a 2012 attempt by Florida to purge alleged non-citizens that was eventually aborted shows that individuals whose citizenship status was challenged by the state were 2.2-3 percentage points more likely to vote in the next election than otherwise similar individuals.¹⁴⁵

Residency Requirements

Today states either do not have any durational residency requirements for voting or they coincide with registration deadlines, as they do in Arizona. Before 1991, Arizona required 50 days of residency to be eligible to vote. In the past, states regularly required one to two years of residence before a person was allowed to vote. Combined with lacking absentee voter rules, this de-facto disenfranchised (temporarily) a growing part of the American population who was becoming more and more mobile.¹⁴⁶ The 1970 Amendments to the Voting Rights Act made residential duration requirements illegal for presidential elections. A 1972 U.S. Supreme Court decision held a one-year and three months residency requirement in Tennessee to be unconstitutional citing that it potentially disenfranchises the 3.3% of the population that moves from one state to another state each year.¹⁴⁷ However, in *Marston v. Lewis* (1973) the U.S. Supreme Court held that Arizona's 50-day residency requirement was constitutional in the light of a legitimate state interest in correcting registrations by volunteer election workers.¹⁴⁸ In 1991, Arizona reduced the residency requirement to 29 days, making it possible for recent movers to vote. It is unknown how much this affected election turnout. In a 20-day period in 2019, 13,900 people moved to Arizona from out of state, some of which were eligible to vote, and some of those would presumably have been prevented from voting under the previous legal arrangement.¹⁴⁹ This number is very small.

Felony Disenfranchisement

In 2019, Arizona made restoring the right to vote for first-time felons easier. According to the Sentencing Project, Arizona currently disenfranchises 233,816 adults or 4.86% of the voting age population due to felony convictions.¹⁵⁰ These numbers vary dramatically by race, affecting 12.69% of voting age African Americans and 7.13% of voting age Latinos. The real number is probably lower since this includes non-citizens. Furthermore, it is unclear how this affects turnout since former felons tend to be part of a group that is unlikely to turn out to vote. For instance, in November 2018, Florida made individuals convicted of felonies (but not currently in prison) eligible to vote. In the run-up to the 2020 election 6% of newly eligible felons registered to vote, and 4% actually turned out to vote.¹⁵¹ This is just 0.3% of the Voting Eligible Population.¹⁵² Two factors contributing are lacking information, many convicted felons simply don't know that they are eligible to vote, and bureaucratic obstacles requiring payment of court fines and fees or filing petitions.¹⁵³ Furthermore, it generally takes time to transform any non-voter into a voter.

In the political science literature, there is no consensus on whether enfranchising felons makes any significant difference to turnout or partisan balance. Studies put the likelihood of formerly ineligible felons voting at 11 % to 21%, which may or may not be enough to tip the balance in a

house or senate race.¹⁵⁴ Some scholars suggest that convicted felons are more likely to vote for Democrats, bolstered by the fact that Republicans tend to oppose enfranchisement, while others find a slight advantage for Republicans.¹⁵⁵ Consistent with the fact that many convicted felons do not vote because they do not know that they are eligible (and fines for voting while ineligible are high), one study suggests that automatically restoring voting rights and notifying newly eligible voters raises turnout by 3 percentage points.¹⁵⁶

Taken together, this suggests turnout in Arizona was increased but only very little by the 2019 reforms.

Keeping Voter Rolls Up to Date – Purges

Purges of voter registration rolls are controversial for good reasons – they have at times removed eligible voters and disproportionately impacted minorities. Flawed purges are usually based on incorrect information or poor methods, but activists often suspect political motives. For example, in 2016 Arkansas removed 7,700 supposed convicted felons from the voter rolls.¹⁵⁷ It later transpired that many names had mistakenly appeared on this list for other justice involvement like misdemeanors and divorces. Another example comes from Texas. Texas, like many other states, compiles lists of deceased people and compares them to the voter rolls. In 2012, they used a matching method that removed individuals that shared birthdates and the last 4 digits of a social security number. In a nation of over 300 million people, a “coincidence” of that type is not uncommon and eligible voters were removed.¹⁵⁸

However, there is nothing inherently improper about voter roll purges. To operate a working voter registration system, states have to remove individuals who pass away, move out of a jurisdiction, receive a felony conviction, are adjudicated to be mentally incapacitated, or choose to be removed. If rolls weren't updated regularly, they would contain more ineligible than eligible voters in as little as 10 years.¹⁵⁹ Accurate systems are essential to allow eligible citizens to vote and prevent fraud. In the past, many states including Arizona removed voters for failing to vote during several election cycles. This practice was outlawed by the 1993 National Voter Registration Act. Arizona has become less stringent in how it treats inactive voters starting in 1982 when a ballot measure ended the practice of removing voters for failure to vote in one general election. Now, no one is removed for simply not voting. However, when county clerks send an election notice to a registered voter and it is returned undeliverable, they are placed on an inactive voter list. Similarly, if the county clerk receives information that a registered voter has moved, and they do not return a voter verification notice (which can be done online), they are placed on an inactive voter list. Voters can re-activate their registration by showing up at the polls; otherwise, they are removed after 4 years. Arizona has also improved its voter rolls in other ways, for instance by establishing state-wide standards and cross-referencing them with other government databases.

There is little academic research on voter purges. The effects of these laws may be understood in comparison to Ohio, which sends a notice to all registered voters who have not turned out in a 2-year period and cancels their registration if they do not return it. After the Federal Appeals Court of the 6th Circuit declared this practice unlawful, 7,500 voters turned out in the 2016 election whose registration had been canceled under this procedure since 2012.¹⁶⁰ The Supreme Court reversed the decision in 2018.¹⁶¹ A higher estimate comes from a study that simulates an Ohio-style law in Florida and North Carolina.¹⁶² The authors find 46,324 (0.3% of VEP) individuals in Florida and 42,428 (0.6% of VEP) individuals in North Carolina that voted in

the 2008 and 2016 elections, but skipped those in between, making them vulnerable to such a purge of non-voters. Especially taking into account that some would have returned the notification, this is not very many. The study also finds some disproportionate effects: In Florida, purgeable Democratic voters were overrepresented by 3 percentage points, while in North Carolina they were even. In Florida, Hispanic voters were overrepresented by 4 percentage points, while in North Carolina white voters were overrepresented by 9 percentage points.

Overall, the evidence suggests that keeping accurate voting rolls is important and that purges need to be done carefully. There is insufficient evidence to assess the impacts of Arizona's changes to voting roll administration on turnout.

Vote-by-Mail

Vote-by-mail makes voting easier and more convenient. Voters can fill out their ballot at home and on their own timeline. On the one hand, that should be expected to increase turnout. On the other hand, it might reduce the salience and social accountability of voting. Voting becomes a less visible, private act. Get-out-the-vote campaigns might be harder to implement over a longer time span. Overall, one might expect mixed effects. Vote-by-mail is also attractive for states and counties since it tends to cost less.¹⁶³

Studying the effects of no-excuse absentee voting on turnout is generally difficult. Not only are there many confounding factors surrounding specific elections and localities, but voters self-select into the method of voting they prefer. Because of that, studies have particularly looked at states with mandatory vote-by-mail like Oregon, Washington, and Colorado.

Many high-quality studies show that introducing universal vote-by-mail increases turnout modestly by 2-5 percentage points, albeit some outliers find 10 percentage points.¹⁶⁴ There are larger effects on special and local elections.¹⁶⁵ With vote by mail, more people complete their ballots instead just voting for the federal candidates.¹⁶⁶ California seems to be a special case, with lower turnout in precincts using all-mail elections.¹⁶⁷ One reason might be that California's system was confusing, which is corroborated by high ballot rejection rates among minorities and non-English speakers.¹⁶⁸ Before California adopted universal vote-by-mail in 2021, it conducted all-mail elections in some precincts based on certain conditions. While these seemed like good experimental conditions for social science, people may have understandably been confused on how to vote.

Vote by mail has small effects on the composition of the electorate because it mostly recruits votes from those that have already been registered to vote instead of recruiting new voters.¹⁶⁹ This finding is in line with studies on many other reforms that make voting easier, which find that they tend to mobilize populations already more engaged.¹⁷⁰ While politicians seem to assume that vote-by-mail advantages Democrats, this is not supported by the research. The partisan balance is mostly unaffected by vote-by-mail.¹⁷¹ Some studies show small increases in turnout among racial minorities, while others don't.¹⁷²

No-excuse absentee voting systems, which require voters to request a ballot, have much smaller turnout effects that might be close to zero.¹⁷³

The effects of Arizona's recent ban on third-party ballot collection are unclear. Community groups say they used to collect a few thousand ballots for each election.¹⁷⁴ Native American

communities are disproportionately affected but the number of voters is unknown.¹⁷⁵ It is also unclear whether county officials and poll workers are currently enforcing the law.¹⁷⁶

The evidence suggests that Arizona's moves to create a de-facto vote-by-mail system has moderately increased voter turnout. Recent legal changes that make the early voter list impermanent move Arizona closer in line with other no-excuse absentee voting systems, potentially decreasing turnout.

Early in Person Voting

Together with vote-by-mail, Arizona expanded opportunities for in-person voting before election day. Early in person voting has similar theoretical effects as vote-by-mail, but the results from academic studies are more mixed. Newer, more sophisticated models tend to find some modest increase in turnout.¹⁷⁷ In one example, an increase in turnout by 3.3 percentage points for a 16 days expansion of early voting.¹⁷⁸ The latter study finds a moderate impact on the turnout of Democrats and the strongest impacts on the turnout of Independents. Other researchers similarly find turnout to increase among ethnic and racial minorities.¹⁷⁹ However, quite a few high-quality studies find zero or negative effects on turnout.¹⁸⁰

Overall, the turnout effects of early in-person voting need to be regarded with caution. Most studies only look at changes in one or a few states in very few elections, making it likely that results are influenced by election or state-specific factors. For instance, several of the studies cited here compare Florida turnout between the elections of 2012 and 2008 because the state reduced early in-person voting from 15 to 8 days. This means, early in-person voting might make voting more convenient (easier) and reduce logistical problems for administrators, but its effects on turnout are relatively uncertain.

Voting Centers and Wait Times

Arizona allows counties to establish voting centers. Voting centers can make voting more convenient. They allow voters to cast ballots in various locations throughout the county – on their way to work, during a lunch break, or when picking up their kids from daycare – instead of at their assigned precinct polling location. However, with voting centers the closest voting location to someone's house might be farther away. Furthermore, voting centers might reduce neighborhood effects, where neighbors mobilize each other to go vote.

Evidence on this issue is very limited, coming from only a few counties in a few states. Two studies find no effects on turnout in most elections.¹⁸¹ Another study finds that turnout is slightly increased (2.6%), especially among infrequent voters.¹⁸² One reason for these mixed findings is that the number and locations of voting centers matter. If voting centers are far away, especially for low-income and minority populations, turnout might decrease.¹⁸³ This means, the effects of voting centers in Arizona remain unknown without studying their specific locations and hours.

Unfortunately, there is not much systematic information available on how different communities in Arizona are served by polling locations, what their average distance is, and their wait times. While counties can establish voting centers, they can also consolidate voting precincts. The Secretary of State has taken some steps to reduce wait times at the polls.

Long lines at polling places can depress turnout and reduce citizen's confidence in the elections. One study estimates 500,000 (0.2% of VEP) lost votes due to long lines in the 2012 presidential election across the nation.¹⁸⁴ The issue is more pronounced for poor and minority voters. An analysis of cell phone data of the 2020 election shows longer wait times in poorer neighborhoods.¹⁸⁵ African Americans waited 26 minutes on average compared to a 12 minutes population average during the 2012 election.¹⁸⁶ The author attributes about 50% of this difference to within-county differences, which includes factors like polling place distribution. Long lines can also have discouraging effects for future elections. Voters, who waited more than an hour, are less likely to vote in future elections, albeit very slightly.¹⁸⁷ Effects are more pronounced in mid-term elections.¹⁸⁸

Without any data collection, effects of changes in Arizona are unknown. For instance, between 2000 and 2020 Maricopa county reduced the number of polling places from 1008 to 748.¹⁸⁹ However, the 2020 election included 175 voting centers that were accessible to voters from every precinct.¹⁹⁰ Between 2008 and 2014, Arizona reduced average wait times from 24 to 2 minutes.¹⁹¹ However, in the 2016 primary, Maricopa county reduced the number of polling places dramatically.¹⁹² Many voters waited in line for hours or turned away. Officials apologized and a settlement agreement requires average wait times below 30 minutes. There are no media reports of long wait times for the 2020 elections.

Taken together the research suggests that reducing long lines might have small positive effects on turnout but may make a larger difference for underserved communities.

Voter ID Requirement at the Polls

Voter ID laws have certainly become one of the most controversial changes to election law. Democrats call them voter suppression laws, President Joe Biden in a recent speech referred to them as “Jim Crow 2.0.”¹⁹³ Mitch McConnell, the highest-ranking Republican official in Congress, calls them “commonsense safeguards” to voter fraud.¹⁹⁴ Voter ID laws are a relatively recent phenomenon. Before Arizona introduced its strict non-photo ID law by ballot measure in 2004, other states had introduced some ID laws, but none of them were strict (i.e., voters would be asked to present ID but allowed to proceed without it). Today, nine states enforce strict ID laws and 25 states non-strict ID laws.¹⁹⁵

Claims that these types of laws might prevent people from voting and disproportionately affect minorities are plausible. According to MIT's 2012 Survey of the Performance of American Elections, 9% of registered voters do not have a driver's license.¹⁹⁶ This number grows to 20% if licenses are included that might be rejected for being expired or showing an address different from the voter's registration. Hispanics are four percentage points, and African Americans are 11 percentage points less likely than white registrants to possess a driver's license. On the one hand, it might be a reasonable assumption to expect that some citizens without photo ID are potential voters, and the cost/inconvenience of obtaining ID prevents them from voting. If that were the case, it would disproportionately affect groups that are less likely to possess ID. On the other hand, people without ID are already much less likely to vote anyway.¹⁹⁷ In that case, we would not expect any large turnout effects of these laws. Additional countervailing forces might reduce turnout effects. There might be an adjustment period (where people wishing to vote obtain ID), after which the effects of ID laws become insignificant. Voter ID laws also lead to countermobilization by groups that perceive these laws as disadvantageous, which if successful, could actually increase turnout.¹⁹⁸

Researchers agree that separating the effects of voter ID laws from other confounding factors is very challenging, especially considering the fact that most of these laws have not been in effect for very long. The findings of the most high-quality studies are mixed. If these laws decrease turnout or change the composition of the electorate, the effects are very modest, comparable to changes to registration deadlines.¹⁹⁹ Overall, claims that voter ID laws substantively benefit Republicans over Democrats seem exaggerated.

A recent study exploits variation due to court decisions in North Carolina. Among the 3 percent of voters who lack ID in North Carolina according to government records, the ID law caused a 0.7 percentage point turnout decrease in the 2016 primary election relative to those with ID.²⁰⁰ Interestingly, the effect persisted after the law was suspended: those without ID were 2.6 percentage points less likely to turnout in the 2016 general election and 1.7 percentage points less likely to turnout in 2018.

Another study using survey data finds that the self-reported probability of voting decreased 3.9 percentage points in strict photo-ID states.²⁰¹ The effect size was the same for African Americans (3.9 percentage points) but 6 percentage points larger for Latinos.

The US Government Accountability Office found that strict photo ID laws lowered turnout in two states by 2.6 percentage points in general and 5.4 percentage points for African Americans.²⁰² Similarly, a more recent attempt to look at disproportionate effects based on actual turnout data shows that turnout in counties where 75% of the population was non-White declined 1.5 percentage points relative to turnout in mostly white counties when with strict voter ID was introduced.²⁰³

An older study finds that strict photo-ID laws decrease turnout by two percentage points but have no effects on the demographic composition of the electorate.²⁰⁴ Lastly, three recent high-quality studies find no significant effects of ID laws on turnout or the composition of electorate.²⁰⁵

It is not only voters who do not possess an ID but also voters who currently do not have access to an ID, that might be barred from voting under certain rules. This is addressed by evidence from Michigan, where voters without access to a valid ID can vote by signing an affidavit. In 2016, 0.45% of all voters and 1.25% of non-white voters chose that option.²⁰⁶ Interestingly, a crosscheck with the DMV database revealed that over 95% of those voters do possess an active state-issued ID, suggesting an upper-bound estimate for potentially disenfranchised voters due to forgetting their ID. A similar study in Texas found that 16,000 voters in 2016 cast a ballot by signing a paper declaration, disproportionately African Americans (16.1%).²⁰⁷ In the 2014 election, when strict ID rules were enforced, this group was 19 percentage points less likely to vote than otherwise similar individuals.

Another concern is that people are prevented from voting because they mistakenly believe that they do not possess the proper paperwork. In one survey over 38% of those living in non-strict ID or no ID states believed that an ID was required to vote.²⁰⁸

Overall, while the turnout effects of voter ID laws might be small, they do de-facto disenfranchise some people, overwhelmingly poor and minority voters. Policymakers introducing these types of laws should consider mitigating these issues, for instance, by making provisions for people whose ID is currently inaccessible and offering low- or no-cost ID issuance. While not explored in this report, the symbolic implications in light of a history of voter

suppression might be more important than the material effects. Findings also point to the importance of voter education. If rules are too complicated, voters may be deterred independently of whether they meet the requirements.

Effects of Changing the Ease of Voting on Fraud

“A tension exists in democracies between safeguarding the integrity of the vote and ensuring broad participation.”²⁰⁹ While this is true conceptually and for extreme cases, as we have seen in the last section, empirically many interventions have little or no effects on participation. Here, I find similar facts surrounding effects on fraud. Historically though, we can find a trade-off between participation and fraud.

In the early history of Western democracies, voter fraud, and election fraud more broadly, were quite common; rules protecting the integrity of the vote were not.²¹⁰ Exchanging votes for small bribes was quite frequent in the 19th century United States and into the 20th century in the South. In the beginning of the 20th century, patronage (e.g., the promise of public jobs for party loyalty) and preferential access to social programs (e.g., disability benefits), were a common campaign strategy, often illustrated by so-called party machines in urban areas. Political parties had ‘clientelistic’ networks (a system of exchanging goods and services for political support) through cities that incentivized voting for their candidates and intimidated voters supporting other candidates. Furthermore, the administration of elections itself was often very corrupt, involving party loyalists as poll workers and ballot counters. Scholars attribute the high voter turnout (around 80% of VEP) between 1840 and 1900 to widespread election fraud.²¹¹

Small reforms, like requiring registration of voters, maintaining accurate voting rolls, and introducing the Australian ballot (uniform secret ballots distributed to all voters), undoubtedly contributed to the demise of corrupt elections and the erection of a more truly democratic system. But it was larger structural factors that made the difference.²¹² With rising incomes, votes could not be induced by small amounts of cash or consumption goods anymore. Restrictions on immigration reduced the inflow of potentially dependent individuals into large cities. With a growing electorate, appeals via mass media became cheaper than maintaining large ‘clientelistic’ networks. The professionalization of the civil service and federally administered social programs reduced opportunities for patronage. The motives of reformers were not always pure, at times including partisan, racist, and elitist impulses.²¹³ However in effect, access to suffrage today is more universal and fraud rarer than in any other time in the history of the United States.²¹⁴

Voter fraud has an ill-defined meaning in public discourse. It can refer to fraudulent voter registration, people voting more than once, non-citizens voting, voter intimidation or coercion, vote-buying, the corruption of the voting or counting process by election or party officials, as well as preventing legal votes from being cast or other voter suppression activities. Furthermore, any of these things can happen with or without affecting the results of an election. Studies conducted in various authoritarian regimes across the world show that factors we usually consider fraud – voting twice, stuffing ballot boxes, forging election returns – are rarely determining election outcomes.²¹⁵ Instead these regimes set up electoral rules that create an unequal playing field for opposition parties and combine that with violence, intimidation, and harassment of political opponents, as well as propaganda.²¹⁶

For the context of this report, where we consider laws that impact the ease of voting, we can adopt a more limited definition. Provisions, like voter ID laws, are passed by legislatures with the official intent of preventing fraud by individual voters, which are defined crimes in state and federal statutes. “Therefore, voter fraud is the intentional, deceitful corruption of the electoral process by voters.”²¹⁷ In this definition, intent is crucial, helping us to distinguish fraud from error. Given a byzantine system of electoral laws and rules, the latter is often more likely.²¹⁸ “This definition covers both knowingly and willingly giving false information to establish voter eligibility and knowingly and willingly voting illegally or participating in a conspiracy to encourage illegal voting by others.”²¹⁹ Other forms of corruption of the electoral process, like stuffing the ballot box or illegally discarding votes, fall under the broader definition of election fraud.

Every government that we call democratic needs some safeguards for election integrity. If election outcomes are determined by voter or election fraud, we assess a regime to be not democratic anymore. For democracy to work, its citizens also need to believe that elections are free and fair and that their vote counts.²²⁰ At the same time, any liberal society has to tolerate a minimum level of crime, including election fraud. Some level of fraud, especially if it’s isolated and irrelevant for outcomes, is normal. Furthermore, the administration of large societies relies on complex rules and imperfect bureaucratic hierarchies with street-level discretion (for instance, a poll worker must make concrete decisions about whether an address is mismatched or whether to ask a person personally known to them for ID).²²¹ This is especially true when legislation is fragmented across states and rules are implemented by local volunteers.

Bureaucratic administration exists in a tension – on the one hand, we want bureaucrats to administer rules impartially and universally in neutral affect, on the other hand, we are upset if people are marginalized or ignored, because their special case is not covered by the bureaucratic rules.²²² Given those realities, we can expect a certain amount of irregularities to derive from mistakes, misunderstood or contradictory rules, as well as well-intentioned use of discretion. As one political scientist puts it: “The United States has a fragmented, inefficient, inequitable, complicated, and overly complex electoral process run on election day essentially by an army of volunteers. It is practically designed to produce irregularities in administration.”²²³

Public discourse today often glances over these complexities. There is little research that actually relates electoral rules to the occurrence of fraud, because election fraud is hard to track and exceedingly rare.²²⁴ While there is certainly no evidence of widespread voter fraud, strong believers will point out that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. However, it is hard to use the absence of evidence to justify the passing of laws with unknown consequences.

A review of the academic literature bears out the following facts about voter fraud in the United States. Evidence comes from analyzing reported cases of fraud, applying statistical tests and matching techniques to various data bases including voting records, as well as theoretical modelling (see Appendix):²²⁵

- Voters rarely fraudulently register or vote. In most cases, irregularities can be attributed to clerical errors or mistakes by voters. The remaining cases consist of individual acts unlikely to have influenced the outcomes of elections. Only few schemes to change electoral outcomes fraudulently have been uncovered in the modern era, most of them concerning local elections.
- Federal and state law sufficiently safeguards the electoral process against voter fraud. It is likely (but not certain) that widespread irregularities would be discovered.

- From a cost-benefit perspective, it is irrational for voters to cast fraudulent ballots. Penalties are high and benefits of one additional vote are low.

Based on the available evidence, there is no reason to believe that any of the laws discussed in this report, have either significantly increased or decreased voter fraud. The most scrutinized case is probably vote-by-mail. Undoubtedly, casting ballots outside the supervision of election officials increases the possibilities of fraud as has been pointed out by many critics.^{226 227} One famous case involved a 2018 Congressional election in North Carolina where a Republican operative collected and filled-in absentee ballots.²²⁸ Courts ordered the election to be repeated. Cases like this are rare, and often involve third-party ballot collection (or harvesting), which Arizona has made illegal except in a few circumstances.

In Oregon, a state that has conducted elections by mail since 2000, allegations or findings of fraud are not more common than anywhere else in the United States.²²⁹ Oregon has one of the best systems to record and publicize election law complaints. Each year, there are on average, 415 complaints to the Election Division. Only two a year lead to guilty pleas or convictions. Most of the recorded issues relate to non-matching signatures, which are resolved by voters providing identification or, when the voter is unresponsive, they are discarded.

A database of voter fraud allegations maintained by the conservative Heritage Foundation lists 1,100 criminal convictions for voter fraud between 2000 and 2020, 143 related to vote by mail.²³⁰ The only nationwide study using sophisticated statistical techniques finds no relationship between increasing vote-by-mail and fraud allegations.²³¹

There is also no measurable impact of introducing voter ID laws on the occurrence of fraud.²³² Interestingly, these laws also do not seem to improve the confidence of voters in the electoral process.²³³

There is no evidence that loosening registration deadlines or election day voter registration has had any impact on voter fraud.²³⁴ The same is true for motor voter laws.²³⁵ A probe by the Bush administration, started in reaction to concerns that the National Voter Registration Act made registering “too easy,” found no evidence of widespread fraud.²³⁶ Reports show that the main source of irregularities are voter rolls that are poorly maintained by poorly trained workers that do not understand the complex rules regulating voter registration.²³⁷

Extensive research revealed no existing studies on voter fraud in connection with the other types of laws discussed in this report.

It is important to keep the dearth of research in mind for policy debates. It is rarely a good idea to modify election procedures without any evidence of potential effects. Furthermore, benefits and costs must be carefully considered. Otherwise, unintended consequences may overwhelm the intended ones. For example, a voter ID law is imaginable that reduces fraud but also makes it more likely that elections will be decided inaccurately.²³⁸ This could happen if it reduces turnout, lowering the winning margin, but affecting potential fraudsters of one candidate differently than those of another candidate.

Case Study: Vote-by-mail in Arizona

In 1991, the Arizona state legislature established no excuse absentee voting (SB 1320). The bill was introduced by Democratic Senate president Pete Rios as a limited change to absentee ballot procedures.²³⁹ At the time, voters needed an excuse to vote an absentee ballot, for instance being out of the county on election day. Applications could be challenged and rejected. Rios proposed an appeals process where a voter could file a petition in court if their application was denied. Rios' proposal came not from a general idea about reform, but a personal grievance. In the 1990 election, his absentee ballot was challenged and disallowed without his knowledge.²⁴⁰ However, when the bill came out of the Judiciary Committee, it proposed a more dramatic change. It allowed absentee voting without excuse and struck the requirement that absentee ballots must be signed in front of an election officer or notary public. The amendment was proposed by Senator Chuck Blanchard (Democrat). It was the result of negotiations with Representative Susan Gerard (Republican), Secretary of State James Shumway (Democrat), and County Recorders, who all supported it.²⁴¹ A companion bill, proposing election day registration (HB 2169) did not pass. The amended bill was passed in a bi-partisan manner, opposed by 6 Republicans in the Senate and unanimously in the House. Searching the archives of the Arizona Republic and other newspapers shows that this bill was neither controversial nor high salience. Besides a piece stating the bill was passed, no articles were found.

The exact motivations behind this change remain unclear but potentially go back to issues surrounding the 1990 election. In previous years, county recorders had argued that absentee voting was confusing to voters and administratively inefficient.²⁴² In 1990, absentee ballot rules were debated due to a run-off election between Fife Symington and Terry Goddard for Arizona governor.²⁴³ Concerns about bad weather disproportionately affecting Native American turnout on the set election date let Democrats propose a loosening of rules for the special election, which was approved by the state legislature.²⁴⁴ Interestingly, at the time the argument was mocked by the editors of the Arizona Republic as "there is no right to fair-weather elections."²⁴⁵ Coconino and Navajo counties mailed absentee ballot request forms to all registered voters. This was seen to potentially benefit Democrats, especially in a low turnout special election. In response, the Republican party mailed 600,000 absentee ballot request forms to voters.²⁴⁶ A campaign advisor credited absentee ballots for the Republican win of the governorship in February 1991.²⁴⁷ Whatever the reason for the change, early voting, which includes voting by mail, became hugely popular very quickly (see Figure 4).

The next reform attempt to the vote-by-mail system was made in 2006, at a time when nearly 50% of voters were taking advantage of early voting opportunities. Proposition 205 would have created a vote-by-mail system in Arizona with minimal opportunities for in-person voting but was defeated by 71.1% of the vote. A review of newspaper articles from that time suggests that the debate was less heated than today, a larger variety of arguments were made, and opinion was not clearly split along party lines.

Some Democrats and Republicans endorsed the ballot measure, while other members from both parties opposed it.²⁴⁸ The Republican Secretary of State at the time did not take a position. Some county recorders did not take any position, while others endorsed it.

The Arizona Chamber of Commerce led the opposition to the proposition, arguing it would lead to fraud.²⁴⁹ But other arguments were discussed too. Some Democrats suggested that an opt-in system would be more efficient (creating less paperwork, preserving more options) than sending

every registered voter a ballot. Others worried that providing only “minimal in-person polling places” might disenfranchise some voters. Traditionalists wanted to preserve the ritual of going to the polls on election day. Lastly, some argued that the type of voters, who need more convenience, should not participate in elections. Proponents argued that the new system would increase turnout and save money.²⁵⁰

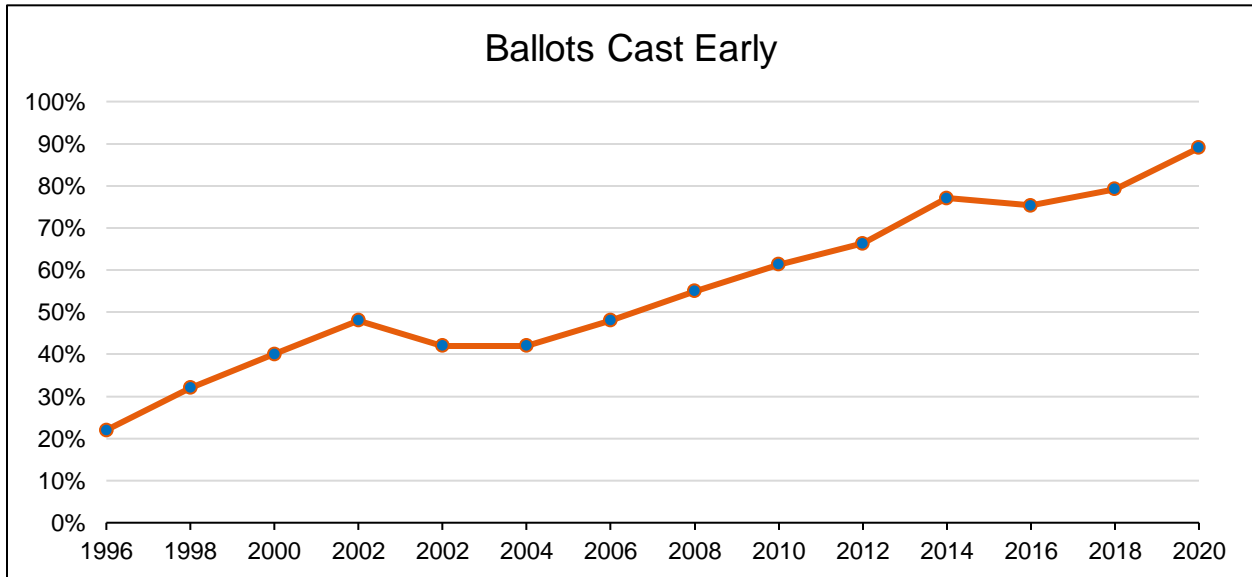


Figure 4: Early ballots as a percentage of all cast votes. Includes mail-in ballots and early in-person voting.²⁵¹

Despite the defeat of the ballot measure, establishing the Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL) a year later was relatively uncontroversial. This is supported by the fact that there was scant news coverage beyond articles reporting the existence of the new bill.²⁵² HB 2106 (2007) was introduced by Republicans and passed in a bi-partisan manner. Only nine Senate Republicans voted against it.

The opposition was led by Senators Gould and Gorman (both Republicans).²⁵³ In committee hearings, Gorman voiced several concerns: the change would lead to more uninformed people voting, the USPS cannot be trusted with ballots, and a higher chance of fraud since the identity of voters is not checked in the same way as at the polls. Supporters argued that the bill would streamline the already existing system where a significant portion of the electorate votes by mail. County recorders, one of the main forces behind the bill, argued that paperwork could be reduced and confusion avoided in cities where there already was permanent early voting in municipal elections. With over 40% of voters receiving early ballots due to pre-election requests, there is no doubt that a lot of processing was necessary. Karen Osborne, Elections Director for Maricopa County called the bill a “commonsense approach for people who want to permanently get early ballots.”²⁵⁴

In the years following, vote-by-mail became more and more popular, with over 60% of voters casting ballots early. However, Arizona did not only stand out for its high percentage of mail-in ballots. In the 2012 general election, about 8% or 183,000 ballots cast were provisional, leading to a two-week delay in results; the national average remained under 1%.²⁵⁵ About 2% of all ballots were rejected, most often because voters weren’t registered in time for the election, voted in the wrong precinct, or didn’t sign their ballots. This suggested that election rules were very complex, often confusing potential voters. Election officials suggested that voter

registration drives did not educate voters properly on the rules.²⁵⁶ One outgrowth of the ensuing discussion was a 2013 bill making the Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL) less permanent. According to HB 2305, counties can send a notice to an early voter who has not voted in any of the last two primary and general elections. If voters do not respond, they are deleted from the early voting list but remain registered voters. The bill passed along partisan lines, with two Republican house members dissenting.

The provision regarding PEVL was added as part of a last-minute amendment before the conference committee. It was originally introduced by Sen. Michele Reagan (Republican) as SB 1261, with input and backing from the Arizona Association of Counties to make election administration more efficient. SB 1261 faced fierce criticism and opposition, especially from Hispanic/Latino advocacy groups. Critics including then-Senator Steve Gallardo (Democrat), Mi Familia Vota, ONE Arizona, Arizona Working Families, and Central Arizonans for a Sustainable Economy (CASE) claimed the bill was aimed at suppressing the Hispanic/Latino vote.²⁵⁷ The bill stalled in the House after passing the Senate and saw multiple last-minute attempts to pass it. The provision was briefly added to SB 1493 in May, but when that bill also stalled, the provision instead passed as a last-minute amendment to HB 2305 on the last day of the session.

Reporters noted that the bill was considered one of the most controversial bills of the session with the terms of the debate allowing for less middle ground.²⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the bill was supported by all 15 county recorders (with Republican and Democratic affiliations) as a solution to delays in the 2012 general election.²⁵⁹ Recordors argued that too many people on the PEVL showed up to vote at the polls instead of submitting their ballot by mail, necessitating the use of provisional ballots and creating additional work for poll workers, who were required to verify each voter's registration and early ballot status. During the 2012 elections, 59,000 registered early voters showed up at the polls in Maricopa County.²⁶⁰ Testifying before the Senate Elections Committee, Maricopa County Elections Director Karen Osborne said that she believed people were less invested in voting by mail since the creation of the PEVL and that "thousands" of people had arrived at the polls saying they didn't ask for an early ballot, didn't want to vote by mail and didn't want to be on the PEVL. She also suggested the measure would reduce costs.²⁶¹ While Democrats called out the bill for a disproportionate impact on minority voters, several, including Senator Steve Gallardo, also expressed sympathy for recordors' desire to cut down on provisional ballots.²⁶² In the light of this context, criticism of other organizations that the bill's main intention was racist voter suppression would seem at least exaggerated, while also maybe reasonable given Arizona's history with such tactics.²⁶³

A referendum effort was launched against HB 2305 in 2014, but while it received significantly more signatures than required to put the measure on the ballot, the legislature chose instead to repeal HB 2305 during the 2014 legislative session (HB 2196).²⁶⁴ However, that was not the end of it. The PEVL provision was re-introduced as SB 1485 in 2021 and passed in a party line vote by Republicans. The lines of debate had become more ideologically entrenched, straying away from facts. This time, hearings were not dominated by election officials arguing for technical changes with small impacts.²⁶⁵ Instead, opponents called it voter suppression, while proponents claimed it was necessary to prevent fraud. Several organizations argued that the bill was "an unnecessary purge that will result in eligible voters unable to vote."²⁶⁶ Others called it "a clear attempt to restrict voting access." Supporters suggested the bill would "restore election integrity," and "combat fraud."²⁶⁷

LUCHA, Chispa Arizona, Mi Familia Vota, and Arizona Coalition for Change claimed the legislation was voter suppression and would have prevented 126,000 voters from voting in 2020.²⁶⁸ However, this number is clearly wrong, instead, it refers to the number of people potentially removed from the list.²⁶⁹ Some of these voters would not have voted anyway. Others might have returned the notice or voted in person. Indigenous voting rights advocates claimed the bill would disenfranchise Native Americans²⁷⁰ or people of color.²⁷¹ An Arizona Republic editorial claimed the bill was introduced by Republicans in reaction to losing the US Senate election in 2018, which is clearly false since, as discussed, the bill goes back to provisional ballot issues in 2013.²⁷² Nonetheless, a 2021 lawsuit repeated that argument.²⁷³

Republicans on the other hand claimed the law was necessary to prevent widespread election fraud.²⁷⁴ Interestingly, during the hearing, the original 2013 argument did not play a big role anymore. Instead, Rep. John Kavanagh, a sponsor of an amendment to the bill explained it was about reducing fraud because getting a hold of absentee ballots and forging signatures is “very easy.”²⁷⁵ His sentiment was that not everyone should vote, “Quantity is important, but we have to look at the quality of votes, as well.”²⁷⁶ Given those comments, it is understandable why Democrats see current Republican efforts as motivated by conspiracy theories and racial resentment.

Looking at the arguments, it is clear that both sides are now engaging in serious hyperbole.²⁷⁷ The law clearly preserves the right to vote in person, early, and on election day, as well as the option to sign up again for the PEVL. At the same time, there is neither evidence that the bill will prevent fraud nor that there is a fraud problem to solve. It is curious that the actual origin of the provision, dealing with too many provisional ballots, has been completely forgotten. Following the story of voting by mail shows that legislators have made voting much easier over the years. This often happened in response to concrete administrative issues, with county recorders arguing for “common-sense reforms” to solve those issues while also making voting easier. Arguments about voter fraud or voter suppression remained largely on the fringe, with members from both parties acknowledging there are always trade-offs in electoral rules. In 2021, the debate has become polarized and unproductive. With the frame of reference being fraud, it seems likely that future Republican bills will err on the side of reducing the ease of voting, in the name of election integrity, while Democrats will evaluate any laws solely through the lens of voter suppression.

It is maybe the symbolism that is the most fraught in this debate. Even if the provision has little to no impact, Republicans would do well to acknowledge the history of voter suppression that weighs on the minds of minority voters. Collecting or not collecting the ballot of a voter living 100 miles from the next post office might have little substantive effect but could communicate that the state will not disenfranchise anyone and build trust. Democrats face a different challenge. Doubling down on voter suppression arguments might be tactically smart but does not help build trust with a growing part of the electorate that falsely believes that there is massive election fraud. To the degree that elite discourse and media coverage influence public attitudes, these electoral debates (alleging non-existing fraud, claiming wide-spread voter suppression) might actively reduce trust in democracy and undermine the functioning of important institutions.²⁷⁸

One thing, that has been largely overlooked in these debates, is that rules for registering to vote and casting ballots are extremely complex, further complicated by the fact that rules are often implemented by local volunteer workers. If legislators in committee hearings are confused by the exact definitions of terms like “inactive voter,” it is no wonder that some voters are confused,

others give up on voting, and poll workers make mistakes.²⁷⁹ It is at least curious that the issue of writing clear, concise rules for voting has barely been considered in the debates.

Conclusion

There is a tension “between safeguarding the integrity of the vote and ensuring broad participation,” but it is larger structural forces – economic development, history, culture – that seem to determine the level of election turnout and fraud.²⁸⁰ At the same time, small procedural changes can increase participation somewhat or effectively disenfranchise some of the population. Given America’s rocky path toward democracy, including widespread voter suppression, electoral rules understandably remain under a microscope. However, empirically most electoral laws currently under discussion are unlikely to have large effects on voter fraud, turnout, or the outcome of elections. Overall, voting is easier and more accessible to more people than it has been for most of history.

Over the last three decades, Arizona legislators have worked to make voting more accessible. Most of these laws were uncontroversial and passed in a bi-partisan manner. Voting laws balanced what’s normatively desirable with what’s administratively feasible. This could be seen in the support given to many reforms by the administrators of elections. There are a few exceptions to this trend, with the potential that 2021 is a turning point where access to the ballot box becomes harder. The first is the 2004 ballot measure requiring birth certificates for registration and ID for voting. As previously discussed, this has the potential to disenfranchise a small number of voters, albeit with potentially insignificant effects on voter turnout or the partisan balance. The other laws increasing the burden on voters are Republican-only initiatives, including bans on ballot collection, restrictions on voter assistance, changes to the permanent voting list, as well as smaller administrative changes. It is uncertain whether making voting easier in Arizona has led to broader participation. However, research shows that some of the changes, especially motor voter provisions and vote-by-mail, are generally associated with small single-digit percentage point increases in voter turnout. There has been generally no evidence that increasing turnout substantively changes the electorate or affects the outcomes of elections.

We have also found that voter fraud is a relatively rare phenomenon unlikely to affect election outcomes. It is likely but not certain that large schemes to unduly influence electoral outcomes would be discovered. If irregularities are found, they are often more likely to be attributable to mistakes and incompetence. There is no evidence that easing access to the ballot box has increased voter fraud, nor is there any evidence that procedural obstacles to voting have reduced the occurrence of voter fraud. Specifically, none of the laws that have been passed with the stated purpose of reducing fraud, have been linked to a specific instance of fraud or found to reduce fraud (maybe with the exception of third-party ballot collection).

These realities raise the question, why do we fight so viciously over these laws in 2022 America? We discussed that electoral rules are always political, especially in winner-take-all contests. Even the most principled defenders of democratic principles might feel incentives to change some rules in their favor, especially when other, seemingly neutral reasons are available to support the change. But these facts just deepen the puzzle: according to the research reviewed, the laws we fight about are unlikely to further the goals of partisan activists. This then suggests public discourse and policy are driven more by ideology and identity, than

reasoning about goals, causes, and effects. Symbolism plays an important role in these debates.

I conclude therefore that we need more evidence and research to inform our public policy debates. When pursuing goals based on values like increasing democratic participation or safeguarding the electoral process, public policy needs to rely on the best available information we have. This is not an argument against innovation and experimentation. New solutions can be introduced based on plausible theories (e.g., voting centers will make voting more convenient and therefore increase turnout), but need to be accompanied by close evaluation. If our plausible theories are not confirmed, we need to change course and consider different solutions. This process is important. In its absence, our public discourse becomes divorced from reality, instead driven by ideological considerations. This leads to polarization and gridlock, stymieing any progress in solving the pressing issues of our times.

If we look at the evidence, we can discuss how to make our elections as free and fair as possible, while encouraging healthy civic participation. Keeping this in mind, compromises are not impossible, but they will require considering symbolism, considering historical context, and addressing perceptions even when they are mistaken.

One suggestion coming out of this research is to simplify rules concerning voter registration and casting ballots. As we have seen, the administration of elections is overly complex. Potential instances of fraud are often due to administrative mistakes by volunteer poll workers. Some cases of voter suppression are similarly attributable to this issue. Studies find voters, for instance, former felons, that don't vote because they mistakenly believe, they aren't eligible. Administering elections according to simple, uniform rules across the country would be an easy way to make voting easier, more transparent, and less vulnerable to mistakes and fraud.

Appendix

Method for Construction of Timeline

I searched all adopted laws between 1989 and 2021 for those that amended A.R.S. Title 16, Elections and Electors. This time period was picked due to feasibility. Full-text indexed laws are available starting in 1989 in the Arizona Advance Legislative Service provided by NexisUni. The search terms were “Sections 16” OR “Section 16.” This resulted in 554 laws, of which 296 were excluded because they were not actually amending Title 16, leaving 258 laws. Additionally, I searched all passed Arizona ballot measures on Ballotpedia.com starting in 1990. 13 measures affecting Title 16 were identified. Then, I reviewed the bill texts and committee staff summaries to determine whether the provisions affect the ease of voting. Generally, I considered a bill to make voting harder (easier) when it for at least some people:

- increases (decreases) the number of steps required to register to vote and/or cast a ballot;
- increases (decreases) the complexity to register to vote and/or cast a ballot,
- decreases (increases) the number of ways one can register to vote and/or cast a ballot;
- imposes (strikes) conditions on how to register to vote and/or cast a ballot;
- increases (decreases) the amount of resources/time necessary for registering or voting;
or
- directs state officials to take any other actions that likely lead to a reduction (increase) in registered voters and/or cast ballots.

Some laws were categorized as undecided when they included provisions in both directions, provisions whose impact seemed contingent on other factors, and provisions where the directionality seemed uncertain. A non-exclusive list of relevant types of provisions includes modifications to the right to vote, voter registration rules, registration drive restrictions, privacy rules, the convenience of voting, polling place rules, voting process rules including ID requirements, rules for provisional ballots and resolution (‘curing’), rules for overseas and uniformed voters, voting assistance rules, and general election administration. To resolve laws with provisions pointing in different directions, I counted provisions in each law.

Changes to Arizona Election Law, 1989-2021

Issue	Easier	Harder
1989-1999		
Right to vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From 50 to 29 days of residence before election in state or town (HB 2074 1991) 	
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration forms availability: Distribute registration forms at government buildings and libraries (SB 1390 1991). Distribute at fire stations (HB 2135 1992). All public service and disability agencies (SB 1206 1994). Groups can request registration forms to distribute in bulk (SB 1110 1998) Streamline voter registration at DMV (SB1206 1994) County recorder can designate other places/persons to receive registration forms (SB 1390 1991) Homeless people without permanent address are eligible to register/vote (SB 1046 1993) Registration notice sent before general election. Undeliverable/new-address unresponsive voters placed on inactive voter list for 4 years instead of immediate cancellation (SB 1390 1991, SB 1002 1992) Registration automatically updated with postal records (SB 1206 1994). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to be 'physically present' in state/subdivision to register to vote (SB 1001 1991) Registration forms without birthdate are incomplete (SB 1206 1994) Registration automatically updated with postal records. If notice is not returned, voter is placed on inactive voter list (SB 1206 1994)
Public record exemption for registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various judges (HB 2370 1995), Victims of domestic violence (HB 2001 1997) 	
Vote by Mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Excuse absentee ballot (SB 1320 1991) 	
Early voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County allowed to establish early voting locations (SB 1046 1993). Any voter can show up to early voting location and vote (no extra steps) until Friday 5pm before election (SB 1003 1997) 	

Polling Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools must make space available for polling places (HB 2124 1992). Precinct lines cannot be changed between 1999-2001, undecided (SB 1178 1999) Polling place locations must be published 80 days before election (SB 1046 1993) In effect until 2000. 	
Provisional Ballots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can vote provisional ballot if name is not on precinct register (SB 1046 1993) Can vote 'new resident' ballot when move within county, no need to reregister (SB 1206 1994). 	
Actual Voting Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voters are allowed to deposit ballot in box themselves (HB 2025 1992) If individual falls ill between second Friday before election and 5pm on election day, can get ballot hand delivered for voting (SB 1110 1998). Verbal requests are sufficient (SB 1227 1999). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits the use of power of attorney in election matters including voting, registration, signing petitions, early ballot requests (SB1110 1998)
Uniformed and Overseas Voters		
Administration		
2000-2009		
Right to vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constitutional amendment: Change the minimum voting age to 18 and eliminate the one-year residency requirement for voting. This had already been implemented in accordance with federal law, and was already contained in AZ statutes, undecided (Proposition 101 2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Someone convicted of forging election returns cannot automatically have their right to vote restored after release (SB 1623 2007)
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voter registration automatically updated with information from early ballot requests and other election communication (SB 1372 2000). Can correct name on voter registry while casting a ballot (SB 1372 2000) Establish state-wide uniform voter registration database, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If jury questionnaire indicates felony conviction without civil rights restored, voter registration is cancelled (SB 1372 2000) Voter has 35 days to respond to change of address notice to remain active voter. Previously, 25 days before next election (SB 1053 2008) In accordance with Federal Help America Vote Act, registration needs to contain drivers' license number and social security number,

	<p>Help America Vote Act (SB 1075 2003)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the county sends notification to verify address change, voter has (formerly 25) 29 days to respond before cancellation (SB 1250 2004). • Filling out license registration form is sufficient to register to vote, no additional form required anymore (SB 1218 2005) • Allows a voter to correct missing or illegible information on a voter registration form by 7 p.m. on an election day and be deemed to have been registered on the date the registration was initially received (SB 1041 2006) 	<p>if voter has been assigned those (SB 1075 2003)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration form is considered incomplete if citizenship questions is not answered, Help America Vote Act (SB 1250 2004) • Require that evidence of United States citizenship be presented by every person to register to vote (Proposition 200 2004), declared unconstitutional for federal elections by US Supreme Court
<p>Public record exemption for registration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosecutors (HB 2083 2001), public defenders, persons protected by an order of protection or an injunction against harassment and any registered voters who reside with them (HB 2257 2001), public defenders and judges (HB 2108 2003), stalking victims and persons under an order of protection or injunction against harassment (SB 1086 2005), commissioners, code enforcement officers, corrections officers and support staff, probation officers, clemency board members, some law enforcement officers, some national guard members, some firefighters (SB 1006 2007) • Information needs to be sealed 120 instead of 150 days after court order (HB 2257 2001) • Uniform application form (HB 2551 2002) • Can request ballot more than 90 days before election (SB 1050 2004) • Notification 6 months before protection expires (HB 2478 2008) 	

Vote by Mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precinct name does not need to be filled in anymore in an early voter affidavit (SB 1372 2000) • If early ballot request is incomplete, county needs to notify voter (SB 1046 2003) • Permanent early voting list (HB 2106 2007) • Early ballots need to be sent out with 5 days of receipt by county (SB 1053 2008) • Early ballot needs to be requested within 93 days of election instead of 90 (SB 1053 2008) • Requires all early ballots requests received on or before the 30th day before the election to be distributed on the 26th day before the election (SB 1074 2009) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadline to request early ballot 11th day preceding the election instead of Friday before election (HB 2106 2007) • Early ballots sent out no earlier than 26th day before election (SB 1074 2009)
Early voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in-person voting must open at least same day as early ballots are sent out (SB 1053 2008) 	
Polling Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools cannot refuse to be polling place by saying it would disrupt school affairs (SB 1050 2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one polling place per precinct must be designated 20 days before election (SB 1372 2000)
Provisional Ballots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Resident ballot renamed provisional ballot – needs to be verified within 10 days for federal election, within 5 days all other elections, Help America Vote Act (SB 1075 2003) • County needs to provide method for notifying voters whether provisional ballot was counted, Help America Vote Act (SB 1075 2003) 	
Actual Voting Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minors are allowed to accompany voters at polling place (HB 2352 2000) • Counties, cities and towns required to obtain voting systems for blind or visually impaired individuals (HB 2083 2005) • The Secretary of State to establish maximum wait times at polling places and publish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter ID required if state-wide database is not established (2003) • Voter ID required (Proposition 200 2004)

	methods for reducing wait times (SB 1557 2006)	
Uniformed and Overseas Voters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request can be made for two election cycles (SB 1023 2003) Ballots can be transmitted via fax (SB 1023 2003). Can be transmitted electronically (HB 2288 2005, HB 2213 2008) Secretary of State is responsible for providing information to uniformed and overseas voters (SB 1075 2003) Allow applications for registration/ballots until 7pm on election day (HB 2288 2005) Allow votes to be cast from locations in the US (HB 2288 2005) Allow voters that have never lived in the US but whose parents are registered in AZ (HB 2288 2005) Federal write-in ballot received late still counts as voter registration (SB 1053 2008) 	
Administration		
2010-2021		
Right to vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Automatic restoration of voting rights for first time offenders, procedural safeguards (HB 2080 2019) 	
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows voter registrations to be accepted on the next immediate business day if the filing deadline falls on a weekend or legal holiday (SB 1307 2017) Can respond to address verification notice online (HB 2133 2019) Requires, rather than allows, the Secretary of State to compare records of deaths with the statewide voter registration database, undecided (HB 2054 2019) Department of Fish and Wildlife has to offer registration with license purchase (SB 1819 2021). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires that numbers of federal-only electors are posted on county website (HB 2039 2019) Empowers state legislature to appoint an "entity" to investigate the federal-only voter registration roll and purge them if deemed ineligible (SB 1819 2021). Declared unconstitutional by AZ Supreme Court

	Declared unconstitutional by AZ Supreme Court	
Public record exemption for registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Border patrol agents (HB 2302 2011), the spouse of a deceased peace officer, a former public official (HB 2389 2013), victim of sexual offense, spouse of a peace officer (HB 2100, HB 2145 2014), former judges, U.S. immigration court judges, employee of the Department of Child Safety who has direct contact with families (HB 2100, SB 1073 2015), employees of adult protective services (SB 1538 2019), hearing officer, member of commission on appellate court appointments (HB 2073 2021). 	
Vote by Mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Method for voters to verify that their ballot has been received (HB 2427 2010) Permanent early voter address can be anywhere in AZ, instead of in county (HB 2304 2011) Allows organizations to distribute early voter registration forms (HB 2701 2012) Return envelopes must not reveal the voter's selections (SB 1238 2017) 5-day cure period for non-matching signatures (SB 1054 2019). Return envelopes must not reveal the voter's party affiliation (SB 1002 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If an election is not called 120 days before the election, counties do not have to send election notice to early voters (HB 2069 2010) Requires a person who delivers more than 10 early ballots to an election official for tallying to provide a copy of the person's photo identification to the election official (SB 1412 2011). No pre-clearance given. Repealed by HB 2033 (2012). Additional felonies related to (fraudulent) collection of ballots (SB 1471 2011). Ballots cannot be returned by paid workers/volunteers of any group or organization, including political action committees (HB 2305 2013). Reversed by HB 2196 (2014). Only family member, householder member, or care giver allowed to return ballot (HB 2023 2016). Early voter request needs to be accompanied by signed statement that voter is eligible to vote in county (HB 2701 2012). Request need to have statement ('won't be able to vote at regular polling place') attached. If it does not, voter can vote early once but will not be added to the list (HB 2305 2013). Reversed by HB 2196 (2014) After notice, delete voter from early voting list, who has not voted in any of last 2 general/primary elections

		<p>(HB 2305 2013). Reversed by HB 2196 (2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After notice, delete voter from early voting list, who has not voted in four years (SB 1485 2021), renamed Active Early Voting List • Missing signature can be added only until election day 7pm (SB 1003 2021). • Early ballot may not be delivered to a person who did not request it (HB 2905 2021)
Early voting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter ID required (SB 1072 2019) • Emergency voting center can only be established by Count Board of Supervisors (SB 1090 2019)
Polling Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counties can establish voting centers (HB 2303 2011) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can consolidate polling places in precinct with lots of early voters (HB 2069 2010)
Provisional Ballots		
Actual Voting Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballot privacy envelope offered (HB 2362 2021). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands the prohibitions for voter assistance at the polls to include employees or volunteers for a candidate, campaign, political organization or political party in that election (SB 1471 2011). No pre-clearance given. Repealed by HB 2033 (2012) • Require ID for requesting emergency early ballot (SB 1090 2019)
Uniformed and Overseas Voters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter can designate means in which to receive voting materials (HB 2427 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Default requests for only one election cycle (HB 2304 2011)
Administration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot receive or spend private monies on election administration (HB 2569 2021)

Effects of Changing Registration Requirements on Voter Registration and Turnout

Provision	Turnout	Registration
Same Day Registration/ No Registration	+2 percentage points. ²⁸¹ +3.3 percentage points. ²⁸² +3-4 percentage points. ²⁸³ +5 percentage points. ²⁸⁴ +6 percentage points. ²⁸⁵ +8.7 percentage points. ²⁸⁶ +10 percentage points. ²⁸⁷ Modestly increases turnout and diminishes socio-demographic differences. ²⁸⁸	None. ²⁸⁹
Shorter Registration Deadline	Moving deadline from 30 to 7 days before election increased turnout by 3.6%. ²⁹⁰ Consistent positive effect, up to 9% for some groups. ²⁹¹ Early closing dates have the largest effects among the young and residentially mobile. ²⁹²	
Availability of registration office	Small consistent positive effect. ²⁹³	
Online Registration	+2 percentage points. ²⁹⁴ +10 percentage points for 18-22-year-olds when combined with pre-registration. ²⁹⁵	+2 percentage points ²⁹⁶
Automatic Registration	Positive but unclear how much. ²⁹⁷	Positive but unclear how much ²⁹⁸
Motor Voter Act	+4.7 percentage points. ²⁹⁹ + 4 percentage points. ³⁰⁰ +3.88 for active motor voter, 0 for passive. ³⁰¹ +3.4 percentage points in presidential election years, -4 percentage points in non-presidential election years. ³⁰² +0.3 percentage points. ³⁰³	+3 percentage points. ³⁰⁴ + 10 percentage points for active motor voter, 0 for passive. ³⁰⁵

Academic Studies of Election Fraud in the United States

Authors/Year	Methods	Findings
Andrew C. Eggers, Haritz Garro, and Justin Grimmer 2021. ³⁰⁶	Analysis of statistical anomalies in the 2020 elections claimed to be evidence of fraud.	“Each of the statistical claims we consider fails in one of two ways. In some instances, accurate claims are made about the election results but they are not actually inconsistent with a free and fair election. In other instances, the supposedly anomalous fact about the 2020 election result turns out to be incorrect.”
David Cottrell, Michael C. Herron, and Sean J. Westwood 2018. ³⁰⁷	Analysis of local election data to look for statistical anomalies.	No evidence of widespread fraud, specifically of non-citizens voting, busing residents across state borders, or rigging by local election officials.
Edie Goldenberg 2020. ³⁰⁸	Review of existing research.	“Voting by mail is rarely subject to fraud, does not give an advantage to one political party over another and can in fact inspire public confidence in the voting process.”
Enrico Cantoni and Vincent Pons 2021. ³⁰⁹	Public records of criminal voter fraud investigations. Statistical analysis.	Strict voter ID laws have no effect on the incidence of voter fraud.
John S. Ahlquist, Kenneth R. Mayer, and Simon Jackman 2014. ³¹⁰	Survey list experiment.	“We find no evidence of widespread voter impersonation, even in the states most contested in the presidential or statewide campaigns.”
Jonathan Auerbach and Steve Pierson 2021 ³¹¹	Public records of criminal voter fraud investigations. Statistical analysis.	“We find no evidence that voting by mail increases the risk of voter fraud overall.”
Justin Levitt 2007. ³¹²	Analysis of voter fraud allegations by state and federal courts; bipartisan federal commissions; political party entities; state and local election officials; and authors, journalists, and bloggers.	“Only a tiny portion of the claimed illegality is substantiated.”
L. J. Ziverell 2016. ³¹³	Survey list experiments.	List experiments, as implemented in the literature, are methodologically flawed and have insufficient statistical power to reveal voter fraud. Contradicts previous studies that have found evidence in such experiments.
Lipton and Ian Urbina 2007. ³¹⁴	Analysis of court records and interviews with Bush administration officials.	“Five years after the Bush administration began a crackdown on voter fraud, the Justice Department has turned up virtually no evidence of any organized effort to skew federal elections.”
Lorraine Minnite 2006. ³¹⁵	Analysis of news reports, federal prosecutions, and survey of local prosecutors.	States with Election Day Voter Registration have very little voter fraud. Most cases are “directly attributable to clerical errors, poll worker shortages and incompetence.”
Lorraine Minnite 2010. ³¹⁶	Literature review, news report case analysis, analysis of official	Most newsworthy allegations of voter fraud remain unsubstantiated. Voter fraud is

	election complaints in four states.	extremely rare compared to the total number of votes cast. No evidence that vote-by-mail increases fraud.
M. V. Hood III and William Gillespie 2012. ³¹⁷	Linking of various government records.	“We find no evidence that election fraud was committed under the auspices of deceased registrants” in Georgia.
News 21 2012. ³¹⁸	Public records search.	Authors find 2,068 alleged election-fraud cases between 2000 and 2012. “The rate is infinitesimal, and in-person voter impersonation on Election Day, is virtually non-existent.”
Ray Christensen and Thomas J. Schultz 2014. ³¹⁹	Statistical and qualitative analysis of orphan voter and low-propensity voter anomalies.	Authors find no cases of fraud beyond those already publicly known.
Shared Goel et al. 2020. ³²⁰	Statistical analysis of nationally aggregated voter rolls.	Authors estimate that there were 33,346 double voters nation-wide in 2012. A clerical error rate of 1.3% would explain all of the votes. Audits find clerical error rates of at least 1%.
Stephen Ansolabehere, Samantha Luks, and Brian Schaffner 2014. ³²¹	Analysis of survey data.	“The likely percent of non-citizen voters in recent US elections is 0.”
The Heritage Foundation 2022. ³²²	Public records search.	A database maintained by the conservative Heritage Foundation lists 1,100 criminal convictions for voter fraud between 2000 and 2020, 143 related to vote by mail.
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