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Partisan schism in America's newest swing state

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Abstract

We assess the opinions of Georgia voters regarding the 2020 presidential election, election administration, and voting laws following passage of Senate Bill (SB) 202. After the 2020 presidential election and subsequent 2021 Senate runoffs, contests all won by Democrats in Georgia, the Republican-controlled legislature passed SB 202 to appease their agitated and disaffected base of supporters. It appears that SB 202 had the effect of boosting Republican voters' confidence in Georgia's election system while registering the opposite effect among Democratic voters. Indeed, across a host of questions, including several asking about specific provisions in SB 202, we find a partisan schism in opinions expressed by Democrats and Republicans.

Keywords

Partisan polarization, public opinion, Georgia, 2020 presidential election, election law

Introduction

Before his improbable 2016 victory, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump sowed the seeds among his fervent base of supporters that if he lost then the election was rigged (Cole, 2021). Fast forward to 2020 and in a global pandemic most states eased voting laws to facilitate participation from a distance. Loosening restrictions on mail ballots raised President Trump's ire; assuming the central focus of his claim that these votes were not legitimate and contributing to his post-election declaration that the election was stolen. Long before the rise and fall of President Trump, the major parties have been engaged in a fierce battle over voting laws and broader issues regarding election administration (Hasen, 2012). After the 2000 presidential election a general pattern manifest in which Republican legislators promote more restrictive voting laws (e.g. strict photo identification at the polls) to secure ballot integrity. In contrast, Democratic lawmakers almost universally denounce such measures as voter suppression that disproportionately affects their coalition and, therefore, prefer election laws that increase ballot access.

Against the backdrop of an already greatly partisan-divided American polity (Campbell, 2016), Georgia became the epicenter of 2020 post-election disputes. For the first time since Bill Clinton in 1992, the Peach State in 2020 went Democratic and in the process marked its status as America's newest presidential battleground.[1] President Trump pleaded with the Republican Secretary of State to give him one more vote than Joe Biden's 11,779 advantage, which was finally certified after counting Georgia's statewide total three times. Then Georgia's two 2021 runoff Senate contests were won by the Democrats, which meant newly elected President Biden would take office under unified government. A day after the runoffs, on January 6th, thousands of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol Building, fueled by their leader's insistence that the election was stolen from him.

In the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election and the two 2021 Senate runoffs registering Democratic victories, partisan polarization in Georgia reached a breaking point as

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the majority Grand Old Party (GOP) passed election reform legislation in early spring. We assess Georgia voters' opinions shortly after the controversial passage of election legislation (Senate Bill 202) on 25 March 2021.[2] Specifically, we evaluate opinions held by Democrats and Republicans regarding a host of election-/voting-law questions, including several on the specific provisions of SB 202. In an environment where it hardly seems possible to raise the political temperature, with few exceptions, we find a partisan schism among Georgia voters. Within the broader scope of a politically polarized America and a jarring attack on the U.S. Capitol, our findings should give scholars pause regarding the prospect and ability of America's two partisan tribes (Iyengar et al., 2019) to find common ground and hence deescalate the dangerous vitriol coursing through the body politic.

A new and more contentious phase in the partisan battle over voting laws

Long-term changes fostering elite-level partisan polarization, particularly among members of Congress, are well-documented and undisputed (see Fleisher and Bond, 2004; Jacobson and Carson, 2020; Lee, 2016; McCarty et al., 2016; Rohde, 1991; Theriault, 2008). Though some contention persists with respect to the extent of mass-level polarization (see Fiorina et al., 2008), surveys show a widening rift among the public, particularly along partisan lines with respect to the ability of individuals to discern polarization in Congress (Hetherington, 2001), increased separation of opinions on salient issues fueling the culture wars (Abramowitz, 2010), differences in presidential approval (Jacobson, 2007, 2020, 2021), ideologically-driven affective polarization (Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016), and polarization rooted in emotions and/or social identities (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2018; Webster, 2020). Indeed, Finkel et al. (2020) liken this trend in hardened partisan divisions within the American electorate to religious identity; a concept they have dubbed political sectarianism.[3] Political sectarianism is a danger to democracy because, "political losses can feel like existential threats that must be averted—whatever the cost" (Finkel et al., 2020: 533).

In the mid-2000s, as Republican lawmakers turned their attention to seeking electoral advantage via restrictive voting laws they promoted as necessary for preventing fraud (Keyssar, 2009), public opinion viewed specific reforms like strict photo identification (ID) at the polls as a valence issue[4], garnering considerable bipartisan support (Gronke et al., 2019; Kane and Wilson, 2021). To be sure, Democratic legislators never backed these election laws in notable numbers (Hicks et al., 2016) and eventually, the message reached the party in the electorate that the GOP favored restricting voter access to ensure ballot integrity/prevent fraud (Von Spakovsky, 2012), whereas Democrats favored legislation making voting easier/more convenient because election fraud was a rare occurrence (Levitt, 2012). Behind these opposing partisan positions is the GOP's hope that restrictive voting laws yield an electoral advantage and likewise Democrats expect expansive voting measures will get more of their supporters to turn out.[5]

Interestingly, despite the ongoing partisan battles taking place in state legislatures across the United States, with Republicans advocating restrictive election provisions while their Democratic counterparts favor expansionary measures, public opinion toward the specifics of these disputes has not exhibited notable activation along partisan lines. For instance, strict photo ID at the polls, perhaps the most salient, enduring (dating its legislative enactment back to the mid-2000s), and pervasive election reform championed by Republican legislators, continues to elude marked partisan division among the mass electorate (Kane and Wilson, 2021).[6] Indeed, the recent observational and experimental evidence of Kane and Wilson (2021) strongly suggests that the Democratic Party in particular, has not been effective in stating the case for why rank-and-file Democratic voters should oppose strict photo ID. Yet, when the case *is* made for photo ID raising the costs of voting, Democrats and Republicans both exhibit less support for this restrictive measure (Kane and Wilson, 2021). Similarly, Valentino and Neuner (2017) demonstrate that it is not difficult to mobilize Democrats against voter ID by framing the law as intended to disenfranchise them. Hence, with respect to the specifics of election reform, even regarding the salient issue of photo ID, voters must receive clear messages (Zaller, 1992) and partisan cues (Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1991) to align with the positions of co-partisan elites (e.g. partisan lawmakers).

By the 2010s, the partisan skirmishes over voting laws reached a new and more dangerous phase because of the advance of affective partisan polarization within the mass public (Iyengar et al., 2019). As more partisans embrace negative partisanship, that is, finding more to dislike about the partisan opposition than to like about their own party (Abramowitz, 2018; Abramowitz and Webster, 2016, 2018), the electoral stakes have intensified. Now, it does not take much to activate anger as a motivation for opposing an election law like voter ID, if it is cast in partisan terms (Valentino and Neuner, 2017). Thus, if election reforms can be framed as a zero-sum game, in which one party benefits at the expense of the opposition, then this is a signal that partisans in the mass public can easily grasp. As stated by Mason (2018: 12), "Under circumstances of perceived threat or competition...preference for the ingroup can lead to outright hostility toward the outgroup, particularly when the competition is a zero-sum game."

The presidency is the greatest prize in American politics and in 2020 the incumbent falsely claimed that he lost

because of widespread voter fraud. President Trump in effect, tapped into the established view of his party that voter fraud is a frequent occurrence, and repeatedly stated that it cost him reelection. In advancing this baseless charge in a political setting steeped in partisan rancor, Trump's supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol to "stop the steal." At the state-level, post-election fallout was most acute and consequential in Georgia, where its electoral votes went to Joe Biden and then delivered him a Senate majority in the two 2021 runoff contests. In short, we expect that the contentious political environment in Georgia equipped partisans with the necessary information and messaging to polarize over election law, and even with respect to specific provisions in the law.

As Schattschneider (1960) made the case decades ago, when a fight breaks out, one needs to pay attention to the groups aligning on either side of a divisive issue. President Trump led the GOP's charge of a stolen election, sending a loud and clear signal to Republican voters that the 2020 presidential contest was stolen and principally by election fraud committed in favor of his Democratic opponent Joe Biden. Similar to Trump's tremendous success in activating many of his supporters' negative opinions toward certain groups (racial minorities, immigrants, and Muslims) in the 2016 election (Sides et al., 2018), in the aftermath of the 2020 election Trump managed to convince most Republican voters that he was unlawfully denied reelection (Jacobson, 2021).

Mass partisan opinion activation after the 2020 elections aligns with the theoretical arguments put forth by Levendusky (2009) and Zaller (1992). First, with few exceptions, Democratic and Republican elites divided over the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Led by Trump, Republican voters received the message of a stolen election made possible by voter fraud. In contrast, Democratic elites were emphatic that the 2020 presidential election was free and fair with no widespread evidence of voter fraud uncovered anywhere. Hence, as per Zaller (1992), Democratic and Republican voters were subjected to clear and opposing partisan messages that produced polarized opinions reflective of those held by and promoted by their co-partisan opinion leaders (Druckman et al., 2018). In the contentious and divisive partisan political environment in Georgia, we agree with Levendusky (2009: 16) who wrote that, "During the election season, news and advertisements about the candidates saturate the airwaves, and voters are bombarded with position-specific information from politicians...One does not have to be a political junkie to find out information about the candidates during an election—it is almost impossible not to. Ordinary voters consequently have fairly accurate views about where the parties stand on salient issues."

In post-2020 election Georgia, a massive partisan brawl erupted over the outcomes of its presidential contest and 2021 Senate runoffs. In this context, from the vantage of Republican voters, subsequent GOP-enacted election reform was surely intended to favor their party, and likewise, Democrats were certain such measures were put forth at their expense. In short, Democratic and Republican voters in Georgia received clear partisan cues regarding the purpose and intentions behind SB 202 (Levendusky, 2009, 2010; Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1991). Republican lawmakers were unified in support of the election legislation and Democratic legislators united against it.[7] Given the heavy media coverage of this event (see Wickerstaff, 2021), we anticipate that our survey of Democratic and Republican Georgia voters exhibits pronounced partisan polarization.

As stated succinctly by Levendusky (2009: 107), "when elites take more polarized positions, voters notice these changes, and as a result, voters are more likely to adopt their party's position on the issues." In the case of Georgia, highly salient and polarized party cues in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, the 2021 Senate runoffs, and finally culminating with passage of SB 202, should register considerable partisan differences in the opinions of Democratic and Republican Georgia voters in this hyper-polarized period.

The data

Our primary data source is a live-interviewer telephone survey of Georgians, conducted by the School of Public and International Affairs Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia. The survey was administered from March 31-19 April 2021 (shortly after Senate Bill 202 was signed into law) and consisted of 887 Georgia registrants who reported voting in the 2020 general election.[8] Post-stratification weighting was applied to ensure respondents were representative of the 2020 electorate regarding education, race, gender, and age. Our interest is confined to partisans (major party identifiers plus Independent leaners), with the sample including 49% Republicans and 42% Democrats.[10] Like Keith et al. (1992), we classify Independent leaners as partisans because their voting behavior and political attitudes better align with the respective party they are closer to, despite not claiming partisan affiliation on the standard seven-point party identification scale (Miller, 1991).[9]

Assessing Georgia's partisan schism over election laws

In 2006 Georgia was one of the first states to enact a strict photo ID law passed along partisan lines (Hicks et al., 2016). Yet, it was not until the contentious 2018 gubernatorial election that claims of voter suppression reached a crescendo. African American Democrat Stacey Abrams lost a close contest to white Republican Secretary of State Brian

Kemp. Kemp did not relinquish his position while running for governor, and Abrams accused him of engaging in minority voter suppression as thousands of Georgians were removed from the registration rolls for inactivity (as allowed under Georgia law). Abrams lost the election with 49.3% of the two-party vote and never officially conceded. Survey data on the 2018 gubernatorial election revealed strong divisions over whether the election was fair, with those not trusting Republicans' oversight of election administration significantly more likely to vote for the Democrat Abrams (Hood and McKee, 2019).

Bitterness over the 2018 race for governor became the backdrop for the partisan rancor that was to come when President Trump stoked partisan polarization after losing Georgia to Joe Biden in 2020. As a Deep South state with a long history of racial strife manifest in the political arena (Key, 1949; McKee, 2019), partisan sorting in Georgia has closely hewed along racial lines, with the lion's share of African Americans identifying as Democrats and most whites affiliated with the GOP (McKee and Springer, 2015). Thus, the racial element underlying partisan polarization in Georgia should not be overlooked.

After losing the 2018 gubernatorial election, Stacey Abrams attained national prominence as a rising star in the Democratic Party. She devoted her political energy to mobilizing voters in the upcoming 2020 presidential election in Georgia and received much of the credit for Biden's narrow victory. In the wake of their losses for president and the two subsequent Senate runoff contests, Georgia Republicans implemented a host of election reforms in SB 202, and Stacey Abrams was the most vocal Democratic opponent of the legislation. Republicans, with Trump leading the charge, directed their unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud at heavily minority urban areas in greater Atlanta. Hence, in Georgia the intersection or race and party is undeniable when considering disputes over election administration. Nevertheless, as we will demonstrate in the forthcoming analysis, party clearly overrides race in considering opinions toward election administration and several of the provisions contained in SB 202.[10]

Ideally, we would employ panel data to assess changes in party polarization before and after passage of SB 202. That is, it would be preferable to capture movement among the same sample of Democrats and Republicans before and after a notable political event like the 2020 presidential election or implementation of salient and consequential election legislation. Although we do not have such data, we have some evidence of opinion change that inarguably reflects responses to important political moments.

For instance, Figure 1 highlights Democratic and Republican opinions before (in 2020 September and October surveys) and after the 2020 presidential contest (a 2021 survey conducted from late-March to mid-April). Before the election there is little partisan daylight separating Democrats and Republicans, the overwhelming share of whom expect the election to be fair and accurate and are willing to accept the outcome. But in a post-election survey there is a partisan chasm over the question of whether Biden won Georgia fairly and confidence in whether votes in Georgia were counted accurately. In defeat, Georgia Republicans do not believe Biden won the state fairly and relatedly do not trust the counting of the presidential vote, despite Republicans (at the state-level) overseeing election administration.

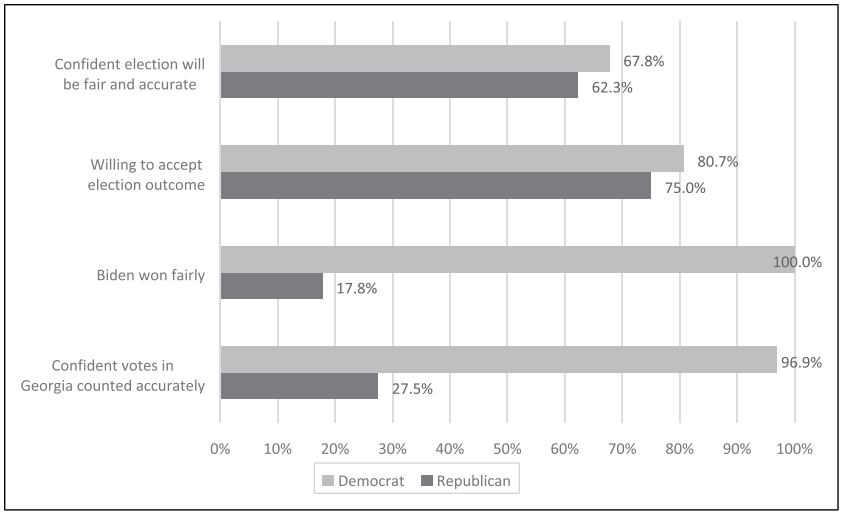

Figure 1. Partisan opinions before and after the 2020 election. *Note*: Data for the "Confident election will be fair and accurate" question come from a survey administered from September 11–20, 2020. Data for the "Willing to accept election outcome" question come from a survey administered from October 14–23, 2020. Both post-election questions were asked on the survey administered from March 31 to 19 April 2021.

Similarly, with data from a 2021 January survey and the same post-election survey documented in Figure 1 (from late-March to mid-April 2021), Figure 2 shows partisan approval/favorability toward three Republican politicians: Trump, Kemp, and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. Among Republicans, Trump is in command of the narrative surrounding the 2020 presidential election. In the highly publicized intra-party GOP dispute over the outcome in Georgia, Trump faced off against Kemp and Raffensperger because they upheld and defended the result. Trump enjoyed by far the greatest popularity among Georgia Republicans in both surveys captured in Figure 2. For Republicans, Kemp is substantially less popular than Trump though his approval holds steady. In contrast, Trump's attacks on Raffensperger did considerable damage, and for famously resisting Trump's efforts to overturn the vote in Georgia, the election secretary is actually more popular among Democrats than Republicans.

For Democrats, Trump is almost universally opposed. Interestingly however, in the January survey, 28% of Democrats approve of Kemp and 61% approve of Raffensperger. In the second survey asking favorability of Kemp and Raffensperger not long after passage of SB 202, their popularity among Democrats drops substantially. Democratic favorability of Kemp is less than 5% and is 40% for Raffensperger. We consider this to be strong circumstantial evidence that Kemp and Raffensperger's support for SB 202 resulted in their notable decline in favorability among Democrats, who received the message that the legislation was inimical to their interests (Hood and McKee, 2022).

For the remainder of the article, the data we rely upon are from the survey administered from late-March to mid-April 2021, which occurred shortly after Georgia Republicans passed SB 202. Table 1 displays partisan opinions on elections and voting in Georgia. The percentages displayed in Table 1 include "Don't Know" responses in the total. Immediately apparent from the findings in Table 1 is the extreme partisan polarization in responses to the lion's share of these questions. Starting at the top, the first two questions ask about voter confidence regarding respondents' own vote, and then their confidence in the Georgia electorate's vote being counted properly in the 2020 presidential election. Capturing a winner versus loser dynamic in this post-election survey, Democrats are substantially more confident (combining *very* and *somewhat* options) than Republicans regarding the correct counting of their own votes and especially the votes of fellow Georgians in the 2020 presidential election.

The next two questions document the partisan divide over preferences for election legislation, as 79% of Democrats want laws that make voting easier, a position shared by just 5% of Republicans. Conversely, 91% of Republicans favor laws that install safeguards to prevent fraud, whereas under 13% of Democrats agree. The next half-dozen questions refer to the recently passed voting legislation. The vast majority of Democrats (86%) think the new law will make it harder to vote, a position shared by 12% of Republicans. More specifically, over 86% of Democrats think SB 202 will make it harder for certain groups to vote, while 7% of Republicans agree. In contrast, 89% of Republicans expect the legislation to make elections more secure and 9% of Democrats concur.

Interestingly, most Democrats (almost 90%) and Republicans (56%) think Trump's loss motivated Georgia legislators to pass SB 202. The Republican response suggests support for voting legislation intended to bolster the GOP, regardless of the legitimacy of Biden's victory. This inference aligns with answers to the next question, as 82% of Republicans versus only 17% of Democrats express increased confidence in Georgia's election system due to SB

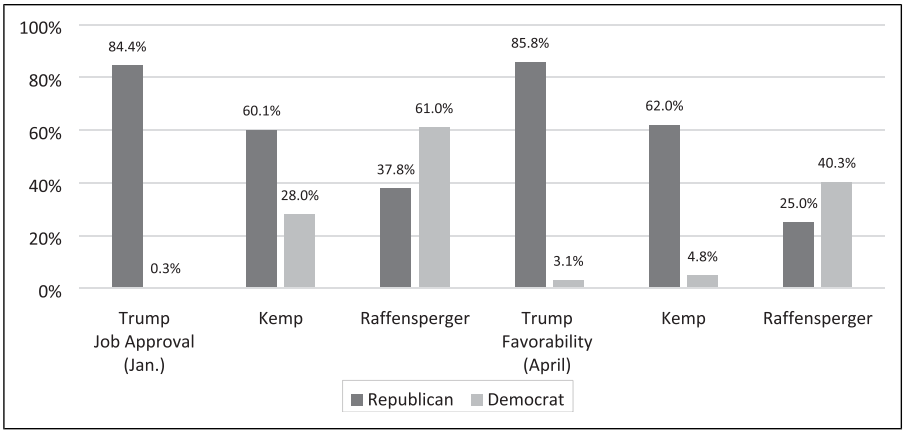

Figure 2. Partisan opinions toward three Republican politicians. Note: The job approval questions were asked on a survey administered from January 17–28, 2021. The favorability questions were asked on the survey administered from March 31 to 19 April 2021.

Table 1. Partisan opinions regarding voting and elections in Georgia.

Percent responding…	Democrat	Republican	Difference
They were very or somewhat confident their vote in the 2020 presidential election was counted as intended			
—	96.0	61.7	34.3
They were very or somewhat confident that votes in Georgia for the 2020 presidential election were counted as voters intended			
—	96.9	27.5	69.4
they think it is more important to make voting easier for eligible voters			
—	79.3	5.3	74.0
they think it is more important to have additional safeguards against potential voting fraud			
—	12.5	91.0	78.5
they think recent changes made to Georgia's election laws will make it harder for voters to cast a ballot in future elections			
—	86.3	12.1	74.2
they think the primary motivation for the recently passed election reform bill was to make it more difficult for certain groups to vote			
—	86.6	7.1	79.5
they think the primary motivation for the recently passed election reform bill was to make future elections more secure			
—	9.2	89.0	79.8
they believe president Trump's loss in Georgia motivated the legislature to pass an election reform bill			
—	89.7	56.0	33.7
that the recent changes made to Georgia's election laws have greatly or somewhat increased their confidence in the state's election system			
—	17.4	81.6	64.2
that the recent changes made to Georgia's election laws have greatly or somewhat decreased their confidence in the state's election system			
—	76.6	11.0	65.6
they think Joe Biden won the presidential election in Georgia fairly			
—	100.0	17.8	82.2
they think Joe Biden won the presidential election in Georgia as a result of fraud			
—	0.0	71.4	71.4

Note: Absolute differences between Democrats and Republicans displayed in the far-right column. All partisan differences are significant at $p < 0.001$.

202. Conversely, these voting reforms reduced voter confidence among 77% of Democrats, but only 11% of Republicans. Finally, all Democrats (100%) believe Biden won Georgia fairly, whereas under 18% of Republicans agree. Conversely, no Democrats think Biden's win was due to fraud, but 71% of Republicans think so.

In 2021, it appears that partisans in the Georgia mass public have unquestionably received the polarized messages delivered by their competing co-partisan elites. The evidence of partisan division in Table 1 is breathtaking. In the dozen cataloged responses, there are only two instances where majorities of Democrats and Republicans agree, and in these two cases Republican agreement is under 75%. In fact, there are four questions in which the partisan gap exceeds 75 percentage points.

Examining support for Senate Bill 202

In contrast to the broader election- and voting-law related questions (and recorded responses) displayed in Table 1, Table 2 details 10 provisions as statutorily written into SB 202. In line with our previously stated expectations, because of the heightened partisan rancor in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election and 2021 Senate runoffs, voters in Georgia should exhibit significant partisan polarization over these various election provisions. That is, we expect significant differences in support for each provision according to party affiliation, with Republicans more likely to register support because SB 202 was advanced to mollify disgruntled Republicans (Wickerstaff, 2021).

Nonetheless, although SB 202 was passed to shore up Republican voters' confidence in Georgia's election system, a caveat is in order: a few of these provisions are bereft of political division. For example, it is hard to see how *expanding* early voting on Saturdays would split Democrats and Republicans. Of course, there are several other provisions in Table 2 that should divide Democrats and Republicans, like curtailing access to ABM (absentee by mail) drop boxes. The listing of provisions in Table 2 (from top to bottom) is ordered from most to least divisive, based on the regression results shown in Table 3 (Models 1–10). Thus, partisan polarization is greatest on *not* counting votes cast out of precinct. Overall, the strong cues (Levendusky, 2009, 2010; Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1991) emanating from partisan elites over SB 202 should produce substantial partisan polarization (Zaller, 1992), even on these detailed provisions.

We begin by examining support for the 10 SB 202 provisions outlined in Table 2 according to party affiliation. As shown in Table 4 below, across all SB 202 provisions, Republican support exceeds that for Democrats by an average of 41.5 percentage points. Majorities of Republicans support all 10 provisions, while majorities of Democrats stand in opposition, with the exception of Saturday and Sunday early voting. Independents fall in between partisans with a majority supporting seven of 10 provisions.

For each provision displayed in Table 2, we also estimate a binary probit model that regressed respondent "support" (support = 1, oppose = 0) onto their party affiliation (our variable of interest) and other standard controls. Party affiliation was measured with two binary indicators for *Democratic* identifiers (including leaners) and pure *Independents*, with Republican identifiers (including leaners) serving as the excluded comparison category. Among the controls included is race, using a binary variable to denote

Table 2. Senate Bill 202 provisions analyzed.

Provision	Description
Out of precinct	Votes cast out of precinct on election-day will not be counted. Previously these votes were partially counted. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–418(a) (2022)]
Runoff elections	Runoff elections will be held 3 weeks following a general election. Previously, runoffs were held 9 weeks following a general election. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–501(a) (1) (2022)]
Absentee ID	Voters requesting or returning an absentee by mail ballot are required to record their driver's license or state ID number for purposes of verification. Voters lacking these forms of identification may use other forms of identification. Signature matching was previously used for absentee ballot verification. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–381(a) (1) (C) (i) (2021); 21-2–384(b) (2021); 21-2–385(a) (2021); 21-2–386(a) (1) (B) (2022)]
ABM applications	Prohibits the secretary of state/county superintendents from sending unsolicited absentee by mail ballot applications. The previous election code was silent on this matter. The SOS did mail an ABM application to all registrants for the 2020 primary election under emergency powers granted during the pandemic. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–381(a) (1) (C) (ii) (2022)]
ABM drop boxes	ABM drop boxes will be provided in county election offices and early voting sites during business hours. Other detailed provisions governing drop boxes are outlined in election code. ABM drop boxes did not exist in Georgia prior to the 2020 election-cycle where they were employed under emergency powers granted during the pandemic. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–385(c) (2022)]
County takeover	Underperforming county election superintendents can be replaced by the state board of elections. Other detailed provisions governing this provision are outlined in election code. Prior to SB 202, no similar provision existed in the state's election code. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–33.1,2 (2022)]
ABM deadline	A voter may request an absentee mail ballot from 78 to 11 days prior to election-day. Previously, the absentee ballot request window was 180 to 4 days prior to election-day. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–381(a) (1) (A) (2022)]
No food/Drink	Prior to SB 202 a ban on electioneering was enforced 150 feet from a precinct voting location and 25 feet from any voter line extending from a precinct. SB 202 clarified that the electioneering ban also included food and drink. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–414(a) (2022)]
Sat early voting	SB 202 increased the number of mandated saturdays during the early in-person voting period for statewide elections from one to two. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–419(d) (1) (2022)]
Sun early voting	SB 202 clarifies that counties have the option to include up to two sundays during the early in-person voting period for statewide elections. Prior to SB 202, Sun early voting could be offered at the county's discretion. [O.C.G.A § 21-2–419(d) (1) (2022)]

Black respondents and *Other Minority* respondents with non-Hispanic white respondents serving as the excluded comparison group. We also include measures for *Gender* (1=Male; 2=Female); *Education* (1=High school or less; 2=Some college, technical degree; 3=College degree; 4=Graduate degree); *Income* (1=Under $25,000; 2=$25,000–49,999; 3=$50,000–74,999; 4 = $75,000–99,999; 5 = $100,000–149,999; 6=$150,00 and over); *Ideology* (1=Very liberal; 2=Liberal; 3=Slightly liberal; 4=Moderate; 5=Slightly conservative; 6=Conservative; 7=Very conservative); and *Age* (in years from 19–95).

As displayed in Table 3 above, even after controlling for other factors party affiliation is consistently the most pronounced dividing line over opinions regarding specific provisions in SB 202. Controlling for typically consequential features like race and ideology, among eight of the 10 SB 202 election provisions, compared to Republicans, Democrats are significantly more likely to oppose their implementation. Likewise, although we purposely confine our interest to partisan polarization, we should mention that Independents align with Democrats against most of these SB 202 election provisions, and this comports with the shift of these Georgia voters toward the Democratic Party in 2020.[11]

To be sure, given Georgia's history as a Deep South state (Black and Black, 2012), it is not surprising that African American voters exhibit a significant and negative preference on some (four to be exact) of these SB 202 election provisions. Also, ideology registers significance in two models and in the anticipated direction, with more conservative voters more supportive of certain election provisions (Absentee ID in Model three and No Food/Drink in Model 8). Additionally, it is worth noting that education only exhibits a statistical relationship in Model 1, with higher educated respondents more inclined to favor the SB 202 provision regarding out of precinct voting.[12] Also, we should mention that in none of the models is there evidence of a gender gap in opinions toward these 10 specific election provisions in SB 202.

In sum, the results in Table 3 tell a partisan story. With few exceptions (provisions regarding early voting on Saturdays and Sundays captured respectively in Models 9 and 10), versus Republicans, Democrats are decidedly less supportive of numerous election provisions Republican

Table 3. Probit models predicting support for Senate Bill 202 provisions.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Democrat	−1.696*** (0.210)	−1.53*** (0.240)	−1.687*** (0.278)	−1.136*** (0.235)	−1.048*** (0.217)	−1.049*** (0.230)	−0.936*** (0.216)	−0.567* (0.243)	−0.468 (0.241)	−0.125 (0.213)
Independent	−1.700*** (0.210)	−0.830*** (0.247)	−1.232*** (0.271)	−0.606* (0.241)	−0.607** (0.239)	−0.979*** (0.241)	−0.572* (0.233)	−0.460* (0.221)	−0.029 (0.277)	0.111 (0.247)
Black	−0.463* (0.212)	−0.460* (0.231)	−0.128 (0.253)	−0.160 (0.218)	0.195 (0.207)	−0.257 (0.219)	−0.039 (0.179)	−0.660* (0.267)	−0.733*** (0.185)	−0.381 (0.202)
Other minority	−0.384 (0.255)	−0.664*** (0.229)	0.068 (0.206)	−0.109 (0.210)	0.037 (0.229)	−0.188 (0.234)	−0.610** (0.233)	−0.291 (0.225)	−0.503* (0.232)	−0.424 (0.229)
Ideology	0.013 (0.044)	0.029 (0.049)	0.117* (0.058)	0.065 (0.052)	0.077 (0.048)	−0.016 (0.045)	0.066 (0.047)	0.185*** (0.050)	0.058 (0.056)	−0.022 (0.048)
Age	0.003 (0.005)	−0.005 (0.005)	−0.004 (0.005)	−0.001 (0.005)	−0.000 (0.004)	−0.005 (0.005)	−0.008 (0.004)	0.002 (0.005)	−0.011* (0.005)	−0.014*** (0.004)
Gender	0.212 (0.145)	0.140 (0.172)	0.286 (0.191)	0.094 (0.151)	0.048 (0.144)	−0.220 (0.155)	0.036 (0.138)	0.071 (0.167)	0.250 (0.165)	0.104 (0.144)
Education	0.168* (0.077)	−0.006 (0.081)	−0.063 (0.082)	0.016 (0.076)	0.002 (0.070)	0.153 (0.075)	−0.061 (0.067)	−0.121 (0.077)	0.027 (0.076)	0.082 (0.066)
Income	−0.042 (0.046)	−0.038 (0.046)	−0.088 (0.054)	−0.040 (0.039)	−0.095** (0.037)	−0.046 (0.037)	−0.082* (0.035)	−0.030 (0.038)	−0.0201 (0.037)	−0.014 (0.036)
Constant	0.238 (0.505)	1.271* (0.568)	1.268 (0.543)	0.446 (0.532)	0.613 (0.442)	0.889 (0.578)	1.373*** (0.428)	−0.846 (0.520)	1.299** (0.472)	1.466*** (0.458)
N	768	726	789	788	792	712	779	766	774	791

Note: Entries are probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *$p < .05$;**$p < .01$;***$p < .001$. Model 1: Out of Precinct Voting, Model 2: Runoff Elections, Model 3: Absentee ID, Model 4: ABM Applications, Model 5: ABM Drop Boxes, Model 6: County Takeover, Model 7: ABM Deadline, Model 8: No Food/Drink, Model 9: Saturday Early Voting, Model 10: Sunday Early Voting.

Table 4. Support for SB 202 provisions by party affiliation.

Election provision	Republican	Democrat	Independent	All	R-D
Out of precinct	80.0	17.6	34.1	50.0	62.4
Runoff elections	87.1	27.1	54.4	58.6	60.0
Absentee ID	94.5	36.8	57.7	67.3	57.7
ABM applications	78.4	29.7	51.6	56.4	48.7
ABM drop boxes	76.2	35.2	52.3	56.7	41.0
County takeover	58.9	20.4	25.9	39.1	38.5
ABM deadline	81.3	44.1	57.4	63.4	37.2
No food/Drink	52.2	11.0	17.0	31.0	41.2
Sat early voting	90.0	65.6	82.1	79.2	24.4
Sun early voting	77.8	73.6	80.7	76.3	4.2
Mean	77.6	36.1	51.3	57.8	41.5

Note: Entries are the percentage of each group in support of SB 202 provisions.

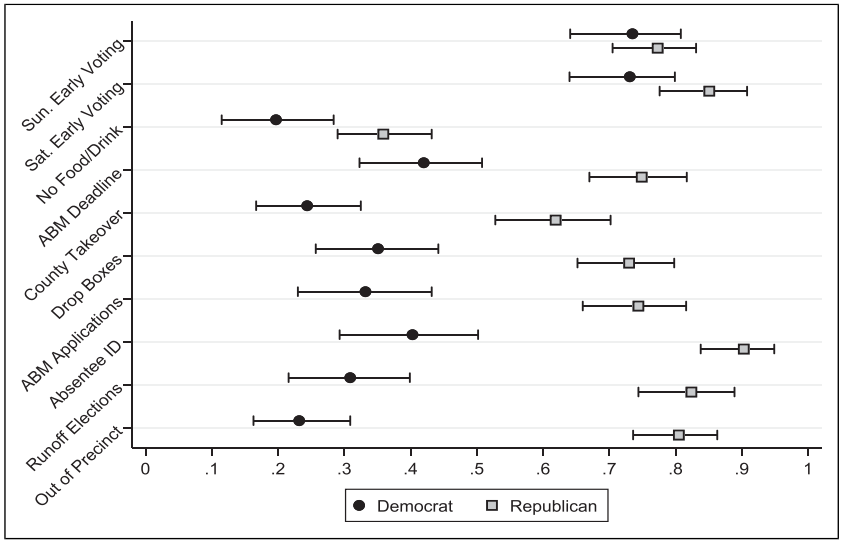

Figure 3. Support for SB 202 provisions by party.

legislators enacted into Georgia law through Senate Bill 202.

To capture the size of the partisan differences in the models presented in Table 3, we convert the model results into a set of predicted probabilities which are displayed in Figure 3. Support values for each of the 10 SB 202 provisions are displayed along with bracketed 95% confidence intervals.[13] As expected, in every case Republicans register greater support for SB 202 provisions. Again, in only two instances are these partisan differences not significant: provisions regarding early voting on Saturdays and Sundays. Otherwise, partisan polarization is significant over the remaining eight provisions shown in Figure 3. Taking the difference in probabilities by party, disparities range from 16 percentage points ("No Food/Drink") to 57 points ("Out of Precinct").

Conclusion

President Trump secured enough votes in an effective combination of states to win the White House in 2016 and subsequently claimed the 2020 election was stolen from him. In the context of an extremely polarized partisan American electorate (Abramowitz, 2018), promoting this myth makes us consider the current health of American democracy. If we believe the responses of Democrats and Republicans in this study, it raises the question of how to return to a state in which partisans can lower the political temperature and narrow their differences in opinions regarding election administration, voting laws, and what transpired in the 2020 presidential election.

Opinion activation in Georgia over election laws has exhibited a remarkable persistence. A January (19–24) 2022 Quinnipiac University Poll of registered Georgia voters

found that the "most urgent issue" after inflation (23%) was election laws (22%). Election laws was the second most urgent issue among Republicans (18%) and the most urgent issue among Democrats (31%).[14] In the aftermath of the 2020 election, Jacobson (2021, 40–43) reports national Republican opinions tracking what we find among Georgia voters, indicating no waning of support for Trump and his peddling of disinformation. Consider that in our survey, 86% of Republicans had a favorable view of Trump compared to 3% of Democrats. Conversely, 84% of Democrats had a favorable view of Biden versus 7% of Republicans.[15] The brokering of a partisan reconciliation in the face of these numbers appears fleeting.

In Georgia, it is well-known that Trump adamantly opposed to two specific Republicans; one who tried his best to avoid the "big lie" of a stolen election (Governor Kemp) and another who aggressively pushed back against Trump's false narrative (Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger). In 2022, both Republicans won their respective party nominations without the need for a runoff. Thus, we see a possible silver lining in our findings. Even though most Georgia Republicans side with Trump's baseless claims of a stolen election and believe that voter fraud is commonplace, this was apparently not the driving factor shaping their voting preferences in the 2022 GOP primary contests. It is one thing to deny the reality of why an election turned out the way it did, but it is quite another to let this faulty belief guide voting behavior moving forward. By 2022, Georgia Republicans appeared much more concerned with which candidates had the most convincing argument for why they should be nominated as the GOP standard-bearer, regardless of, and likely in spite of, their views on what transpired in the 2020 presidential election.

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Supplemental Material

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Notes

1. In percentage terms there were no closer presidential and senatorial elections than those taking place in Georgia. The two-party 2020 presidential vote split 50.1–49.9% in favor of Democrat Joe Biden; the two-party vote broke 50.6–49.4% in favor of Democrat Jon Ossoff in the regular 2021 Senate runoff; the two-party vote went 51.0–49.0% in favor of Democrat Raphael Warnock in the special 2021 Senate runoff. Data calculated from *Dave Leip's Atlas U.S. Presidential Elections* (https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/index.html).
2. In keeping with most election laws championed by Republicans as necessary to safeguard the ballot box, voting on Georgia's Senate Bill (SB) 202 was polarized on the basis of party affiliation (Hicks et al., 2015; Hicks et al., 2016). In both the state house and state senate, only Republicans voted in favor of the legislation while all Democrats voted against it: the ultimate expression of a party unity vote.
3. As explained by Finkel et al. (2020: 533), "Political sectarianism consists of three core ingredients: othering—the tendency to view opposing partisans as essentially different or alien to oneself; aversion—the tendency to dislike and distrust opposing partisans; and moralization—the tendency to view opposing partisans as iniquitous. It is the confluence of these ingredients that makes sectarianism so corrosive in the political sphere."
4. An effective Republican-promoted framing of voter ID is that it is like other activities in which people are expected to provide verification, like boarding an airplane (Kane and Wilson, 2021; Keyssar, 2009).
5. We are agnostic with respect to the *actual* participatory effects of restrictive voting laws because the corpus of extant studies has generated inconclusive findings.
6. As Kane and Wilson (2021) document, majorities of Democrats and Republicans in the mass public support strict photo ID provisions, albeit Republicans are notably more supportive.
7. See Figures A3 and A4 in the online appendix, which show Democratic and Republican voters, respectively, were aware that their co-partisan lawmakers polarized in their voting on SB 202.
8. A dual-frame statewide random sample consisting of approximately 70% cell phone numbers and 30% landline numbers was obtained through L2. L2 is a sampling vendor that maintains a database constructed from state voter registration lists. Through commercial sources, phone numbers have been appended to the individual records (registrants) that make up these lists. The sample was subset to include only registrants who had voted in the 2020 general as determined by official voting history records from the Georgia Secretary of State. Respondents were also asked if they had voted in the 2020 election, with those indicating they had not being screened out of the survey. This project has received IRB approval from the University of Georgia.
9. Importantly, our empirical results hardly differ if we limit all analyses to a classification scheme in which partisans consist of strong and not so strong identifiers while Independent leaners are coded as Independents. Results will be made available upon request.
10. For instance, including race (specifically a dummy for Black respondents) and party in Model six of Table 3, which assesses

support for replacing an "underperforming" county election superintendent with the State Board of Elections, reveals that the party variable for Democrat is significant whereas the racial variables are not (Black and other minority dummies with white as the comparison category). Indeed, in several of the models shown in Table 3, a respondent's race is not significant, but party consistently is.

11. According to the Georgia exit polls, including third-party preferences, in 2016 Independents voted 52% for Trump and 41% for Clinton, whereas in 2020 Independents voted 53% for Biden and 44% for Trump. Like Levendusky (2009: 106), our "hypotheses are about how partisans respond to party cues, and as a result…[we] lack any clear expectation about how independents will respond to these party cues."
12. In two instances, higher income voters are more likely to oppose specific provisions in SB 202, the restrictions on ABM Drop Boxes in Model five and the newly imposed ABM Deadline in Model 7. Also, older voters are significantly more opposed to the early voting Saturday and Sunday provisions in Models 9 and 10, respectively, but we are not sure why this is the case.
13. Predicted probabilities displayed in Figure 3 were based on the observed value approach (see Hanmer and Kalkan, 2013).
14. A report of this Quinnipiac University Poll is available at: https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3833.
15. Data reported in the text include "Don't Know" responses.

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