

Where Do Things Stand Now? Assessing the State of the Georgia Electorate Post-2022

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Project Goals

Following the 2020 election, Georgia found itself at the nexus of the American election universe. Unlike a number of states that were mired in controversy before Election Day over pandemic-related procedures, most of the controversies in Georgia occurred following the election when former President Trump claimed he had lost the state due to voter fraud. What followed was a period of unparalleled election-related turmoil that culminated in the defeat of two Republican U.S. Senators in a statewide runoff on January 5, 2021. There is little doubt that confidence in the state's election machinery, especially among Republicans, had been shaken. In a survey of Georgians administered in the spring of 2021, 70% of Republicans still believed that Trump had lost the popular vote in Georgia due to fraud. In the spring of 2021, on a purely party-line vote the Republican-controlled General Assembly passed a 98-page omnibus election reform bill known as SB (Senate Bill) 202. As expressed in the bill's preamble, there is no doubt that this measure was passed, in part, to help bolster voter confidence (with the unstated target audience especially being GOP identifiers). Even before the bill was passed and signed into law, Democrats both inside and outside of Georgia labeled it as a voter suppression measure.

Despite the controversy over SB 202, it was in place for the 2022 midterm election in Georgia. The primary goal of this project centers on assessing where things in Georgia currently stand regarding voter confidence and general satisfaction with the state's election system. Second, given that SB 202 did produce a number of changes in the manner in which elections are administered, especially in regard to non-precinct voting, we also want to evaluate how these changes may have affected both voters and local election officials. In order to do so we will employ a three-pronged approach making use of (1) available administrative data; (2) a post-election telephone survey of Georgia voters; and (3) a survey of county election officials in the state.

Initial Findings

Our post-election telephone survey of Georgia voters was completed in early December, along with data processing and initial analysis. The survey includes more than 1,200 Georgians who participated in the 2022 midterm election. In short, the bulk of the findings from this survey paint a very positive picture of voters' perceptions of their experiences in the 2022 election. Below, we detail some initial findings from the survey data.

There were few reports of issues with voting during the 2022 midterm and this is reflected in the results of our survey. Overall, only 1.1% of survey respondents reported they encountered an issue while casting their ballot. Of those who voted in-person (Election Day or Early In-Person), 75% reported wait times of ten minutes or less. In terms of overall voting experience, 72% rated their experience as *excellent*, up from 55% of voters following the 2020 presidential contest. Ninety percent of voters reported they were *very* or *somewhat confident* that their vote was counted as intended in 2022—a 12-point increase over 2020. In terms of confidence that votes at

the state-level were counted as intended, three-quarters (76%) of respondents were *very* or *somewhat confident*, compared to only 59% of respondents in 2020. Eighty-seven percent of voters gave county election officials a grade of *excellent* or *good* for the 2022 midterm election. In regard specifically to SB 202, 42% reported that the measure had increased their confidence in the state's election system, 25% reported that it had decreased confidence, and 33% expressed no opinion on the measure. Asked to rate the difficulty in casting a ballot in 2022 compared to 2020, 92% of respondents reported that the process was no more difficult or that it was easier. Asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements concerning elections in Georgia, 82% of respondents agreed that votes were counted in a timely manner; 77% agreed that only properly cast ballots were counted; and 77% agreed that it is easy to cast a ballot. Finally, respondents were also asked to rate the manner in which Georgia conducts elections on a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 being not at all satisfied and 10 extremely satisfied. More than half (56%) of respondents gave the state a score of 8 or higher and the mean for the overall distribution was 7.4.

Next Steps

We will continue to analyze the survey data pertaining to voter perceptions of the 2022 midterm, providing more granular analyses with the aid of multivariate modeling.

Early in the spring 2023 semester we will be partnering with the Georgia Association of Voter Registration and Election Officials (GAVREO) to conduct a mail/internet survey of county election officials. In addition to questions pertaining to the availability of resources (e.g., funding, personnel, and training), we plan to specifically ask about changes brought about by SB 202, including implementation and evaluations of such changes. Data collection, analysis, and reporting will be complete by May of 2023.

During the spring semester of 2023 we will also be analyzing available administrative data to answer other questions pertaining to the effects of SB 202 on the 2022 general election. Using these data, we will be able to make comparisons to previous election cycles, such as utilization rates for absentee by mail and early in-person voting and absentee ballot rejection rates and the reasons for rejection.

Using the post-election survey of Georgia voters, the survey of local election officials, and administrative data, we will be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of elections in the Peach State and the effects of any changes specifically brought about by SB 202.