
Booting Barnes: Explaining the Historic Upset in the 2002 Georgia Gubernatorial Election

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Republican Sonny Perdue's defeat of Democrat Roy Barnes in the 2002 Georgia gubernatorial election was a stunning upset. Not only did Barnes, the incumbent, have history on his side—no Republican had been elected governor of Georgia since Reconstruction—he led in every pre-election poll and outspent Perdue six to one. To explain Perdue's victory, we rely on a unique exit poll conducted by Fox News and a county-level statistical model. Our analyses of these data show that several issues salient in the campaign helped Perdue win. Specifically, Barnes was hurt by anger over his positions on education reform and a drastic overhaul of the state flag. At the same time, the victory can be interpreted more broadly in terms of an ongoing realignment among white Georgia voters.

In the final poll taken before the 2002 Georgia gubernatorial election, incumbent Roy Barnes held an eleven point lead over his Republican challenger, Sonny Perdue (Salzer 2002a). This was hardly surprising. Barnes, a first-term Democrat, had led in every public poll taken since the campaign began (Dart 2002), and Perdue never edged closer than seven percentage points until election day (Beiler 2003). Reelection seemed an afterthought, and moreover, the gubernatorial contest was being overshadowed by a fierce Senate campaign. Once Georgians had their say on November 5, however, Barnes' defeat was more than stunning—it was historic. Not only had Perdue overcome what seemed to be insurmountable polling and fundraising disadvantages, his election broke a Democratic stranglehold on the Georgia governorship that had kept the GOP out since Reconstruction. For a Republican running for governor in Georgia, Perdue won an unprecedented share of the vote among rural whites, an indication of a continuing realignment in favor of the GOP (Wyman 2002, 3). In winning 51 percent of the vote, Perdue had broad support, carrying 118 of the state's 159 counties.

This article examines the 2002 Georgia gubernatorial contest, placing the campaign and election in the more general context of contemporary gubernatorial elections in the South and Georgia.¹ It then focuses on a review of the most important issues during the campaign. To explain Perdue's victory, we rely on a unique exit poll conducted by Fox News and a county-level statistical model. Our analyses of these data show that several issues salient in the campaign—most prominently controversy over the state flag and education reform—helped Perdue “boot Barnes,” as one popular placard urged voters to do (Whitt 2002). At the same time, the victory can be interpreted more broadly in terms of an ongoing realignment among white Georgia voters.

Georgia in Context

To understand how Perdue could pull off such a stunning upset it is useful to briefly review the historical record of Southern gubernatorial elections and the empirical evidence that illustrates the realignment of white Georgia voters into the Republican Party. In this section, Georgia's electoral history is examined in a South-wide perspective.² Perdue's victory provides more evidence of Republican ascendancy in the South. Seven Southern states held gubernatorial elections in 2002, and Republican candidates were victorious in all but Tennessee.³ Overall, the GOP now holds seven of the eleven governorships in the South. In contrast to the sharp increase in GOP gains in U.S. House elections in 1992 and 1994, Republican success in Southern gubernatorial elections has come gradually. Surveying the last 20 years of gubernatorial contests reveals the steady growth of the GOP's political strength. In each year from 1982 to 1985, Republicans occupied no more than two governorships. The party's fortunes improved considerably between 1986 and 1989, with five Republican governors serving in each of these years. Republican advancement halted in the early 1990s, with the GOP in control of no more than four seats between 1990 and 1993. Republican growth resumed in 1994, however, and has persisted through 2002. Over the span of the last 29 elections, from 1994–2000, Republicans have held at least six of eleven Southern governorships in every year except 2001.

Figures 1 and 2 present the Republican percentage of the gubernatorial vote over the last 20 years in the South and in Georgia, respectively.⁴ For the South, a modest Republican trend is present as Republican candidates have increased their share of the two-party vote by a little over one-half of a percentage point for each election. A good deal of the fluctuation in the trend

Figure 1. Republican Advancement in Southern Gubernatorial Elections, 1982-2002

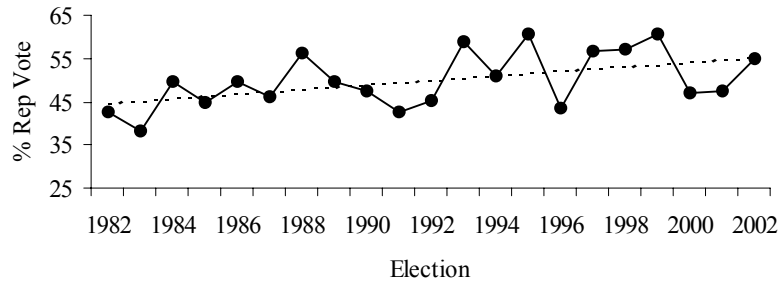
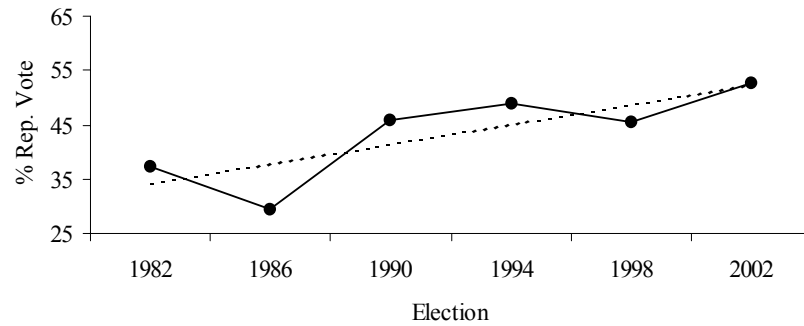


Figure 2. Republican Advancement in Georgia Gubernatorial Elections, 1982-2002



is attributable to the variation in the number of elections held each year and the different rates of Republican success in the Deep and Peripheral South.⁵

The Republican trend in Georgia is sharper, with an average increase of 3.7 percent in the GOP vote share for each election since 1982; however, the

base of the Republican vote share in Georgia elections is much lower when compared to the South, 30 percent versus 44 percent. This finding is not at all surprising because until Perdue's win, the Democratic Party had monopolized the Georgia governorship for the previous 130 years. Before the 1990s, Republican electoral and organizational strength was weaker in Georgia than in any other Southern state (Aistrup 1989; Bass and DeVries 1995, 155-57; Binford, Baxter, and Sturrock 1999; Bullock 1998; Scher 1997). In Georgia politics, 2002 was an historic year because it marked the first time since 1868 that a Republican won the governorship—making Georgia the last of the Southern states to elect a Republican governor since Reconstruction (Bullock 1998; Congressional Quarterly 1998).⁶

Throughout the South, the 1990s was a period of rapid growth for the Republican Party (Lamis 1999, 1-31). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for gubernatorial elections in the South and Georgia from 1990 to 2002. By comparing Georgia with the rest of the Southern states holding elections in midterm years, it is clear that Democrat Roy Barnes' 1998 victory bucked the Republican trend. Except for the 1998 election, the GOP share of the two-party gubernatorial vote in Georgia closely parallels the share for the South in midterms. Furthermore, compared with the 1998 contest, the number of Georgia counties in 2002 that cast a majority of gubernatorial votes in favor of the GOP increased by 187 percent. Barnes' aberrant 1998 victory aside, what accounts for the Republican trend in contemporary Georgia elections? In order to address this question we provide some recent statistics on Georgia voters.

Like most of the South, especially the Deep South, Georgia's white electorate continues to realign in favor of the Republican Party.⁷ Turning to the individual level for evidence of Republican advancement, Table 2 presents data on party identification among white and black Georgia voters from 1990 through 2002. In 1990, 40 percent of white voters identified themselves as Republicans, but by 2002, the proportion of self-identified white Republican voters had increased to 53 percent. Due to the increase in the Republican identification of white voters, by 2002 the overall Georgia electorate reached parity in terms of party identification—42 percent Democratic and 42 percent Republican.

As whites have moved to the GOP, racially polarized voting has taken hold, with the gap between the vote choice of blacks and whites widening with each gubernatorial contest. In Table 3, two-party vote choice in the last five Georgia gubernatorial elections, from 1986-2002, is broken down by race. In 1986, 90 percent of African Americans voted Democratic. The percentage

Table 1. Republican Gains in Southern Gubernatorial Elections, 1990-2002

	1990	1991	1992	1993
<i>South</i>				
Dem votes	6,362,949	1,395,466	1,368,246	733,527
Rep votes	5,754,748	1,032,509	1,121,955	1,045,319
Total	12,117,697	2,427,975	2,490,201	1,778,846
Rep vote (%)	47	43	45	59
Elections	7	2	1	1
Rep seats (N = 11)	3	4	3	4
<i>Georgia</i>				
Dem votes	766,662			
Rep votes	645,625			
Total	1,412,287			
Rep vote (%)	46			
Rep counties (N = 159)	18			
	1994	1995	1996	1997
<i>South</i>				
Dem votes	7,075,221	930,071	1,436,638	738,971
Rep votes	7,349,123	1,439,760	1,097,053	969,062
Total	14,424,344	2,369,831	2,533,691	1,708,033
Rep vote (%)	51	61	43	57
Elections	7	2	1	1
Rep seats (N = 11)	6	7	7	7
<i>Georgia</i>				
Dem votes	788,926			
Rep votes	756,371			
Total	1,545,297			
Rep vote (%)	49			
Rep counties (N = 159)	75			

Table 1. continued

	1998	1999	2000	2001
<i>South</i>				
Dem votes	5,770,472	761,479	1,530,324	984,177
Rep votes	7,663,556	1,175,894	1,360,960	887,234
Total	13,434,028	1,937,373	2,891,284	1,871,411
Rep vote (%)	57	61	47	47
Elections	7	2	1	1
Rep seats (N = 11)	7	6	6	5
<i>Georgia</i>				
Dem votes	941,076			
Rep votes	790,201			
Total	1,731,277			
Rep vote (%)	46			
Rep counties (N = 159)	41			
	2002			
<i>South</i>				
Dem votes	7,351,375			
Rep votes	8,980,688			
Total	16,332,063			
Rep vote (%)	55			
Elections	7			
Rep seats (N = 11)	7			
<i>Georgia</i>				
Dem votes	937,057			
Rep votes	1,040,001			
Total	1,977,058			
Rep vote (%)	53			
Rep counties (N = 159)	118			

Sources: Scammon (various years); Congressional Quarterly (1998); Georgia Secretary of State (2003)

Table 2. Party Identification of Georgia Voters, 1990-2002

Year	Total (%)			Whites (%)			Blacks (%)		
	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
1990	45	32	23	35	40	26	83	4	13
1992	43	36	21	32	43	25	86	6	7
1994	42	37	22	34	43	23	83	5	12
1996	40	36	24	28	45	27	79	8	13
1998	42	39	20	25	53	23	84	5	11
2000	43	40	17	29	51	19	83	7	10
2002	42	42	15	30	53	18	78	13	9

Sources: ABC News/Washington Post (1986); Voter Research and Surveys (1990, 1992); Voter News Service (1994, 1996, 1998, 2000); Opinion Dynamics Corporation (2002)

increases to 94 percent in 2002. The stable voting behavior of blacks contrasts with the dynamic pattern exhibited by whites. Whereas African-American voters remain committed to Democratic candidates, white voters have dramatically changed allegiance. In 1986, more than two-thirds of white voters supported the Democratic candidate. One election later 56 percent of white voters went Republican, and in the last two elections, more than 60 percent of white voters cast ballots for the Republican gubernatorial candidate.

This dramatic trend of rising Republican strength in the South generally, and in Georgia specifically, has considerable power in explaining why Sonny Perdue was able to unseat Roy Barnes in November 2002. However, Perdue's party affiliation was not, in and of itself, decisive. Georgia voters have by no means cast monolithically Republican ballots in recent elections, as evidenced by Barnes' convincing victory in 1998. Furthermore, Democrats in 2002 won five of the other nine statewide races, not including the U.S. Senate contest, with an average of 55 percent of the vote, suggesting that Barnes himself—not the Democratic Party—was the target of voter displeasure.

Thus Perdue's stunning upset must be understood partially as a function of the continuing Republican realignment in the South, but also as a result of the Georgia electorate's response to a series of unpopular initiatives by Roy Barnes and the Perdue campaign's success in making these issues salient.

Table 3. Vote Choice by Race in Georgia Gubernatorial Elections, 1986-2002

Election	Democrat	Republican
1986		
White voters	67%	33%
Black voters	90%	10%
1990		
White voters	44%	56%
Black voters	91%	9%
1994		
White voters	43%	57%
Black voters	90%	10%
1998		
White voters	39%	61%
Black voters	92%	8%
2002		
White voters	39%	61%
Black voters	94%	6%

Sources: ABC News/Washington Post (1986); Voter Research and Surveys (1990); Voter News Service (1994, 1998); Opinion Dynamics Corporation (2002)

Growing GOP strength alone was not enough to oust Barnes from office. Combined with public frustration over education reform, the rapid overhaul of the state flag, a popular Republican president, and Perdue's portrayal of the Governor as out of step with ordinary Georgians, the rising Republican tide helped the GOP take back the governor's mansion. In the next section, our focus shifts to a more specific discussion of the campaign issues that proved fatal to Barnes' bid for a second term.

The Issues and the Campaign

Sonny Perdue's victory, while stunning, was more than a surprise. It was monumental. Newspaper readers in the days after the election saw headlines proclaiming Barnes' defeat as "historic," a "shake-up," and a "revolution" (Cochran 2002; Galloway and Tamman 2002). As Perdue himself put it, voters had placed a Republican in the governor's mansion for the first time since the invention of the telephone.

Because the shock over Perdue's victory was a product of pre-election polling that showed him far behind Barnes, the inaccurate poll results deserve some attention. Two factors may have played a part in underestimating Perdue's support. Survey respondents may have been hesitant to declare their support for Perdue because he was perceived to be running a racially divisive campaign (Gorman 2003). While supportive of his policies, some voters may have felt uncomfortable saying as much to an interviewer. The same effect emerged during David Duke's Senate and gubernatorial campaigns in Louisiana, as polls underestimated his actual level of support (Beiler 2003). Voters may be more comfortable expressing their true preferences on a secret ballot than to a stranger on the telephone. Additionally, the pattern of voter turnout could explain the erroneous polls. The GOP launched a massive get-out-the-vote effort in Georgia and elsewhere in the three days before the election. To the extent that Republicans won the turnout battle, polls may have oversampled Barnes voters, artificially inflating the governor's support (Gorman 2003). Moreover, rural whites turned out at a greater rate than in 1998 and shifted dramatically toward Perdue, evidence of which is presented in Table 5. Failing to take into account the political power of the controversy over the state flag, pre-election polls made it seem as though Perdue was a longshot (Beiler 2003).

Part of our analysis relies on a Fox News exit poll that, like every other survey on the Georgia election, failed to predict Perdue's victory, showing him with 48 percent to Barnes' 52 percent. The poll may have encountered the same problems noted previously, but we do not believe its flaws outweigh its usefulness. An inspection of key variables in the poll—such as party identification, race, place of residence, and gun ownership—conforms to conventional patterns of vote choice.⁸ Moreover, the poll, warts and all, leads us to the same conclusions as our examination of turnout data and a county-level statistical model. As the only exit poll from the Georgia contest, we believe its analytical utility more than makes up for its inability to predict Perdue's victory.

The New Democrat vs. the Former Democrat

Roy Barnes was elected governor in 1998, winning 52.5 percent of the vote to his Republican opponent Guy Milner's 44.1 percent. A New Democrat with suitably moderate to conservative positions, Barnes was the prototype of a successful Democrat in the increasingly Republican South (Binford, Baxter, and Sturrock 1999, 109). Barnes seemed to have such potentially wide appeal, coverage of his reelection bid often came in tandem

with mentions of the possibility of a vice presidential nomination in 2004 (Gettleman 2002). Some writers even suggested he could run for president, following the lead of Democratic-Southern-governors-turned-president Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton (Gettleman 2002; Marlantes 2002; Sperling 2002). Even after Perdue's victory, one Republican pollster conceded that "I know of no one's polling that predicted this or saw it coming" (Galloway and Tamman 2002). Barnes' lead in the money race dwarfed even his substantial polling advantage. A week before Election Day, Barnes had spent \$19 million to Perdue's less than \$3 million.

Perdue appeared overmatched, but as a veteran politician, he was by no means out of his league. In 1990, Perdue was elected state senator as a Democrat from Bonaire, just south of Macon. He eventually rose to president pro tempore of the Senate, becoming one of the most powerful Democrats in the state. In 1998, as his district trended Republican, Perdue switched parties and joined the GOP. In 2002, Perdue was seen as a legitimate gubernatorial challenger, but his victory would not have been possible without a series of political missteps by Barnes.

Overhauling the Flag, and Fast

The Confederate battle flag has long been a symbol of the Civil War and the legacy of slavery in the United States. In the South, the flag has generated conflict between those who say it honors racism and those who view the emblem as part of their heritage.

In 1993, then Governor Zell Miller called for dropping the Confederate flag from the state banner. The proposal, which generated considerable controversy and prompted protests, was quickly defeated in the state assembly and Miller never revisited the issue (Binford, Baxter, and Sturrock 1999). Pierre Howard, lieutenant governor at the time, described the incident as "a cataclysmic event," which facilitated the realignment among Georgia voters (quoted in Binford, Baxter, and Sturrock 1999, 118).

The intensity of the opposition to Miller's plan should have been instructive to Barnes. In January 2001, however, the governor plunged into the fray with a new plan. Since 1956, the Confederate battle flag had made up two-thirds of Georgia's state flag. Business leaders, worried that bad publicity and potential boycotts would damage the state's economy, urged the governor to pass legislation that would defuse the situation. On January 24, 2001, Democrats introduced a measure in the state House to overhaul the design of the flag and drastically shrink the Confederate emblem. Devised in secret by Democratic leaders, including Barnes the bill moved from committee to a 94

to 82 floor vote in favor of passage in less than six hours, giving critics almost no time to mobilize opposition to the change (Cook 2001; Galloway 2002). Less than a week later, the Senate approved the measure 34 to 22 after four hours of debate.⁹ Barnes signed the measure the next day, and the new banner was run up the flagpole at the Capitol (Cook and Pruitt 2001). In less than a week, the governor and his allies had ended 45 years of fighting over the flag—or so they hoped.

In the days surrounding the flag vote, legislators were deluged by communications from ardent supporters of the change as well as those who were angry about the bill and the speed with which it was passed (Chapman 2001). During the gubernatorial campaign, Perdue capitalized on the discontent among rural whites who felt their concerns had been discarded, their voices ignored. Denouncing Barnes' tactics as heavy-handed, and telling supporters it was time the governor learned "he was not elected owner of this state" (Nigut 2002), Perdue promised to hold a referendum on the flag if he was elected.¹⁰ In an attempt to blunt the effect of the issue, Barnes accused Perdue of using the flag to divide the state along racial lines (Salzer 2002a). The issue, however, mobilized rural whites to campaign hard for the Republican. Members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans took to following Barnes around at campaign events, displaying the old Georgia flag and anti-Barnes signs. Some members of the group, which claims more than 5,000 member families, erected 24-foot flagpoles flying the banner at various locations around the state (McCain 2002).

The voting patterns of the predominately white counties in Georgia are instructive. Ninety-six counties have a population that is at least 65 percent white. In 1998, Barnes won 55 of those. Four years later, Perdue won 95 of those counties, with Barnes winning only Clinch County deep in South Georgia (Chapman and Galloway 2002). With the flag a salient concern in the 2002 campaign, we would expect a county's racial makeup to be a significant predictor of the county's voting patterns.

We can also use the January 2001 Georgia House and Senate votes on the flag change to test whether the racial and demographic makeup of a district was related to its representative's vote on the issue. Rural whites were the citizens most likely to oppose a change to the state flag (Gettleman 2003), so we would expect Republican representatives whose districts include a large proportion of rural areas and few African Americans to be more likely to vote against the flag change.

Table 4 presents a logit model for both the House and Senate for the probability that a representative voted against changing the flag, a show of

support for the old Confederate emblem.¹¹ Looking first at the model for the House, our expectations are confirmed. Controlling for other factors, an increase in the percentage of a district's rural population made it more likely that the representative would vote *against* the change, $p < .05$. At the same time, an increase in the proportion of African Americans living in a district increased the likelihood of a vote *for* the change, $p < .001$. If we hold the

Table 4. Logit Model for the Probability of Voting Against Changing the State Flag in the Georgia House and Senate

Independent Variables	House		Senate	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
Republican Representative	2.345***	0.608	3.379**	1.311
Black %	-0.083***	0.022	-0.068	0.049
Hispanic %	-0.052	0.136	-0.057	0.435
Suburban %	0.019	0.013	0.059	0.036
Rural %	0.026*	0.011	0.026	0.026
Average Income (% HH)	-0.00006	0.00004	0.00004	0.00001
College Education (%)	-0.005	0.037	-0.051	0.109
Social Security (% HH receiving)	0.057	0.048	0.288*	0.135
Constant	-0.289	2.235	-10.916	6.568
N	176		56	
Log Likelihood	-66.989		-19.078	
PRE	65.9%		66.7%	
Pseudo R ²	0.449		0.492	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ two-tailed test

Note: Coefficients are logit estimates. The dependent variable is coded as follows: "1" = a vote against changing the flag, "0" = a vote for the proposed flag change. Four state House members—three Democrats and one Republican—chose not to vote for or against altering the Georgia state flag.

Sources: Georgia General Assembly (2003); *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (2001); Barone, Lilley, and DeFranco (1998)

other variables at their mean values, a member who represents a 60 percent African-American district has a .97 probability of voting in favor of changing the flag. The probability for a member in a ten percent African-American district is .32.

The *rural* variable is statistically significant and has a considerable impact on the flag vote. Taking the extreme case, after placing other variables at their mean values, a member who represents an entirely rural district has a .65 probability of voting *against* changing the flag. By comparison, a member representing a district with no rural parts has a probability of .88 of voting to change the flag.

By far, party affiliation was the most important determinant of a representative's vote on the flag issue. Republican representatives are significantly more likely to vote *against* the change, $p < .001$. Holding all other variables in the model at their mean values, there was a .65 probability that a Republican representative voted against changing the flag. By contrast, the likelihood of a Democratic member voting in favor of changing the flag was .85. Interestingly, among the House Democrats voting against the flag change—a stance that put them at odds with Barnes and the assembly leadership—all but one represented rural districts.¹² The votes *not* cast tell us something about the influence of district demographics on a House member's vote: the three Democrats for whom no vote was recorded all represented rural districts, which suggests their abstention was a strategic attempt to avoid alienating either Barnes or their own constituents.

Turning to the model for the Senate, only the coefficient for the representative's party is significant, $p < .01$. The coefficient for the percentage of blacks in a Senate district is negatively signed, as expected, but it does not quite reach statistical significance, $p = .17$. The coefficient for the rural percentage of a district is also not significant, but correctly signed. A number of potential explanations may exist for the null finding. One is that we have fewer cases in the Senate model—56 districts compared to 180 House districts—making it more difficult to show significance on the coefficients for our independent variables. It may also be that because Georgia House districts are much smaller than Senate districts, the latter are more heterogeneous, making it less likely that racial and geographic factors will have the same level of explanatory power. Further, Democrats in the Senate had less flexibility in their votes than did their House counterparts. With only an eight-seat majority in the Senate—as opposed to a 30-seat advantage in the House—Democrats representing rural white districts may have felt less secure in crossing party lines, thus risking defeat on the bill. In the end, this could explain the absence

of strong effects for the demographic variables in the Senate model.

Another way to gauge the electoral relevance of the flag issue is to look at the fate of legislators who voted the “wrong” way on the bill—that is, those who represented districts with large numbers of rural whites but who voted to change the flag. In other words, was the flag salient enough to spoil a representative’s chances for reelection in 2002? In the House, we identified eleven legislators—three Republicans and eight Democrats—who represented rural districts with at least 70 percent white population yet voted for the change. If the flag is a particularly important issue for rural white voters, we might expect at least some of these legislators to have trouble in their reelection bids.

The analysis is complicated because of the redistricting that took place between the 2000 and 2002 elections. Legislators were not running in the same districts they represented when they cast their votes on the flag change, a factor that makes it hard to make valid inferences about the electoral effect of those votes. In any event, two legislators who we might say were on the “wrong” side of the flag vote did lose reelection bids in 2002. Democrats Tracy Stallings’ and Newt Hudson’s defeats were probably related to their positions on the state flag controversy. In fact, news coverage indicated that eventual winner Republican Mark Butler sought to use the 2001 flag vote as a campaign issue to defeat Stallings (Pedraza-Vidamour 2002).

In the Senate, four members who voted the “wrong” way found themselves out of office in 2002. Again, redistricting complicates the analysis, but there are suggestions that at least two of the losses had something to do with the flag controversy. In a particularly suggestive case, Republican John Bulloch, a House member who had voted to keep the old flag, defeated incumbent Democrat Harold Ragan, who had voted for the change, in a rural district that is more than 60 percent white. In a second case, incumbent Democrat Richard Marable lost to Republican Preston Smith in a rural district with a population that is more than 80 percent white. Marable’s vote for the flag change was an issue in the campaign, with Smith supporting a statewide referendum, the same position taken by Sonny Perdue (Fethe 2002).

In general, the analysis presented so far suggests that support for changing the flag, which reduced the prominence of the Confederate battle emblem, was related to party, race, and geography and was, in at least a few cases, relevant to the electoral fortunes of Georgia Democrats.

Reform Rankles the Teachers

The flag issue alone did not bring Barnes down. Throughout the 1990s, Georgia’s educational system was among the worst in the 50 states. The

state's students consistently performed below average on tests of math, science, reading, and writing skills.¹³ In January 2000, Roy Barnes orchestrated the passage of a series of bills designed to turn the state's public education system around. The legislation imposed standards for promotion of students to the next grade and attempted to hold teachers more accountable for their students' performance. It also effectively did away with teacher tenure, eliminated fair dismissal hearings for some educators, and tied teacher evaluations and bonus payments solely to student achievement (Chapman and Galloway 2002; Salzer 2002b). If the flag issue generated ill will toward Barnes among rural whites, education reform had the same effect among public school teachers. Not only did the reforms do away with a measure of job security, but many educators felt that Barnes was blaming them for the state's abysmal academic record.

A rapid rise in test scores following the passage of the education plan might have moderated irritation among teachers, yet two years later, with no evidence of a dramatic turnaround in Georgia's public schools, anger had not receded. During the 2002 gubernatorial campaign, Perdue seized on the issue. He criticized Barnes' reforms as too expensive and ineffective, noting that the teacher-student ratio had declined only slightly since 2000 (Salzer 2002a). At the same time, the state's ranking on the college-entrance SAT declined during Barnes' tenure from 48th to 50th, slipping from second-to-last in 2001 to last place in 2002 when South Carolina's test scores improved (Salzer 2002a). Meanwhile, Barnes spent much of his huge war chest on ads that argued his education plan had improved the state's schools, a claim that critics said was dubious, since there was little evidence of progress (Salzer 2002a).

The most symbolic blow came when the state's most politically active teachers group, the 38,000-member Georgia Association of Educators, declined to endorse the governor. The group did not endorse Perdue either, but for an organization that traditionally throws its support behind Democrats, its abstention spoke volumes about discontent with the governor and his education record. The group's spokesman said that Barnes did not earn their endorsement (Salzer 2002b). Worse for Barnes, the group did endorse the Democrats running for reelection for lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, and labor commissioner (Salzer 2002b).

Dissatisfaction with Barnes' education plan extended beyond the relatively small number of public school teachers. Education is among the most important issues for suburban voters, and to the extent that Barnes' efforts were perceived as failing to fix the public schools, suburban voters would be expected to look for an alternative (Binford, Baxter, and Sturrock 1999, 120; Bullock 1998, 58). The following county-level analysis tests the hypothesis that

teachers' frustration with Barnes and his education plan contributed to the governor's ousting.

Beyond Flags and Schools

While the Confederate flag controversy and the education issue should explain much of the vote in 2002, Perdue helped make the issues more salient by using them to create an unfavorable image of the governor. The perception of Barnes as arrogant and out of touch swirled around both the flag and education debates, as well as an aggressive Democratic redistricting plan that may have contributed to discontent among voters (Wyman 2002). This image of Barnes as a dictator became a focal point of the Perdue campaign. In May 2002, Perdue posted on his web site a ten minute video that depicted Barnes as an enormous, crowned rat—nicknamed “King Roy.” The clip was intended to portray the governor as autocratic and power-hungry, a vermin stalking around Atlanta and scaling the Capitol's golden dome (Galloway 2002). The downloadable video drew considerable media attention and may have generated more exposure for Perdue's campaign than would have been possible with an expensive ad buy, which, given Perdue's limited campaign coffers, was out of the question.

The account thus far shows that the Republican trend in the South made it possible for the GOP to recapture the Georgia governorship, and that Perdue's victory cannot be understood without exploring the 2002 campaign itself. Our discussion now turns to testing some of the regional and campaign-specific explanations discussed so far.

The Importance of Turnout

Turnout was certainly a critical factor in the 2002 election.¹⁴ At the county level, as shown in Table 5, overall turnout among registered voters grew by two percent between 1998 and 2002, from 31 to 33 percent.¹⁵ Among whites, the percentage increase in turnout was twice the size of the increase among blacks—ten percent as opposed to five percent. If we classify counties as rural, suburban, and urban, we find some interesting differences between the 1998 and 2002 elections.¹⁶ The greatest increase in turnout in 2002 took place in the urban counties, where white turnout increased by almost 18 percent and black turnout increased more than 31 percent. Turnout did not increase as much in rural and suburban counties, at five and six percent respectively, and it actually declined among African Americans—by three percent in rural counties and by five percent in suburban counties.

Table 5. County-level Registered Voter Turnout and Republican Vote Share in Georgia Gubernatorial Elections, 1998 and 2002

Counties	1998 (%)	White (%)	Black (%)	Republican (%)
All	30.5	33.8	23.8	42.3
Rural	31.6	35.4	23.8	38.2
Suburban	29.4	32.3	24.9	42.3
Urban	29.3	31.8	22.8	50.5
	2002	White	Black	Republican
All	33.3	37.1	25.0	56.7
Rural	33.3	37.9	23.1	55.7
Suburban	31.0	34.8	23.6	57.6
Urban	35.2	37.5	30.0	58.0
Percent Change	1998 vs. 2002	White	Black	Republican
All (159)	9.0	10.0	5.3	33.9
Rural (82)	5.2	7.3	-2.7	45.9
Suburban (35)	5.6	7.8	-5.2	36.1
Urban (42)	19.9	17.8	31.4	14.8

Source: Georgia Secretary of State (2003)

Although we are cognizant of the ecological inference fallacy, the increase in turnout among registered whites most likely aided Perdue. Consider the average percentage of the Republican vote in urban counties. In 1998, that percentage was 51 percent, and in 2002 it was 58 percent. Yet the increase in black turnout in 2002 in urban counties was substantially greater than the increase in urban white turnout, suggesting that even urban whites moved in favor of Perdue.

Perhaps most striking is the increase in the Republican vote in rural counties. In 1998, the average share of the Republican vote was 38 percent. In 2002, the average share of the Republican vote jumped to 56 percent in rural counties—a 46 percent increase over 1998. By contrast, in 2002 the average share of the Republican vote in suburban and urban counties went up, 36 and 15 percent respectively. If we make the rather safe assumption that black voters were solidly behind Barnes in 2002—evidence for which we provide in survey data in Table 3, then the greatest proportional shift in political support was among rural whites who backed Perdue.

Models

To better understand what factors impacted the vote decision in the 2002 Georgia gubernatorial election, we have constructed two models of vote choice: an individual-level logit model and a county-level Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model. Each has strengths and weaknesses. The individual model allows us to make direct statements about the behavior of Georgia voters, but it lacks key variables available in the county model. Because of ecological inference problems, the county model does not allow us to make strong statements concerning the behavior of individual voters, but it nicely complements our individual-level model (King 1997; Voss 2000). In short, although these models are quite different in terms of explanatory variables and levels of analysis, they present congruent evidence about the factors that we have argued led to Perdue's victory.

Individual-level Model

Our polling data is unique. Ordinarily, the Voter News Service (VNS) conducts exit polls as part of its agreement with a consortium of the major television networks and other national news outlets. In 2002, however, VNS did not release exit polling data, leaving journalists and researchers without one of the primary tools with which to analyze election returns (Rutenberg 2002). Fox News, however, conducted its own exit poll in Georgia, which we have acquired.¹⁷ We are aware of no other available exit polling data from the state.

We rely on this data set to construct the individual-level model. The dependent variable in the individual model is coded "1" if a respondent voted for Perdue and "0" for Barnes. Party identification is represented by dummy variables for Republican and Democratic identifiers, with Independent as the omitted category. Our race variable is a dummy, with whites coded "1" and all other racial/ethnic categories coded "0". We also include a variable for place of residence, coded "1" for the Atlanta area—a proxy for those respondents who reside in the most urban part of the state. We then include two issue variables: "Do you support or oppose U.S. military action to disarm Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power?" and "Which of the following do you think is more responsible for Georgia's state budget problems?" For the question regarding support or opposition of military action in Iraq, we coded support as "1" and opposition as "0." For the question about Georgia's state budget problems, we coded state policies as "1" and national policies or the business cycle as "0."

The Iraq question serves as a measure of support for President George W. Bush, who was at the time making the argument that Saddam Hussein needed to be confronted. We expect those who support the President to be more likely to support Perdue, a fellow Republican. The second question taps respondents' beliefs about whether the state's budget troubles could be attributed to Barnes' leadership or to larger national or economic forces. Those who believed state policies were to blame should be more likely to vote for a change in the governor's mansion. Finally, we include a dummy variable coded "1" for respondents who not only own a gun, but reside in a household that includes another gun owner.

We expect a positive and significant relationship for all of the covariates in the model with the exception of "Democrat" and "Atlanta area." These are the only variables that should have a negative and significant impact on vote choice when Perdue is coded "1" and Barnes "0." That is, we expect increases in all of the other independent variables to increase the likelihood of a vote for Perdue.

County-Level Model

The dependent variable in the county model is the Republican percentage of the two-party county vote. The dependent variable is regressed onto the following explanatory variables, all of which are scaled in terms of the county percentage: *Republican partisanship*, an index based on the Republican share of the county vote averaged across numerous elections; *white voting-age population* (WVAP); *public school teacher (K-12) voting-age population* (TVAP); *Evangelical Protestant population*; *rural population*; *urban cluster population*; and *median family income*.¹⁸ For the two geographic variables, *rural cluster* and *urban cluster*, the omitted variable is the urbanized area percentage of the county population.

We expect that all of the independent variables will have a positive influence on the Republican percentage of the county vote. An increase in Republican partisanship and a larger white population should increase Perdue's vote share. Typically, we would expect the teacher variable to be either insignificant or negative positively affecting the Democratic share of the county vote, but given the well-documented discontent of Georgia schoolteachers with Barnes in 2002, we expect the variable to favor the Republican candidate. Compared to mainline Protestants and those who do not claim a religious affiliation, we expect a higher number of Evangelical Protestants to boost the county-level Republican vote share. This variable is a rough proxy for the religious right, the most loyal Republican constituency (Balz and Brownstein

1996, 305-09; Farnsworth 2002; Green et al. 1998).

Rural and urban cluster populations are expected to increase the share of the GOP vote in contrast to the omitted variable, urbanized area, which has the greatest population density.¹⁹ Specifically, in as much as the rural share of the population corresponds to rural white voters, we expect Perdue to received strong support from this segment of the electorate because it was rankled by the alteration of the Georgia flag (Gettleman 2003). Finally, we expect wealthier counties, as measured by *median family income*, to increase the Republican share of the county vote.

Results

Individual-Level Model

In Table 6 we have strong evidence of the importance of race, for it is noticeably more influential—based on the size of the coefficient and statistical

Table 6. Individual-Level Model for 2002 Georgia Gubernatorial Election

Dependent Variable: 1 = Perdue (Rep), 0 = Barnes (Dem)	Coefficient	Std. Error
Republican	1.429***	0.311
Democrat	-1.570***	0.350
White	2.656***	0.383
Atlanta area	-0.972***	0.298
Support military action in Iraq	1.574***	0.380
Blame state policies for Georgia's state budget problems	1.049***	0.257
Gun owner in gun owning household	1.683**	0.567
Constant	-3.995***	0.581
N	608	
Log Likelihood	-206.797	
PRE	70.7%	
Pseudo R ²	.509	

*p < .05 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 two-tailed test

Note: Coefficients are logit estimates.

Source: Opinion Dynamics Corporation (2002)

significance, $t = 6.9$ —than all other variables in its effect on vote choice. If we hold all other variables at their mean values, the probability of a white respondent voting for Perdue is .61. By contrast, the probability for a nonwhite respondent is a mere .10. Broken down by party, the probabilities of a Perdue vote are .64 and .24 for Republican and Democratic identifiers respectively.

Place of residence is also an important factor in vote choice. Holding all other covariates at their mean values, respondents residing in the Atlanta area have a .27 probability of voting Republican, whereas respondents outside the Atlanta area have a .50 probability of voting for Perdue. This is further evidence for our contention that Perdue ran particularly strong in rural Georgia, most likely because of intense opposition to Barnes' flag change, and among suburbanites who may have been put off by Barnes' controversial education reforms.

Clearly, other state and national issues also played an important role in the election. Consider the difference in the probability of voting for Perdue among voters who blame the state for Georgia's economic woes and those who do not, .61 versus .35. The difference in the likelihood of supporting Perdue among those in favor of military intervention in Iraq vis-à-vis those opposed is substantial as well, .55 versus .20. Finally, respondents who are gun owners and live in a household where someone else owns a firearm are much more likely to vote Republican compared to others, at .80 versus .43.

County-Level Model

The results of the county model shown in Table 7 fit our expectations. All of the independent variables are properly signed, and only the *median family income* variable is not significant, $p < .01$. The model explains over three-quarters of the variance, with an adjusted R^2 of .78. Republican partisanship and the proportion of a county's white voting-age population are the most statistically significant factors, $t = 5.6$ and $t = 5.4$ respectively. In practical terms, a one-percent increase in the county's Republican partisanship amounts to over two-thirds of a percentage point increase in Perdue's share of the county vote.

Even after controlling for the racial makeup of the county voting-age population, less densely populated counties—that is, the percentage of a county's rural and urban cluster populations—have a positive effect on the Republican portion of the vote. An increase in the county proportion of Evangelical Protestants has a substantial positive effect on the Republican share of the county vote.

Table 7. County-Level Model for 2002 Georgia Gubernatorial Election

Dependent Variable:		
% GOP county vote (Two-Party)	Coefficient	Std. Error
Republican partisanship	0.676***	0.120
White (%)	0.274***	0.051
Teacher (K-12) (%)	4.292**	1.460
Evangelical Protestant (%)	0.127**	0.045
Rural (%)	0.100***	0.021
Urban Cluster (%)	0.091***	0.025
Median Family Income (1999)	3.901 x 0.1 ⁷	0.000
Constant	-0.131**	0.041
N	159	
Adjusted R ²	.777	
Std. Error of Estimate	.054	

*p < .05 ** p < .01 ***p < .001 two-tailed test

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients.

Sources: Georgia Secretary of State (2003); U. S. Census Bureau (2003); Georgia Statistics System at the University of Georgia (2003); and the American Religion Data Archive (2003)

The most surprising finding from Table 7 is the size of the coefficient for the percentage of a county's public school teacher voting-age population.²⁰ A one-percent increase in a county's TVAP increases the Republican percentage of the county vote by more than four percent. This is a rather staggering effect, but realistically, the TVAP in a county is meager: (the average and median county percentages for TVAP are 1.5 percent and 1.6 percent, respectively, and the standard deviation is 0.3 percent; therefore, the actual impact of the variable is modest. Nonetheless, at the aggregate level, the TVAP variable provides strong evidence in support of numerous media reports that Barnes was hurt on election day by his controversial attempt at education reform.

Conclusion

In *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1996), V.O. Key aptly refers to Georgia as operating under the "Rule of the Rustics." The rural electorate

decided gubernatorial contests as well as other state-level elections through use of the county-unit system, an electoral scheme that biased elections in favor of rural voters. Because of the disproportionately large number of rural counties, this allocation of votes allowed the rural electorate to decide the fate of elections for more than 50 years (Peirce 1974). In 1962, the county-unit system was a casualty of the “one person, one vote” principle laid out in *Baker v. Carr* (Bullock 1998; Peirce 1974), but its abolition did not mean the demise of rural voting power.

Instead, the clout of rural voters was apparent again in 1966. Republican Howard “Bo” Callaway won a plurality of the popular vote, but because he failed to win a majority, the decision fell to the state general assembly. In the election, “Callaway was able to get the city vote, but the rustics’ hearts belonged to [Democrat Lester] Maddox” (Peirce 1974, 319). Rural legislators followed suit, throwing the election to Maddox, in effect ending the GOP’s best chance to make inroads in Georgia for the next 25 years.

As we have shown, as late as 1986, two-thirds of white Georgians voted Democratic in the governor’s race, yet in the next election a majority of white voters cast ballots in favor of the Republican candidate. Still, the white share of the Democratic vote combined with the votes of African Americans, was large enough to defeat Republican Johnny Isakson in 1990 and Guy Millner in the next two contests. The missing ingredient to GOP success was a larger share of the rural white vote. In 2002, Sonny Perdue won an unprecedented share of the rural white vote, in part because of Roy Barnes’ orchestration of the overhaul of the state flag. The new law, passed in 2001, drastically shrunk the size of the flag’s Confederate battle emblem, triggering the mobilization of rural white voters who responded favorably to Perdue’s promise to hold a referendum on the flag.

Barnes was also hurt by attempts to reform the state’s education system, which angered public school teachers and resulted in a backlash from a typically Democratic constituency. As a Democrat in a state undergoing a continuing realignment of white voters into the GOP, Barnes needed to walk a fine line to hold together a vital share of the white vote. The governor’s positions on the flag and education reform sealed his political fate by reducing his share of the white vote to less than what was needed to win. As was the case in all previous gubernatorial contests, the votes of rural whites were crucial for Democratic victories. Perhaps if V.O. Key was alive today he would characterize the 2002 Georgia gubernatorial election as “The Revenge of the Rustics.”

Notes

¹ See Barone, Cohen, and Ujifusa (2003), Beiler (2003), Bullock (2003) and the Cook Political Report (2002) for excellent summaries of the 2002 Georgia gubernatorial election.

² In keeping with the rationale put forth by Black and Black (1987), we consider Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina as Deep South states. It follows that the remaining Confederate states make up the Peripheral South: Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

³ To avoid repetitive citations, the data discussed in this section come from the same sources cited beneath the tables and figures.

⁴ The numbers for Georgia are included in these data on the South.

⁵ Before 1986, Arkansas had two-year terms for its governors (Congressional Quarterly 1998). Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas hold their gubernatorial contests in midterm years. Louisiana and Mississippi hold their elections in the years immediately preceding a presidential election. Virginia holds its contests in years immediately following a presidential contest. Finally, North Carolina is the only Southern state to hold its gubernatorial elections during presidential years.

⁶ Rufus Bullock, who served from 1868 to 1871, was the last *elected* Republican governor.

⁷ Of course, a sizable population of white voters have dealigned since the 1960s.

⁸ One exception is the poll's variable for identification with the religious right. A majority of voters in this category are shown to have voted for Barnes, a finding that simply does not make sense given what we know about the traditional voting behavior of the group. We do not know whether this is a problem with the question itself or the coding of the variable. For that reason, we exclude the variable from our analysis.

⁹ Perdue, a Republican state senator from Bonaire at the time, voted against the flag change.

¹⁰ In a March 2004 referendum, Georgians voted for a flag modeled after the first national banner of the Confederacy, which does not include the controversial Confederate battle emblem. The flag defeated the Barnes alternative by a 3-to-1 margin. An image of the new flag is available online at http://www.sos.state.ga.us/museum/html/georgia_state_flag_current.htm.

¹¹ The dependent variable—whether a legislator voted for or against the change to the state flag—was compiled from public records available from the Georgia General Assembly (2003). The partisan affiliation for each member was determined through the Assembly’s Web site and through newspaper accounts of the flag vote (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 2001). The remaining independent variables concerning the racial, geographic, and economic makeup of each district were compiled from Barone, Lilley, and DeFranco (1998).

¹² Rural districts are those made up of more than 50 percent rural areas, according to the Barone, Lilley, and DeFranco (1998) categorization.

¹³ Data on the state’s educational record can be found on the National Center for Education Statistics web site at <http://nces.ed.gov>.

¹⁴ Indeed the GOP believed it would be. As part of a nationwide “72-hour project,” President Bush made an appearance in the suburbs outside Atlanta three days before the election. Within minutes of the rally, the party had recruited 500 new volunteers, hustled them onto buses, and sent them out to knock on doors in the suburbs north of Atlanta (Beiler 2003; Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report 2002; Halbfinger 2002). The effort, led by Georgia Republican Party Chairman Ralph Reed, mobilized voters in those counties where Perdue won big on Election Day.

¹⁵ Because the unit of analysis in Table 5 is the county, as opposed to the total statewide vote for governor, the numbers in do not match up with actual *statewide* election returns. For example, because Perdue received a disproportionate number of his votes from smaller counties, the county average of the Republican share of the two-party vote is skewed upwards. The same principle also holds with respect to turnout by race. What is averaged at the county level does not necessarily equal the actual statewide percentage.

¹⁶ We classify counties according to the following scheme: *urban*, counties in metro areas of more than 250,000 population; *suburban*, counties in metro

areas of fewer than 250,000 population and counties with urban populations of 20,000 or more; and *rural*, counties with completely rural populations and urban populations of less than 20,000. Our coding is derived from the rural-urban continuum codes provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, available online at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/RuralUrbCon/>.

¹⁷ Thanks go to Fox News for allowing us to use these data, and to Daron R. Shaw for providing us with the files and codebooks necessary to complete the analysis.

¹⁸ The Republican partisanship index is the average Republican percentage of the two-party vote across 24 down-ballot races between 1990 and 2000. It is comprised of results from elections for secretary of state, attorney general, agriculture commissioner, insurance commissioner, state school superintendent, labor commissioner, and public service commissioner. The measure does not include the six elections over this time period in which the Republican Party did not field a candidate.

¹⁹ By definition an urban cluster “must have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile, and adjacent block groups and blocks with at least 500 people per square mile that together encompass a population of at least 2,500 people, but fewer than 50,000 people.” An urbanized area is a “[d]ensely settled area that has a census population of at least 50,000. The geographic core of block groups or blocks must have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile, and adjacent block groups and blocks with at least 500 people per square mile.” Rural areas consist of all those places outside of urban clusters and urbanized areas. Geographic definitions are from the Census 2000 address available online at <http://www.census.gov/mso/www/c2000basics/chapter4.htm>.

²⁰ The variable is not highly correlated with county population or the other variables in the model.

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