

**Social Justice Campaigns and Democratic Party Gains:
How Georgia’s Partisan Reformers Overtook North Carolina’s Moral Advocates**

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Abstract: How did Democrats running for federal office win in Georgia in 2020-21, but not in North Carolina, a state long seen by pundits and operatives as more “flippable”? This article situates recent Democratic losses and victories in the broader context of two movements for racial and economic justice – led by former North Carolina NAACP president Reverend William Barber and former Georgia House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams. We track shifting political opportunity structures and the organizational and strategic evolution of both movements over the last 15 years, with a special focus on movement outreach beyond major metropolitan areas. Employing a range of new organizational data, we find significant associations between organizing by Abrams’s network and increases in Black voter turnout and Democratic vote shares in Georgia, but no such effects from Barber movement organizing in North Carolina. Our findings suggest that social justice campaigns aiming to boost participation and government responsiveness to poor minority citizens do better if they frankly tie grassroots outreach to partisan candidates and causes.

As the 2020 US elections loomed, pundits pointed to North Carolina as the southern state most likely to flip from red to blue. Acting on conventional wisdom, White House contenders visited that state repeatedly and the major parties channeled tens of millions of dollars into North Carolina (Montinaro 2020; Ruthard and Berlin 2020). But when the November votes were tallied, the North Carolina GOP held on in both the presidential and Senate races, while Democrats shockingly claimed Georgia's 16 electoral votes for the presidency. Additional surprises soon followed – in a runoff election triggered by the failure of Georgia's GOP Senate contenders to reach 50%. The Peach State's two Democratic candidates, Jon Ossoff and Reverend Raphael Warnock, defied their party's usual poor performance in runoffs to score dual wins on January 6, 2021, delivering U.S. Senate control to Democrats at least through 2022.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

A brief look at previous statewide top-of-the-ticket contests in Figure 1 underlines that, not long ago, Georgia was much more Republican than the Tar Heel State.¹ After Barack Obama's first presidential run boosted Democratic fortunes, the party's fortunes plunged in both by 2010 and only gradually regained ground thereafter. Georgia remained more solidly red through 2014, but then the story changed. Although North Carolina Democrats eked out a hair-thin victory in the 2016 governor's race (not shown in this figure), they have since plateaued just short of victories in presidential and Senatorial contests, while Georgia Democrats have gained cycle by cycle – until they prevailed in three critical statewide contests in 2020-21.

In the aftermath of this earthquake-like outcome, Monday-morning-quarterbacks offer rationales for why Georgia was supposedly more poised to “go blue.” Some highlight modest demographic differences with North Carolina, real contributors but insufficient given the narrowness of recent electoral margins. Others simply declare that North Carolina does not have “a Stacey Abrams,” referring to the dynamic Black Georgia gubernatorial candidate who has led the charge for racial and economic democracy. However, North Carolina has had its own charismatic social justice crusader, the Reverend William Barber II. Well before Georgia's Abrams and allies attracted national attention in

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, data for all election results analyses come from the Georgia Secretary of State, the North Carolina State Board of Elections, and Dave Leip's county-level election data for US federal offices.

2018, North Carolina’s “Forward Together” Moral Movement grew from its inception in 2007 and achieved national celebrity during massive protests in 2013-14. Unusually in the context of contemporary US liberalism, both the Barber and Abrams efforts have targeted state-level as well as national politics, calling for governments to further racial equity and address the needs of low-income residents, above all Blacks. Especially since 2014, both social justice campaigns have supported Democratic opponents to steadily more right-leaning Republicans.

Such parallels only sharpen the puzzle tackled here: How and why have the Georgia Democrats and social justice reformers – like the tortoise in the classic fairy tale – caught up and edged ahead of the North Carolina hare? Our answers follow from a comparative-historical analysis of recent party and movement dynamics. Leaders of contemporary US movements for social justice must make fateful choices about political tactics and party alignments in a polarizing polity. Some – like Barber’s movement in North Carolina – press for changes from “outside” partisan electoral politics, while others – like the Abrams organizational constellation in Georgia – seek to build partisan clout. In the following sections, we dissect the goals and scope of these statewide justice campaigns -- using evidence from group records, the Internet Wayback machine, media accounts, and confidential interviews with a few key informants. After tracing campaign roots and dynamics, we use mapping and statistical techniques to test for electoral effects in recent statewide contests.

Overall, our comparative analysis supports findings that may startle scholars and pundits who believe that pressure from outside party and governmental orbits is especially politically potent. In the current ideologically divided US system, social justice campaigns aiming to engage and serve underprivileged groups can make more headway through sustained, grassroots organizing aligned with a political party than by mounting issue-focused protests and nonpartisan moral appeals.

BEYOND DEMOGRAPHY AND METROPOLITAN TRENDS

Socioeconomic underpinnings are not certain political destiny, but they do set parameters. North Carolina and Georgia have long grown in parallel ways, starting just under three million residents in 1920 and arriving at around 10.5 million by 2019. For the 2020 election cycle, eligible voting-age populations stood at 7.7 million for Georgia and 7.8 million for North Carolina. These states now boast

fast-growing economies, magnets for newcomers, including immigrants and college-educated migrants (some of them African Americans returning to their ancestral South). According to 2019 US Census data, both states have the same share of residents aged 25 or older with college degrees. North Carolinians are slightly older, whiter, and more rural. The fact that Georgia has more Blacks can help liberals, but that state's somewhat greater shares of poor and foreign-born people can also cut the other way, if such residents vote less than others.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The political geographies of Georgia and North Carolina (see Figure 2) will be front and center in this analysis. In Georgia, the massive metropole of Atlanta and suburbs by now accounts for more than 45% of the state's population. The state also has eight regional secondary cities with populations of 50,000 and above, most located toward the south and some growing slowly if at all. North Carolina has more rural areas and small towns and seven secondary cities spread across the state from Asheville in the mountains to Wilmington on the Atlantic coast, and its fast-growing metropolises are in separate regions. The largest urban-suburban complex around Charlotte stretches down into South Carolina, while the second largest Research Triangle complex (spanning Durham/Chapel Hill and the state capital, Raleigh) is situated in the center of the state. A third, less economically flourishing metro cluster consists of High Point, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem in the central Piedmont Triad region.

Nationwide, today's Democrats and liberal reformers must link two disparate sets of potential supporters – on the one hand, college-educated voters who are increasingly moving away from Republicans and, on the other hand, low- to moderate-income voters, especially Blacks who have been the party's loyal core. Democrats must also navigate growing chasms between big cities and surrounding suburbs (where both college grads and minorities often live) versus outer suburbs, medium-sized cities, and small-town rural areas (where many residents without college degrees vote Republican by ever-mounting margins). In the North, the demographic and metro/non-metro divides usually line up – but that is less true in North Carolina, Georgia, and other southern states where substantial shares of African Americans live in often economically struggling medium-size cities or small town or rural areas. According 2019 Census estimates, 46.8% of voting-eligible Black Georgians lived outside Atlanta (two-fifths of those in secondary city counties and three-fifths in non-urban counties). Similarly, 52.8% of

voting-eligible Black North Carolinians lived beyond the state’s three major metro areas (about three-in-ten of those in secondary city counties and almost seven-in-ten in non-urban counties).

Some analysts attribute rising Democratic fortunes in Georgia entirely to Atlanta’s preponderance. But reformers have never been able to rely on that hub alone – and still cannot. For much of the twentieth century, Georgia cities were disempowered by a rigged “county unit” system for party primaries (Mickey 2015; Tuck 2001). From the Jim Crow era through the early Civil Rights period, Atlanta’s Black and white leaders fashioned “establishment” compromises that left Black leaders somewhat disinterested as well as relatively unable to build statewide networks. Even now, Atlantans enjoy opportunities to realize ambitions right there – en route to the national stage. As we will see, it matters greatly that Stacey Abrams, an ambitious member of the Atlanta elite, decided *not* to run for mayor and instead set her sights on building sufficient *statewide* party and civic capacities to make Democratic victories more feasible than they are with metro support alone.

A TALE OF TWO SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGNS

Campaigns to shift power relations started in 2005 in North Carolina, and between 2007 and 2011 in Georgia. At these junctures, two ambitious and well-respected African American leaders, Reverend William Barber II and attorney Stacey Abrams, made choices about how to assemble coalitions to reorient state government and boost the life chances and political clout of less privileged people, especially African Americans.

The North Carolina NAACP and Coalition-Building for Moral Advocacy

Tar Heel movement-building started when Reverend Barber, the minister of the Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, decided to contest the presidency of the North Carolina Conference of NAACP branches. Forty-two years old at the time, Barber spent his childhood in Washington County, North Carolina, a poor, rural area in the eastern part of the state where his “father was preacher, and organizer and a teacher, his mother a school secretary.” (Secret 2006; also Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove 2016). From high school on, Barber was active in student government and the NAACP youth activities, commitments he continued while studying for his BA at North Carolina Central University, a

historically Black college, and then for a Master of Divinity Degree from Duke University and a doctorate in Public Policy and Pastoral Care from Drew University. After a brief minister stint in Durham, Barber was appointed by Democratic Governor Jim Hunt to serve as the executive director of the state's Human Rights Coalition. In 1993, congregants in Goldsboro asked Barber to serve as their pastor, and a decade later, people impressed with his leadership urged a run for state NAACP president.

“New hands take NAACP reins” was the headline of an October 9, 2005, article in the *Raleigh News & Observer*, published the day after Barber decisively defeated incumbent president Melvin “Skip” Alston, a businessman and Guilford County commissioner (Easterbrook 2005). The two men had “presented delegates with a contrast” of personalities and strategies for propelling social change. (Binker 2005). Alston was someone who “looks at home in a business suit and usually speaks one on one in measured, carefully chosen phrases.” Barber’s speaking style, by contrast, “is littered with inflections and phrases that give him away as a preacher” pledging to “speak truth to power” like “the man he quotes most frequently, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.” (Binker 2005). The two advocated different tactics to influence state government. While Alston was proud that he had “made the organization more politically potent” by “working with state legislators” whose presence meant that the “NAACP does not have to jump up and holler anymore . . .” (Fitzsimon 2005).² But Barber and his allies criticized the NAACP’s “banqueting and socializing culture” and propensity for “fawning over politicians who had regularly used the NAACP’s infrastructure to get elected, and then went to Jones Street [where the General Assembly is located] and compiled perfect vote records of betrayal of the interests of poor and working people” (McSurely 2008). He promised a return to 1960s-style civil rights activism that would “stand on our principles” and no longer “check with” legislators to negotiate what’s most politically acceptable” (Secret 2006).

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

After his election, Barber took charge of a well-established NAACP federation of about With one hundred local branches – “by far the best-known civil rights group both nationally and at the state level,” its “state president... one of the most recognized leaders in North Carolina who does not hold

² By 2005 there were 19 Black Representatives, 16% of the 120-member North Carolina House and close to a third of the Democratic House caucus. There were also six Black Senators, 12% of the fully body and just over a fifth of the Senate Democratic caucus.

statewide political office” (Binker 2005). A look back tells us how this came to be. Founded in 1909 in New York City, the NAACP quickly reached North Carolina, with pioneering units in place by 1919. Across the South, the NAACP reached a crescendo during and after World War II, after which many states faced rollbacks, as happened in Georgia under the sway of the Ku Klux Klan-backed governorships of Eugene and his son Herman Talmadge.³ But growth continued in North Carolina (see Figure 3), where membership peaked between the 1960s and 1980s (Gavins 2006). Statewide actions were undertaken long before the Barber era. Apart from the NAACP, no other association, including the Black teachers’ association and church conventions, “expressed public opposition to Jim Crow... on behalf of a statewide constituency...” (Gavins 1991, 116).

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Right after Reverend Barber took the helm in late 2005, he traveled more than 50,000 miles to speak at more than two dozen local branches (McSurely 2008, Secret 2006).⁴ Yet Barber aimed to do more, in collaboration with a longtime white progressive activist and attorney named Al McSurely. Along with the rest of the state leadership, they fashioned “a coalition that extended beyond the base of the NAACP to include others who were concerned about justice and the good of the whole” (Barber 2016, 48) and reached out “to other progressive organizations that were predominantly white.” In McSurely’s later telling (2008), “our aim was radical. To put forth a People’s Agenda that would challenge the lawmakers’ entrenched habit of doing business for business.” After debate, “the NAACP leadership voted unanimously to sponsor the ‘Historic Thousands on Jones Street People’s Assembly’” – the flyer for the first 2007 iteration appears in Figure 4. The title was soon shortened to “HKonJ,” which became the moniker for annual repetitions of this coalition-sponsored march to the General Assembly in Raleigh. “Thousands” was deliberately left vague to leave room for misestimates and growth, while still signaling that this “wasn’t just a couple of lobbyists... with policy papers, begging for some crumbs for poor people. This was a People’s Lobby. Marching on the People’s House” (McSurely 2008).

³ For NAACP dynamics, see Mickey (2015), Sullivan (2009); and Berg (2005). Mickey (especially p.88) explains complexities of estimating branches and membership. All authors note that each time the national NAACP raised dues, membership levels receded for a time. Georgia’s setbacks from the late 1940s were nevertheless greater and more persistent.

⁴ The state conference added five new local branches during the Barber years, including predominantly white units in western counties (see Schulson 2017), and also expanded youth auxiliaries and college branches.

[FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Initially the NAACP-led coalition brought together sixteen policy organizations focused on a variety of issues and constituencies. Yet as tracked in Figure 5, it soon added other advocacy groups, unions, and religious congregations, totaling more than two dozen by early 2007, some 86 by 2008, and dozens more in later years. The coalition of NAACP “partners” was called a “Black-Brown-White” “transformative moral fusion” alliance, where each group would embrace other partners’ causes, ranging from educational development to civil rights, from unionization to social services, from gay rights to women’s reproductive freedom. “Every issue was equally important,” in Barber’s (2016, 53) view. “[O]ur most directly affected members would always speak to the issue closest to their own hearts. But they would never speak alone.” Each year brought community events and advocacy projects leading into, and following up from, the annual HKonJ March in Raleigh – and particular causes could get extra emphasis in given years, to respond to particular circumstances and rotate support for partner issues.

During the early years when Democrats remained in charge of state government, activism for a deliberately nonpartisan “moral” agenda gained some traction. Same-day voter registration enacted in 2007 and may have facilitated the vote surge for Obama in 2008 (Wiggins 2009). Movement leaders took early credit for state budgetary adjustments and union recognition for Smithfield pork-processing workers; and legal observers credited Barber’s coalition with helping pass steps to reduce racial bias in the death penalty (Strobino 2008; O’Brien and Grosso 2011). But according to one report (Chou 2008), more than half of 83 bills backed by the Moral Movement failed to get out of committee. Although legislators in left-leaning districts praised the full 14-point agenda, Republicans and many Democrats pigeonholed it as a laundry list of far-left causes (Collins 2008).

After 2010, insufficient responsiveness from Raleigh Democrats was no longer the chief obstacle. That November, Republicans flipped control of the General Assembly, and two years later, in 2012, GOP contender Pat McCrory won the governorship. Unlike the sorts of business-oriented moderates who had long held sway in the state GOP, the newly ascendant Republicans included ultra-free-market ideologues backed by Koch network allies, along with many Christian conservatives and Tea Party supporters fiercely opposed to Obama-era Democrats (Tervo 2020). This fast and furious right-wing takeover hit both the state Democratic Party and the NAACP-led movement like a hurricane – and both would face ongoing dilemmas about how to respond. Prospects for the defeated North

Carolina Democrats were especially dire. After several years of scandals and controversies, the state leadership was so decimated that Senator Kay Hagan and the national Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee chose to run her 2014 re-election campaign through the Wake County party organization (Willis 2014).

Meanwhile, the NAACP coalition channeled street demonstrations against “extremists” – Reverend Barber’s nonpartisan euphemism for the new GOP trifecta. As the newly ascendant hard-right legislature and governor teamed up to gut aid to workers and the poor, slash educational and social spending, attack reproductive freedoms and gay rights, and roll back voting access, liberal and progressive organizations went on full defensive. Most that were not already part of the NAACP partnership quickly signed on. Tens of thousands of newly activated people turned out for the Raleigh marches in 2013 and 2014 (see figure 5 above, and Kane 2013, Fuller 2014, Berman 2014).

During the legislative session from April to July 2013, activists launched “Moral Mondays” civil disobedience sit-ins at the General Assembly, during which close to 1,000 were arrested (McClain 2014). Throughout that summer and into the fall, Barber toured the state to allow NAACP branches and others beyond the Triangle to participate in the protests. In 2014, a new “Moral Freedom Summer” campaign deployed paid field organizers to do voter registration and canvassing as the state headed into a pivotal important US Senate contest between Democratic incumbent Kay Hagan and GOP legislative leader Thom Tillis, who had driven right-wing changes in Raleigh (Yeoman 2014). This was a peak moment for both Moral Movement protests and electoral efforts, but before we assess the impact, we describe the development of a different kind of social justice campaign in neighboring Georgia.

Building the Georgia Democratic Party and Statewide Voter Engagement

Around the same time as North Carolina’s Forward Together coalition took shape, the seeds of another statewide equity campaign were planted in Georgia, when 32-year-old Atlanta lawyer Stacey Abrams decided to run in 2006 for a seat in that state’s House of Representatives. After winning, Abrams served on the Ways & Means and Appropriations committees and orchestrated party fundraising. Following her second reelection in 2010 she made a successful bid for Minority Leader, becoming the first woman and African American in that post. Her personal triumph came as Georgia

Democrats lost dozens of seats and suffered nine defections from members who switched party affiliations to the GOP, leaving it just one seat short of supermajority control.

Leadership of a beleaguered caucus might not seem the best perch from which to build a new campaign for racial and economic justice, but there was no *statewide* extra-party civil rights network ready at hand, because earlier efforts to do such organizing, including through the NAACP, had faltered in the face of postwar repression (Sullivan 2009; Tuck 2001). Abrams was quite young, albeit accomplished, when she set out to organize and fund-raise for what grew into an intertwined network of Democratic Party and non-profit projects. One of six children of librarian mother and a dockworker father who later became ministers, she was born in 1973 and raised mostly in Gulfport, Mississippi (Beveridge 2018). After her family moved to Atlanta, Abrams was her high school's valedictorian and graduated magna cum laude from Spelman College with a BA in economics, sociology, and political science. She earned a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Texas, Austin, and a JD from Yale Law School, before returning to Georgia to do nonprofit tax law at a prestigious Atlanta firm and serve as appointed Deputy City Attorney. The energetic Abrams was always frankly politically ambitious, initially imagining she would run for the Atlanta mayorship. But established political players were not so welcoming, and she soon re-set her sights, reasoning that state government has "tremendous capacity to help people unlock their own potential" by improving conditions and opportunities for disadvantaged families (Abrams 2018).

As Minority Leader, Abrams raised modest funds from outside donors to bolster messaging and help reelect threatened House Democratic incumbents. She also traversed the state to meet Democrats who still held many posts in local governments, and to engage with "county party chairs,... people who wanted to run for office, grassroots leaders and activists, all on their home turfs" (Abrams and Groh-Wargo 2021). "Georgia Democrats seeking a road back," was the January 7, 2011 *Macon Telegraph* article about her early tour with House Caucus Chairman Brian Thomas, a white Democrat from Lilburn, to visit the medium-sized cities of Albany, Columbus, Valdosta, and Macon. At every stop, Abrams promised Democrats would "hold the majority accountable" and focus on "three themes: economic security, educational opportunity, and individual freedom" (Gaines 2011). She aimed to "connect...with lonely Democrats and 'people who don't know they're Democrats yet.'" Speaking in June 2011 "before a joint meeting of the Middle Georgia Democratic Women's Club and the Houston County Democratic Committee," Abrams noted the 250,000 vote party gap in the most recent elections

was “a difference Democrats could turn around. ‘It’s time we make it known that it’s safe to be a Democrat again’” (Pannell 2011).

Trips to spread hope and make contacts peaked in Abrams’s first years as House leader. According to an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* tally of “per diem” reimbursements to legislators who travel for state business, Abrams claimed 156 payments in 2011, 144 in 2012, and 141 in 2013, greatly surpassing the average of 60 per year from 2008 to 2010 claimed by the preceding House leader, DuBose Porter (Salzer 2018; see also Szilagyi 2018). With the Georgia GOP aiming to restrict Democrats to concentrated Black areas in Atlanta and a few districts beyond, Abrams worked to maintain a multiracial party by promoting white as well as Black candidacies and doing sustained outreach to the state’s growing Hispanic and Asian-American constituencies. Intern programs she helped launch deliberately recruited a rainbow of young people from all parts of the state, some of whom went on to run for office (Abrams 2018, 62-64; Sheinin 2012). In Atlanta and beyond, Abrams’s travel calendars reveal attendance at events celebrating Asian, Hispanic, and Black leaders, as well as speeches at business and professional conventions (Szilagyi 2018; see also Yam 2012).

Abrams also became her party’s de facto chief strategist by teaming up in 2011 with Lauren Groh-Wargo, an experienced state elections organizer who had previously worked in labor campaigns and had most recently run an Ohio battleground campaign (Abrams 2018, 53, 169; Abrams and Groh-Wargo 2021; Lesbians Who Tech n.d.). Together, Abrams and Groh-Wargo drafted election-by-election plans and a long-term ten-year plan to expand Democratic electoral appeal in Georgia by targeting growing demographic groups and previously uninvolved Black voters. Arguably, this path was open because the 2010 defeats and defections of many longstanding party honchos created a pressing need to re-brand the Georgia Democratic Party – opening more space for fresh thinking than may have existed in other southern state parties that experienced more gradual racial and generational changes. In North Carolina during the early 2010s no Abrams-like African American leader emerged to lead a weakened Democratic Party. Even after white Democrat Roy Cooper became governor in 2016, his party-building efforts focused on gaining legislative seats and securing his own reelection. For Democrats in the North Carolina legislature, change was gradual as preexisting ranks of mostly white solons tied to business interests in Charlotte and the eastern parts of the state gave way bit by bit to more Blacks and lawyers and nonprofit leaders from the Research Triangle (Davis 2009).

Although Abrams changed the state party's direction and racial leadership, she promulgated a relatively moderate message (Fausset 2018, Marcetic 2020). Drawn from many advocacy organizations, the agenda of the Barber movement in North Carolina featured left-leaning progressive goals, while the Georgia efforts were orchestrated by an office-seeking politician trying to win majorities and refresh the "Democratic Party" brand. Where the Barber Forward Together movement stressed fighting for local school desegregation, the Abrams-led Georgia Democrats spoke about enhancing support for "community schools" and using education to "expand opportunities" (Abrams and Groh-Wargo 2021; DeConto 2007). Where North Carolina advocates stressed anti-racism and anti-poverty policies, the Georgians spoke more generally about creating better jobs and expanding access to health care.

Not coincidentally, the full flowering of Georgia's contemporary social justice campaign came via the tellingly labeled "New Georgia Project – Affordable Care Act" that Abrams and her allies set up in 2013 to help poor people get benefits under President Obama's 2010 health care law. Georgia Republicans had not only blocked federal funding to expand Medicaid to the near-poor, but also imposed hard-to-meet rules on "navigators" who were supposed to encourage sign-ups for subsidized private insurance. Realizing that many Georgians would not get help, Abrams set up that first iteration of what would eventually become the New Georgia Project (NGP) voter outreach operation to hire "local community members to knock on more than twenty thousand doors and make more than 180,000 phone calls" across 39 nonurban as well as urban counties to "explain health insurance to families who'd never had the option before" (Abrams 2020, 48; Traister 2020).

Once deployed, NGP field workers generated political insights as well as insurance enrollments. On the ground, many people did not understand the state government's role. Confused that Obama might be denying them access to his own reform, people had to be educated about how the GOP-run state government distorted implementation and why it might matter to vote *specifically for Democrats*. Bitter prior experiences had led Blacks to conclude that elections were futile; and in some districts, constituents who knew representatives through local reputations or personal ties might not have noticed switches from Democratic to Republican affiliations. Organizers learned a crucial lesson lost to consultants who presume poor Black people will support Democrats: To connect the dots between partisan control of government and policy changes, ordinary Georgians needed to hear things spelled out by trusted people – not just once, or during a single election cycle, but again and again.

By the end of 2013, the mission of the New Georgia Project was enlarged to include voter registration and education (Abrams 2020), and thereafter Abrams’s well-honed penchant for seeding new projects proceeded on two parallel (if often interconnected) tracks. In addition to continuing efforts to beef up the capacities of the state Democratic Party, Abrams helped found, inspire, and fund a bevy of non-profit civic organizations, some 501(c)(3)s devoted to nonpartisan voter registration and issue education and others 501(c)(4)s or PACs that could engage in frank partisan outreach, including ongoing leadership training and voter contacting. Abrams-linked organizational vehicles and resource flows are complex, and compilations in Appendix A represent our best effort to summarize undertakings ordered chronologically, starting before the New Georgia Project and moving through Abrams’s final years as legislative leader and her efforts during and after the 2017-18 run for governor.

Findings about organizational creations and revisions of pre-existing missions show that Abrams and her advisors repeatedly updated tactics for enlarging and engaging new voting constituencies. In addition to repurposing the NGP in 2014, Abrams set up a Voter Access Institute to mobilize voters about Medicaid expansion and build partnerships with local issue organizing. This Institute later became the nonprofit framework for the assorted “Fair Fight” projects launched after Abrams fell short of winning the governorship in 2018. Nonprofit organizations directly founded or run by Abrams and close associates have been intertwined with one another and at least loosely associated with Democratic Party organs or campaigns.⁵ In some instances these relationships are more direct – NGP employs some individuals who also serve as volunteer Democratic Party county chairs on their own time (Neighbors on Call 2021). Good government watchdogs naturally criticized connections between formally separate projects. But Abrams had training and experience as a topflight lawyer specializing in tax-exempt organizations, so she knew how to set up legally compliant projects and keep organizational books and leaderships separate enough to pass muster when Republicans inevitably mounted investigations of these efforts (Abrams 2018; see also Perry 2018).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

⁵ For example: Groh-Wargo originally consulted on campaign manager trainings for the Georgia Democratic Party before leading the New Georgia Project voter registration and the Voter Access Institute from 2014 to 2017. The Democratic Party of Georgia executive director from 2014 to 2019 went on to serve as CEO of Fair Count.

Not only did Abrams encourage complementary non-profit and party-building projects, she also helped raise the necessary funds, as table 1 tracks. Although Abrams was relatively unknown in conventional party groups during her 2006 primary campaign, she displayed fundraising prowess, raising \$127,000 — about ten times the amount of her two opponents combined. Money raised was spent on direct mail and hiring community members to go with her door to door (Abrams 2018, 66; Bluestein 2018). Soon after Abrams won her first seat, Georgia House colleagues tapped her to chair “the newly created fund-raising committee for our caucus,” giving her exposure to donors and lobbyists who “normally would have ignored a legislator in her freshman term” (Abrams 2018, 164-165). This experience proved valuable when she ran to lead the caucus just two years later. By the time Abrams ran for governor in 2018, the party had expanded from two employees in 2010 to 150 employees benefitting from “\$25 million in the bank” (as quoted in Stuart 2020). Abrams later explained that she “leveraged” her House Minority Leader title to make appeals to potential rich donors such as Steve Phillips, Susan Sandler, and Tom Steyer, Georgia Soros, and other progressives in the Democracy Alliance. “I went national in a way that just had not been done by my predecessors” to boost fundraising “from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars” (as quoted in Traister 2020).

Fundraising prowess made possible not just party-building but also civic investments in an assortment of non-profits Abrams and her partners founded and, eventually, contributions to independent allied groups as well. In just six months during 2014, Abrams herself raised \$3.5 million for the New Georgia Project’s voter registration efforts, securing donor support even as the project got off the ground in fits and starts. More than \$12.5 million was raised for such projects during the critical 2013 to 2016 period before Abrams was on the ticket statewide (Abrams 2018, 54). In her book that offers career advice, Abrams instructs prospective leaders to be “aggressive about asking for investment. Fund-raising is essential to success” (Abrams 2018, 122).

For Georgia reformers, Abrams’s cultivation of a few maverick national funders was critical, because presidential campaigns and national mainstream Democratic honchos invested very little prior to huge sums spent on Jon Ossoff’s 2017 special-election campaign and Abrams’s 2018 governor campaign (Martin and Shorey 2017). National party and liberal resources flowed much more generously into North Carolina. In 2016, for instance, Democratic presidential contender Hillary Clinton came nearly as close to winning Georgia as North Carolina. While her campaign and aligned PACs spent \$33

million on North Carolina television and radio advertising from April 5, 2015, to November 7, 2016, it allocated only \$2.5 million to the Peach State.

As we have learned, politically ambitious statewide social justice campaigns grew from different origins in both North Carolina and Georgia. By 2014, these movements faced obstacles from increasingly hard-right Republicans in control of state governments and, in response, launched new efforts to mobilize voters to tip the scales toward Democrats in critical statewide contests. Have their endeavors paid off? Those are the issues to which we now turn.

MOVEMENT GEOGRAPHIES AND POLITICAL PAYOFFS

Deciphering the political impact of social movements is one of the most challenging tasks researchers can undertake. Definitive evidence is hard to come by, true for our study as well, yet we have made progress by linking geo-codable data about reformers' organizing activities to electoral shifts. For North Carolina, our findings suggest that the Barber movement – despite its stress on advancing participation and prospects for lower-income urban and nonurban poor people, especially Blacks – actually boosted progressive metropolitan liberalism and reinforced increasing Democratic Party reliance on college-educated voters. For Georgia, available evidence suggests that Abrams-orchestrated efforts have been more broadly successful at boosting vote shares for Democrats, not just around economically booming Atlanta but also in secondary cities and some less prosperous small-town areas with large Black populations.

Dual North Carolina Networks at Cross Purposes

In North Carolina, as we have seen, Barber's Forward Together Moral Movement grew by connecting the state NAACP conference and its more than 100 local branches with a newly fashioned coalition of organizations advocating for various causes and constituencies in state politics. This linkage could have strengthened liberal and Democratic Party politics across regions and urban-rural divides, but our analysis suggests that this has not happened in the electoral sphere.

Earlier (see figure 5 above) we tracked the growth of the NAACP-led coalition of left-leaning “partner” groups pledged to jointly co-sponsor the annual HKonJ marches and petition the state legislature in Raleigh. To learn more about this alliance, we gathered the addresses of groups that joined at various junctures. As figure 6 shows, from the start and increasingly over the years, most coalition partners were headquartered in the Research Triangle. A minority of partner groups were headquartered in the other major metro areas, and just a smattering (mostly NAACP branches, church congregations, or union locals) were based in non-metro towns or counties. Even if some groups have branches or sponsor activities throughout the state, the NAACP partnership has always been most densely networked in the Triangle.

[FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

By 2012-14, Forward Together efforts reached a new crescendo with swelling participation in the annual marches, media-oriented tours to stage rallies around the state, and nationally publicized civil disobedience sit-ins during the Moral Mondays campaign of 2013. Using social media sources, newspaper articles, and an interview with a knowledgeable leader active in 2014, we have been able to assemble rich locational data for several kinds of Moral Movement efforts, enabling probes of how those efforts relate to Democratic electoral fortunes.

One set of sources documents Moral Mondays protestors arrested during sit-ins at the General Assembly between April and July 2013. At that time, Civitas Institute staffers compiled profiles for 820 of the almost 1000 arrestees, drawing from arrest records and other public sources. Summaries show that arrestees were 57% female, 86% white, and mostly older (57% above the age of 55). Many were active or retired ministers, professors, teachers, business owners, public-sector workers, and nonprofit employees; and at least four-fifths of identified arrestees were registered Democrats. Civitas sleuths also found organizational affiliations for 324 arrestees, indicating involvements with NAACP branches, unions, student groups, civil rights groups – especially ties to organizations that were long-time partners in the Forward Together coalition. Lastly, home addresses available for most arrestees indicate that more than two-thirds came from the major metropolitan regions – about three-fifths from the Triangle counties alone. Another 9% of arrestees hailed from eight additional counties with medium-sized secondary cities of 50,000 people or more, while just 20% came from non-urban counties. All of these

arrestee data reinforce the picture of the Barber movement's strong reliance on progressive-minded metropolitan activists.

In the pivotal 2012 to 2014 period, Reverend Barber also conducted statewide tours to publicize issues and visit NAACP branches – including a 27-city “Poverty Tour” in 2012 and a tour of 26 places across the state to extend the Raleigh Moral Mondays movement's visibility in 2013. Despite such travel, 46% of the stops and rallies were held in secondary-city or major metropolitan areas located in just 18 of North Carolina's 100 counties. Again, these findings make sense, given what we have learned about the Barber movements stress on public moral persuasion, fostered by the sorts of high-profile media coverage likely in metro and city venues.

[FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

Most important for possible electoral impacts were efforts undertaken through the NAACP's 2014 “Moral Freedom Summer” campaign. After earlier efforts to counter GOP legislation had failed, and as the November 2014 elections loomed, the North Carolina movement prioritized voting and briefly turned to field tactics similar to those the Abrams alliance would pursue in more sustained and better-resourced ways in Georgia (Yeoman 2014). Paid Moral Freedom Summer organizers lived and worked in their adopted counties for several months, educating and registering voters and supporting local NAACP branch-building. This was the most consistent and geographically widespread effort the Barber movement ever mounted, with full or shared deployments in 39 of North Carolina's 100 counties – including in 27 of 82 nonurban counties. Even so, organizing tilted overall toward metro and urban counties, with full or half-time field workers installed in seven out of nine secondary-city counties and in five of ten counties in North Carolina's three metro clusters (see figure 7). Notably as well, voter outreach was not explicitly tied to Democratic Party campaigns or party-building efforts, but instead embodied Reverend Barber's plan to “win by changing the conversation for every candidate and party” and educating “voters about how candidates have voted or committed to vote on issues that are part of our shared moral agenda” (Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove 2016, 124, 128).

Moral Freedom Summer outreach did not achieve any discernible electoral impact. New voter sign-ups proved elusive, as a sympathetic reporter explained in a story about efforts in a poor, disproportionately Black rural county, where a young male organizer got a polite response but signed up only a few new voters – in line with the reported bottom line that Moral Freedom Summer achieved only

about 4,000 new registrations overall, far short of the originally trumpeted 50,000 goal (Yeoman 2015). Compared to Georgia, North Carolina already had relatively high levels of Black voter registration, because reforms back in 2007 had enabled a record number of African American voters to sign up to vote for Barack Obama both times (Joyce 2010). As of 2014, many voters of color surely remained unregistered, but the bigger challenge across the state was persuading lower-income, younger, and Black and Hispanic North Carolinians to turn out to vote for Democrats in actual elections. Yet when November 2014 rolled around, statewide turnout was very low and incumbent Democratic Senator Kay Hagan lost badly to her GOP challenger. Hagan remained just as reliant as Democrats before her on votes from the Research Triangle; she attracted smaller two-party Democratic vote shares compared to 2012 in both Metro Triad and secondary-city counties – the very areas where Barber events and organizing had been most intensely focused.

Our statistical analyses paint the same picture. Using multiple linear regression, we probed for significant movement contributors to 2012 to 2014 Black turnout retention and changes in Democratic two-party vote shares in non-metropolitan North Carolina counties, with demographic controls (see Appendix B for a full presentation). Our models included all 90 counties (those beyond the Research Triangle, Charlotte area, and Piedmont Triad) and measured Barber organizing with binary indicators of whether counties hosted Moral Freedom Summer organizers in 2014, hosted one or more tour events in 2012 and 2013, and/or had active NAACP branches in 2016, the most proximate year for which we have data. The models also control for county population densities, median income, and demographic composition. We find no statistically significant relationships between Moral Movement events or organizer deployments and Black turnout retention or for gains in Democratic vote shares between the 2012 and 2014 elections. As a robustness check, we re-ran our model excluding the eight secondary city counties and examining the period from 2010 to 2014 and got similar results. We also looked for longer-term electoral impacts from 2012 to 2016 and 2012 to 2020 and found no evidence of significant Moral Movement effects.

Longer-term impacts would have been surprising to find because the North Carolina NAACP's summer 2014 foray into electorally relevant field organizing was not expanded or sustained for anything like the multiple years it took Abrams's coalition to entice more participation from lower-income, especially minority voters. Instead, after 2014 the Forward Together coalition turned back to urban protests and annual marches pushing for their longstanding progressive policy menu. Nor is it clear that

the coalition could have raised the resources necessary for sustained organizing, because Reverend Barber never developed the sort of big-donor ties we have documented for Stacey Abrams in Georgia. Indeed, Barber’s recurrent denunciations of wealthy interests and big money in politics probably made him unmotivated to try.

National Democrats, meanwhile, continued their usual pattern of pouring short-term resources into North Carolina, hoping, but failing, to tip the scales in each successive presidential and Senate contests. Tar Heel Democrats did score one important victory in 2016, when Democratic gubernatorial candidate Roy Cooper eked out a miniscule margin of victory over GOP Governor Pat McCrory. Activists and some observers argue that GOPer McCrory was weakened by Moral Movement protests against his decision to sign into law a nationally controversial anti-transgender “bathroom bill” passed by the GOP legislature (Rubin 2016; Schulson 2017a). The NAACP coalition’s emphasis on mutual support for various issue causes may have helped to blunt right-wing anti-LBGTQ appeals to Black churchgoers. However, more skeptical observers point to simmering controversies over tolls on an expressway north of Charlotte as the reason McCrory lost more than enough votes in those suburbs to account for Cooper’s 10,277-vote margin of victory (Boraks 2016).

If the Moral Movement plausibly did make a difference in that very close 2016 governor race, we might conclude that a publicity oriented, mostly metropolitan-centered movement can indeed influence elections by “changing the public conversation.” Yet Republicans who still control the North Carolina legislature have remained unmoved, and the Barber movement has been disappointed about Governor Cooper’s unwillingness to champion redistributive priorities aimed at helping Blacks and the poor. Meanwhile, Cooper’s relatively good electoral fortunes across the urban-rural divide have not transferred to other statewide Democratic contenders, who are increasingly reliant on metropolitan and college-degreed constituencies that are not quite enough to eke out victories. Black voter turnout has stalled or receded, especially in secondary cities and nonurban areas with the highest proportions of eligible Black voters.⁶ Whether registered to vote or not, many rural and urban North Carolina Blacks

⁶From 2014 to 2020, Democratic two-party vote shares declined by 0.21% on average across four secondary-city counties with high shares of Black voters versus an increase for the Democratic share of 1.57% in secondary-city counties with considerably lower Black vote shares. In some of those places, like New Hanover (around Wilmington) and Buncombe (around Asheville), college-educated whites moved toward Democrats – and, indeed, statewide, county shares of college-degreed eligible voters are a better predictor of Democratic margins than county shares of Black eligibles. The reverse is true in Georgia.

have not been made aware that Democrats are the alternative to the “immoral” extremists so eloquently condemned by the Barber-inspired Forward Together movement.

Boosting Democratic Turnout in Georgia

Social justice campaigners in Georgia’s Abrams-orchestrated network have taken a more electorally focused approach to empowering Black and lower-income people. In Georgia as in North Carolina, Black vote shares for Democrats surged in the Obama contests of 2008 and 2012, but thereafter receded. Only since 2014 have both registration levels and turnout moved upward for voting-age Black Georgians – contributing to improved Democratic prospects. The key issue is whether these trends are plausibly related to voter outreach encouraged by the Abrams network.

We should be clear about Georgia electoral trends we will not gainsay or explore in depth. Many pundits have pointed out, accurately, that the biggest swings toward top-of-the-ticket Democratic candidates in Georgia have come among Trump-averse voters in the suburban counties surrounding Atlanta (Bacon 2020; Cohn, Conlen, and Smart 2020). That is very true – and there are many indicators that the suburban swing has also been helped along by Abrams’s appeal as a gubernatorial candidate in 2018 as well as her network’s continuing outreach to suburban voters of all races. Setting aside these shifts, we focus here on the rest of the state beyond the nine counties that make up greater Atlanta. This makes sense for two reasons: Democrats cannot quite win statewide with only votes from the Atlanta region.⁷ And Abrams has always prioritized *statewide* outreach – including to non-participating potential Black voters in secondary cities and small-town or rural counties.

We could try to track county-level voter registration changes from the end of 2013, when the Abrams projects turned from policy to voter outreach. But this step is unlikely to bear fruit because, even though Abrams has never fully acknowledged it, New Georgia Project efforts for November 2014 did not come close to meeting their declared goal of newly registering at least 120,000 voters. Independent observers estimate that at most about 46,000 were actually signed up by then, with perhaps 18,000 more added to the rolls soon afterwards (Blau 2015a, 2015b; Abrams 2020, 59). In terms of

⁷ Between 2008 and 2021, the share of total votes from Atlanta and its suburbs has ranged from 41.9% to 43.2% -- less than enough for statewide Democratic candidates to rely exclusively on Atlanta and its suburbs for votes.

attaining original bold goals, NGP's first big push was only modestly more successful than simultaneous Moral Freedom Summer efforts in North Carolina – and neither made any immediate electoral difference.

Still, the 2014 Democratic Senatorial debacles in both states mark an analytically interesting fork in the road – because, afterwards, North Carolina's Barber coalition pulled back from sustained voter field outreach, while the Georgia Abrams network launched revised expanded efforts. Many NGP projects for 2014 had been outsourced to paid consultants favored by the national Democratic Party (Torres 2016). After the shortcomings of that approach were appreciated, the Abrams network raised resources and provided trained organizers for sustained, in-state voter-contacting, including new projects to reach Asian-Americans and Hispanics as well as outreach to African Americans in regional cities and surrounding rural counties. Such efforts geared up for 2016, gained steam during Abrams's run for governor in 2017-18, and then, crucially, did not stop. In North Carolina, Reverend Barber resigned his NAACP post in 2017 to move “onto the national stage” to lead the Poor People's Campaign advocacy organization (Quillin 2017). In contrast, after her near-miss for Georgia governor in 2018, Stacey Abrams declined invitations to go national and chose to remain focused on expanding her state's Democratic electorate (Traister 2020). Persistence matters.

Mid-course corrections after 2014 likely enabled Georgia's in-state organizers to hit future voter registration benchmarks (see New Georgia Project 2017, 2018), but registration was far from the only objective. Once registered, people must be repeatedly encouraged actually to submit ballots for each election, maybe using new procedures when Republicans repeatedly change the rules. Abrams-inspired organizing therefore stressed weaving continuous, community level ties. From a bird's eye perspective, this approach seems to have paid off. As figure 8 shows, Black turnout shares as a percentage of the state voting populations of North Carolina and Georgia tracked one another closely through 2014 (with Georgia's absolute share a bit higher because Blacks are about 30% rather than 20% of the eligible voter population). But after 2014, the trajectories diverge, as Black Georgians became considerably more likely to go to the polls and made up a growing share of the overall state electorate.

[FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE]

The first full-blown test came in the near-miss Abrams run for governor in the 2017 Democratic primary and the 2018 general election. Door-knocking for that campaign started “more than a year

before Election Day,” including in secondary cities and non-urban areas (Gibson 2021). Although Abrams did not quite match raw Obama-era vote totals in many key places (Regan-Porter [2018] 2019), not only were new voters registered, the Abrams network demonstrated it could boost the nonwhite share of the statewide electorate to 40% (Gibson 2021). As political scientist Andra Gillespie (2018) concludes, that gubernatorial campaign showed that southern Democrats do not have to keep nominating “centrist white candidates,” because Black candidates can become fully competitive by engaging new voters.

Two years later, Joe Biden eked out a narrow presidential win over Trump in Georgia, claiming modestly improved vote shares from suburbanites of all races after a campaign that stressed his partnership with the nation’s first Black president, Barack Obama, and proclaimed goals more progressive than Hillary Clinton in 2016. Because the 2020 election season unfolded amid the COVID-19 pandemic, both media accounts and our research interviews indicate that Democratic voter outreach in Georgia (as well as nationwide) relied more heavily than originally planned on media and virtual contacts – and this may help explain why Biden’s Black vote share was not much better than Abrams in 2018. Still, Abrams-encouraged Democrats did what they needed to do to secure Georgia for Biden and force two Senate runoffs.

Democratic victories in the January runoff may have been when the previously built Abrams network bore fruit – by facilitating extraordinary Democratic turnout, especially among Blacks (Cohn, Conlen, and Smart 2020; Fraga, Peskowitz, and Szewczyk 2021). Georgia runoffs usually see sharp turnout drops, with Democrats falling off more and thus allowing Republicans to improve their margins in overtime (Rakich et al. 2021). But January 2021 brought a momentous switch. Although GOP turnout carried over from November at an impressive 89.2% rate, historically much more than enough to win, Democratic turnout carried over at an unprecedented 92.5% rate. For Warnock and Ossoff, even more than for Biden in November, victories were grounded in very strong statewide Black voter engagement – beyond as well as within the greater Atlanta metroplex.

By all accounts, from November 2020 to January 5, 2021, all-hands-on-deck voter contacting occurred – both through the state Democratic Party working with the Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff campaigns and through the New Georgia Project’s field outreach operations, first implanted in 2015 and operating by 2020-21 in tandem with allied nonprofit and community organizing groups. Those allies

included Black Votes Matter, 1000 Women Strong, the Albany Voters Coalition, Southerners on New Ground, the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, the Working Families Party, and a coalition of grassroots groups called ProGeorgia (1000 Women Strong: GA Impact Report 2021; Andrews 2020; Gibson 2021; Madeson 2021; North 2020; Barber 2020; Rosenfeld 2021; see also Democratic Party of Georgia 2021). For the 2021 Senate runoffs, party and civic group organizers and volunteers threw off previous pandemic limits and went door to door while also phone banking and engaging on social media. We know that NGP worked not just with allied political operations, but also with community-based associations such as those linking Black churches. Outreach to rural areas also took creative forms, such as activating networks of Black funeral home directors in southwest Georgia (1000 Women Strong: GA Impact Report 2021). Demographics did not change from November to January, but the intensity of on the ground field organizing through previously implanted NGP and community networks certainly did.

[FIGURE 9 ABOUT HERE]

To set up statistical tests for electoral effects comparable to those we presented earlier for North Carolina, we looked for county-level indications of both runoff-specific organizing and previously well-established voter outreach capacities stretching beyond the greater Atlanta region. For run-off specific outreach variables, we identified the places candidates Ossoff and Warnock visited on their most-publicized statewide tours.⁸ Likewise, we know where the Democratic Party of Georgia opened field offices for that stretch ([removed] 2021).⁹ For previously well-established field organizing capacities, our best indications come from the New Georgia Project’s “2015-16 Prospectus” prepared for appeals to major donors at the time when the Project revamped its plans and capacities following the 2014 shortfalls. This document describes plans for sustained voter outreach from regional field offices headquartered in or near all but two of Georgia’s secondary cities. From extensive media searches and job listings, we know that all the regional NGP field headquarters have remained active hubs, doing outreach in surrounding non-urban counties as well in the home counties. Accordingly, we designated

⁸ Making more visits to Black Belt and South Georgia places than to the Atlanta suburbs, Ossoff and/or Warnock visited all secondary city counties – and many smaller cities, towns, and counties, reaping local coverage for claims they are “very concerned about rural Georgia” (see Jones and Reh 2020).

⁹ Our information on the location of dozens of Democratic Party of Georgia field offices comes from a student paper by [removed], “Georgia on Our Minds: How Ossoff and Warnock Achieved Record Turnout in 2021” ([University Name], May 9, 2021).

counties that either house regional NGP offices or are geographically adjacent to them as having an NGP presence. This measure is a plausible proxy for the distinctively Abrams-network ground-level outreach that built on capacities in place well before the 2020-21 runoff sprint.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

We use multiple linear regression to explore the possible impacts of these organizing measures on shifts in Black turnout and Democratic two-party vote shares from November 2020 to January 2021 in non-metropolitan Georgia counties, while controlling for demographic differences between these counties. Specifically, we control for differences in population density, median per capita income, higher education shares, and Black population shares. The models presented in table 2 includes all 150 non-metro Georgia counties beyond Atlanta and its suburbs, though the results are consistent when we exclude the nine counties with secondary cities. The results are also robust to the inclusion of an interaction term between hosting or being proximate to an NGP field office in 2015 and hosting a Democratic Party field office for the runoff (see Appendix B).

Our results indicate that Democratic victories in January 2021 probably do owe in part to previously established Abrams network capacities beyond as well as within the greater Atlanta metroplex. We find positive relationships between counties hosting or being in proximity to NGP regional field offices and our two outcomes of interest – namely, Black turnout retention and Democratic vote share changes from November 2020 to January 2021. These relationships are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Holding all other covariates constant, counties where NGP field offices were established in 2015 are predicted to exhibit a 2.0% increase in Black turnout retention and a 0.57% increase in Democratic vote share between the 2020 general and 2021 runoff elections.

By contrast, for the shifts of interest, we find no statistically significant effects (at the 0.05 level) from hosting a Democratic Party of Georgia field office for the runoff, or hosting a December 2020 stop from the Ossoff or Warnock campaigns. If anything, Democratic Party field office locations are slightly negatively associated with Black turnout retention between the 2020 general and 2021 runoff elections. As it happens, most Democratic Party field offices beyond Atlanta were installed in places where Blacks were lower shares of eligible voters, and very few non-urban Democratic outposts were in counties with or near NGP headquarters – perhaps signaling an informal division of labor between the party and allied nonprofits. Party outreach may have been more focused on whiter areas, while nonprofit efforts by the

NGP and others was more about engaging potential Black voters. Our results suggest that Abrams-inspired and funded organization-building since 2015 has indeed furthered Georgia activists' hopes to tip the arc of history through social justice – specifically by facilitating more robust and persistent Black voter turnout to elect Democrats.

THE BOTTOM LINE – FOR NOW

Over the last fifteen years, remarkable statewide movements for racial and economic justice grew in North Carolina and Georgia under the guidance of two galvanizing Black leaders. In North Carolina, Barber took charge of an NAACP conference and network of branches, the preeminent civil rights organization in the state, and proceeded to link that NAACP federation to an alliance of already existing, mostly professionally directed non-profit, nonpartisan policy organizations. The interlinked organizations involved in North Carolina's social justice movement were previously well-established outside of North Carolina Democratic Party organs, even if some participants overlap. Georgia was not as densely populated with professional non-profits or networked NAACP branches, leaving space for a new civil rights champion to build outward from the legislature – first by building organizational capacity for Democrats and helping nonprofit organizations to register, educate, motivate, and turn out actual voters. Of course, nothing predetermined that a Stacey Abrams would arise to lead such a network, but when biographical ambition met partisan crisis, the Georgia Democratic latticework inside and outside the legislature offered a statewide framework and a potentially growing constituency of Black and other citizens interested in supporting social justice reforms.

Contrasting visions of how to build power have animated these reform campaigns. Barber's movement uses marches, protests, and public events to attract media attention, in order to move public opinion and thereby press politicians and leaders of all stripes to aid the poor and minorities by adopting a progressive 14-point policy agenda. As sociologist Kenneth Andrews explains, the Barber movement deploys non-partisan Biblical rhetoric as the best way “to reclaim the religious high ground” and “blunt the fact that the movement's demands are uncompromising” (as quoted in Yeoman 2015). In Georgia, by contrast, Abrams herself and the various organizations and alliances she has encouraged hold that winning elections and changing officeholders are the best ways to redirect government. Although Abrams does not say so outright, the efforts she has led presume that voter outreach and education can be more effective over time than mounting big public protests and focusing just on issues. As they seek

to newly empower Blacks and other minorities and draw previously uninvolved or erratic voters to the polls, Abrams and her allies frankly align with mainstream-liberal Democratic Party campaigns and messages. Hardly blunted or blurred, their messages are bold and focused on articulating broadly popular partisan goals.

Our findings suggest that the Abrams approach has made more headway in shifting the balance of political power and possibilities. In contrast to what many social movement scholars presume, if the goal is to engage formerly excluded or nonparticipating minority citizens, it can pay off to link civic groups rooted in specific communities to a reformed, well-resourced state Democratic Party and associated candidate campaigns – especially if leaders keep a majoritarian focus, persist for years, and learn from defeats and set-backs along the way. Movement effects in elections are likely to be bigger and more enduring if organizational capacities are persistently deployed on the ground. Bursts of media-worthy protests are unlikely to suffice.

By tracking years of organizational efforts in geospatial terms, we have cast new light on the recent election outcomes that surprised so many 2020 pundits. Given what we have found, it is not surprising that, by now, many Democrats and civil rights activists in North Carolina are trying to learn lessons from Georgia reformers to propel a “New North Carolina Project” that can reach large pockets of rural and urban Blacks and other racial minorities who do not vote regularly or ever (Neighbors on Call 2021; New North Carolina Project 2021). Nevertheless, a word of caution is in order. Although we believe our analysis illuminates recent electoral trajectories, we do not claim our study points to settled trends. Elections in Georgia and North Carolina remain on the knife’s edge and could go either way in coming cycles – especially because Republicans and highly mobilized white activists are looking for ways to reverse Georgia Democratic gains and prevent imitations elsewhere.

Given the overall slack in US electoral participation, even slight shifts in citizen engagement through new mobilizations or backlashes against previous mobilizations can turn election outcomes from losses to wins, from victories to defeats – leading to 180-degree policy shifts in the current polarized environment. We cannot predict what will happen next in Georgia or North Carolina, but we believe our examination of movement-party trajectories in these key states has added insights beyond instant post-2020 accounts. Most fundamentally, this comparison of the Barber and Abrams-orchestrated social justice campaigns highlights the high stakes in choices about electoral and party alignments. In

the current era of US politics, civic movements on the left and right that frankly and persistently align with a revamped and re-energized political party seem to make more headway than movements devoted to orchestrating protests outside or “above” partisan politics. That may be especially true for social justice campaigns like the two we have examined here, whose overriding purpose is to expand citizen participation, produce sustained shifts in political power, and leverage government to address the needs of long-marginalized citizens.

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Table 1. Fundraising for Abrams Candidate Campaigns and Nonprofit Voter Projects

Time Period	Amounts Abrams raised as candidate	Amounts raised for nonprofits Abrams founded	Total Sums
Career in Georgia House, 2005-10	\$285,010.22	X	\$285,010.22
Minority Leader initial period, 2011-12	\$249,679.00	X	\$249,679.00
Organizational development, 2013-16	\$643,398.39	\$12,547,048	\$13,190,446.39
Gubernatorial bid, 2017-18	\$27,664,188.57	\$5,574,034	\$33,238,222.57

Sources: Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission, authors' searches of candidate campaign reports filed under Stacey Yvonne Abrams, not including any donations she solicited to the state party or caucus. Total amounts for Abrams's founded nonprofits determined from authors' searches of IRS 990s for Third Sector Development, the Voter Access Institute, New Georgia Project, and New Georgia Project Action Fund.

Table 2. Outreach Beyond Atlanta and Changes in Black Turnout and Democratic Margins in the 2021 Georgia Senate Runoffs

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Black Turnout Retention	Change in Dem Vote Share
	(1)	(2)
Dem Party Field Office, 2020	-1.647*	0.051
	(0.834)	(0.175)
NGP Field Office, 2015ff	2.002**	0.567***
	(0.780)	(0.164)
Ossoff-Warnock Tour Stop	-1.515	-0.188
	(1.041)	(0.218)
Black Reg %, 2020	0.024	-0.002
	(0.018)	(0.004)
Change in Black Reg %, 2020-21	-0.050	-0.014
	(0.077)	(0.016)
Black CVAP as % of Total, 2019	0.076***	0.003
	(0.020)	(0.004)
% of Total CVAP (25+) with BA	0.108	-0.007
	(0.078)	(0.016)
Median Per Capita Income	0.005	-0.041***
	(0.068)	(0.014)
Population Density	0.001	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.0005)
Constant	83.358***	2.109***
	(1.842)	(0.387)
Observations	150	150
R ²	0.248	0.231
Adjusted R ²	0.199	0.181
Residual Std. Error (df = 140)	3.345	0.702
F Statistic (df = 9; 140)	5.117***	4.663***

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 1. Gaps between Democratic and Republican Vote Shares in Key Statewide Elections in Georgia and North Carolina, 2008 to 2021

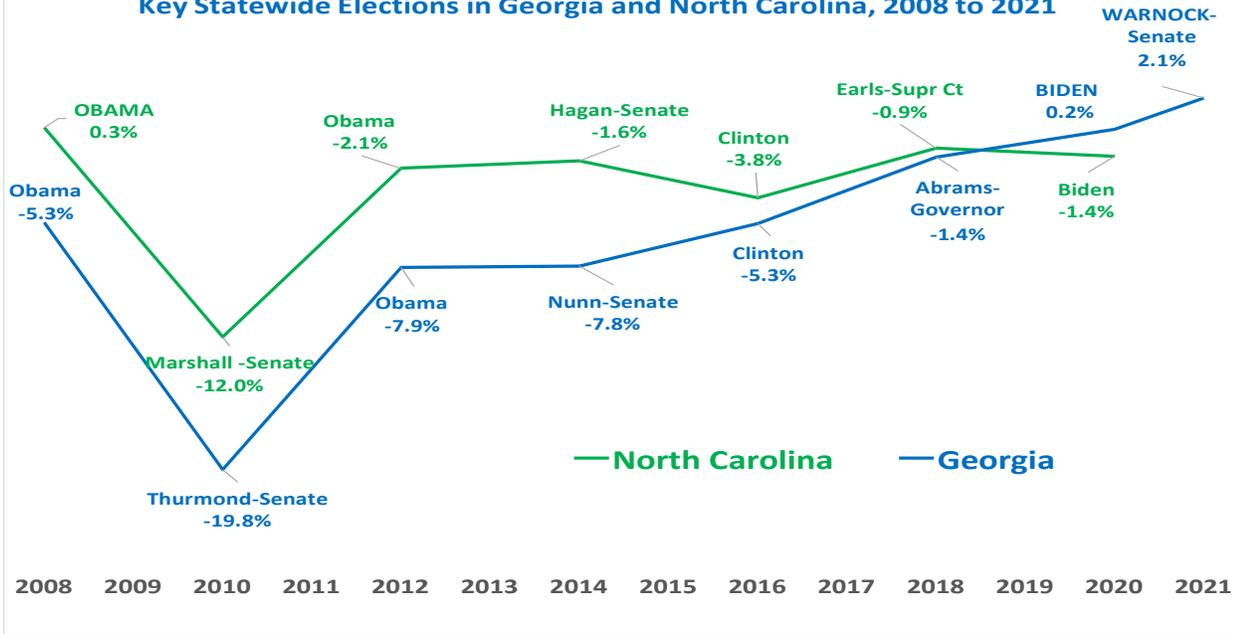
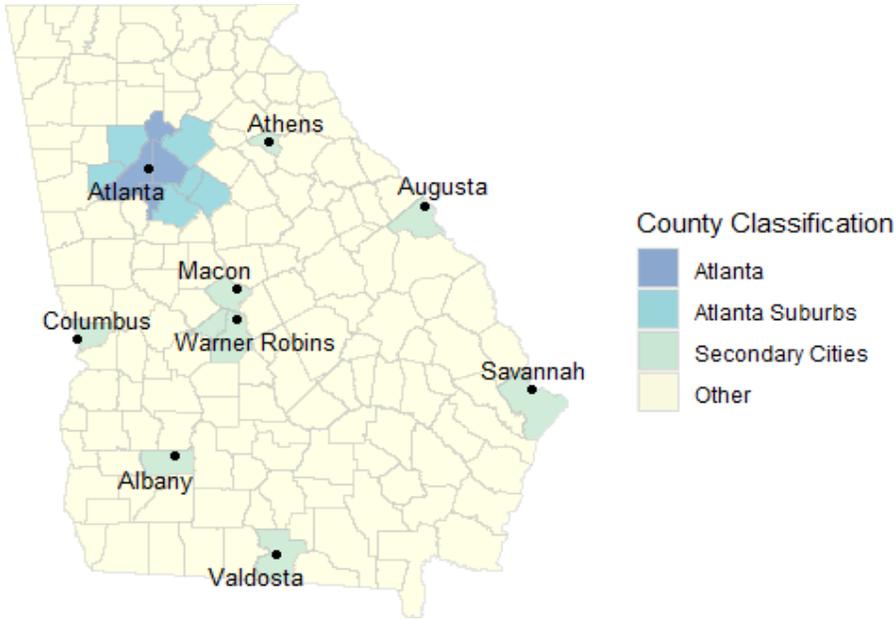


Figure 2. Metro Areas, Secondary Cities, and Nonurban Counties in Georgia and North Carolina

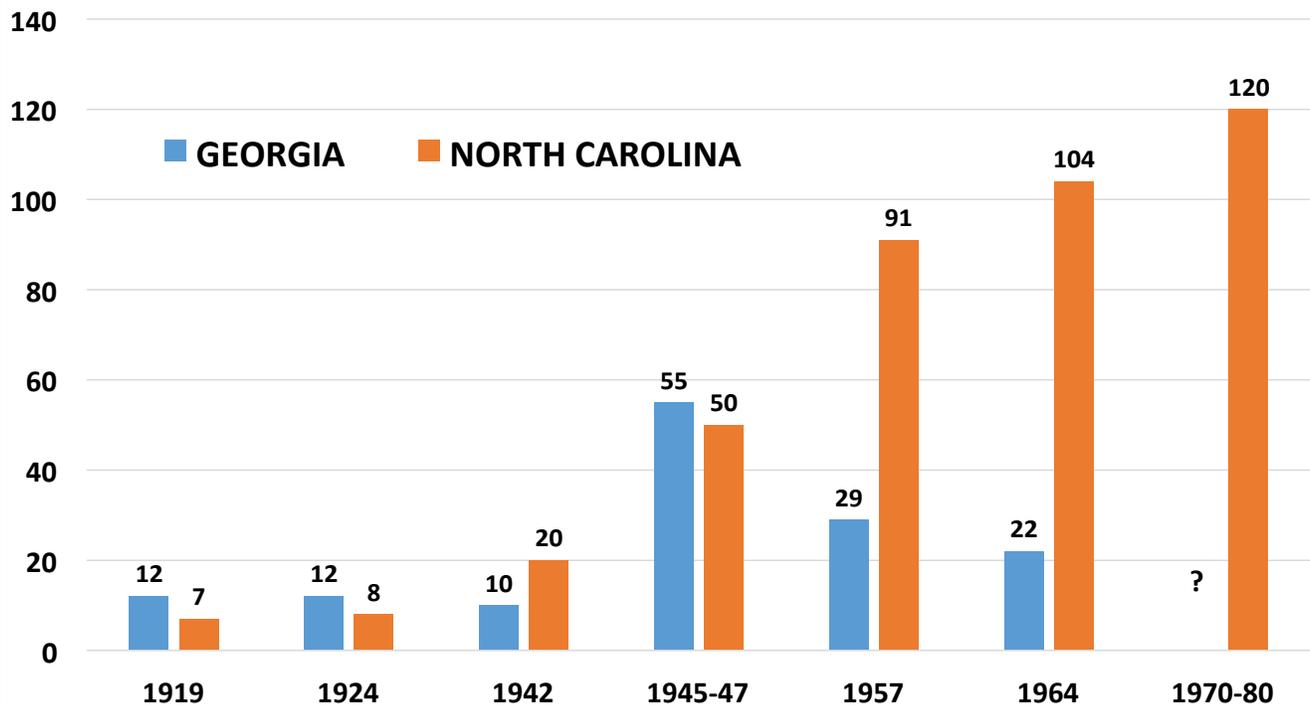
GEORGIA



NORTH CAROLINA

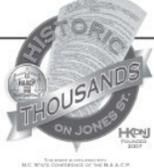


Figure 3. NAACP Branches in Georgia & North Carolina



Sources: Most estimates come from the Mapping American Social Movements Project, University of Washington; additional North Carolina estimates come from Raymond Gavins, "The NAACP in North Carolina during the Age of Segregation," pp.105-25 in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, ed. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991); and Raymond Gavins, "National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill:

Figure 4. The North Carolina NAACP Coalition: Flyer for First March and the 14-Point People's Agenda



The North Carolina State NAACP invites you and your organization to

HISTORIC K(THOUSANDS) ON JONES STREET

Saturday, February 10, 2007

Arrival at 11:00 a.m., Program at 12 p.m. followed by a March to the State Legislature Building, Progress Energy Center (Old Raleigh Memorial Auditorium), 2 East South Street, Raleigh, North Carolina

HK ON J: THE PEOPLE'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In order to make substantial and progressive change in North Carolina public policy, we need a movement and not a moment.

HK on J is a call by the North Carolina NAACP to the progressive and civil rights community to come together to support 14-point public policy strategy that will begin to shift North Carolina political action in a way that will more clearly match our rhetoric with reality.

February 12, 2007 is the 98th birthday of the NAACP, in commemoration of a time when progressive whites and blacks came together to fight racial injustice and social inequality. Today, our challenges revolve around the issues of education, health, labor rights, economic empowerment, civic engagement, and criminal justice.

THE GOALS OF HK ON J ARE TO:

- Gather 50-100 people from each North Carolina county to meet in Raleigh before the General Assembly to embrace a 14-point agenda that we demand the legislature to act upon. We will insert the 14-point agenda in every political debate and discussion until they become a reality.
- Remind North Carolina that the General Assembly belongs to the people, not the powerful; to everyday folk, not just those with the money and the influence.
- Create a statewide network of the progressive and civil rights community which we will build in order to promote a progressive agenda and civil rights in North Carolina.

HK ON J WILL NOT BE A MOMENT, BUT A MOVEMENT. This event will bring hardworking, everyday people together and on March 28, 2007 the Second Annual People of Color Legislative Day where we bring hundreds of people together to lobby the General Assembly will be held.

For more information:
Visit <http://naacp.ubercn.com/> or call 1-(866)-586-6544 Today!

"OUR servants meet in OUR House. They decide how to spend OUR taxes. But their decisions have been corrupted. Rich corporations pay to play in our House. We can't match their money, but with God's Grace and your hard work, we can sure out-number them!" Please join me on February 10, 2007 in Raleigh.

Rev. Dr. William I. Barber,
President of the North Carolina State NAACP

THE PEOPLE'S AGENDA: 14 POINTS

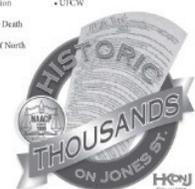
- All Children Need High Quality, Well Funded, Diverse Schools.
- Livable Wages and Support for Low Income People.
- Health Care for All.
- Redress Two Ugly Chapters in N.C.'s Racist History: The overthrow of the bi-racial 1898 Wilmington Government and the sterilization of poor, mainly Black, women from 1947-1977.
- Same Day Registration and Public Financing of Elections.
- Lift Every Historically Black College and University.
- Document and Redress 200 years of State Discrimination in Hiring and Contracting.
- Provide Affordable Housing and Stop Consumer Abuse.
- Abolish Racially Biased Death Penalty and Mandatory Sentencing Laws; Reform our Prisons.
- Put Young People to Work to Save the Environment and Fight for Environmental Justice.
- Collective Bargaining for Public Employees.
- Protect the Rights of Immigrants from Latin America and other Nations.
- Organize, Strengthen and Provide Funding For Our Civil Rights Enforcement Agencies and Statutes Now.
- Bring Our Troops Home from Iraq Now.

GROWING LIST OF HKONJ COALITION PARTNERS

- ACORN
- AFL-CIO
- Black Workers for Justice
- Carolina Justice Policy Center
- Democracy NC
- El Pueblo
- General Baptist State Convention
- Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation
- NC Association of CDCs
- NC Black Leadership Caucus
- NC Community Development Initiative
- NC Council of Churches
- NC Fair Share
- NC Institute for Minority-Even Dev
- NC Justice Center
- NC WARN
- Old North State Medical Society
- Opportunities Industrialization Center
- People of Color Day Coalition Members
- People of Faith Against the Death Penalty
- Prince Hall Grand Lodge of North Carolina
- Southern Faith, Labor and Community Alliance
- Southerners for Economic Justice
- The AME Zion Church
- Triangle Lost Generation Task Force
- Triangle Urban League
- UJ Local 150
- UFCW

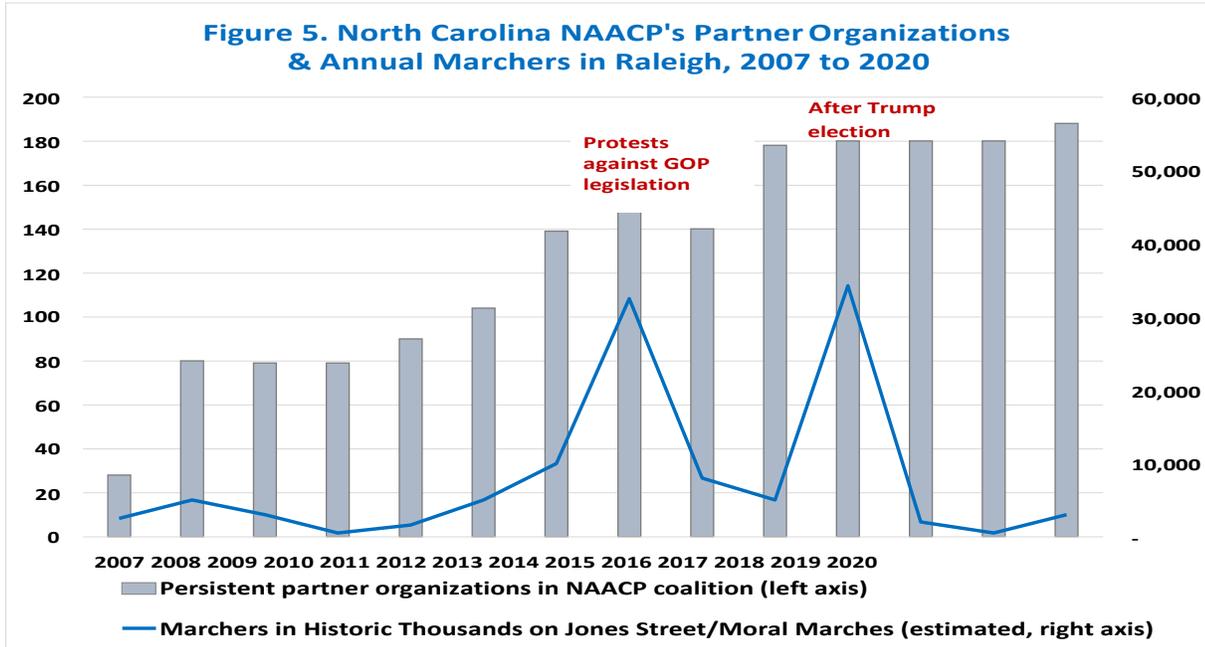
If your organization would like to endorse this event please contact the NC NAACP by January 30th.
Email: HKonJ@gmail.com or visit <http://naacp.ubercn.com/> or call 1-(866)-586-6544 Today!

For grassroots organizations that wish to sign-up for this event contact Curtis Gatewood at 919-939-3401 or curtisgatewood@minister.com



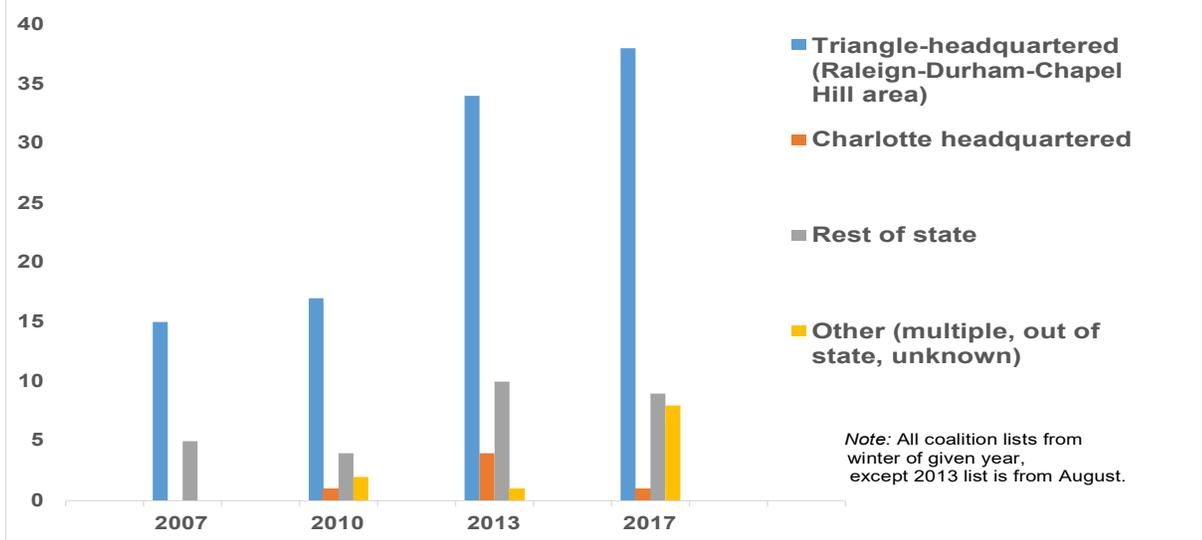
Source:
NC
Policy
Watch,

accessed March 1, 2021: <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/hkonj-flyer.pdf>



Sources: HKonJ partner organization figures from authors' tally of dated lists, accessed via Wayback archives of the state NAACP website; crowd estimates from *Raleigh News & Observer* reporting.

**Figure 6. Organizational Partners in the North Carolina NAACP's Advocacy and Annual March Coalition
Persistent Partners from given year to 2020**



Sources: Author analysis of HKonJ partner organizations dated lists, accessed via Wayback archives of the state NAACP website.

Figure 7. North Carolina Counties with Moral Freedom Summer Organizers, 2014



Figure 8. Georgia and North Carolina Black Turnout as Percent of Voting Age Citizens for Statewide Top of Ticket Races 2008 to 2020

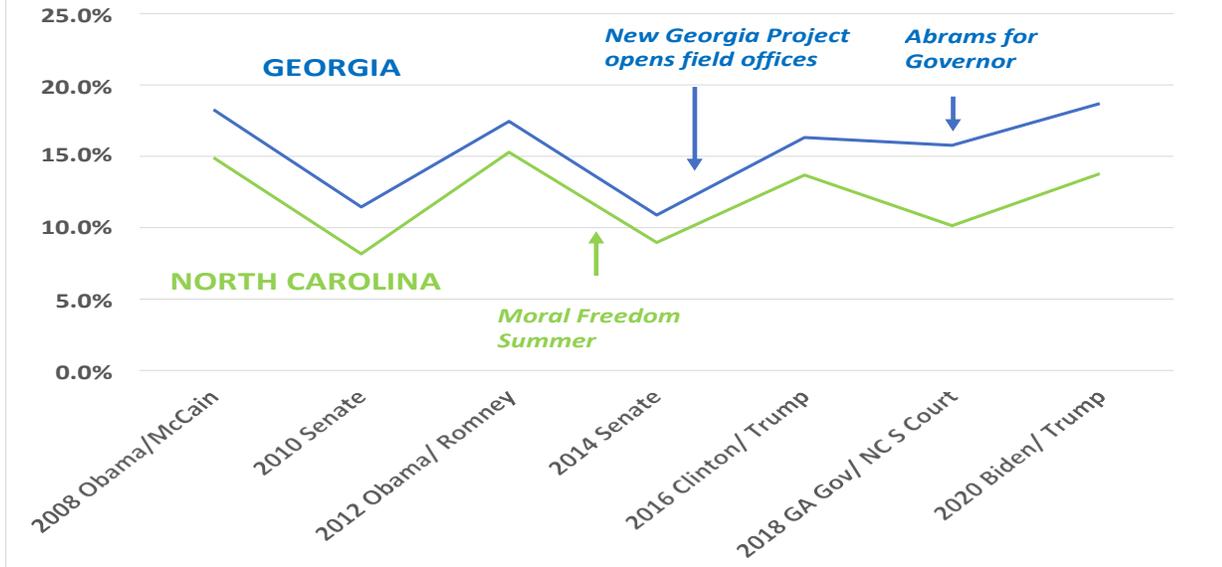
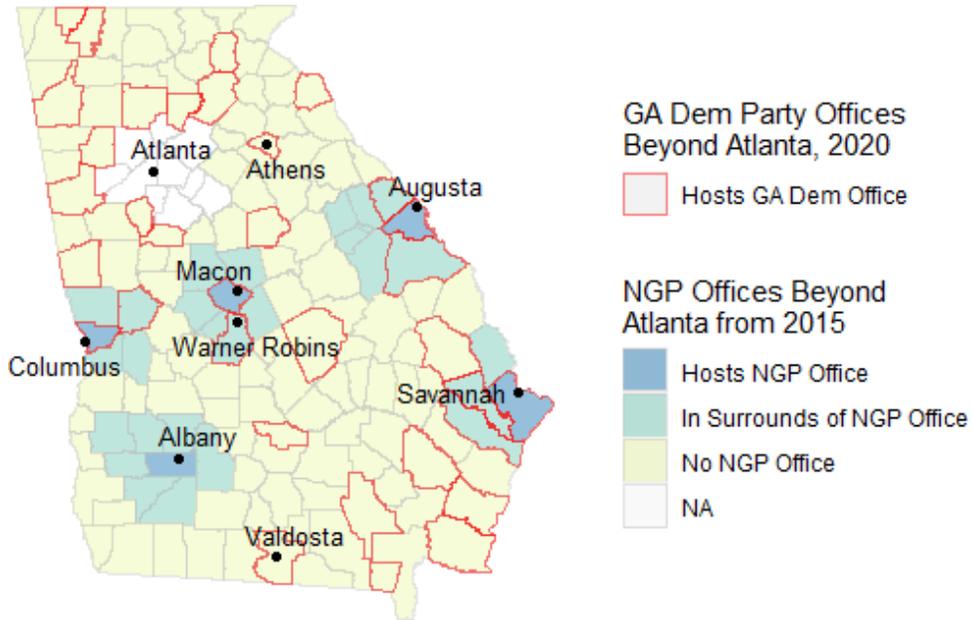


Figure 9. Democratic Party and New Georgia Project Offices Beyond Atlanta during the 2021 Georgia Senate Runoffs



APPENDIX A, part one: Organizations Started by Stacey Abrams

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Dates Active</i>	<i>Type & tax status</i>	<i>Goals/activities</i>	<i>Scope</i>	<i>Election cycles since 2014 active</i>	<i>Key Leaders</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Third Sector Development	Aug 1998 to c. March 2019	Nonprofit (501c3 by 2013)	consulting, incubating other organizations	N/A	2014-2018	Stacey Abrams, CEO	Abrams founded as law student. No tax returns until 2013, when home of NGP
GeorgiaNEXT	May 2011 to Sept 2020	PAC (527)	candidate recruitment, voter education	Statewide	2014-2018	Ashley Robinson, CEO	Abrams PAC, she is listed as an "advisor"
New Georgia Project	2013 (from Third Sector Dev); independent in 2017	Nonprofit (501c3 & 501c4)	voter registration, voter education	Statewide	2013-2021	Nsé Ufot, CEO	Also New Georgia Project Action (Fund). Former subset of Third Sector. Started as a health care enrollment/voter registration drive
Voter Access Institute	2014 to 2018	Nonprofit 501c4	voter registration, voter education	Statewide	2014-2018	Stacey Abrams, CEO and President Lauren Groh-Wargo, CFO	Became Fair Fight. Included "Advocates for Change Institute" to train young people to be campaign professionals
Fair Fight Action	Nov, 2018 to present	Carey PAC (hybrid, can donate to candidates or Indep expenditures organizations)	voter registration, voting rights	National	2020-on	Stacey Abrams, Founder and Board Chair; Lauren Groh-Wargo, CEO	Formerly Voter Access Institute, founded in 2014. Fair Fight U (campus chapters); Fair Fight Inc (accepts federal PAC money); Fair Fight PAC/Fair Fight 2020
Fair Count	Feb, 2019 to present	Nonprofit (501c3)	civic networks	National	2020-on	Rebecca DeHart, CEO Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean, VP. Board includes DuBose Porter, Rep. Carolyn Hughes	Started as census outreach, then did Covid outreach
Southern Economic Advancement Project	March 2019 to present	Nonprofit (501c3)	policy research	Cross-state	2020-on	Stacey Abrams, executive director; Sarah Beth Gehl, research director (former policy director for Abrams campaign); Genny Castillo (former Abrams intern)	Fiscally-sponsored project of the Roosevelt Institute

APPENDIX A, part two: Organizations Receiving Funds

Organization	Approx. Founding Date	Type & tax status	Goals/activities	Scope	Election cycles since 2014 active	Affiliate network?	Notes
ProGeorgia	2012	Nonprofit (501c3)	voter education, voter mobilization, civic networks, policy advocacy	Statewide	2014-on	Network of 30-40 organizations	Received funds from NGP in 2017. Plans to est. ProGeorgia began in 2011 after a small group of non-profit organizations worked together on civic engagement projects during the 2010 election season. In 2012, ProGeorgia was officially established by 12 organizations
Asian American Advocacy Fund / Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta	2010	Nonprofit (501c3)	policy advocacy, civic networks, legal services, voter education	Local - Atlanta region	2014-on	ProGeorgia network	Received funds from TSD in 2014 and from Fair Fight Action in 2020. Founded in 2010, reaffiliated in 2014.
Coalition for the People's Agenda	1998	Nonprofit (501c3)	voter registration, voter education, voter mobilization, policy advocacy	Statewide	2014-on	ProGeorgia network	Received funds from TSD in 2014.
Equality Foundation of Georgia	1999	Nonprofit (501c3)	voter registration, voter education, policy advocacy	Statewide	2014-on	ProGeorgia network; DA state infrastructure	Received funds from TSD in 2014.
GALEO - Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials	2004	Nonprofit (501c3)	civic networks	Statewide	2014-on	ProGeorgia network	Received funds from TSD in 2014.
Georgia NAACP	1917	Nonprofit (501c3 & 501c4)	civic networks	Statewide		ProGeorgia network	Received funds from TSD in 2014 and 2015.
Georgia WAND (Women's Action for New Directions)	1982	Nonprofit (501c3 & 501c4)	civic networks, policy advocacy	Statewide	2014-on	ProGeorgia network	Received funds from TSD in 2014.
Black Voters Matter	2018	Nonprofit (501c3)	voter registration, voter education, voter mobilization	Cross-state	2018-on		Received FFA Grant in 2020.
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights / GLAHR Action Network	2001	Nonprofit (501c3)	civic networks, voter education, policy advocacy	Statewide	2014-on		Received FFA Grant in 2020.
Mijente	2016	Nonprofit (501c3)	voter education, voter mobilization	National	2016-on		Received FFA Grant in 2020.
Southerners on New Ground (SONG and SONG Power)	1999	Nonprofit (501c3 & 501c4)	civic networks, voter education, policy advocacy	Cross-state	2014-on		Received FFA Grant in 2020.
Columbus NAACP	1918	Nonprofit (501c4)	civic networks	Local - Columbus area	2014-on		Received funds from TSD in 2014.
Georgia Stand Up	2005	Nonprofit (501c3)	civic networks, voter education, policy advocacy	Statewide	2014-on	ProGeorgia network	Received funds from TSD in 2014.
Voter Empowerment Collaborative	1981	Nonprofit (501c3)	civic networks, voter education, voter registration, voter mobilization	Statewide	2014-on		Received funds from TSD in 2014.
Women on the Rise	2013	Nonprofit (501c3)	civic networks, policy advocacy	Local - Atlanta area	2014-on		Received FFA Grant in 2020.
Georgia Democratic Party		State party	voter registration, voter education, voter mobilization	Statewide	2014-on	Democratic Party	Received millions from FFA in 2020.

Sources: Authors' compilations from IRS 990 forms; Georgia Secretary of State website; Abrams' resume, accessed: <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/109701/witnesses/HHRG-116-JU10-Bio-AbramsS-20190625.pdf>; searches of organizations' websites and various media sources.