A Review Examining How the Republican Party Can Win Key Electoral Votes in Georgia and North Carolina

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Abstract

Given the importance of the 2024 presidential election for the Republican Party, it is imperative that they are able to win the 32 combined electoral votes from the states of Georgia and North Carolina. In order to determine the best strategy for the Republican Party to employ, this paper will first examine voting behavior theories that explain recent voting trends among the United States electorate as a whole. Next, it will focus on the political history of the American South in order to explain recent voting trends in the area. The next two sections will focus on the historical and recent voting trends in both Florida and Virginia to highlight where the Republican Party has succeeded and failed in the region. Then, this paper will examine the historical and recent voting trends in Georgia and North Carolina in order to determine what the Republican Party needs to do to win these states in 2024. Lastly, the paper will conclude with a set of recommendations for the Republican Party to adopt in order to give them the best chance of winning the 32 electoral votes of Georgia and North Carolina.

Keywords: voting trends, 2024 presidential election, Georgia, North Carolina
In 2016, the future looked bright for the Republican Party. They were able to maintain their majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives, and in what came as a surprise to many, Trump was able to beat Hilary Clinton to win the presidency. However, during the 2018 midterms, Democrats were able to take back a majority in the House. This trend continued in 2020 as Donald Trump lost his reelection bid to Joe Biden, and the Senate became a 50-50 split with the tie-breaking vote going to Democratic Vice President, Kamala Harris. In only four years, Republicans had entirely lost the control they had in the federal government. While Republicans gained back majority in the House during the 2022 midterms, they lost a seat in the Senate with John Fetterman beating Mehmet Oz in the Pennsylvania Senate race. Moreover, Republicans went into the 2022 midterms expecting to win an overwhelming amount of their races across the country. With Joe Biden struggling in approval ratings and the economy in a bad state, this raises the question of why Republicans were unable to fully take advantage of this opportunity and whether they have a chance of winning the 2024 presidential election.

Due to the Republican Party’s recent performance at the federal level, 2024 will be a pivotal election cycle that could determine the future direction of the Party. At the moment, it seems likely that Donald Trump will win the Republican nomination as he currently enjoys a significant lead over the other candidates at 56.6 percent. Additionally, Joe Biden is currently claiming to be running for reelection in what will likely be a rematch of the 2020 election. In 2024, Donald Trump will look to learn from his failures in the last election and capitalize on Joe Biden’s low approval among the American public in order to win the presidency.

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However, with the country seemingly moving in a more liberal direction, this will be an uphill battle for Trump and the Republican Party. While the Party will undoubtedly invest significant resources in important swing states in the Rust Belt and the Southwest such as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Arizona and Nevada, they should not overlook the Southern Region where they have lost ground in the area in recent elections. Specifically, they need to focus on the states of Georgia and North Carolina to give them a chance of winning the 2024 election. In Georgia, Trump lost the state and the Party lost both Senate seats in 2020. Additionally, while Trump was able to narrowly win the state of North Carolina in 2020, he lost significant ground in the state from 2016, and Democrats will likely direct a large portion of their resources there in an attempt to flip the state for 2024. The 32 combined electoral points of these states (16 each) are incredibly crucial for Trump’s chances of winning the 2024 election. If Trump loses both states, there is seemingly no path to victory without flipping a state that is not currently considered a swing state. Moreover, even if Trump splits these states, he will likely need to rely on winning Pennsylvania that recently rejected his endorsed candidate for Senate, Mehmet Oz. Because of this, the Republican Party needs to invest significant resources as well as examine recent trends in these states to give them a chance of winning the 2024 presidential election.

In order to examine how the Republican Party can win the 2024 presidential election, this paper will focus on the importance of performing well in the states of Georgia and North Carolina. First the paper will look at general voting behavior theories that explain recent voting trends among the American electorate since 2016. Next, it will look more in depth at historical and recent voting trends in the American South, concentrating on the states of Florida, Virginia, Georgia and North Carolina. With Florida moving in a conservative direction and Virginia moving in a liberal direction, these states help to highlight the Republican Party’s successes and
failures in the region. Lastly, this paper will make recommendations for how Trump and the Republican Party can win the key states of Georgia and North Carolina in the 2024 presidential election.

**Voting Behavior Theories**

Before looking into state-specific trends, it is important to examine general voting behavior theories to help explain recent voting trends in the country. One trend that has been especially pronounced since the Republican primaries leading up to the 2016 election is the rural versus urban divide. This trend was actively exploited by Donald Trump and was a significant reason why he won the 2016 Presidential Election over Hilary Clinton. This divide is mainly rooted in the economic inequalities of the country. Since World War II, while growth has increased exponentially among the wealthiest individuals, it has been relatively stagnant for the lowest 40 percent in income.² This income inequality has produced a large gap between political access for wealthy Americans and everyone else. Because of this, the policies passed by elected officials tend to reflect the preferences and needs of the wealthier urban Americans rather than rural Americans.³ This includes more than just economic policy. On a range of issues such as abortion, gun control, death penalty and education spending, state policy tends to be unresponsive to the preferences of the lowest-income rural constituents.⁴ Additionally, rural communities have their own distinct culture and lifestyle that is different from that of urban communities. This difference has led rural communities to feel as though their distinct culture is

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³ Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*
⁴ Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*
not respected by urban Americans and policymakers in the United States.\textsuperscript{5} Ultimately, these reasons have contributed to a rural consciousness that resents their fellow urban Americans. During the 2016 election, Donald Trump was able to play into this rural resentment towards urban communities and the political elite. By fueling this feeling among rural Americans, Trump effectively captured the rural vote and turned rural America into a Republican stronghold.

Another broader voting behavior theory that Donald Trump has exploited is that inciting anger among the American electorate leads to increased voter loyalty. Over the course of this century, the American public has become increasingly polarized. However, more than polarization, Americans who consider themselves Republicans are actively angry with their Democratic counterparts and vice versa.\textsuperscript{6} This feeling of anger is a powerful force that drives patterns of political behavior and public opinion. There are three main reasons that have amplified this sense of anger among the American public. The first trend is how the American public has been essentially boxed into partisan identities along racial, ethnic, cultural and ideological lines. This alignment of identities has created an “us versus them” sentiment among Americans which perpetuates anger fueled politics.\textsuperscript{7} The second trend is the role of the media. The current media environment is made up of biased, partisan news outlets that report events through an ideological lens. This media environment works to reinforce pre-existing beliefs among viewers which further entrenches partisan identities.\textsuperscript{8} Lastly, the development of the internet and social media has worked to advance these partisan divisions. Americans with differing views can argue with each other via social media or other online sources which

\textsuperscript{5} Cramer, \textit{The Politics of Resentment}


\textsuperscript{7} Webster, \textit{American Rage}

\textsuperscript{8} Webster, \textit{American Rage}
reinforces this sense of anger for those with opposing beliefs. This sense of anger has the effect of strengthening voter loyalty while weakening trust in government institutions and commitment to democratic norms.\(^9\) Trump exploited this trend by constantly engaging in passionate, rage-fueled rants about how Democrats are trying to ruin the country. This has worked to solidify his base and even played a major role in many Americans believing his claim that the 2020 election was fraudulent.

Similarly, another anger related voting behavior theory that worked in Trump’s favor in 2016 is that appeals to anger typically increase voting activity among whites. Conversely, this appeal does not have the same effect on African Americans who respond better to enthusiasm.\(^10\) Anger has been demonstrated to especially push white voters to take up costly political action such as voting and donating to campaigns. This trend is much more pronounced for whites than African Americans due to their different responses to negative political developments.\(^11\) When whites are faced with negative developments, appeals to anger work to instill a sense that they can actively reverse these policies through political action. However, African Americans, appeals to anger to not have the same result as they tend to respond to negative developments with a sense of hopelessness.\(^12\) The United States’ long history of discriminating against African Americans has shaped this collective emotional response of hopelessness. Since African Americans have had to deal with negative political developments for centuries it is no surprise to them when threats emerge.\(^13\) This racial resignation has created an anger gap in politics between white Americans and African Americans. While appeals to anger typically do not work as well

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\(^9\) Webster, *American Rage*  
\(^11\) Phoenix, *The Anger Gap*  
\(^12\) Phoenix, *The Anger Gap*  
\(^13\) Phoenix, *The Anger Gap*
with African Americans, this demographic does respond to feelings of enthusiasm which has a stronger mobilizing effect on black participation relative to whites.\textsuperscript{14} This trend was exemplified in the change in voter turnout from 2012 to 2016. Voter turnout among African Americans had been steadily increasing since 1996, hitting a historical high of 66.4 percent in 2012. However, this number steeply fell in 2016 to 59.3 percent.\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand, while turnout among whites had been steadily decreasing since 2004 to 64.1 percent in 2012, this percentage jumped back up in 2016 to 65.3 percent.\textsuperscript{16} In 2008 and 2012 especially, African Americans felt a great deal of enthusiasm with President Barack Obama being the first black president. However, when Donald Trump came onto the scene in 2016, his appeals to anger worked to mobilize white voters. The depressed black turnout in 2016 was likely more pronounced due to the lack of enthusiasm for Democratic candidate Hilary Clinton. It is important to note that this lack of response to anger-fueling political messaging by African Americans is also shared by other racial minorities such as Hispanics and Asians. For similar reasons, Hispanics and Asians tend to have this same sense of apathy with appeals to anger.\textsuperscript{17}

The last, more general voting behavior theory that is important to understand is that the collective policy preferences of the American public are rational and stable, following consistent patterns. Public opinion rarely fluctuates by large amounts from the overall trend.\textsuperscript{18} In this sense, it is easy to understand and predict the ways in which the public will feel about any given domestic or foreign policy issue. While when looking at individuals there seems to be major differences in policy preferences, looking at the American public as a whole shows that the

\textsuperscript{14} Phoenix, \textit{The Anger Gap}
\textsuperscript{15} Phoenix, \textit{The Anger Gap}
\textsuperscript{16} Phoenix, \textit{The Anger Gap}
\textsuperscript{17} Phoenix, \textit{The Anger Gap}
collective preferences do not fluctuate nearly as much. These random deviations of individuals tend to cancel out over a large sample which leads to a collective opinion that is largely free of the random error of individual preferences. For example, in the case of many social issues such as racial equality, women’s rights and law enforcement, public opinion moved steadily in a liberal direction during the 1950s and 1960s, moved back in a conservative direction in the late 1970s and has resumed its liberal trend since then. Additionally with economic policy, the public’s preferences have held steady as well except in times of economic crisis. In different demographics within the American public, opinions of different groups also tend to move in parallel directions at the same time. This emphasizes that regardless of the differing backgrounds of individual Americans, the overall collective trend on policy preferences seems to be steady among all groups of people. It is important to note the role that mass media plays in the formation of these trends. While the collective preferences generally move in a predictable direction, shifts in public opinion are typically caused by how news is shaped by influential media sources. It is important for parties and candidates to understand these collective trends in policy preferences. By understanding these predictable trends, candidates can shape their political messaging accordingly.

Understanding these voting behavior theories are important to gain insight into recent voting trends. In 2016, Donald Trump was able to use these voting behavior trends to his advantage. By using anger-fueling rhetoric throughout his campaign, Trump was able to intensify rural resentment for urban dwellers, as well as increase voter loyalty and turnout among
the white electorate. Through his ability to effectively exploit these trends in voting behavior, Trump was able to win key states and ultimately the presidency in 2016. However, in 2020, while Trump continued to incite anger with his political messaging, he was not able to win the election. This could have been the result of Biden appealing to a sense of enthusiasm among minority voters. Among African Americans, Hispanics and Asians, voter turnout increased significantly from their percentages in 2016. Additionally, this could have been more pronounced due to Trump’s handling of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and voters wanting a change in leadership. For the 2024 election, Trump will likely not be able to rely on his anger-fueling tactics as he did in 2016. In order to win the election, he will need to identify the trend of collective policy preferences among the American public and tailor his campaign accordingly. More specifically, he will need to examine trends occurring in the American South to strategize the best way to win the key electoral votes from Georgia and North Carolina.

**Overview of Southern Voting Trends**

The American South has a long history of voting in unity. After the end of the Civil War through the mid-20th century, the candidate from the Democratic party could usually count on the electoral votes from the entire Southern region. From the 1880 election to the 1944 election, the former confederate states all voted for the candidate from the Democratic Party in all but two elections (1920 and 1928). Since the Democratic party during this time was essentially the party of the common man advocating for states’ rights and supporting agrarian interests, they aligned with the core ideals of the Southern Bloc.

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During this period, politics of the South primarily revolved around the position of African Americans. These states were mainly concerned with maintaining the supremacy of whites over African Americans in the region.\textsuperscript{26} After slavery was abolished, there were counties, called black belts, where the African American population outnumbered the white population in the area. As a result, these politically powerful black belts became primarily focused on maintaining the superiority of the white minority.\textsuperscript{27} Even though the whites in these black belts were outnumbered by blacks in the region, through unity and political skill, they were able to wield decisive power and influence over the entire Southern Region.\textsuperscript{28} Through this significant influence, white politicians in the black belts were able to gain support from the rest of the South for policies that disenfranchised African Americans such as poll taxes and literacy tests.\textsuperscript{29} More importantly, a serious two-party competition in the region would be profoundly detrimental to the efforts of black belt whites. Because of this, it was essential to rally Southern unity around the Democratic Party in order to block any national move to interfere with the South’s desire to deal with race relations differently than the rest of the country.\textsuperscript{30} Ultimately, black belt whites were able to persuade the rest of the South to unite in order to protect their doctrine over the status of African Americans and effectively put down the threat of two-party competition in the region for over half a century.\textsuperscript{31}

Additionally, the South in the early 20th century was primarily an agrarian society, and their economic interests were at odds with the industrialized North. While the rest of the country

\textsuperscript{26} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
\textsuperscript{27} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
\textsuperscript{28} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
\textsuperscript{29} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
\textsuperscript{30} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
\textsuperscript{31} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
was rapidly becoming urbanized and industrialized, the South remained vastly poor and rural.\textsuperscript{32} During this time, the Democratic Party was more favorable to the agrarian interests of the South, supporting policies such as lower tariffs. This was important since most of the black belt whites were large agricultural operators who were overwhelmingly conservative.\textsuperscript{33} The Democratic Party’s support for the interests of agricultural communities solidified them as the dominant Party in the region for decades. Ultimately, through support for agrarian interests and an emphasis on states’ rights, the Democratic Party was able to win over black belt whites who shaped the South into a stronghold for the Party during the early 20th century.

This Southern unity for the Democratic Party began to fracture in 1948. At this time, the power of black belt whites began to sharply decline. The Democratic Party began to abandon this demographic in favor of more liberal urban voters. More importantly, President Truman sent a proposal for legislative action on civil rights to Congress in 1948.\textsuperscript{34} This enraged Southerners who were increasingly fearful that African Americans would soon gain equal rights in the United States.\textsuperscript{35} As a result, by the general election in 1952, the Southern voting unity had been broken with Tennessee, Virginia, Florida and Texas voting Republican. In 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was passed, the “one-party South” had been officially dismantled. With the Civil Rights Act and a series of Supreme Court Decisions that reaffirmed the voting rights of African Americans, millions of Southerners became eligible to vote which made possible the emergence of political opposition.\textsuperscript{36} In addition to Civil Rights legislation being passed, the South’s gradual shift towards urbanization and industrialization played an important role in the region’s shifting

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  \item Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
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  \item Perman, \textit{Pursuit of Unity}
  \item Perman, \textit{Pursuit of Unity}
\end{itemize}
ideals. After the conclusion of World War II, the South began to renovate their economy with manufacturing firms, industrial enterprises, commercial and banking operations growing increasingly prevalent in the area.\textsuperscript{37} As these industries began to thrive in the South, cities grew exponentially, and suburbs began to sprawl into areas that were relatively poor and rural a decade before. Additionally, as national corporations expanded into the Southern Region, their employees became transplants into the various growing cities such as Atlanta and Charlotte.

These shifting trends in the South as well as the Democratic Party’s transition to a more liberal platform allowed the Republican Party to make significant gains in the Southern Region. Republicans were able to capture the conservative wing of the Democratic Party following the Civil Rights Act, and by 1990, they were able to make substantial gains in congressional and state elections.\textsuperscript{38} Ultimately, the Republican Party was able to take advantage of this opportunity and has had incredible success in the region gaining the electoral votes of most of these former confederate states in all but one election since 1972. However, while Republicans have been successful in the region, the Party does not enjoy the same unified conservative stronghold that the Democratic Party once had in the early 20th century. As previously stated, the region is much more urbanized and developed than it was in the first half of the 20th century. This has created hubs of liberal voting constituencies around the major cities in the South. While Republicans can be confident of their standing in rural counties, the increasing suburbanization in the South is threatening to cut into Republican’s margins and increase the Democratic presence in the region. Additionally, the surge of migration into southern states presents another problem for a Republican Party that has seemingly alienated many of the demographic groups that are becoming an increasingly higher share of the population.

\textsuperscript{37} Perman, \textit{Pursuit of Unity}
\textsuperscript{38} Perman, \textit{Pursuit of Unity}
As the past presidential elections have been incredibly close and competitive, the Republican Party needs to be able to rely on the electoral votes of these southern states in order to feel confident in the general election. Notable trends such as Virginia voting for the Democratic candidate in every presidential election since 2008 and Florida shifting from a democratic leaning swing state in the early 21st century to a solid Republican stronghold are important to look at in order to determine where the Republican Party has failed and succeeded in the region. Additionally, the recent trends of Georgia narrowly voting for Joe Biden in 2020 and Donald Trump losing ground in North Carolina from the 2016 election to the 2020 election should raise concern in the Republican Party. Especially what projects to be another close general election in 2024, the Republican Party cannot afford to lose in both Georgia and North Carolina. Assuming none of the non-swing states flip Republican, losing Georgia and North Carolina would leave no path to victory for the Republican Party. Even if Republicans were to hold on to North Carolina and lose Georgia, their chances would be slim as they would likely have to also win Pennsylvania in this scenario. Because of this, it is essential for the Republican candidate to win in both Georgia and North Carolina in order to have a legitimate chance of winning the 2024 Presidential Election. In the following section, I will examine the historical and current political trends in Florida, Virginia, Georgia and North Carolina in order to determine the best strategy for the Republican Party to implement in the region to gain the key electoral votes from Georgia and North Carolina in 2024.

*Florida’s Voting Trends*

Throughout its history, Florida has had unusual political trends. Even though the state voted for the Democratic candidate in all but one election from 1880 to 1948, the shape of
Florida’s society and their core values were clearly different from the rest of the South during this time. In the first half of the 20th century, large cities had already begun to attract a large portion of the state’s population. By 1940, 43 percent of the population lived in either Pensacola, Jacksonville, St. Petersburg, Tampa or Miami.39 This relatively vast urbanization resulted in politics that largely differed from the rest of the South that was predominantly rural at this time. Additionally, even a significant portion of Florida’s rural population was non-agricultural. Because of this, Florida had the smallest farm population of all the southern states with only 16 percent of the population living on farms. For comparison, the second lowest proportion was Texas at almost 34 percent.40 Due to this relatively small farm population in the state, the rustic demagoguery that characterized politics in other parts of the South at the time was largely absent in Florida. Furthermore, this early urbanization in the state led to Florida’s politics becoming less concerned with the status of African Americans.41 While the politics of race relations were by no means absent in Florida, it was much more a secondary issue to Florida voters than in other southern states where it was constantly the primary issue among the former plantation owners in black belt areas.

In addition to a lower focus on the status of African Americans, this relatively high degree of urbanization in the state led to the building of a highly diversified economy. Unlike the one-dimensional, cotton based agricultural economies of other southern states, Florida enjoyed many thriving sectors in their economy such as fishing, real estate and tourism.42 This diversified economy fundamentally set Florida apart from other southern states. Where in other parts of the South, agrarian interests played a major role in politics at the time, this was not the case in

39 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
40 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
41 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
42 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
Florida. With many more thriving sectors in Florida’s economy, it made them less reliant on favorable agrarian policies from politicians.

Another trend unique to Florida at this time was a rapid increase of its population via immigration from other states. For migrating citizens, Florida presented a beautiful, coastal state with different urban hubs that offered an opportunity to earn a relatively high income. From 1920 to 1930, this rapid migration resulted in Florida’s population increasing at four times the national rate. At the time, the other southern states did not see anywhere near this volume of immigration, and their constituents largely consisted of families that had lived in the state for decades. Conversely, due to the rapid influx of immigrants, almost half of Florida’s population was born in another state. This was another major reason why the politics of Florida differed so greatly from the rest of the South. The lack of family roots in the state created an uncrystallized social structure wherein generational political loyalties do not exist.

This political fluidity centered around human relations rather than political loyalties created a political atmosphere of multi-factionalism in the state. As many different groups of voters lived in counties that were vastly different from each other, candidates for office mostly ran without collaboration from other local candidates or even a central party presence. The distribution of the vote in primaries was generally dispersed among several candidates rather than going to primarily one or two candidates as it was in other southern states. This political individualism created an environment where political candidates succeeded mostly due to an outstanding personality and excellent public speaking skills rather than endorsements from party bosses. This discontinuous nature of the political system in Florida made it so that the Florida

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43 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
44 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
45 Key, *Southern Politics in State*
voters were never attached to any specific faction. Because of this, political alliances were rarely formed in the state’s political system.

The increased urbanization, rapid rate of migration, diversified economy and multi-factional political atmosphere distanced Florida from the rest of the South in the first half of the 20th century. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Florida’s ideological and cultural differences from the rest of the South became even more pronounced. Unlike the rest of the South that has generally held steady in their support for the more conservative party, Florida has repeatedly swung from voting for the Democratic candidate and the Republican candidate in the general election. This made Florida an important swing state where candidates spent millions in campaign funds trying to win the state.

During the beginning of the 21st century, Florida has voted twice for the Democrat and four times for the Republican in presidential elections. Until 2020, the margins of victory in Florida had been extremely narrow for both parties. Notably in 2000, George W. Bush won the state by just over 500 votes. In the 2008 and 2012 elections, Democrats narrowly won the state with Barack Obama winning 50.9 percent and 50.01 percent of the vote respectively. However, beginning in 2020, the state has seemingly shifted to becoming a Republican stronghold. In 2020, Donald Trump won the state with 51.2 percent of the vote. During the 2022 midterms, Ron DeSantis won the governorship with 59.4 percent of the vote, remarkably winning the historically liberal county of Miami-Dade by over 11 percentage points. This recent success

that the Republican Party has had in Florida is important to examine in order to see if it can be replicated in the key southern states of Georgia and North Carolina in 2024.

After Barack Obama won the state for the second time in 2012, Republicans rushed to create a plan for their presence in the state in order to stop Florida from becoming a staple for Democratic party. In this new strategy, the Republican Party built a permanent campaign apparatus in the state, started recruiting candidates to run for local offices and spring boarded them to higher offices. This focus on state governments has been a key republican strategy throughout the country during this century. This plan has had an especially encouraging result in Florida recently and has been an important reason for Republican success in the state. By recruiting republican candidates for local offices, these candidates gain important name recognition in various key counties. This accelerates their political career as they run for higher offices at an increasingly successful rate. In 2022, Republicans were able to gain a supermajority in the state legislature. Additionally, 2022 marked the first time since reconstruction that not a single Democrat held a statewide elected office.

One particular politician who has made significant inroads for the Republican Party in Florida has been Governor Ron DeSantis. After his initial inauguration in 2019, he directed Republican efforts to be focused on registering previously unregistered Republicans. This resulted in the Republican Party netting an increase of 40,000 voters that year. Currently, the state of Florida has 588,930 more registered Republicans than it did in 2018. This focus on

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increasing the number of registered Republican voters in the state has been one of the key reasons why Florida is now a solid Republican state.

In addition to registering more Republicans in the state, Governor DeSantis took advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to turn Florida into a conservative safe haven. American citizens who grew tired and angry with the policies in more left-leaning states that closed businesses and schools, implemented statewide mask mandates and required vaccination moved in large waves to Florida. In addition to pre-pandemic attractions such as good weather, affordable housing and low taxes, waves of people and businesses moved to the state as Governor DeSantis constantly claimed that they could escape the pandemic restrictions in the “free state of Florida.”

Even after the COVID-19 pandemic began to reside, Governor DeSantis continued to use his increasingly large platform to publicly bring attention to his conservative policies. Specifically with regards to education issues, many parents grew worried over their level of control in their children’s education. Governor DeSantis took advantage of this national sentiment by passing policies such as the Parents’ Bill of Rights in 2021 and most recently the Parental Rights Education Act in 2022. Through marketing these policies as important protections for parents of children in schools in the state, Governor DeSantis was able to attract more conservative voters to the state.

This conservative rhetoric and Former President Trump moving to Florida have resulted in Florida becoming a hub for Republican politics. Many national conservative operatives and donors who want to be close to the Former President have moved to the state. For example, the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) was held in Florida in 2021, a change from
their normal setting of Washington D.C. Currently many conservative institutions are trying to build out their intellectual infrastructure in the state. With all of these important conservative institutions and Republican officials moving to the state, it seems as though Florida will only shift further in the direction of the Republican Party for years to come.

The last important aspect of Florida that has significantly contributed to Republican’s success in the state is the relatively large Hispanic population. The Hispanic population in Florida is unlike the Hispanic populations of other states with the majority of Hispanics in Florida being Cuban. Since 2012, Republicans have made a concerted effort to reach out to this demographic in Florida. Through anti-socialist messaging used by both Ron DeSantis and Donald Trump, this demographic of mostly Cuban Hispanics began to turn to the Republican Party. Especially since these immigrants are generally escaping far left regimes in their home countries, these Hispanic immigrants began to feel embraced by a Republican Party that pushed for less government restrictions and opening the economy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. By reaching out to the Hispanic community in Florida, Republicans have effectively identified the demographic trend and have seemingly captured this important portion of the Florida electorate.

Ultimately, this recent trend of Florida becoming a Republican stronghold can provide hope for the Republican Party in southern states like Georgia and North Carolina where they have lost significant ground in recent elections. Even though focusing on recruiting candidates for local offices has worked in Florida, this strategy is much more long term, and would be

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unlikely to have an effect on the 2024 presidential election. However, the focus on registering more Republican voters in the state was a key strategic decision that ignited Republican dominance in the state. This focus should be implemented in other key states in order to maximize the Republican vote. Additionally, while conservative migration to the state was exaggerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the very public, conservative rhetoric used by Governor DeSantis was a major reason for this influx of Republican voters. However, while this approach has worked in Florida, it is not a guarantee that this would have the same effect in other states. Lastly, the Republican effort to reach out to the important Hispanic demographic in Florida has provided them the security they need in such an important state. A similar effort to identify and capture key demographics in the states of Georgia and North Carolina could be the key to winning these states in the 2024 Presidential Election.

**Virginia’s Voting Trends**

In contrast to Florida’s multi-factional political atmosphere in the early 20th century, Virginia was much more structured. Early 20th century politics in Virginia was entirely controlled by an oligarchy political machine. This machine, led by Harry F. Byrd, subverted democratic institutions and deprived most Virginians of their vote in order to maintain their immense power in the state.\textsuperscript{55} In Virginia, a smaller proportion of the electorate voted than in any other southern state at the time. On average, from 1925 to 1945, an alarmingly low rate of 11.5 percent of constituents over the age of 21 voted in Democratic primaries.\textsuperscript{56} This restricted electorate had the effect of making elections more manageable and easier for the Byrd machine to control which candidate wins.

\textsuperscript{55} Key, *Southern Politics in State*
\textsuperscript{56} Key, *Southern Politics in State*
The main reason why voter turnout was so low was that the opposition leadership was extremely weak. Virginia had two well-defined political factions: The machine and the anti-organization group.57 The opposition anti-organization group was incredibly weak, lacking leaders with strong political abilities. Additionally, in contrast to the Byrd machine, the anti-organization faction did not have a solid network of local officials across the state.58 The faction was merely held together by common opposition to the Byrd machine. Because of this, this opposition party could not rally the support of enough voters in the state to have a realistic chance of competing with the Byrd machine.59 This created a solid one-party political environment in the state.

While maintaining strong control of Virginia politics, the Byrd machine continually demonstrated a sense of honor, social responsibility, an aversion to taking bribes and a high degree of sensitivity to public opinion.60 Individuals in lower offices who had erratic qualities were blocked by the machine from gaining higher offices. The Byrd machine placed an importance on repressing certain vulgar characteristics that were employed by other southern politicians during this time.61 Additionally, by promoting candidates with gentlemen qualities, the Byrd machine worked effectively to push out candidates who were overly concerned with the status of African Americans. Whereas in other southern states politics was mainly driven by race dynamics, this was not a primary issue in Virginia at the time due to this feature of the Byrd machine.
The Byrd machine also made a concerted effort to look out for the interests of businesses in the state, both local and large enterprises. By focusing on the needs of the business community, the organization passed through policies of favorable corporate taxation, anti-labor and restraining the expansion of public services. As a result, they received almost undivided support from the business community in the state. This situation created an environment where businesses tended to thrive which led to increased urbanization through sustained growth of major cities in the state such as Richmond and Norfolk. This increasingly diversified economy allowed Virginia to become less reliant on their agriculture industry than other southern states.

While Virginia and Florida had very different political atmospheres during the first half of the 20th century, the politics of both states created conditions that began to differentiate them from the rest of the South. In Virginia the Byrd machine’s emphasis on candidates’ gentlemanly qualities and their business interests allowed the state to develop out of the race-focused, agrarian driven societies of other southern states. Unlike Florida however, Virginia was not considered a swing state at any point in time in the last half of the 20th century through the first couple elections in the 21st century. From the 1968 election to the 2004 election, Virginia did not go to the Democratic candidate a single time and Republicans won in the state by fairly large margins. While Virginia seemed to safely be considered a Republican state, Barack Obama surprisingly won the state in the 2008 election with 52.6 percent of the vote. Since this election, Democrats have easily won in the state in every general election, with Joe Biden notably winning

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62 Key, Southern Politics in State
63 Key, Southern Politics in State
54.1 percent of the vote in 2020.66 Because of this dramatic shift in Virginia, it is important to look into where the Republican Party failed in order to learn from these mistakes in the 2024 election.

As previously discussed, Virginia began to see a trend of urbanization towards the mid 20th century. This trend has only intensified since then. Many areas in Virginia that used to be far-stretching rural farmland are now increasingly becoming suburban zones for wealthier individuals to live outside of sprawling cities. This suburban sprawl has had the effect of attracting people to migrate into the state. Since 1990, Virginia’s population has increased by 38 percent with most of this growth occurring in these dense suburbs surrounding thriving cities.67

More importantly, this influx of people into the state as a result of suburbanization has significantly changed the demographics of the state. Whereas in 1990, only about 3 percent of the state’s eligible voters were born outside of the United States, today foreign-born voters make up about 10 percent of eligible voters.68 In 2000, Virginia’s population was 72.3 percent white, 4.7 percent Hispanic and 3.7 percent Asian.69 In just 20 years, this demographic makeup has changed substantially. In 2020, the population was 60.3 percent white, 10.5 percent Hispanic and 7.1 percent Asian.70

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This growing Hispanic and Asian demographic in Virginia has significantly contributed to the Republican Party’s failure in the state in national elections. Unlike in Florida, Virginia’s Hispanic population is primarily made up of Mexican and Central American descent. Whereas Republican messaging worked to capture the mostly Cuban Hispanic vote in Florida, this has not had the same effect in Virginia. These communities are generally turned off by the Republican Party’s rhetoric surrounding the southern border. This has led a majority of these Hispanic voters to feel as though the Republican Party doesn’t care about them. In addition to the Hispanic demographic, Republicans have generally failed to effectively reach out to the Asian community. Nationally, about 62% of Asian voters identify as Democrats with just over two-thirds of both the Indian and Korean population leaning left. This is especially concerning considering that most of the Asian community in Virginia is Indian or Korean. Ultimately, Republican failures to connect with Hispanic and Asian communities in Virginia is a major reason why the state has gone to the Democratic Party in recent elections.

Republican failures in the state on a national level are also likely more pronounced due to the presence of Donald Trump as the party’s de facto leader and presidential candidate in the past two elections. In 2020, Trump only managed to win 44 percent of the vote in Virginia which was the worst performance from a Republican presidential candidate in the state since 1948.

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Trump’s general anti-foreign rhetoric as well as his strong stance on border security have been an obstacle for Republicans trying to gain a larger portion of the Hispanic and Asian vote. Additionally, while this far-right messaging has rallied support in rural communities, it has been gravely detrimental in the growing cities and suburbs where wealthier, well-educated young voters reside. While support for President Biden isn’t overwhelming with this demographic, Trump’s approval rating during his presidency was abysmal with this group hovering around 30 percent.74

While Trump has struggled in Virginia, a more moderate Republican candidate would have a much greater chance of performing well in the state. An example of this is how current Governor Glenn Youngkin performed in his gubernatorial race in 2021 winning 50.6 percent of the vote.75 Similar to how Governor DeSantis focused on parents’ rights, Youngkin was able to effectively gain the support of many parents through his K-12 policy. With many parents feeling uneasy about the public education in counties such as Loudoun, Youngkin made public efforts to persuade the constituency that his conservative approach to public education is necessary. In addition to his focus on K-12 policy, Youngkin was able to distance himself from some of the more controversial policies pushed by Donald Trump. Youngkin has not been overly vocal on immigration issues, and he supported a 15-week abortion ban rather than a more radical 6-week or outright ban.76 This more moderate approach to politics in the state has been much more

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effective at gaining the support of Virginians as his approval rating has been consistently above 50 percent.\textsuperscript{77}

Ultimately, the Republican Party’s performance in Virginia highlights key areas that the Party needs to focus on heading into the 2024 Election. The failure to capture majorities in the key demographic groups of Hispanics and Asians in the state have significantly contributed to poor results in recent general elections. Republicans need to be more effective at reaching out to these communities and instilling a sense that the Party cares about them. Additionally, the differing performances of Donald Trump and Glenn Youngkin in the state underline the importance of taking a more moderate approach. While Trump had historically bad results in the state during the 2020 Election, Youngkin won the governorship just a year later and continues to be popular among Virginians. While at the moment, it seems as though Donald Trump will win the Republican nomination, this will likely be detrimental to Republican efforts in not only Virginia but the key states of Georgia and North Carolina. If Trump does indeed win the nomination, it is important that he shifts his messaging to be more moderate in order to reach key demographics in the region.

\textit{Georgia’s Voting Trends}

In the early 20th Century, all politics in Georgia revolved around Eugene Talmadge who led a cohesive conservative faction in the state. He was a candidate in every statewide Democratic primary except one from 1926 to 1946.\textsuperscript{78} He ran for commissioner of agriculture


\textsuperscript{78} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
three times winning every time, governor five times winning four and twice for United States Senator losing both times.\textsuperscript{79} Talmadge embodied the southern demagoguery that was a characteristic of many southern politicians at the time. He constantly engaged in race baiting, fueling the fears of black belt whites over the growing status of African Americans.\textsuperscript{80} In many of his campaigns, this racist incentive was his primary political strategy. As a result, counties with a high proportion of African American in their population generally tended to vote for Talmadge or his backed candidate.

Additionally, Talmadge had a strong appeal to rural voters as he often voiced his hatred for corporations and organized labor.\textsuperscript{81} At the time, Georgia had a county-unit system of voting which heavily favored small, rural counties. This created an enormous incentive for candidates to incite antagonism between rural farmers and city dwellers. Talmadge took advantage of this by fueling the rural hatred of cities. He rallied rural farmers with his political messaging and pitted them against the corporations in Georgia's cities. This antagonism between populous cities and small rural towns plagued Georgia politics throughout the period. In addition to politicians like Talmadge fueling the hatred, the general agrarian crisis at the time had the effect of embedding a long-lasting rural hatred of city dwellers.\textsuperscript{82}

These characteristics of Talmadge played a large role in creating a political environment of bi-factionalism in the state. After Talmadge entered gubernatorial politics in 1932, the overwhelming majority of votes in the primary clustered around either Talmadge (or his backed candidate) or a single anti-Talmadge opponent.\textsuperscript{83} The Talmadge versus anti-Talmadge

\textsuperscript{79} Key, Southern Politics in State
\textsuperscript{80} Key, Southern Politics in State
\textsuperscript{81} Key, Southern Politics in State
\textsuperscript{82} Key, Southern Politics in State
\textsuperscript{83} Key, Southern Politics in State
atmosphere produced a north versus south sectionalism in the state with many northern counties opposing Talmadge and southern counties favoring him.\textsuperscript{84} This result is hardly surprising, as a high proportion of the manufacturing labor force in Georgia was located in the northern half of the state.

This north-south, rural-city sectionalism played a major role in Georgia politics throughout the early 20th century. As previously stated, the county-unit system was the main driver of the perpetuation of politicians fueling rural distrust of cities. Data from the 1960 census illustrated that while rural counties only accounted for 32 percent of the state’s population, they controlled 59 percent of the total unit vote.\textsuperscript{85} Not only did this system dilute the urban vote in the state, but it also worked to protect segregation and other white supremacy policies. Because of this, the Supreme Court eventually ruled this system as unconstitutional under their decision in \textit{Gray v. Saunders} in 1962.\textsuperscript{86} After this system was redesigned to be more equal, Georgia politicians no longer had the incentive to pit rural voters against their city dweller counterparts. Nonetheless, the foundational hatred that rural Georgians had for cities had already been ingrained in their society.

Despite this fundamental change in their voting system, Georgia has generally voted for the conservative candidate in presidential elections since the county-unit system was redesigned. From the 1964 election through the 2016 election, Georgia only voted for the Democrat three times. Twice for Jimmy Carter who was from Georgia and once for Bill Clinton wherein third-

\textsuperscript{84} Key, \textit{Southern Politics in State}
party candidate Ross Perot siphoned off a portion of the Republican vote.\textsuperscript{87} In the first five elections of the 21st century, Republicans enjoyed wide margins of victory in the state, and Donald Trump even beat Hilary Clinton by over five percentage points in 2016.\textsuperscript{88} However, the success that the Republican Party had in the state ended in 2020 when Joe Biden narrowly beat Donald Trump in the state by 0.23 percentage points.\textsuperscript{89} In the same election cycle, both Senate positions in Georgia were narrowly flipped to Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock after a tight runoff election. Additionally, in 2022, Raphael Warnock was able to hold his position against the Republican challenger Herschel Walker by a much wider margin of 2.8 percentage points.\textsuperscript{90} This recent left-leaning trend in Georgia is especially concerning for Republicans’ chances of winning the 2024 election. Because of this, it is important to examine what trends led to the state shifting towards the Democratic Party in order to see where Republicans can correct mistakes and regain lost ground.

Similar to trends in Virginia, Georgia has seen rapid growth of their suburbs surrounding big cities, specifically around Atlanta. In 2020, the 10 counties that made up the Atlanta Regional Commission, had a population of about 4.7 million people which is approximately 45 percent of the state’s total population.\textsuperscript{91} Like suburbs in Virginia, these areas are becoming increasingly diverse. In the now 11 countries under the Atlanta Regional Committee (Forsyth County added in 2021), only Cherokee, Forsyth and Fayette have a majority white population.

As a whole, whites only make up 38.5 percent of the area’s population with African Americans at 36 percent, Hispanics at 13 percent and Asians at 8 percent. Notably, since 2010, Asians were the fastest growing demographic in the region increasing 55 percent.92

This diversification of the suburbs surrounding Atlanta has been a major contributor to the state flipping in 2020. In 2012, Republican candidate Mitt Romney won Cobb County, Gwinnett County and Henry County by wide margins. However, in the 2016 election, Donald Trump lost these counties. In 2020, Trump performed even worse in these counties winning only 42 percent of the vote in Cobb, 40.2 percent in Gwinnett and 39.2 percent in Henry.93 The main reason why Republicans have struggled in these areas is their inability to effectively connect with the growing Hispanic and Asian communities in these suburbs. In the past decade, Democrats have done a much better job of focusing on these demographic groups and welcoming them into their party.

A key reason to Democrats success with these demographic groups and overall in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area is due to Stacy Abrams’ targeted strategy focused on increasing voter turnout with these groups. In 2014, she started a program called the New Georgia Project which focused on getting people of color more involved in the electoral voting process.94 This focus on getting more African Americans, Hispanics and Asians involved in the voting process not only had the effect of increasing voter turnout but also resulted in these voters increasingly voting for the Democratic Party. While Abrams didn’t win her gubernatorial election in 2018, she far

exceeded expectations in what was a historically solid republican state. Her performance effectively convinced the Democratic Party to adopt her strategy in the state. Adopting this strategy to capture the growing African American, Hispanic and Asian vote in the state played a significant role in the party’s success on a national level in the 2020 presidential election and the 2022 midterms.

Additionally, Georgia is another state where the presence of Donald Trump has likely been detrimental to Republican efforts. As discussed, the rapidly changing demographics of the state have played a major role in the sifting voting trends. While Georgia is gaining more voters from the African American, Hispanic and Asian communities, the Trump-effect pushes many of these voters away from the Republican Party. Similar to trends in Virginia, Hispanics in the state generally do not have a favorable view of Trump due to his strong border security rhetoric and Asians are turned away from his anti-foreign rhetoric. Additionally, out-of-state transplants into the cities and suburbs are increasingly voting for Democratic candidates over Trump and his backed Republican candidates. Trump’s insistence on declaring the 2020 election fraudulent, specifically the process in Georgia, has alienated many of these voters in the state. Especially with the recent election racketeering case brought against Trump, these voters are constantly reminded of his attempt to seemingly subvert democratic institutions culminating in the January 6th storming of the Capitol.

While the election fraud issue strengthens rural support for Trump, urban voters are driven further away from the party. This was emphasized during the Senate election runoffs in 2020. Trump essentially forced Republican candidates David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler to support his claims of election fraud. Specifically with Perdue, his chances looked good leading his opponent, Jon Ossoff, by 1.8 percentage points prior to the runoff. However, after a couple
months of Trump contesting the general election results, Perdue lost the runoff by 1.2 percentage points. Additionally, Loeffler lost by a wider margin of 2 percentage points in her runoff.95

Trump’s emphasis on the 2020 election being fraudulent has also had the effect of dividing the Republican Party over this issue. Specifically, Trump has had heated, public disagreements with current governor Brian Kemp over this issue. In the wake of the 2020 election results, Kemp refused to agree with Trump’s notions of election fraud, nor did he help Trump subvert the electoral result in Georgia. This has led to Trump publicly rallying against Kemp and backing his primary opponent David Perdue. While Kemp ended up winning reelection in 2022, there still remains a strife between him and Trump. This intra-party division has created a sense of dysfunction within the party. While Republicans have been divided since the 2020 election, the Democratic Party presented a unified front that is more attractive to Georgia’s increasingly diverse, urban voters.

Republicans have a lot of work to do in Georgia in order to win the state back in the 2024 election. While Republicans have performed slightly better with African Americans, Hispanics and Asians nationally, it is critical for them to make a concerted effort to continue to improve their standing with these key demographic groups. If they are not able to do so, their chances of winning the state are very slim. Additionally, what looks to be another Donald Trump nomination for the party in 2024 could be especially damaging for Republican efforts to flip the state. With Governor Brian Kemp easily winning re-election in 2022 with 53.4 percent of the vote and Trump-backed candidate Herschel Walker losing his senate race, this emphasizes the

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need for a more moderate approach in the state.\textsuperscript{96} If Trump is to win the state back in 2024, he needs to steer away from his more extreme conservative rhetoric as well as end his obsession with claiming the 2020 election as fraudulent. Additionally, he needs to do what he can to divert attention from his ongoing election racketeering case in the state. Given the importance of winning Georgia in 2024, the Republican Party needs to utilize all resources necessary to make inroads in the African American, Hispanic and Asian communities as well as shift to a more moderate platform.

\textit{North Carolina’s Voting Trends}

During the first half of the 20th century, North Carolina’s politics and society did not closely resemble that of other southern states at the time. North Carolina was much closer to national norms than it was to the rest of the South. The state employed a rather orderly governmental process without the presence of any scandals. Politicians in the state resembled those of Virginia with gentlemanly qualities.\textsuperscript{97} Unlike the Talmage demagoguery in Georgia at the time, politicians in North Carolina were much more presentable. Erratic, race baiting candidates did not tend to succeed in statewide elections. Due to the absence of political demagoguery, the state had a reputation for being fair with African Americans. Of all the former confederate states, North Carolina employed the most cooperation between white and African American leadership.\textsuperscript{98} While African Americans were by no means free of struggle in the state,
they were generally given a more equal standing in North Carolina’s society than in the rest of the South.

A key reason for these relatively compassionate views towards African Americans was the development of high-quality public education focused on self-examination, freedom and tolerance. Under Governor Charles Brantley Aycock from 1901 to 1905, a great deal of state resources was refocused towards public education. Unlike other public universities in the South, Aycock, who emphasized universal education, did not exclude African Americans from attending the university. At the time, the other southern states generally did not invest a lot of resources in their respective public education systems. As a result, Aycock’s emphasis on improving public education in the state created a population that was generally much more educated than the rest of the South.

With a more educated population, productivity in the state began to boom. In addition to thriving tobacco and textile production, the state also had growing manufacturing and banking industries. This industrialization allowed North Carolina to enjoy sustained progress throughout the beginning of the 20th century. Additionally, this environment created an aggressive aristocracy of banking and manufacturing elite that held a significant stake in the state’s politics. Centered in the growing cities of Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston-Salem and Durham, the aristocracy made constant efforts to advance their business interests. Because of this, North Carolina’s government generally displayed a sense of sympathy for the problems of corporations in the state. However, the government also had a sense of responsibility for community matters as well raising taxes and funding public projects when necessary. This

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99 Key, Southern Politics in State
100 Key, Southern Politics in State
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sense of public responsibility allowed the aristocracy to exist without overwhelming protest from the rural population. The business centered nature of politics in North Carolina resulted in the state becoming significantly less reliant on their agriculture industry. Unlike other southern states, North Carolina was able to develop out of a predominantly agrarian society and diversify their economy. Ultimately, the growing financial and manufacturing industries led to North Carolina becoming much more progressive than the rest of the South.

While these trends led to North Carolina becoming more progressive than the rest of the South, they still voted for the Democratic Party in every election except one in the first half of the 20th century. Even in the second half of the 20th century, after the Civil Rights Act was passed, North Carolina continued to vote for the more conservative party, voting for the Republican party in every presidential election except one election from 1968 to 2000. So far in the 21st century, North Carolina has largely continued this trend with the exception of voting for Barack Obama in 2008. However, from 2016 to 2020, Republicans have seemingly been losing ground in the state. In 2016, Donald Trump won the state fairly easily by 3.6 percentage points, but in 2020 he won the state by a much smaller margin of 1.3 percentage points. Additionally, North Carolina’s current Democratic governor, Roy Cooper, won his first bid in 2016 narrowly by about 0.1 percentage points. In 2020 he won his re-election bid much more easily by a margin of 4.5 percentage points over the Trump-endorsed candidate, Dan Forest.

As previously discussed, it is critical for Republicans to hold onto North Carolina in the 2024

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election. If the state flips, Republicans’ chances of victory in the election become exceedingly slim. Because of this, it is important for the Party to examine the causes of their recent slide in the state.

In recent years, North Carolina has been similar to Virginia and Georgia regarding the increasing urbanization in the state. In the past decade, 75 percent of the increase in voters in the state occurred in only 12 counties.\textsuperscript{107} These fast-growing counties in and around the major cities of Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham have become Democratic strongholds in the state. In the most populous county of Wake, while they narrowly voted for Bush in 2000, Biden won the county by 27 percentage points. Similarly in the second most populous county of Mecklenburg, Bush won by 3 percentage points in 2000 while Biden took the county by 36 percentage points in 2020.\textsuperscript{108} Like in Virginia and Georgia, this shift is largely due to the diversification effect of urbanization. Since 2010, the state has seen a nearly 40 percent increase in their Hispanic population and a 64.2 percent increase in their Asian population.\textsuperscript{109} As discussed throughout this paper, Republicans have struggled to appeal to this demographic group. In addition to Hispanics and Asians, this increasing urbanization has resulted in a large number of out-of-state, wealthier, college educated voters moving to the growing cities in the state. This demographic also tends to vote with the Democratic Party.

While the rapid rate of urbanization in Georgia resulted in the state flipping to the Democratic Party in 2020, Republicans were able to narrowly win in North Carolina. A key


reason for this was that while the Atlanta Metropolitan Area accounted for nearly half of the state’s total population, the Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham Metropolitan areas only accounted for about 42 percent of the overall population in North Carolina. In 2020, North Carolina still had the second most rural voters in the country, and these voters overwhelmingly voted for Donald Trump. However, even though the Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham areas are currently smaller than the Atlanta Metropolitan Area, they are growing at a much faster rate. Since 2000, while the Atlanta area’s share of the population grew by about 6.5 percent, Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham’s share of the state’s population grew by approximately 16.6 percent. This rapid rate of growth in these areas should be concerning to Republicans who narrowly won the state in 2020. These areas have continued to grow since the 2020 election and could present a serious threat to Republican efforts in the state for 2024.

Just like in Virginia and Georgia, a major obstacle for Republicans in these growing urban areas is the presence of Donald Trump. As previously discussed, Trump has not performed well with the key demographics of Hispanics, Asians and college educated voters. His rhetoric and support for more extreme conservative policies are highly popular among rural communities, and this was a major reason why he held onto a narrow victory in the state in 2020. However, with growing urban areas taking up more of the electorate, it is unclear if he will be able to win again in the state by relying on the rural vote. Additionally, his endorsed gubernatorial candidate, Mark Robinson, is a similarly polarizing political figure making numerous derogatory comments in the past. The combination of these two polarizing Republican candidates on the state’s ballot in 2024 could push urban voters even further away from the Party.

Additionally, another issue that is likely to play a role in how North Carolina votes in the 2024 election is the state’s abortion policy. Prior to this year, North Carolina’s policy allowed for abortions up to 20 weeks after pregnancy. However once Republicans gained a supermajority in the state legislature, they were able to overrule Governor Cooper’s veto and pass legislation shortening this to a 12-week ban on abortion. While this has been supported by the sturdier conservatives in the state, polls show that the majority of North Carolina’s population disapproves of the new policy. The issue of abortion has gained significant attention since the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* Supreme Court decision in 2022. Because of this, abortion policy will likely be a driving force for many voters during the 2024 election. Nationally, an overwhelming majority of urban voters are in favor of less restrictions on abortions. Because of this it will be beneficial for Republicans to stray away from making abortion a main focus of their campaigning in 2024.

On the other hand, a policy area where Republicans have an advantage is the economy. In general, North Carolina voters lean more conservative on economic policies. With growing inflation, a majority of North Carolina voters don’t like how the Biden Administration has handled the economy so far. This is an area where Trump, the likely Republican candidate, can win over voters in the urban areas of Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham. By focusing on how he can improve the economy rather than divisive social issues, Trump has a chance at gaining more ground in these growing urban areas than he did in 2020.

While not currently considered a swing state, North Carolina is sure to be an important battleground in the 2024 election. With Biden performing much better than expected in the state

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in 2020 and Roy Cooper easily winning his re-election in 2022, Democrats have begun to focus their resources on flipping North Carolina. Because of this, Republicans cannot be complacent with their recent federal victories in the state. Just like in Virginia and Georgia, North Carolina’s rapid urbanization and diversification of their population threatens the Republican Party’s ability to win in 2024. If Donald Trump is indeed the Republican nominee in 2024 and he continues to focus on polarizing issues such as abortion, there is a very real possibility that the state flips to the Democratic Party. In order to make sure this doesn’t happen, Trump will need to distance himself from the recently passed 12-week abortion ban and focus his messaging to revolve around how he will improve the economy. This will give Trump the best chance of increasing his share of the vote in the urban areas of Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham. Given the importance of holding onto North Carolina in 2024, Republicans need to do everything possible to minimize the Democratic vote in these urban areas.

**Recommendations for Republican Party in 2024**

The 2024 presidential election is expected to be a tight race with a lot on the line for both the Republican and Democratic Party. The winner of the election will likely have to address many important international issues such as conflicts in Ukraine and Israel, the growing threats of China and Iran as well as domestic issues over the state of the economy and border security just to name a few. The Republican Party will look to regain the presidency while restoring their majority in the Senate that they lost in 2020 in order to have full control over the future of the country. However, recent voting trends in the 2020 elections as well as the 2022 midterms present problems that the Party needs to overcome in 2024. At the moment it seems likely that the 2024 election will be a repeat of the 2020 election with President Biden running for re-
election and Trump expecting to get the Republican nomination. Because of this, the Republican party needs to investigate why Trump lost key portions of the United States’ electorate and create a plan on how to improve in these areas in 2024.

While there are many states that the Republican Party needs to focus on in order to improve their chances of winning the election, performing well in Georgia and North Carolina are critical to Republicans’ overall success. In Georgia, Republicans have performed surprisingly poorly on the federal level in both the 2020 General and Senate Elections as well as the 2022 Senate Election. For 2024, Donald Trump will have to perform significantly better in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area than he did in 2020 in order to win the state. In North Carolina, Trump lost significant ground among their electorate from 2016 to 2020. While he still marginally won the state in 2020, Democrats will undoubtedly invest significant resources in attempting to flip the state in 2024. Because of this, the Republican Party cannot rely on winning North Carolina without a clear strategy on how to maximize their vote in the state. If the Republican Party isn’t able to win in both of these states, they would seemingly have no path to victory in 2024. Even splitting these states would make winning the election highly improbable. Due to this reason, Georgia and North Carolina should be top priorities for the Republican Party heading into the 2024 General Election.

Looking at Republicans’ recent overwhelming success in Florida, an important reason for their breakthrough in the state is the focus on registering Republican voters. When Governor Ron DeSantis won his first gubernatorial election in 2018, he focused resources on registering previously unregistered Republican constituents. While there are a number of reasons that have led Florida to become a Republican stronghold, this emphasis on voter registration is an often overlooked factor in Trump winning the state by 3.3 percentage points in 2020. Additionally,
Stacy Abrams focus on voter registration among Democratic leaning constituents in Georgia was a major reason why she surpassed expectations in her 2018 Gubernatorial Election. This recent focus by the Democratic Party to register voters in Georgia was also a significant contributing factor to their recent success in the state for federal elections. Due to this proven value of focusing on registering voters, it is crucial for the Republican Party to replicate their voter registration efforts from Florida in the states of Georgia and North Carolina. Specifically in Georgia, where Democrats have made a concerted effort to register more voters in the state, Republicans need to combat this with running their own voter registration program. While investing in voter registration programs is an expensive process, it would nonetheless be worthwhile for the Republican Party to direct resources for this purpose. By registering more voters in these key states of Georgia and North Carolina, Republicans can maximize their potential vote which would significantly help them win these states in 2024.

In addition to focusing on voter registration in these states, the Republican Party needs to reassess how their political messaging has affected their performances in recent elections. Since Trump will most likely be the Republican candidate for president in 2024, it is important he tones down his erratic outbursts and rants attacking his opponents. While these tactics have worked in his favor among rural voters, this voting bloc is already solidly republican. In 2024, Trump will need to reach out to urban voters and perform much better with this demographic than he did in 2020. Unlike with rural voters, urban voters do not respond favorably to Trump’s erratic antics.

Specifically, Trump’s insistence on claiming that the 2020 election was fraudulent, and that Democrats stole the election from him has been detrimental to Republican efforts across the country. In the key state of Georgia, Trump’s ongoing election racketeering case will
undoubtedly be an obstacle for him in trying to increase his share of their growing urban vote. This negative reaction to election fraud rhetoric is clear as many Trump-backed candidates in 2022 who went along with Trump’s election fraud claim lost their races across the country. In Georgia, Herschel Walker, who Trump heavily backed throughout his Senate campaign ended up losing the race by 2.8 percentage points. Additionally, both 2020 Republican candidates for the Georgia Senate seats, David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, ended up losing their runoff races after they doubled down on Trump’s claims of election fraud. On the other hand, Georgia’s Governor Brian Kemp was able to easily win his reelection bid by 7.5 percentage points, improving on his election performance in 2018. Throughout the election controversy, Kemp refused to accept Trump’s election fraud claim. This resulted in Trump publicly endorsing Kemp’s opponent in the Republican primary. However, regardless of losing Trump’s support, Kemp captured the majority of the Georgia electorate. This performance by Brian Kemp as well as the underwhelming performance of Herschel Walker in 2022 underline the need for Trump to pivot away from his election fraud rhetoric. If Trump is able to make this pivot as well as minimize the publicity on his election racketeering case, his chances of winning in both Georgia and North Carolina will increase substantially.

Another way that the Republican Party can pick up more of the vote share in these two states for the 2024 election is to convey a more moderate platform. Mainly on social issues, Donald Trump and like-minded Republican candidates have tended to take stances that many consider to be more radical than their Democratic counterparts. In many cases this has deterred

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people from voting for the Republican Party. This effect was shown in Virginia as Glenn Youngkin was able to win the Gubernatorial election in 2021. Prior to Youngkin, Virginia has only elected one Republican governor in the 21st century. Additionally, Trump’s poor performance in the state in 2020, capturing only 44 percent of the vote, made Youngkin’s win surprising. Youngkin’s incredible performance in the state was mainly due to his ability to run on a more moderate platform. He was able to distance himself from the more controversial Republican policies such as restrictive abortion policies and enhanced border security while centering his campaign on K-12 policy, emphasizing the importance of parents’ rights. Through this moderate approach, Youngkin was able to win the gubernatorial race by a margin of 2 percentage points. In light of Youngkin’s success, this more moderate approach should be replicated by Donald Trump in order to help his chances of winning the southern states of Georgia and North Carolina.

While Joe Biden was widely seen as the more moderate candidate in the 2020 election, his performance as president has seen disapproval from the majority of Americans. Currently Biden’s approval ratings are around 37 percent. As the Biden administration fails to gain the approval of most Americans, this presents an opportunity for Republicans to retake the office in 2024. However, in order to take advantage of Biden’s low approval ratings, Trump needs to appear as a more moderate candidate than he did in 2020. Doing so will make him much more attractive to voters who voted for Joe Biden in the 2020 election but don’t like what he has done during his presidency.

While the country is moving on from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic where Trump’s decisions and rhetoric revolving around the virus made him seem like a more radical candidate, there are still policy areas where Trump needs to be careful with his messaging in order to come off as more moderate. One main area where Trump needs to take a more moderate stance is on abortion. In 2022, when the Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade precedent, with their decision on Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the issue of abortion was pushed to the forefront of Americans’ minds. This polarizing policy issue is thought to be a contributing factor as to why many Republicans didn’t perform as well as they thought they should have in the 2022 midterms. Depending on how Trump addresses his beliefs on abortion throughout the duration of his campaign, it could significantly affect how urban voters feel about him. In North Carolina, the new Republican supermajority in the state senate allowed them to overrule Governor Cooper’s veto and pass a 12-week abortion ban. In Georgia, their policy is even more restrictive with a 6-week abortion ban. With many voters in these two states opposing their respective abortion policies, it will be important for Trump to refrain from endorsing 12-week, 6-week or outright abortion bans. If Trump is able to avoid being labeled as anti-abortion, this will significantly increase his chances of capturing more of the urban vote in these states for the 2024 election.

While these aforementioned recommendations will be important for Republicans, the most crucial strategy for the Republican Party in the 2024 election will be their ability to capture more of the Hispanic and Asian vote in these states. While Trump actually slightly improved with Hispanics and Asians from the 2016 election to the 2020 election, he needs to capture more

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of these demographics in order to combat Democratic gains from rapid urbanization. In Georgia, Hispanics and Asians were the two fastest growing race demographics in the state. Since 2010, the Hispanic population increased by 31.6 percent and Asians increased by 52.3 percent.\textsuperscript{117} Similarly, in North Carolina, these groups grew at a rapid rate. Since 2010, the Hispanic population in North Carolina grew by 39.8 percent and the Asian population grew by 64.2 percent.\textsuperscript{118} Because of these demographic trends, it will be critical for Trump to reach out to these groups and capture more of their voters. Nationally, Democrats are currently more favorable to both of these demographics at nearly a 2-1 ratio. The Republican Party needs to make a more concerted effort to connect with these voters in order to win in Georgia and North Carolina.

To do this, the Party and Donald Trump need to focus on issues where their platform more closely aligns with Hispanic and Asian ideals. With the Hispanic demographic, recent Republican stances on abortion and border security have worked to push these voters towards the Democratic Party. However, one area where conservative ideals resonate with Hispanics is economic policy. Especially given the high rate of inflation and the general state of the economy under the Biden Administration, Republicans will have the opportunity to provide a better alternative to how the economy is handled. If Trump is able to convey a clear plan forward to improve the economy, this will likely improve his standing with Hispanics who make up a large portion of the country’s working class. This strategy worked rather successfully in Florida, where Trump and DeSantis persuaded Hispanics to vote against the “socialist left agenda.”

While the Hispanic population in Florida is mostly Cuban, this message can still resonate with the Mexican and Central American Hispanics in Georgia and North Carolina as long as Trump refrains from strong border security messaging.

Similarly, this focus on economic policy should be well received with the Asian population as well. With many Asians in these states working in the tech sector which has experienced widespread layoffs recently, there has been a growing sense among this demographic that the current economic policy under Joe Biden has been a failure. Consequently, Biden’s approval rating among Asians fell from 66 percent in 2021 to 42 percent just before the 2022 midterms and has remained relatively unchanged since then. Additionally, managers from Glenn Youngkin’s 2021 gubernatorial campaign attribute a large reason for his victory to economic worries from the Asian demographic. The current economic situation under Biden presents a special opportunity for Republicans to pick up votes within the Asian community.

Trump needs to take advantage of this by focusing on how he will improve the economy if elected in 2024.

In addition to economic policy, Asians are particularly concerned with the increasing crime problem that many cities across the country are facing. This is another policy area where Trump can improve his standing in the community. While Asians, who predominantly live in these growing urban centers, want to feel safe, these areas are becoming increasingly infested with crime. In urban areas across the country, many criminal acts are going unprosecuted by Democratic District Attorneys. If Trump continues to display tough-on-crime attitudes, he could


turn Asian voters away from the Democratic Party which has been seen as more lenient in terms of prosecuting crime.

Lastly, Asian Americans have become increasingly frustrated with how they are affected by positive discrimination policies like affirmative action. These practices that give universities and companies more incentive to hire underrepresented African Americans over Asian Americans have made it significantly harder for Asians to succeed professionally. In 2023, when the conservative leaning Supreme Court ruled these race-based admission practices unconstitutional, it received widespread support from the Asian community. If Trump can incorporate his disapproval for positive discrimination policies into his 2024 campaign messaging, it would significantly improve his chances at capturing a greater portion of the Asian demographic than he did in 2020.

Ultimately, the Republican Party faces an uphill battle in the 2024 Presidential Election. Because of this, it is crucial for the Party to focus a significant portion of their resources on the important states of Georgia and North Carolina in order to give them a chance of winning. To perform well in these states, the Party will need to make an effort to register more Republican voters to maximize their voter base. Additionally, as Trump will likely be the Republican nominee, he needs to tone down his erratic rhetoric and refocus his political messaging to better align with the Georgia and North Carolina electorate. Specifically, he needs to move on from election fraud claims and refrain from taking more radical stances on social issues such as abortion. Most importantly, Trump needs to make every effort possible to make substantial gains with the Hispanic and Asian voting demographics in these states. By focusing his campaign around improving the economy, cracking down on crime and opposing positive discrimination practices, this would give Trump the best chances at capturing a larger portion of votes within
the Hispanic and Asian demographics. It is important to note that even if Trump is able to win both Georgia and North Carolina, winning the election isn’t a guarantee as they would have to pick up one or more swing states. However, losing one or both of these states would leave nearly no path to victory. Because of this, it is critical for Donald Trump and the Republican Party to follow these strategies in order to gain the 32 electoral votes from these states in the 2024 presidential election.
Bibliography


