

**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 regarded as more “flippable”? This article uses newly assembled data to situate recent Democratic fortunes in the context of two long-running statewide campaigns for racial and economic justice – led by North Carolina’s Reverend William Barber II and by Georgia’s Stacey Abrams. We track shifting political opportunity structures and the organizational and strategic evolution of both movements during the 2010s, with a special focus on outreach beyond major metropolitan areas into medium-sized cities and non-urban areas where many African Americans live in both states. Our findings suggest that social justice campaigns aiming to increase government responsiveness to poor minority citizens do better if they engage in persistent, locally embedded voter outreach along partisan lines rather than heavily relying on morally framed, media-friendly protests. This research also demonstrates how data on organizational networks can be assembled and used to explore historical-institutional hypotheses about the impact of social movements.

As the 2020 U.S. elections loomed, North Carolina was widely presumed to be 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.¹ 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 in January 2021, delivering at least temporary control of the U.S. Senate to Democrats.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

That Democrats had higher hopes for North Carolina in 2020 is understandable because, for many years, Georgia was a safely Republican stronghold. Back in 2008, Barack Obama eked out a presidential victory in North Carolina but lost Georgia by more than five points – even though Blacks who turned out at high levels that year made up about 30% of Georgia’s voting-aged citizen population compared to about 21% in North Carolina.² A persistently larger Black population share in Georgia than in North Carolina seems decisive to many pundits. But if demography is paramount, Georgia’s greater Black voting potential took many years to be realized. As Figure 1 shows, in the two-party competition to win key statewide races, Georgia Democrats fell even further behind their North Carolina counterparts for several cycles after 2008. Only after a 2014 nadir for Democrats in both states did the trajectories shift. After that, North Carolina Democrats basically plateaued, eking out a hair-thin gubernatorial victory in 2016 but otherwise unable to win presidential or U.S. Senate contests. Meanwhile, Georgia Democrats closed their two-party gap cycle by cycle from 2016 through the 2021 Senate runoffs.

Beyond demographics, other observers stress that North Carolina “does not have a Stacey Abrams” – pointing to Georgia’s dynamic 2018 African American gubernatorial candidate. The idea seems to be that a charismatic Black candidate is both necessary and sufficient to harvest demographic

¹ Bill Ruthard and Jonathan Berlin, “Campaign trail tracker: Where Trump, Biden, and their running mates have traveled in the presidential race’s final weeks,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 2020; and Dominico Montinaro, “Presidential campaign TV ad spending crosses \$1 billion mark in key states,” *NPR*, October 13, 2020.

² Voting-aged citizen population estimates are drawn from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates. The Census began producing annual citizen voting age population estimates in 2009, hence why we draw data from that year.

potential. But that cannot be the whole story, either. Abrams did not win her 2018 governor's race while two years later much-less-exciting Joe Biden was able to claim Georgia's Electoral College votes. More important, we cannot think of Stacey Abrams as just a charismatic candidate. Working with many others, Abrams has sought for many years to build constellations of allied organizations capable of transforming the electorate and political balances in Georgia. Originally, she aimed to beef up Democratic capacities in the state legislature, then worked to implement redistributive policies such as the Affordable Care Act, and finally orchestrated organizations doing sustained, locally rooted voter education and outreach.

Nor has North Carolina lacked for its own justice campaigns. Years before Abrams gained public acclaim, North Carolina boasted a dynamic social justice crusader aiming to shift power relations and political agendas. After winning the North Carolina NAACP presidency, Reverend William Barber II and his team launched the Forward Together Moral Movement and built alliances between NAACP chapters and dozens of advocacy organizations. By 2013, the Forward Together alliance was mounting massive protest marches widely touted as likely to push the Tar Heel state into the blue column.

Unusually in the context of contemporary US liberalism, both the Barber- and Abrams-orchestrated constellations have targeted state-level as well as national politics, calling for legislatures and governors to address the needs of low-income residents and particularly Blacks. Each campaign built on the work of at least some preexisting organizations and constructed new network connections in service of statewide organizing with outreach beyond metro areas. These two statewide campaigns have also followed similar trajectories in one telling respect: prior to 2014, each focused primarily on achieving more equitable governance without much attention to direct voter engagement at the grassroots. But when it became evident that right-wing Republicans in full control of the respective state governments would not budge, both sets of social justice reformers – at least briefly, in the case of Barber – turned toward statewide efforts at voter engagement. Although they approached it differently and achieved very different effects, leaders and activists in both states realized they had to defeat Republicans and elect Democratic replacements if they were to accomplish their shared overall mission of bending public policy toward social justice.

Parallels between the long-running Barber and Abrams-orchestrated movements that preceded the 2020 elections only sharpen the puzzle tackled here: How and why have the Georgia Democrats

and allied social justice reformers – like the tortoise in the classic fairy tale – recently caught up and edged ahead of the North Carolina counterparts, the “hare” that seemed ahead just a few years ago? Our answers follow from a comparative-historical analysis grounded in freshly collected empirical data about the arrays of organizations created or drawn into the Barber and Abrams coalitions. As scholars have long recognized, movements for change are not driven only by the personal outlooks of leaders or the actions of masses of individual participants. Sociopolitical movements for change are always grounded in congeries of loosely-connected organizations pushing together for the same overall transformations. But even though lip service is often paid to such underpinnings, systematic data is difficult to find, so scholars often do not discover all they might about how organizational constellations come together and, in turn, channel ongoing movement efforts, tactical choices, and accomplishments. Our project shows that organizational data can be assembled and used to test hypotheses about movement impacts. More details on sources appear below but, overall, we assembled our new data by mining public sources and lists preserved on the Internet Wayback Machine and then filling holes left by such efforts with facts drawn from confidential interviews with knowledgeable, well-placed organizers in North Carolina and Georgia.

MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL TRAJECTORIES IN TWO DYNAMIC SOUTHERN STATES

North Carolina and Georgia have not only been home in the 2000s to two of the most prominent statewide racial and economic justice campaigns unfolding in the Democratic Party orbit. These states also have important contextual similarities. Both are comparable in population size and Electoral College clout; both have fast-growing economies and metropolises with growing shares of college-credentialed people; and both have large shares of Blacks living and working in medium-sized-cities and small-town rural areas as well as in the biggest metropolises. Their social justice campaigns have similarly stressed outreach to and serving the needs of non-metropolitan residents as well as metropolitan constituencies. That matters electorally as well as in many other ways, because Georgia and North Carolina Democrats cannot win statewide contests unless they can draw strong support from medium-city and (at least some) rural Blacks as well as from white and non-white metropolitan

voters.³

North Carolina and Georgia have long grown in parallel ways, starting with 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.⁴ These states now boast fast-growing economies and are magnets for newcomers, including immigrants and college-educated migrants (some of them African Americans returning to their ancestral South). Both states have similar shares of residents aged 25 or older with college degrees. North Carolinians are whiter and slightly older.⁵

Georgia's larger Black population share potentially helps liberal reformers and Democrats. But any state with greater shares of poor and historically disenfranchised people can also lag both in registering such potential voters and actually getting registered people to the polls in any given election. Shortfalls have long been the story in Georgia. Until recently, Black registration and turnout rates were markedly lower in Georgia than in North Carolina, leaving Georgia far short of realizing the potential impact of Black voters and allowing Tar Heel Democrats to rely on high turnout rates among Blacks despite their smaller overall share in that state's population. But things have changed over time in ways that demography alone cannot explain. North Carolina started to lose ground in Black registration and turnout after 2012. And in recent years Georgia has sharply improved its Black registration and turnout rates across the board in metro, medium-city, and small-town areas alike. This upturn in Georgia Black voting is partially attributable to that state's adoption of automatic voter registration in 2016, but – as we argue in this article – it is also attributable to sustained voter education and outreach efforts.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

³ Data on county-level voter turnout in both states supports this point. In Georgia, the share of votes coming from counties containing Atlanta and its suburbs has ranged from 41.9% to 43.2% in presidential, midterm, and runoff elections between 2008 and 2021. In North Carolina, the share of votes coming from counties containing Charlotte, Raleigh/Durham, and the Piedmont Triad has ranged from 38.8% to 42.4% between 2008 and 2020.

⁴ Voting-aged citizen population estimates are drawn from the 2015-2019 ACS 5-year Estimates and are the most recently published estimates of these figures.

⁵ According to 2019 ACS data, 32.5% and 32.3% of residents aged 25 and older in Georgia and North Carolina, respectively, had received bachelor's degrees. 52.0% and 62.6% of Georgia and North Carolina residents identified as non-Hispanic whites, and 14.3% and 16.7% of Georgia and North Carolina residents were older than 65 years.

The spatial 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 its 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 – as well as, importantly for our analysis, seven secondary cities spread across the state from Asheville in the mountains to Wilmington on the Atlantic coast. What is more, North Carolina’s 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.

Contemporary 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. Across many states, 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 of Atlanta and its suburbs (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 growth in metropolitan Atlanta coupled with recent shifts of many college-credential suburbanites to the Democrats. In this analysis, we acknowledge these realities as very important contributors to recent outcomes, including in 2020. We stress, however, that Democrats in Georgia cannot win just with votes from greater Atlanta. The need to get “beyond Atlanta” has long been a challenge for political

reformers in the Peach State. For much of the twentieth century, Georgia cities were disempowered by a rigged “county unit” system for party primaries.⁶ From the Jim Crow era through the early Civil Rights period, Atlanta’s Black and white leaders responded by fashioning “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 within the city – 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.

Now we are ready to unfold our comparative-historical analysis of movement dynamics and political gains and shortfalls. We first track the emergence and organizational accomplishments of the Barber and Abrams-orchestrated social justice campaigns, and then proceed to assess their likely political effects, including recent electoral impacts, with particular focus beyond both states’ metropolitan centers and on Black populations. In both North Carolina and Georgia, social justice organizational coalitions took time to build and, once foundations were in place, these arrays channeled distinctive movement tactics that registered variable results in large part depending on the shifting overall political realities of these two states. After tracing the roots and dynamics of movement organizational constellations, we use mapping and statistical techniques to probe for associations between organizational activity and the outcomes of recent statewide electoral contests. Findings from these tests cannot be interpreted as causal effects; sufficient data on precise organizational indicators are not available for such analyses. Nevertheless, our mapping exercises and statistical probes reinforce the rest of our comparative-historical findings about the electoral contributions of these two movements with similar aspirations to transform politics and governance to meet the needs of Blacks and less privileged residents. Especially after both movements turned to direct voter engagement in 2014, the more persistent and partisan-aligned undertakings in Georgia were able to make more headway than the nonpartisan morally framed Barber movement in North Carolina.

⁶ See especially Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); and sections on Georgia in Robert Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America’s Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

ORGANIZATION-BUILDING IN 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, took on new leadership roles and started to assemble organizational coalitions to reorient state government. The centers of gravity of both organizational arrays ended up in nonprofit civil society, but they evolved from different directions. The Barber-orchestrated organizational constellations formed outside of government and party politics to try to exert influence through nonpartisan moral pressures, while the Abrams-orchestrated constellations extended from avowedly partisan-leaning spaces, pushing outward from state government and the Democratic Party into adjacent civil society.

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.”⁷ 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.

⁷ Moisi Secret, “Firing up the faithful: The state’s NAACP’s new president,” *Indy Week*, February 1, 2006. For Barber’s biography, we also drew from his book, the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016).

“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.⁸ The two men had “presented delegates with a contrast” of personalities and strategies for propelling social change.⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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...”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.¹³

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

After his election, Barber took charge of a well-established NAACP federation with about one hundred local branches – “by far the best-known civil rights group both nationally and at the state level,” its “state president is one of the most recognized leaders in North Carolina

⁸ Michael Easterbrook, “New hands take the NAACP reins,” *News & Observer*, October 9, 2005.

⁹ Mark Binker, “NAACP replaces Alston as president,” *Greensboro News & Record*, October 7, 2005.

¹⁰ Binker, “NAACP Replaces Alston as President”; Secret, “Firing up the faithful.”

¹¹ The quotes from Alston appear in Chris Fitzsimon, “Two men vie for presidency of N.C. chapter of NAACP,” *NC Policy Watch*, October 4, 2005. 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. For the longer-term picture, see Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley Wadelington, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2019), chapter 10.

¹² Al McSurely, “Breathing Life into Dem Dry Bones with Apologies to Ezekiel: A Short History of the People’s 14 Point Agenda and the HKonJ People’s General Assembly,” remarks delivered to the Orange County People’s Assembly Meeting on November 15, 2008. A copy of the remarks is available through the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹³ Secret, “Firing up the faithful.”

who does not hold statewide political office.”¹⁴ A look back tells us how this came to be. Founded in 1909 in New York City, the NAACP quickly reached both North Carolina and Georgia, 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.¹⁵ But growth continued in North Carolina (see Figure 3), where membership peaked between the 1960s and 1980s.¹⁶ 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...”¹⁷

[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.¹⁸ 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” and reached out “to other progressive organizations that were predominantly white.”¹⁹ In McSurely’s later telling, “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

¹⁴ Binker, “NAACP replaces Alston as president.”

¹⁵ For broader discussions of NAACP dynamics in various southern states, see Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*; Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009); and Manfred Berg, “*The Ticket to Freedom*”: *The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 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.

¹⁶ Raymond Gavins, “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, edited by William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Gavins, “The NAACP in North Carolina...,” p. 116.

¹⁸ McSurely, “A Short History...”; and also Secret, “Firing up the faithful.” From information we have gathered, the state conference added five new local branches during the Barber years, including predominantly white units in western counties (see Michael Schulson, “The North Carolina County Has a Thriving Branch of the NAACP – And It’s Mostly White,” *Scalawag* [co-published with *The Nation*], October 31, 2017). The Barber years also brought expansions in youth auxiliaries and college branches.

¹⁹ Barber, *The Third Reconstruction*, p. 48, and the following pages tell the story of how this coalition was constructed.

Assembly” – the flyer for the first 2007 iteration appears in Figure 4.²⁰ 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.”

[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 view. “[O]ur most directly affected members would always speak to the issue closest to their own hearts. But they would never speak alone.”²¹ 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 may have facilitated the vote surge for Obama in 2008.²² 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.²³ But according to one 2008 report, more than half of 83 bills backed

²⁰ All quoted passages through this paragraph are from McSurely, “A Short History...”

²¹ Barber, *The Third Reconstruction*, p. 53.

²² Lori D. R. Wiggins, “North Carolina Voters Change State from Red to Blue,” *The Crisis*, Spring 2009.

²³ Dante Strobino, “10,000 say ‘Organize the South,’” *Workers World*, February 25, 2009; Barbara O’Brien and Catherine M. Grosso, “Confronting Race: How a Confluence of Social Movements Convinced North Carolina to Go Where the McCleskey Court Wouldn’t,” *Michigan State Law Review* 463 (2011); and North Carolina Racial Justice Act, <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2009/s461>.

by the Moral Movement failed to get out of committee.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ This rapid 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. The myriad Raleigh-based left advocacy organizations accustomed to lobbying state government for policy priorities suddenly found no powerholders to whom they could turn. 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.²⁷

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

²⁴ Renee Chou, “March, Rally to Push 14-Point Progressive Agenda,” *WRAL Local News*, February 9, 2008.

²⁵ Kristin Collins, “‘Historic Thousands’ march to legislature,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 10, 2008. For a broad perspective on the ambivalences of North Carolina politics, see Christopher A. Cooper and H. Gibbs Knotts, editors, *The New Politics of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

²⁶ For a full analysis of GOP goals and transformations in North Carolina, see Caroline Tervo, “Why Republicans Went Hard Right in North Carolina,” chapter 3 in *Upending American Politics*, edited by Theda Skocpol and Caroline Tervo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁷ Derek Willis, “Kay Hagan Sidesteps Democratic Party Turmoil in North Carolina,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2014.

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).²⁸

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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.

²⁸ Dan Kane “Marching Against GOP Policies,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, February 10, 2013, 1B; Jaime Fuller, “80,000 people protested in NC this weekend. Here’s why,” and *Washington Post*, February 10, 2014; and Ari Berman, “North Carolina’s Moral Monday Movement Kicks Off 2014 With a Massive Rally in Raleigh,” *The Nation*, February 8, 2014.

²⁹ Dani McClain, “How the Moral Mondays ‘Fusion Coalition’ is Taking North Carolina Back,” *The Nation*, July 3, 2014.

³⁰ Barry Yeoman, “Shifting Tactics, Moral Monday Movement Launches New Freedom Summer,” *Portside: Material of Interest to People on the Left*, July 5, 2014.

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 had faltered in the face of repression.³¹ 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.³² 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 and initially aimed toward running for the Atlanta mayorship. But established political players in the metropole 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.³³

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."³⁴ "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

³¹ This paragraph relies on Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), especially chapter 2, and on Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), p.305 and chapter 8.

³² Lici Beveridge, "Stacey Abrams, Georgia Candidate for Governor, Has Strong Mississippi Roots," *Hattiesburg American*, September 21, 2018.

³³ Suggested in one of our confidential interviews. Stacey Abrams, *Lead from the Outside: How to Build Your Future and Make Real Change* [originally published as *Minority Leader*] (New York: Picador, 2018), p. 23.

³⁴ Stacey Abrams and Lauren Groh-Wargo, "How to Turn Your Red State Blue," *New York Times*, February 11, 2021.

freedom.”³⁵ 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 gap between the two parties in the most recent election was “a difference Democrats could turn around. ‘It’s time we make it known that it’s safe to be a Democrat again.’”³⁶

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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹

In 2011 Abrams also became her party’s de facto chief strategist, teaming up in 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.⁴⁰ Together, they

³⁵ Jim Gaines, “Georgia Democrats seeking a road back,” *The Macon Telegraph*, January 7, 2011.

³⁶ Michael W. Pannell, “House minority leader addresses local Democrats,” *Macon Telegraph*, June 22, 2011, E5.

³⁷ James Salzer, “While in Georgia House leadership, Abrams was also a per diem leader,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 18, 2018. More detail on parts of some of these travel days can be found in a conservative muckraking article: Jessica Szilagyi, “Abrams Collected ‘official Business’ Per Diem Days for Political & Personal Events 70+ Times,” *AllOnGeorgia.com*, October 24, 2018.

³⁸ Aaron Gould Sheinin, “Democratic Leader Accuses GOP of ‘Purging’ White Democrats,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 10, 2012; and Stacey Abrams, *Lead from the Outside* [previously *Minority Leader*] (New York: Henry Holt, 2018), pp. 62-64.

³⁹ Such events are among dozens detailed in Szilagyi, “Abrams Collected...Per Diem Days for Political and Personal Events...” See also Kimmy Yam, “How Stacey Abrams has been mobilizing Asian Americans for years,” *Asian America*, January 15, 2012.

⁴⁰ “Speaker’s Bio: Lauren Groh-Wargo” *Lesbians Who Tech*, accessed May 24, 2021, <https://lesbianswhotech.org/speakers/lauren-groh-wargo/>; Abrams, *Lead from the Outside*, p.53; Abrams and Groh-Wargo, “How to Turn Your Red State Blue”; and *Lead from the Outside*, p. 169.

drafted election-by-election plans and a ten-year plan to expand Democratic electoral appeal in Georgia by targeting growing demographic groups and previously uninvolved Black voters. This path was open because the 2010 defeats and defections of many longstanding Georgia Democratic Party honchos created a pressing need to re-brand and opened more space for fresh thinking than in other southern state parties where racial and generational changes unfolded more slowly. By contrast, gradual change was the story for North Carolina Democrats. No Abrams-like galvanizing statewide leader emerged in the 2010s, and even after white Democrat and former attorney general Roy Cooper narrowly became governor in 2016, his party-building efforts focused on gaining legislative seats and securing his own reelection. In the North Carolina legislature, meanwhile, preexisting ranks of mostly white Democratic 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.⁴¹

Just as the Barber coalition aimed to shift North Carolina policymaking, Abrams and her allies also sought to move Georgia governance in egalitarian directions. But of course these differently forged social justice coalitions proceeded in different ways. While North Carolinians orchestrated mass meetings and marches to urge state officials to act on a large agenda that added together the diverse policy priorities of dozens of preexisting advocacy groups, Minority Leader Abrams engineered bipartisan compromises where possible and, when the GOP would not budge, worked with fellow politicians to articulate broadly popular oppositional stances that might attract more voter support.⁴² Subtle but telling differences resulted. Where the Barber Forward Together movement advocated for local school desegregation, for instance, the Abrams-led Georgia Democrats spoke about enhancing support for “community schools” and using education to “expand opportunities.”⁴³ Where North Carolina advocates stressed anti-racism and

⁴¹ See the commentary about this transition from John Davis, “Liberal Insurgents End Sen. Basnight’s Historic Era of Power: Business Agenda and Long-term Jobs Growth Threatened by Attrition of Allies,” *Political Report from John Davis Consulting*, December 10, 2009.

⁴² Richard Fausset, “There Is More to Stacey Abrams Than Meets Partisan Eyes,” *New York Times*, August 19, 2018. Abrams’s moderation has been criticized by some on the progressive left. See Branko Marcetic, “Stacey Abrams’s Record is Not as Progressive as She Wants You to Think,” *Jacobin*, July 24, 2020. As Minority Leader, Abrams was well known for working with the GOP governor on changes to the state’s HOPE college scholarship program. Her leadership style was to engage on many issues and seek modifications of GOP legislation, rather than only denouncing from the minority position.

⁴³ Jesse James DeConto, “Massing for schools, peace” *Raleigh News & Observer*, 1B and 2B; Abrams and Groh-Wargo, “How to Turn Your Red State Blue.”

anti-poverty policies, the Georgians spoke more generally about creating better jobs and expanding access to health care.

Peach State reformers also placed a high priority on finding ways to leverage redistributive Obama-era federal measures that could boost poor residents of all races in urban and rural communities. Not coincidentally, the full flowering of Georgia’s social justice campaign came via the tellingly labeled “New Georgia Project – Affordable Care Act,” a project devoted to implementing President Obama’s 2010 health care reform. Launched in 2013 after Georgia Republicans 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, that first New Georgia Project hired “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.”⁴⁴ Once deployed, field workers generated political insights as well as insurance enrollments.

On the ground, the NGP-ACA field workers learned that 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 when some of them switched party affiliations to become Republicans. Organizers learned a crucial lesson lost to consultants who presume poor Black people will automatically understand they should 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.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Abrams, *Our Time is Now*, p. 48; and Rebecca Traister, “Stacey Abrams On Finishing the Job In Georgia ‘It can be undone just as quickly and effectively as we did it,’” *thecut.com*, November 19, 2020.

⁴⁵ North Carolina advocates also supported ACA implementation, but did so only sporadically while promoting multiple priorities, and thus may not have developed similar sorts of local awareness and connections. Further details in remarks from Kendra Davenport Cotton, Chief Operating Officer for the New Georgia Project Action Fund, in an online event, “Building a Grassroots Strategy to Elect Democrats in NC: How Georgia Did It,” hosted

By the end of 2013, the mission of the New Georgia Project was enlarged to include voter registration and education, and thereafter Abrams’s well-honed penchant for seeding new projects proceeded on two parallel (if often interconnected) tracks.⁴⁶ 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 501c3s devoted to nonpartisan voter registration and issue education and others 501c4s 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 the supplementary material 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.

Our findings show that Abrams and her advisors repeatedly updated tactics or launched new efforts to engage potential 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 aligned with Democratic Party organs or campaigns.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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

by Neighbors on Call, March 10, 2021. Recording accessed on YouTube: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=-92Oeur9ZdA>.

⁴⁶ Abrams, *Our Time*, chapter 2.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ “Building a Grassroots Strategy to Elect Democrats in NC: How Georgia Did It,” *Neighbors on Call*.

organizational books and leaderships separate enough to pass muster when Republicans inevitably mounted investigations of these efforts.⁴⁹

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

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.⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ 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.”⁵² 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, George 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.”⁵³ 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

⁴⁹ For a critique, see William Perry, “Unethical Abrams,” from *Georgia Ethics Watchdogs Blog Report*, May 17, 2018. On Abrams’s time as a private practice attorney setting up organizations and funding mechanisms, see *Lead from the Outside*, chapter four. Before running for office, Abrams also published work as a tax policy expert, see for example Stacey Abrams “Can a Charity Tax Credit Help the Poor?” *American Prospect*, December 19, 2001. Abrams emphasized that she distanced herself from the nonprofits she founded after launching her campaign for governor.

⁵⁰ *Lead from the Outside*, p. 66; Greg Bluestein, “How Abrams’ and Kemp’s first runs for office helped shape their careers,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 25, 2018.

⁵¹ *Lead from the Outside*, p. 164-5.

⁵² Attributed to Rebecca DeHart in Tessa Stuart, “Stacey Abrams Is Building a New Kind of Political Machine in the Deep South,” *Rolling Stone*, March 1, 2020.

⁵³ Quoted in Traister, “Stacey Abrams on Finishing the Job....”

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. 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 gubernatorial campaign.⁵⁴

Before moving to a more thorough dissection of recent electoral trends, we summarize what we have established about the longer-term North Carolina and Georgia reform movements that have fed into those trends. Politically ambitious statewide social justice campaigns grew from different origins in North Carolina and Georgia, but in both states, reformers devoted their earliest efforts to reorienting state government – the Forward Together Movement by mounting outside pressures and the Abrams-orchestrated alliances by shoring up and redirecting Georgia Democrats, maneuvering within the state legislature, and trying to implement national reforms. By 2014, both movements faced immovable obstacles from increasingly hard-right Republicans in control of the North Carolina and Georgia state governments. In response, both launched new efforts to engage voters – especially Black economically struggling voters beyond as well as within major metro areas. Although they proceeded in different ways, both sets of movement leaders hoped to defeat and bypass extreme GOPers in critical statewide contests, to open more space for the social justice gains they seek. Have their electorally relevant endeavors paid off? To what degree, where, and why in each state? 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

⁵⁴ Jonathan Martin and Rachel Shorey, "Ossoff raises \$23 million in most expensive House race in history," *New York Times*, June 9, 2017; the following year, Abrams and coordinated efforts would spend \$42 million on her bid for Governor. Back in 2016, by contrast, the Hillary Clinton campaign came nearly as close to winning Georgia as North Carolina, even though her campaign and aligned PACs allocated only \$2.5 to the former while dumping \$33 million for television and radio ads in North Carolina from April 5, 2015 through November 7, 2016.

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 Black voter registration and turnout and, in turn, improving vote shares for Democrats; and we find that this has happened not just around economically booming Atlanta but also in secondary cities and some less prosperous small-town areas with large Black populations.

It is worth stressing that the validity of our assessments in this section do *not* depend on any assumption that North Carolina or Georgia reformers care only about elections. Our comparison makes sense because both movements have long pursued very similar overall missions – to revamp power relations toward Blacks and the economically underprivileged – and both made electorally relevant turns starting in 2014. Social movement theorists are often reluctant to assess successes and failures of movements that deploy different tactics. We hold that movement successes and shortfalls cannot be properly assessed merely by saying each movement pursues distinctive tactics effectively. That approach tends to conclude that every movement is a success. When aspects of movement efforts are comparable, as they are here, it is not only valid but essential to try to measure and compare actual accomplishments and see if those can be related to underlying structures, such as distinctive organizational constellations.

Dual North Carolina Movement 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 already implanted 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. 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 movement’s 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.⁵⁵ 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 voter registration effort the Barber movement ever mounted, with full- or part-time 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 part-time organizers 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.”⁵⁶

Moral Freedom Summer outreach did not achieve discernible electoral impacts. 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

⁵⁵ Barry Yeoman, “Shifting Tactics, Moral Monday Movement Launches a New Freedom Summer,” *Portside*, July 5, 2014.

⁵⁶ Barber, *Third Reconstruction*, pp. 124, 128. Interestingly, Barber says more about proposals for third party efforts than about reforming and reinvigorating the North Carolina Democratic Party.

trumpeted 50,000 goal.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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 low and incumbent Democratic Senator Kay Hagan lost 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.⁵⁹

Our statistical analyses paint the same picture. Using weighted least squares regression, we probe for significant associations between Barber organizing and changes in Black turnout and Democratic margins between 2012 and 2014 in the 90 non-metropolitan North Carolina counties beyond the Research Triangle, the Charlotte area, and the Piedmont Triad.⁶⁰ We weight our models using logged 2012 county-level population estimates to account for intercounty variation in population size. We focus on changes between 2012 and 2014 because these were the pivotal years when Barber and his affiliated organizations forayed into seeking to achieve moral goals by mobilizing voters. Non-metropolitan counties are our focus, because we are interested in discerning associations between statewide organizing – which necessarily includes organizing beyond metropolitan areas – and our outcomes of interest.

We measure our county-level outcome variables by calculating the percent change between Black turnout in 2012 and 2014 and by taking the difference between Democratic two-party vote shares for top-of-the-ticket races in 2012 and 2014. We draw turnout numbers by

⁵⁷ Barry Yeoman, “Can Moral Mondays Produce Victorious Tuesdays?,” *The American Prospect*, January 19, 2015.

⁵⁸ Robert Joyce, “Early Voting in North Carolina,” *UNC School of Government Blog: Coates’ Cannons*, October 5, 2010.

⁵⁹ According to the North Carolina State Board of Elections, statewide voter turnout in 2014 was 44.0%. Hagan received 49.1% of the two-party vote share statewide, or 45,600 fewer votes than her Republican opponent. In metro counties and secondary city counties, respectively, Hagan received 54.4% and 50.0% of votes. In 2012, Obama received 55.9% and 52.3% of votes in these county types.

⁶⁰ Specifically, we include all North Carolina counties other than Cabarrus, Davidson, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Mecklenburg, Orange, Randolph, and Wake.

county and race from the North Carolina State Board of Elections' Historical Election Results Data and county-level election results from Dave Leip's Detailed General Election Data. Our independent variables of interest capture the presence of Forward Together Moral Movement organizing; specifically, we use the previously-described binary indicators of whether counties hosted Moral Freedom Summer organizers in 2014 and/or hosted one or more tour events in 2012 and 2013. The models also control for demographic differences between counties, which we capture with 2012 Census data on county population densities, median incomes, higher education percentages, and Black population percentages.

We do not find statistically significant, positive associations between Moral Movement events or organizer deployments and changes in Black turnout or top-of-the-ticket Democratic margins between the 2012 and 2014 elections. As a robustness check, we re-ran our model using ordinary least squares, excluding the eight secondary city counties, and examining the period from 2010 to 2014 – so as to compare two midterm elections – and in each case found similar results. We also did not find statistically significant associations between Moral Movement organizing and longer-term electoral impacts from 2012 to 2016 and 2012 to 2020. Appendix A presents the base model, and the supplementary material presents these alternative specifications.

Finding suggestive evidence of longer-term impacts would have been surprising 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. This may have happened in part because the first efforts proved unfruitful; and it may have also been the case that Reverend Barber (as he himself recounts in his various books) never developed the sort of big-donor ties we have documented for Stacey Abrams in Georgia. National Democrats, meanwhile, continued their usual pattern of pouring short-term mobilization resources into North Carolina, hoping, but failing, to tip the scales in each successive presidential and Senate contests.

Another reason the Barber movement reverted to moral pressure and advocacy strategies may be that the political opportunity structure they faced in Raleigh eventually became slightly more welcoming. In late 2016, Tar Heel Democrats scored one important win as their

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.⁶¹ The Forward Together coalition’s emphasis on mutual support for various issue causes may have helped to blunt right-wing anti-LGBTQ 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.⁶² 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.” More basically, whatever tipped the close race, the presence of a Democratic gubernatorial administration after 2016 meant that many advocacy groups in the Forward Together coalition could resume making demands for new administrative and regulatory rulings from state officials.

No one can conclude, however, that the Forward Together Moral Movement has succeeded in reorienting North Carolina government to meet the needs of Blacks and the poor. The ultra-right Republicans who still control the Tarheel General Assembly have remained unmoved, and Barber activists have been disappointed that Governor Cooper is usually unwilling to meet their criminal justice demands or champion redistributive policy priorities.⁶³ 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 usually not quite enough to eke out victories. Tellingly, during the very years after 2010 when the Barber-led coalitions gained strength and visibility in North Carolina, Black registration rates and voter turnout rates stalled or receded, especially (as figures in the supplementary material track) in nonurban areas with the highest proportions of eligible

⁶¹ Larry Rubin, “Moral Mondays Coalition Defeats McCrory – Trump’s Man in N.C.,” *People’s World*, December 15, 2016; and Michael Schulson, “North Carolina Went Red in 2016? But Can It Be a Model for Democrats?,” *Politico*, February 4, 2017.

⁶² David Boraks, “McCrory Loses On Home Turf; Blame I-77 Tolls, HB2, Shifting Vote Patterns,” WFAE.org, November 9, 2016.

⁶³ Our sources for this statement include confidential interviews, as well as repeated media coverage of activist protests against the Cooper administration.

Black voters. Democratic vote shares also suffered in key areas.⁶⁴ Whether registered to vote or not, many North Carolina Blacks have not been made aware that Democrats are the alternative to the “immoral” extremists so eloquently condemned by the Reverend and the state NAACP’s many networked organizational allies.

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 agree are important but do not ourselves 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.⁶⁵ Likewise, the suburban swing has been helped 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 and surround Atlanta. This makes sense for two reasons: Democrats cannot quite win statewide with only votes from the Atlanta

⁶⁴ From 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.

⁶⁵ Perry Bacon Jr, “How Georgia Turned Blue,” *FiveThirtyEight*, November 18, 2020; Nate Cohn, Matthew Conlen, and Charlie Smart, “Detailed Turnout Data Shows How Georgia Turned Blue,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2020.

region.⁶⁶ And Abrams has always prioritized *statewide* outreach – including to non-participating potential Black voters in secondary cities and small-town or rural counties.

From the end of 2013, Abrams constellation projects turned toward voter outreach – but not very successfully at first. Although Abrams has never fully acknowledged it, New Georgia Project efforts leading into 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.⁶⁷ In terms of 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. Afterwards, North Carolina’s Barber coalition pulled back from sustained voter field outreach, while the Georgia Abrams network launched waves of revised and expanded efforts. Much of NGP work for 2014 had been outsourced to paid consultants favored by the national Democratic Party.⁶⁸ After NGP leaders understood the shortcomings of that approach, the Abrams network redirected toward raising resources and provided trained organizers for sustained, in-state voter-contacting. Their efforts included 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. During those same years in North Carolina, Reverend Barber resigned his NAACP post in 2017 to move “onto the national stage” and lead the Poor People’s Campaign advocacy organization with operations in multiple states.⁶⁹ In contrast, even after her near-miss for Georgia governor in 2018, Stacey Abrams declined

⁶⁶ 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.

⁶⁷ Max Blau, “The New Georgia Project: Stacey Abrams’s \$10 million plan to double down on voter registration,” *Atlanta Magazine*, November 30, 2015; Max Blau, “The New Georgia Problem,” *Creative Loafing* blog, February 16, 2015; and Abrams, *Our Time is Now*, p. 59.

⁶⁸ Kristina Torres, “New Georgia Project releases financial records, renews voter push,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 4, 2016.

⁶⁹ Martha Quillin, “Barber Bids Farewell to State NAACP, Will Step onto National Stage,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 7, 2017.

invitations to go national and chose to remain focused on expanding her state’s Democratic electorate.⁷⁰ Persistence matters.

Mid-course corrections after 2014 likely enabled Georgia’s in-state organizers to hit future voter registration benchmarks,⁷¹ but registration was far from the only objective, because people must be repeatedly encouraged to actually 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 higher because Blacks are about 30% rather than 21% 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.⁷² Although Abrams did not quite match raw Obama-era vote totals in many key places, not only were new voters registered, the Abrams network demonstrated it could boost the nonwhite share of the statewide electorate to 40%.⁷³ As political scientist Andra Gillespie concludes, that gubernatorial campaign showed that southern Democrats do not have to keep nominating

⁷⁰ Traister, “Stacey Abrams On Finishing the Job in Georgia...”

⁷¹ From April to July 2016, the NGP announced that it successfully submitted 68,000 new voter registration applications, and 221,897 were submitted by early summer 2018. Figures reported on the New Georgia Project website, as accessed through the Wayback Machine, July 20, 2017:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20170720152041/http://newgeorgiaproject.org/blog/>; and accessed August 2018

<http://web.archive.org/web/20180809065643/https://newgeorgiaproject.org/blog/>.

⁷² Brittany Gibson, “How Georgia Got Organized,” *The American Prospect*, January 2, 2021.

⁷³ Tim Regan-Porter, “Is Georgia Red, Blue, or Purple? Data Shows Rural, Metro Voters More Divided than Ever,” *The Telegraph*, November 13, 2018, updated October 11, 2019; Gibson, “How Georgia Got Organized.”

“centrist white candidates,” because Black candidates can become fully competitive by engaging new voters.⁷⁴

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’s in 2018. Still, Abrams-encouraged Democrats did what they needed to do to secure Georgia for Biden and force two Senate runoffs.

By all available indications, Democratic victories in the January runoff were the moment when the previously built Abrams network bore fruit – by facilitating extraordinary Democratic turnout, especially among Blacks.⁷⁵ Georgia runoffs usually see sharp turnout drops, with Democrats falling off more and thus allowing Republicans to improve their margins in overtime.⁷⁶ 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 – especially through many aligned nonprofits that had been funded or encouraged by the Abrams network and were now ready to magnify, extend, and deepen efforts mounted by the state Democratic Party working with the Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff campaigns. First implanted beyond as well as within the Atlanta region in 2015, the New

⁷⁴ Andra Gillespie, “In Georgia’s Gubernatorial Race, Stacey Abrams’ Strategy May Make Victory Easier for Future Black Candidates in the South,” *The Conversation*, November 28, 2018.

⁷⁵ Cohn, “Why Warnock and Ossoff Won...”; and Bernard L. Fraga, Zachary Peskowitz, and James Szewczyk, “New Georgia Runoffs Data Finds That More Black Voters Than Usual Came Out. Trump Voters Stayed Home,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 2021.

⁷⁶ Nathaniel Rakich, Geoffrey Skelley, Laura Bronner, and Julia Wolfe, “How Democrats Won the Georgia Runoffs,” *FiveThirtyEight*, January 7, 2021.

Georgia Project’s field outreach operations worked in tandem with allied nonprofit and community organizing groups including 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.⁷⁷ For the 2021 Senate runoffs, 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.⁷⁸ 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.

Weighted least squares regression models comparable to those we described earlier for North Carolina probe possible associations between organizing activity and shifts between November 2020 and January 2021 in Black turnout and top-of-the-ticket Democratic margins. For these models, our outcomes of interest are the percent change in Black turnout between 2020 and 2021 and the difference in two-party Democratic vote share between Biden’s presidential election in 2020 and Warnock’s senatorial election in 2021. These variables are measured at the county-level for the 150 Georgia counties beyond Atlanta and its suburbs and are drawn from the Georgia Secretary of State’s Voter Turnout by Demographics and Results by Demographics.⁷⁹ Counties are weighted by logged 2019 population estimates to account for intercounty variation in population size.

[FIGURE 9 ABOUT HERE]

⁷⁷ Gibson, “How Georgia Got Organized”; Anna North, “Black Women Organizers on What Happened in Georgia – and What Comes Next,” *Vox*, November 11, 2020; Frances Madson, “Changing Tides in Georgia’s ‘Black Belt’ Could Deliver the Senate to Democrats,” *Salon*, January 5, 2021; Becca Andrews, “‘Voting is Life or Death’: How Georgia Democrats are Organizing in One of the Earliest COVID Hot Spots,” *Mother Jones*, December 17, 2020; Steven Rosenfeld, “Grassroots Outreach Is the Frontline in Georgia,” *billmoyers.com*, January 3, 2021; “‘Deep Canvassing’ Targets Rural Georgia,” *Portside*, December 18, 2020; and *1000 Women Strong: 2020 Impact Report*. See also the state party’s after report, “Democratic Party of Georgia 2020 Victory Report.”

⁷⁸ *1000 Women Strong: 2020 Impact Report*.

⁷⁹ Specifically, we consider all Georgia counties beyond Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Newton, and Rockdale.

Our independent variables are county-level indications of both runoff-specific organizing and previously well-established voter outreach capacities stretching beyond the greater Atlanta region (mapped in Figure 9). For run-off specific outreach variables, we used the Wayback Machine to identify the places candidates Ossoff and Warnock visited on their most-publicized statewide tours.⁸⁰ Likewise, we know where the Democratic Party of Georgia opened field offices for that stretch.⁸¹ 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, as well as confidential interviews, 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 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. We also control for demographic differences between counties in population density, median per capita income, higher education shares, and Black population shares, all measured by the Census in 2019. The results of the models presented in Table 2 are consistent when we use ordinary least squares regression, exclude the nine counties with secondary cities, and consider differences in Democratic vote share between Biden’s 2020 election and Ossoff’s 2021 election (see supplementary material).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The results in Table 2 indicate that NGP organizing beyond the greater Atlanta metroplex is associated at the $\alpha=0.05$ level of statistical significance with factors contributing to Democratic victories in January 2021. We find positive relationships between counties hosting or being in proximity to NGP regional field offices and our two outcomes of interest – namely,

⁸⁰ 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).

⁸¹ 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).

Black turnout retention and Democratic vote share changes from November 2020 to January 2021. Holding all other covariates constant, the presence of an NGP field office within or nearby a non-metropolitan county is associated with a 1.8% increase in Black turnout retention and a 0.5% increase in Democratic vote share between the 2020 general and 2021 runoff elections.

By contrast, for the shifts of interest, we do not find statistically significant associations (at the $\alpha=0.05$ level) between hosting a Democratic Party of Georgia field office for the runoff, or hosting a December 2020 stop from the Ossoff or Warnock campaigns and changes in Black turnout or top-of-the-ticket Democratic margins. 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. We have also obtained data on Georgia Democratic Party operations for the runoffs that show heavy reliance on out-of-state organizers who were usually much less embedded locally than NGP operatives. 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.

CONCLUSION

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 offered a statewide framework and a previously under-engaged large constituency of Black citizens interested in supporting social justice reforms.

Contrasting visions of *how* to build power have animated these reform campaigns. Barber’s movement has primarily used 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.”⁸² In Georgia, by contrast, Abrams herself and the various organizations and alliances she and her allies 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, even as they operate through nonprofits, clearly align with mainstream-liberal Democratic Party campaigns and messages. Their messages and outreach are bold, sustained, 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

⁸² Andrews quoted in Yeoman, “Can Moral Mondays Produce Victorious Tuesdays?”

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.

This article also used over-time analysis and newly collected organizational data to show how and why these two statewide social justice movements ended up pursuing the tactics they did, and to what effect – especially in the most recent period since 2014 when both movements tried to influence election outcomes. By tracking years of organizational efforts in geospatial terms, we have also cast new light on the 2020 election outcomes that surprised so many 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.⁸³ Those efforts may bear fruit, but this analysis also suggests that it could take time, because the Georgia outcomes in 2020 and 2021 had years of organizing behind them.

A word of caution is in also order about our analysis of recent events. Although we believe our research illuminates recent electoral trajectories, we do not proclaim any 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.

Although we cannot predict what will happen next in Georgia or North Carolina, we believe our examination of movement-party trajectories in these key states has added insights beyond instant accounts. Most fundamentally, this historical and institutionally situated comparison of the Barber and Abrams-orchestrated social justice campaigns highlights reasons for – as well as the high stakes of – movement choices about party alignments. In the current era

⁸³ See the New North Carolina Project website: <https://newnorthcarolinaproject.org/>. Executive director Aimy Steele discussed the organization in “Building a Grassroots Strategy to Elect Democrats in NC: How Georgia Did It,” *Neighbors on Call*.

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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Appendix A: Outreach Beyond North Carolina Metropolitan Areas and Changes in Black Turnout and Democratic Margins, 2012-2014

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	% Change in Black Turnout	Change in Dem Vote Share
	(1)	(2)
Moral Freedom Summer Organizer	1.147 (2.565)	-0.796* (0.469)
Hosted Moral Mondays Rally	0.161 (2.357)	-0.858** (0.431)
Population Density	-0.011 (0.008)	0.00001 (0.001)
Median Household Income (\$1,000s)	0.633*** (0.194)	-0.049 (0.035)
% CVAP (25+) with BA	-0.437* (0.223)	0.072* (0.041)
Black CVAP as % of Total	0.162** (0.073)	-0.025* (0.013)
Constant	-60.258*** (7.159)	2.406* (1.287)
Observations	89	90
R ²	0.199	0.257
Adjusted R ²	0.140	0.204
Residual Std. Error	29.662 (df = 82)	5.422 (df = 83)
F Statistic	3.396*** (df = 6; 82)	4.797*** (df = 6; 83)

Note: Models present weighted least squares regressions investigating associations between organizing activity in North Carolina counties beyond Charlotte, the Research Triangle, and the Piedmont Triad and two dependent variables: percent changes in Black turnout and changes in Democratic margins between 2012 and 2014. One North Carolina county is excluded from the first model because it had no Black voters in 2012. Organizing measures come from authors' searches of webpages related to HKonJ. County-level data on Black turnout and Democratic margins are from the North Carolina State Board of Elections and Dave Leip's Detailed General Election Data, respectively. Observations are weighted by log county population from 5-year ACS estimates in 2012. Measures of population density per square mile, median household income, higher education shares, and Black population shares are also from 5-year ACS estimates in 2012. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

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

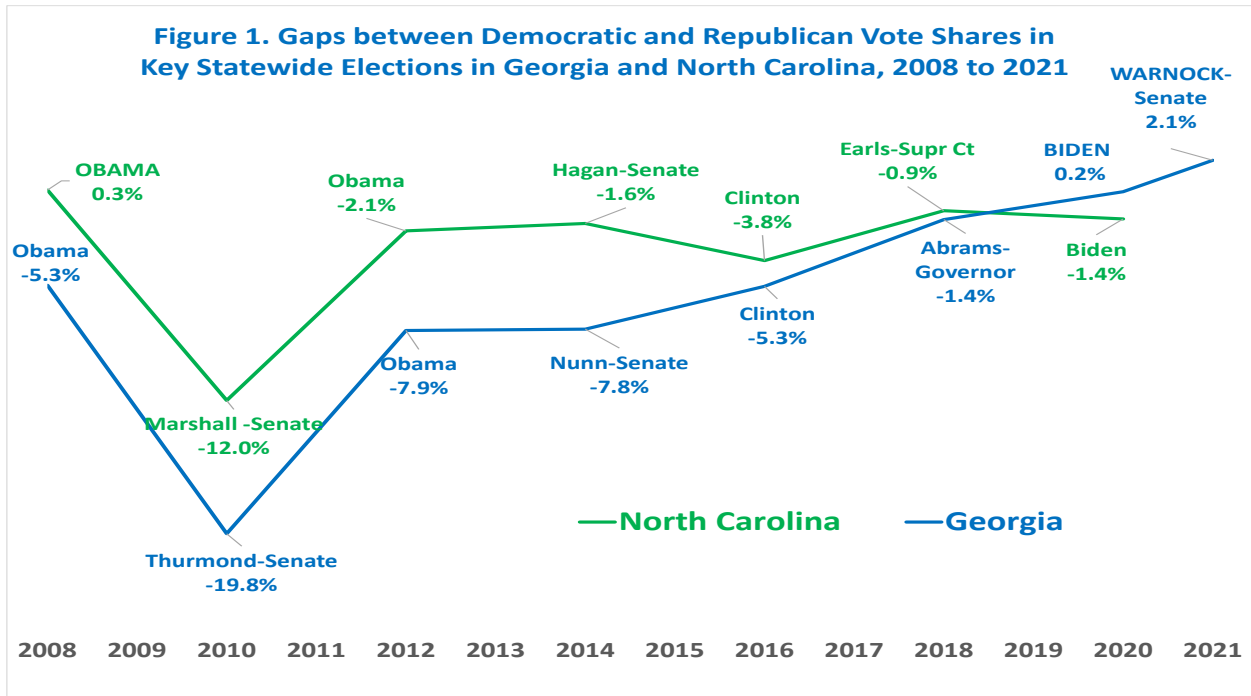
Time Period	Amounts Abrams raised as candidate	Amounts raised for nonprofits Abrams founded	Total Sums
Career in Georgia House, 2005-10	\$285,010.22	X	\$285,010.22
Minority Leader initial period, 2011-12	\$249,679.00	X	\$249,679.00
Organizational development, 2013-16	\$643,398.39	\$12,547,048	\$13,190,446.39
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

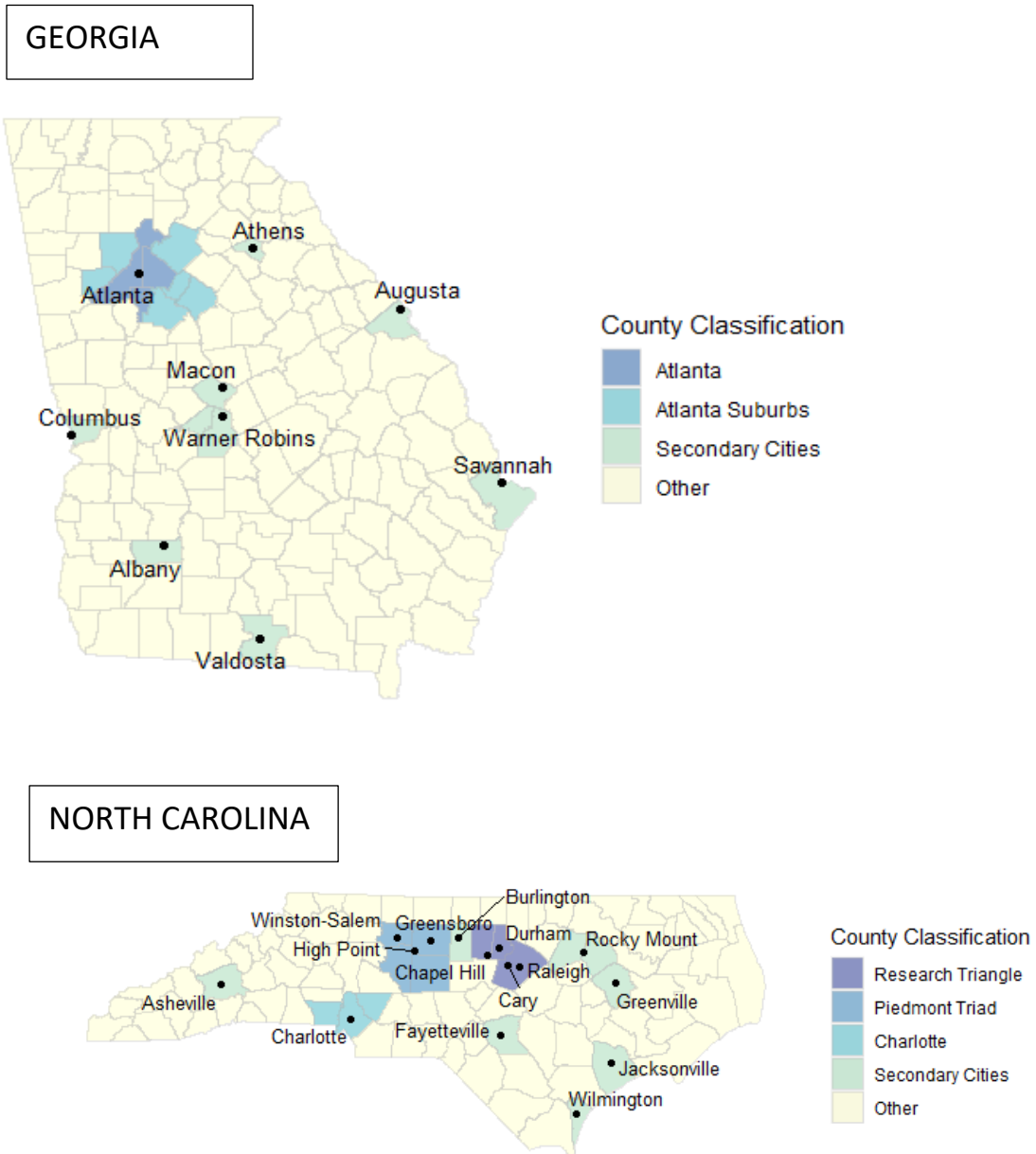
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	% Change in Black Turnout	Change in Dem Vote Share
	(1)	(2)
NGP Field Office	1.795** (0.754)	0.525*** (0.156)
Dem Party Field Office	-1.453* (0.795)	0.044 (0.164)
Ossoff-Warnock Tour Stop	-1.989* (1.008)	-0.219 (0.208)
Population Density	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.0004)
Median Household Income (\$1,000s)	0.071 (0.057)	-0.045*** (0.012)
% CVAP (25+) with BA	0.054 (0.063)	-0.003 (0.013)
Black CVAP as % of Total	0.085*** (0.019)	0.004 (0.004)
Constant	-16.809*** (1.703)	2.057*** (0.352)
Observations	150	150
R ²	0.240	0.236
Adjusted R ²	0.202	0.198
Residual Std. Error (df = 142)	10.494	2.167
F Statistic (df = 7; 142)	6.401***	6.257***

Note: Models present weighted least squares regressions investigating associations between organizing activity in Georgia counties beyond the Atlanta metroplex and two dependent variables: percent changes in Black turnout between the 2020 general and 2021 runoff elections, and changes in Democratic margins between Biden's presidential race and Warnock's senatorial runoff. Organizing measures come from authors' searches of webpages related to the New Georgia Project and the Democratic Party of Georgia. County-level data on Black turnout and Democratic vote share are from the Georgia Secretary of State. The variance of observations is weighted by log county population from 5-year ACS estimates in 2019. Data on population density per square mile, median household income, higher education shares, and Black population shares are from 5-year ACS estimates in 2019, the most proximate year with data availability. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.



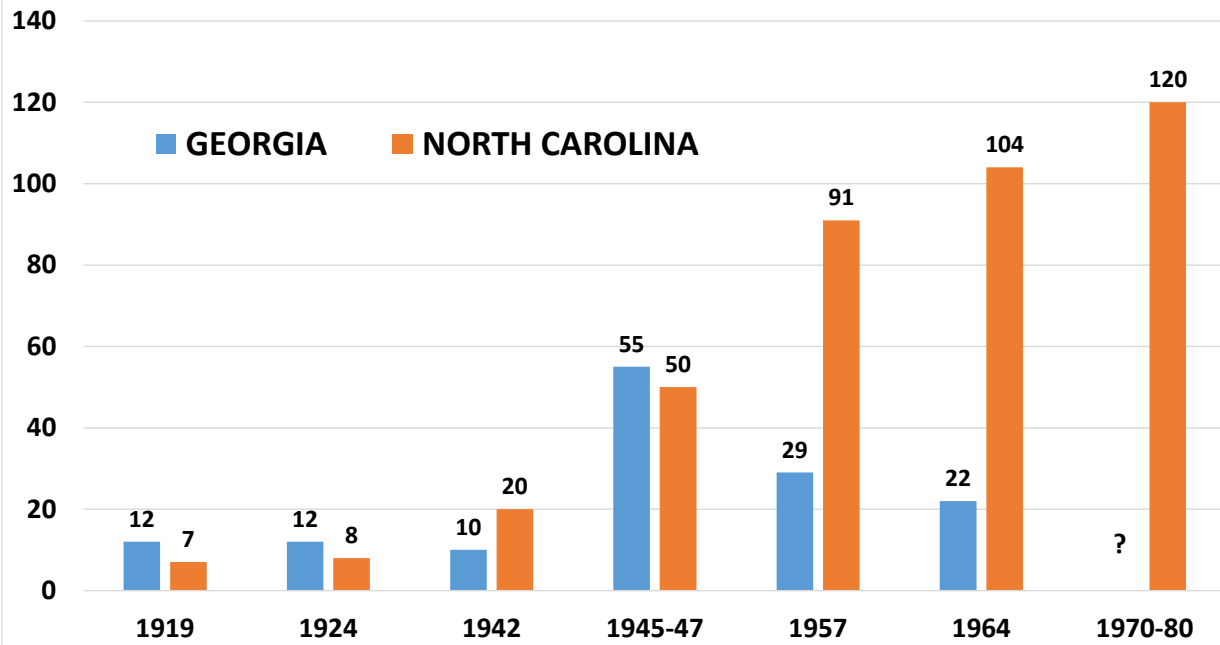
Sources: Georgia Secretary of State Current and Past Election Results, accessed March 27, 2021: https://sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/current_and_past_elections_results; North Carolina State Board of Elections Historical Election Results Data, accessed March 27, 2021: <https://www.ncsbe.gov/results-data/election-results/historical-election-results-data>.

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




Source: Authors' coding, based off the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes.

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: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

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.ubernc.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 watch their money, but with God's Grace and your hard work, we can save our member them! Please join me on February 10, 2007 in Raleigh."

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

THE PEOPLE'S AGENDA: 14 POINTS


1. All Children Need High Quality, Well Funded, Diverse Schools.
2. Livable Wages and Support for Low Income People.
3. Health Care for All.
4. 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.
5. Same Day Registration and Public Financing of Elections.
6. Lift Every Historically Black College and University.
7. Document and Redress 200 years of State Discrimination in Hiring and Contracting.
8. Provide Affordable Housing and Stop Consumer Abuse.
9. Abolish Racially Biased Death Penalty and Mandatory Sentencing Laws; Reform our Prisons.
10. Put Young People to Work to Save the Environment and Fight for Environmental Justice.
11. Collective Bargaining for Public Employees.
12. Protect the Rights of Immigrants from Latin America and other Nations.
13. Organize, Strengthen and Provide Funding For Our Civil Rights Enforcement Agencies and Statutes Now.
14. Bring Our Troops Home from Iraq Now.

GROWING LIST OF HKONJ COALITION PARTNERS

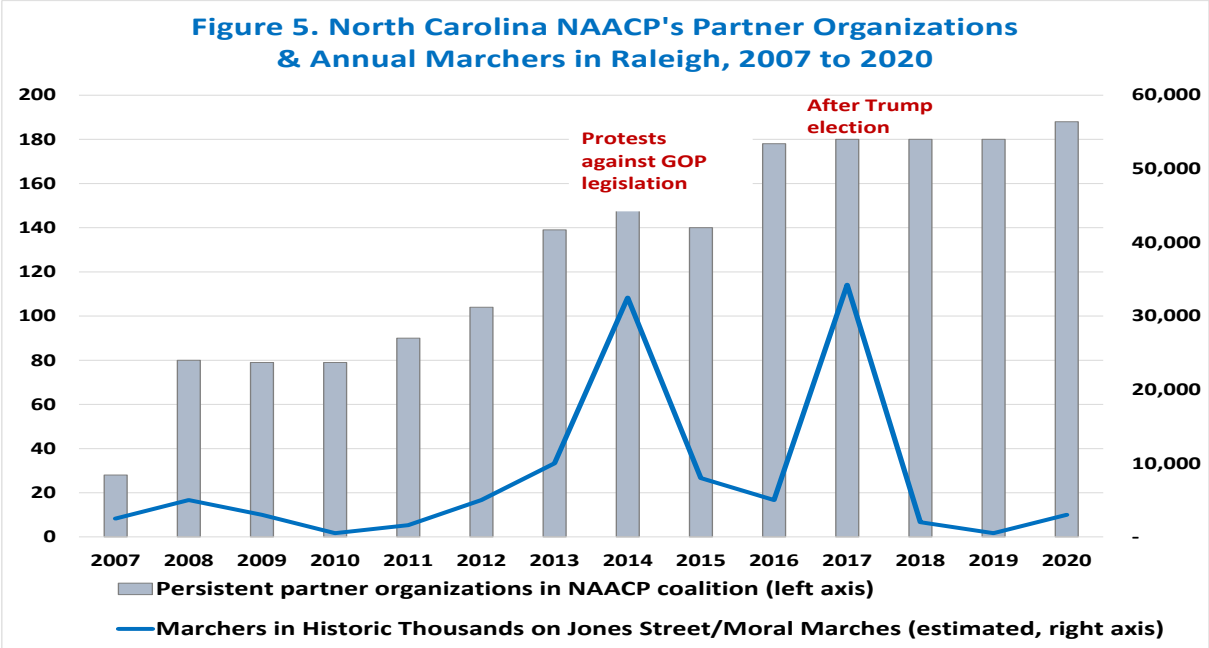
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACCBN • AFL-CIO • Black Workers for Justice • Carolina Justice Policy Center • Democracy NC • E. Pueblo • General Baptist State Convention • Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation • NC Association of CDICs • NC Black Leadership Council • NC Community Development Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Council of Churches • NC Fair Share • NC Institute for Minority Econ Dev • NC Justice Center • NC WABN • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern Faith, Labor and Community Alliance • Southerners for Economic Justice • The AME Zion Church • Triangle Low Generation Task Force • Triangle Urban League • U.S. Local 106 • UICW
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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.ubernc.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

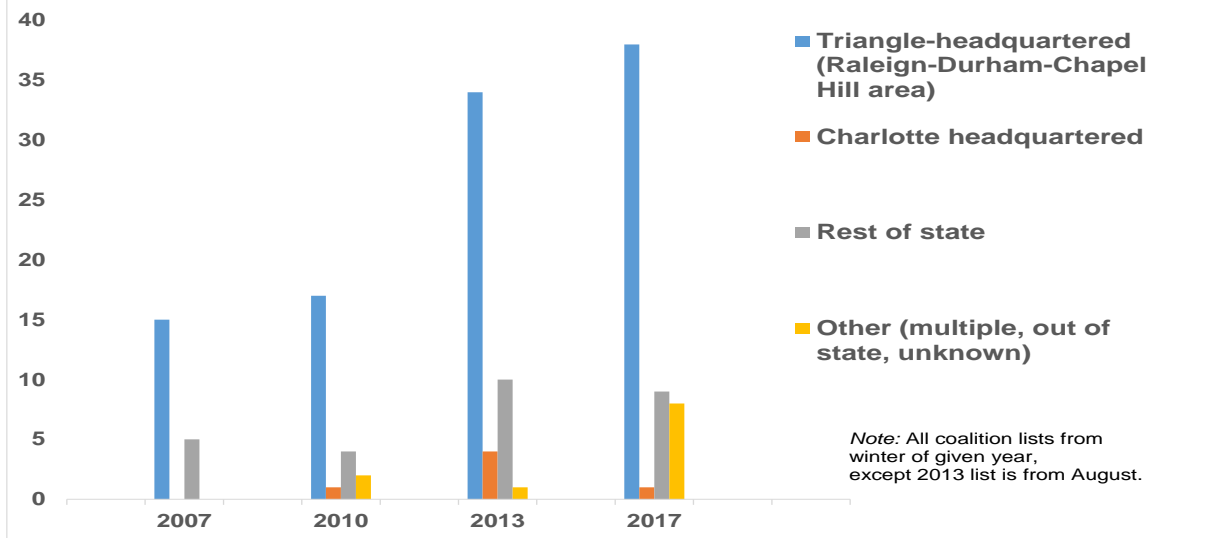


Source: NC Policy Watch, accessed March 1, 2021: <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/hkonj-flyer.pdf>.



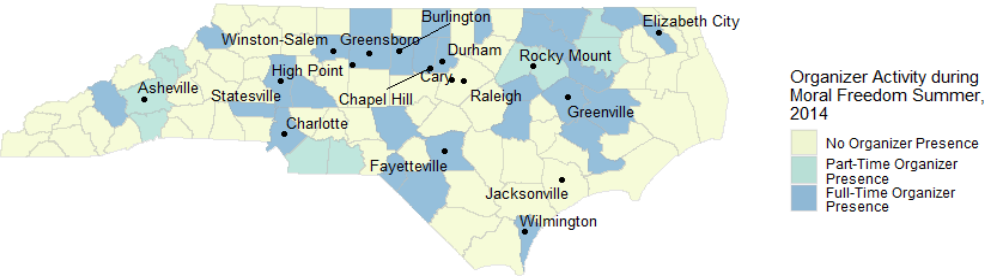
Sources: HKonJ partner organization figures from authors' tally of dated lists, accessed via Wayback archives of the state NAACP website (https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://naacpnc.org/); crowd estimates from *Raleigh News & Observer* reporting.

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

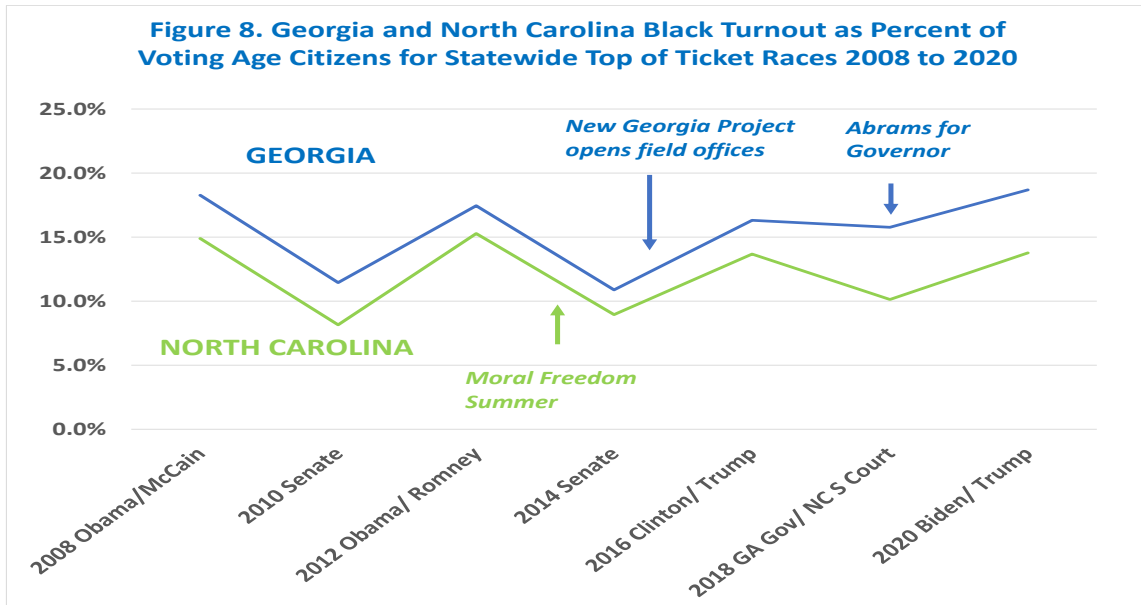


Sources: Author analysis of HKonJ partner organizations dated lists, accessed via Wayback archives of the state NAACP website (https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://naacpnc.org/).

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



Sources: North Carolina NAACP social media posts, confidential interview.



Note: Citizen voting age population estimates are available from 2009 to 2019; 2008 and 2020 estimates are accordingly approximated using figures from 2009 and 2019, respectively.

Sources: Citizen Voting Age Population estimates from the Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/voting-rights/cvap.html>. Black turnout statistics from the North Carolina State Board of Elections' Historical Election Results Data and the Georgia Secretary of State's Voter Turnout by Demographics data: <https://www.ncsbe.gov/results-data/election-results/historical-election-results-data>, https://sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/voter_turn_out_by_demographics.

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

